



# A Year Later, Resettlement of Syrian Refugees Remains an Urgent Priority

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## About IRAP

The International Refugee Assistance Project (“IRAP”) is a global legal aid and advocacy organization working to create a world where refugees and all people seeking safety are empowered to claim their right to freedom of movement and a path to lasting refuge.

This paper compiles information that IRAP has learned through the individual representation of Syrian clients in Jordan, Lebanon, Türkiye and elsewhere in the Middle East & North Africa region who are in need of resettlement or relocation to a safe third country; as well as desk research and analysis of return data and projections by the UN Refugee Agency.

## Acknowledgements

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## Executive Summary

As a legal aid and advocacy organization working with refugees around the world to help them access lawful pathways to safety, IRAP has, throughout the past year since the fall of the Assad regime on December 8th, 2024, counseled Syrian clients with differing views on the prospect of return – some were eager to go home and did so with alacrity; others feared return to the same degree or even more than they had before; many chose to approach the question with caution and evaluate events and conditions in Syria before making a decision; and some were newly arrived refugees from Syria who had, after the fall of the regime, fled massacres against ethnic minorities or persecution based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

This paper, which is the result of desk research and of our legal work with Syrian clients throughout the civil war and especially over the past year (December 2024-December 2025, during which we counseled and/or represented approximately 781 clients from Syria), is not meant to be a verdict – even an interim one – on Syria’s interim government led by President Ahmed Al-Sharaa or on Syria’s prospects for long term recovery. Instead, it is an examination of the following questions:

*Do conditions in Syria over the past year, now, and as they are likely to be in the near future, justify the significant reduction of resettlement targets for Syrians and parallel emphasis on voluntary repatriation over other durable solutions by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)?*

*And do conditions in Syria justify decisions by resettlement countries to significantly reduce resettlement admissions targets for Syrian refugees, exclude Syrians from relocation programs, and end other forms of protection for Syrians, including for those facing the highest protection risks?*

This paper first analyzes several very high risk groups for whom we conclude returning to Syria is emphatically not safe, including:

- **women and girls;**
- **LGBTQIA+ individuals;**
- **religious and ethnic minorities;** and,



- **those imputed to support the Assad regime.**

We then look at factors such as **continued armed conflict and insecurity** and **dire humanitarian conditions**, which we argue make return unsafe even for populations outside of these specific risk groups.

With this in mind, we turn to the question of the UN Refugee Agency's projected resettlement needs, return intention surveys, and monitoring of returns. We draw the conclusion that the substantial reduction in projected resettlement needs for the Middle East & North Africa and Türkiye (a reduction of almost half a million refugees) is unwarranted. This conclusion is based on:

(a) the grim reality of conditions on the ground in Syria;

(b) the major decline in Syrian refugees' expression of intent to return from when they were surveyed in December 2024 and when they were surveyed in June 2025 (33% fewer expressed an intent to return); and,

(c) the fact that monitoring of actual returns reflects fewer returns than anticipated.

It is also important to keep in mind that resettlement does not take place proportionately across a population of refugees. The vast majority of refugees do not meet the risk criteria that would make them eligible for resettlement—refugees are selected for resettlement not only because they meet the refugee definition according to international law, but because they face severe hardships in the country of first asylum and resettlement to a safe third country is the only way to address those severe hardships. This means that we should not expect resettlement of Syrians to decrease in proportion to the number of Syrians returning home unless return is equally likely across the whole Syrian refugee population, including those risk groups eligible for resettlement. In fact, the risk groups most likely to still face severe danger in Syria overlap significantly with the risk groups most likely to also face severe danger in their country of first asylum, and therefore most likely to be in need of and eligible for resettlement – groups such as women and girls at risk, LGBTQIA+ individuals, refugees with urgent medical needs, displaced persons with disabilities that qualify as urgent medical needs, and in some cases religious and ethnic minorities. As a result, **even a large**



**number of returnees might correspond to only a very small reduction in the number of refugees in dire need of resettlement.**

We conclude by recommending that:

- the UN Refugee Agency and countries of resettlement **continue to prioritize the resettlement of Syrian refugees,** and
- countries of resettlement **ensure that all resettlement and relocation pathways and temporary protection programs remain open to Syrians**

These measures amount to a moral response in a moment of urgent humanitarian need, while also aligning with the best interests of nations receiving refugees.

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## I. Is it safe to return to Syria?

One year ago, in a turn of events that shocked the world, Syria's then President Bashar Al-Assad left his closest supporters waiting for him to deliver a speech at the Presidential Palace while he quietly slipped onto a plane bound for Moscow. While opposition forces closed in on Damascus and Assad's supporters scrambled to make sense of a new reality they could barely fathom, Syrians around the world rejoiced at the sudden fall of a brutal regime that had imprinted a legacy of cruelty and oppression across generations... and wondered what would come next for Syria. Even amid the euphoria of this new chance at freedom, many of the same Syrians who celebrated the fall of Assad also wondered about the future – would the interim government be permitted a chance to rebuild or would armed conflict continue? Would the opposition forces now in power and led by Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) protect the rights of religious and ethnic minorities whom it had targeted during the civil war? For many, the most pressing question was, when would it be safe to return?

Over the course of the Syrian Civil War, about 6.1 million Syrians fled to neighboring countries of first asylum, while about 7.4 million were internally displaced, together representing about a fourth of Syria's population. By December of 2024, there were 2.9 million Syrian refugees living in Türkiye, 755,000 in Lebanon, 611,000 in Jordan, and 304,000 in Iraq. 788,000 Syrian refugees sought asylum in, or were resettled to, Germany, and 592,000 sought asylum in, or were resettled to, other countries, mostly in Europe and North America.<sup>1</sup> The fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 gave hope to millions of Syrians at home and around the world that an era of brutal oppression was finally over and might give way to freedom and safety in Syria. Many Syrians who had sought refuge in neighboring countries began to cautiously ask themselves whether or not it would soon be safe to return home. International organizations, INGOs, and local NGOs began to ask the same question. At the same time, many governments acted in haste to immediately suspend or shut down resettlement and relocation programs for Syrians, pause asylum adjudication, and in some cases move forward with plans to deport Syrians to Syria<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR Global Trends in Forced Displacement Report, 2024, 14, produced by UNHCR, June 12, 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2024?page=14>.

<sup>2</sup> Philippe Leroy Beaulieu and Alessandro Parodi. "European countries halt Syrian asylum applications after Assad's fall." *Reuters*. December 11th, 2024.

Now, almost a year after the fall of the Assad regime, it is abundantly clear that while the question of return remains complex for many Syrians, there are certain key groups for whom it is not complex at all and who continue to have a well-founded fear of severe harm, up to and including torture and death, should they return to Syria. These key high risk groups are analyzed here.

## A) High risk groups

### Women and girls

Women and girls in Syria remain at risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) despite the fall of the Assad regime. Both before and during the Syrian war, women and girls have been subjected to various forms of gender-related violence by government and non-governmental actors alike, including the Syrian National Army (SNA), the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL).<sup>3</sup> Hay'at Tahrir Al Shams (HTS) forces, whose leader now serves as Syria's interim president, have reportedly subjected women and girls to arbitrary arrests and detentions for violating dress codes and to freedom of movement restrictions. Prior to coming to power, HTS subjected those arrested and detained to corporal punishment, including lashing, and even executions.<sup>4</sup> Further, much of the violence against women and girls has been perpetrated by family members, their community, and society at large – a form of persecution that

<https://www.reuters.com/world/european-countries-halt-syrian-asylum-applications-after-assads-fall-2024-12-10/>

<sup>3</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), *Interim Country Guidance, Syria, Women and girls* (last updated, June 2025), <https://euaa.europa.eu/interim-country-guidance-syria/women-and-girls>; Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), *On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women: SNHR's 12th Annual Report on Violations against Females in Syria* (25 Nov 2023), <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/international-day-elimination-violence-against-women-snhrs-12th-annual-report-violations-against-females-syria-enar>; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, *Joint submission for the UPR of Syria 40th session of the UPR Working Group* (January-February 2022), <https://women-now.org/report/Joint-Submission-for-the-UPR-of-Syria-EN.pdf>; Alice Chancellor, "The Women Want the Fall of The (Gendered) Regime: In What Ways Are Syrian Women Challenging State Feminism Through an Online Feminist Counterpublic?," Cornell eCommons, 2021, <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/6c87514c-b830-40ab-972e-144799f3b8bf/content>.

<sup>4</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), *Interim Country Guidance, Syria, Women and girls* (last updated, June 2025), <https://euaa.europa.eu/interim-country-guidance-syria/women-and-girls>; SNHR, "The Most Notable Hay'at Tahrir al Sham Violations Since the Establishment of Jabhat al Nusra to Date" Jan 31, 2022, <https://snhr.org/blog/2022/01/31/57274/>; , *On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women: SNHR's 12th Annual Report on Violations against Females in Syria* (25 Nov 2023), <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/international-day-elimination-violence-against-women-snhrs-12th-annual-report-violations-against-females-syria-enar>.

the current administration, like the Assad regime before it, is unwilling or unable to effectively protect against.

As a result, despite the regime change, several agents of persecution remain present in Syria, and there are no indications that these agents' attitudes towards women and girls have changed. In fact, women and girls in Syria "have linked these political changes to deteriorating safety and increased levels of GBV."<sup>5</sup>

Women and girls continue to face physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and economic violence and are denied access to rights, services, and opportunities throughout the country. Other forms of serious harm against women and girls include domestic, family, and intimate partner violence; early and forced marriage; technology-facilitated GBV; and femicide (or so-called honor killings).<sup>6</sup>

Factors leading to added risks for SGBV include: age (e.g. older women, adolescent girls, young women); family status (e.g. widowed or divorced women); situations of displacement (in which women and girls may be disconnected from family members and from the ordinary forms of societal protection prevalent in their country of origin); disabilities; certain perceptions of gender roles within the family, community, or home area; lack of documentation; former or current detention; and diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression of sexual characteristics (SOGIESC).<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, women and girls in Syria, especially those with certain factors of vulnerability, remain at serious risk of SGBV and other forms of harm despite the regime change.

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<sup>5</sup> UNFPA, *Advocacy Brief, An Overview of Gender Based Violence in Syria 2025*, (23 Jun 2025), <https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2025-06/Advocacy%20Brief%202025%20A%2008.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> UNFPA, *Advocacy Brief, An Overview of Gender Based Violence in Syria 2025*, (23 Jun 2025), <https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2025-06/Advocacy%20Brief%202025%20A%2008.pdf>. (Technology-facilitated GBV refers to the weaponizing of technology and online platforms to attack women and girls on the basis of their gender and includes acts such as sextortion (blackmail by threatening to publish sexual information, photos or videos); image-based abuse (sharing intimate photos without consent); doxxing (publishing private personal information); and using technology to locate survivors of abuse in order to inflict further violence, among many others.

<sup>7</sup> UNFPA, *Advocacy Brief, An Overview of Gender Based Violence in Syria 2025*, (23 Jun 2025), <https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2025-06/Advocacy%20Brief%202025%20A%2008.pdf>; EUAA, *Interim Country Guidance, Syria, Women and girls* (last updated, June 2025), <https://euaa.europa.eu/interim-country-guidance-syria/women-and-girls>.

**Razan\*** is a Kurdish Syrian mother living with her children in Türkiye. One of her sons is critically ill with liver cancer, which led her and her husband and their children to travel to Damascus in the midst of the civil war to seek treatment for him. They were all detained at a regime checkpoint, and then her husband was arrested and imprisoned for the remainder of the war. While Razan and her children were internally displaced after being released from the checkpoint, a man who was a relative of her husband and affiliated with HTS (who controlled the area) raped her at gunpoint in front of her children. He returned over the course of several nights with a different man each night who again raped her in front of her children.

Razan fled with her children to Türkiye. Her husband's relative was able to establish contact with her through family connections, and he blackmailed her into sending him sexually explicit videos, threatening to expose her rape to her family. He located her in Türkiye, raped her in her home, and robbed her of all her money. Razan fled with her children to a different city in Türkiye and stayed with her brother. Due to a police notice at her old apartment, her brother became suspicious that she had been subjected to rape and investigated and partially confirmed his suspicions. This led Razan to flee again within Türkiye and cut off communication with her family for fear that they would subject her to honor violence. Razan's brother eventually found her and demanded to search her phone, where he found court documents related to her rape. He then hit her and told her that he would not harm her further but that he could not protect her from her brothers, her cousins, and her tribe.

Razan cannot return to Syria – she fears honor violence from her immediate and extended family as well as her tribe, and she believes her husband, released from prison after the fall of the Assad regime, has found out about her rape from her family and will kill her if he finds her. She is also afraid of continued persecution by her husband's relative who has repeatedly raped her and who is affiliated with HTS. And finally, her son's liver cancer remains critical and cannot be appropriately treated either in Syria or in Türkiye.

*\*As with all case examples in this paper, names have been changed and identifying information redacted for the protection of the individuals. All case examples represent individuals IRAP worked with in the course of 2025.*

## LGBTQIA+ Individuals

Despite the regime change, individuals in Syria with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression of sexual characteristics (SOGIESC), more commonly referred to as LGBTQIA+ individuals, continue to be exposed to forms of persecution such as abduction, torture, arbitrary detention, violence, sexual violence, and killing.<sup>8</sup> LGBTQIA+ individuals have faced and continue to face harm from non-state actors, including ISIL, the SNA, their family, community, and society at large.

While homosexuality and diverse gender identities were already viewed restrictively by society prior to 2011, the war exacerbated the situation of LGBTQIA+ individuals, with state actors and militant groups engaging in severe human rights abuses against this group, including in the form of sexual violence based on individuals' perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>9</sup> HTS in particular reportedly regularly detained, tortured, and killed individuals with diverse SOGIESC in the territories they controlled, and abductions of persons assumed or perceived to be gay have also been documented.<sup>10</sup>

Currently, homophobic and transphobic attacks continue to be perpetrated in Syria with the acquiescence of state authorities.<sup>11</sup> Further, same-sex sexual activity continues to be prohibited under the Penal Code of 1949,<sup>12</sup> meaning that individuals with diverse SOGIESC or identifying as LGBTQIA+ have no recourse to

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<sup>8</sup> EUAA, *Interim Country Guidance, Persons with diverse SOGIESC (also referred to as LGBTIQ persons)* (last updated, June 2025),

<https://euaa.europa.eu/interim-country-guidance-syria/persons-diverse-sogiesc-also-referred-lgbtiq-persons>.

<sup>9</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Sexual Violence Against Men, Trans Women in Syria Conflict* (July 2020),

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/29/sexual-violence-against-men-trans-women-syria-conflict>.

<sup>10</sup> EUAA, *Interim Country Guidance, Persons with diverse SOGIESC (also referred to as LGBTIQ persons)* (last updated, June 2025),

<https://euaa.europa.eu/interim-country-guidance-syria/persons-diverse-sogiesc-also-referred-lgbtiq-persons>.

<sup>11</sup> Mostafa Al Dabbas, "As Syria Faces New Divides, LGBTQ+ Hate Remains The Most Reliable Consensus,"

*World Crunch*, February 22, 2025, <https://worldcrunch.com/lgbtq-plus/lgbt-syria-violence-homophobia/>; EUAA, *Interim Country Guidance, Persons with diverse SOGIESC (also referred to as LGBTIQ persons)* (last updated, June 2025),

<https://euaa.europa.eu/interim-country-guidance-syria/persons-diverse-sogiesc-also-referred-lgbtiq-persons>;

Madeline Edwards, "War, Love, and Isolation for Transgender Syrians in Lebanon," *Inkstick Media*, June 4, 2025,

<https://inkstickmedia.com/war-love-and-isolation-for-transgender-syrians-in-lebanon/>

<sup>12</sup> Human Dignity Trust, *Country Profile: Syria*, (last updated January 2025),

<https://www.humandignitytrust.org/country-profile/syria/>; EUAA, *Interim Country Guidance, Persons with diverse SOGIESC (also referred to as LGBTIQ persons)* (last updated, June 2025),

<https://euaa.europa.eu/interim-country-guidance-syria/persons-diverse-sogiesc-also-referred-lgbtiq-persons>.



government entities for help when facing persecution from private actors.<sup>13</sup> One local organization reported a 70% spike in aggression against LGBTQIA+ persons in the country since the beginning of 2025 compared to previous years.<sup>14</sup>

LGBTQIA+ persons continue to face serious risks in Syria, such that returning for those fitting this profile would present a threat to their life and subject them to persecution.

**Lia\*** is a trans woman from Syria living in Lebanon. She had hopes of returning to Syria after the fall of the Assad regime but discovered, while discussing return plans with family back in Syria, that they had learned of her gender identity. Her father formally disowned her and gave his permission to her brother to kill her. Lia's brother frequently messages her, threatening to kill her if she ever returns to Syria. He has come to Lebanon looking for her – he appeared at her home three times threatening to harm her, but she was not at home. She was staying in an unfinished building under construction for the purpose of evading him. He has strong ties to General Security in Syria and she fears that he will make use of those connections to subject her to detention, abuse, and death at the hands of the state. Lia rarely ventures out for fear of being detained by Lebanese police and deported to Syria. Her primary concern is her safety from her brother, but she is also in extreme danger as a trans woman refugee in Lebanon and has survived rape twice – both times, men exploited her need to find work, offered her a job that involved going with them to an isolated location, and then tied her up and raped her.

**Elise\*** is a Syrian trans woman who fled to Lebanon in the past few months. She faced significant persecution in Syria for being a trans woman, including being detained multiple times for "crimes" related to her sexual orientation and gender identity. During these detentions she was subjected to torture, sexual violence, and other forms of inhumane treatment.

<sup>13</sup> EUAA, *Interim Country Guidance, Persons with diverse SOGIESC (also referred to as LGBTIQ persons)* (last updated, June 2025),

<https://euaa.europa.eu/interim-country-guidance-syria/persons-diverse-sogiesc-also-referred-lgbtq-persons>.

<sup>14</sup> Maysaa Ajjan, "Syrian authorities ramp up LGBTQ+ crackdowns under al-Sharaa," *Media Diversity Institute*, June 13, 2025,

[rulehttps://www.media-diversity.org/syrian-authorities-ramp-up-lgbtq-crackdowns-under-al-sharaa-rule/](https://www.media-diversity.org/syrian-authorities-ramp-up-lgbtq-crackdowns-under-al-sharaa-rule/)

After the Assad regime fell, Elise felt that things became even more dangerous for LGBTQIA people in Syria. In early January 2025, Elise was attending a birthday party of a friend of hers, also queer, when suddenly a group of men came and attacked everyone at the party. Elise was beaten during this attack, and then along with the other attendees, was presented to a local Sheikh, who said if the party had been for a wedding, they should all have been killed, but since it was only a birthday party, the beating was sufficient, and they should all be released. After Elise was released, she moved to a different area, but soon learned that armed men had found out that she, a trans woman, was living in the area, and were looking for her to kill her. She then decided she could no longer stay in Syria, and fled to Lebanon. In Lebanon, she is currently facing threats from multiple sources, as well as regular harassment and discrimination as a trans woman living in Lebanon.

### **Religious and ethnic minorities**

Despite initial hopeful rhetoric on the part of the interim HTS government regarding inclusion of ethnic and religious minorities in a new Syria, local human rights organizations have raised concerns that religious extremism is on the rise, with a strict and puritanical Wahhabist ideology visibly taking over more traditionally moderate spaces, and new religious authorities “promoting violence against ‘non-believers’ and stirring up animosity toward members of different sects.”<sup>15</sup> As outlined below, several religious and ethnic minorities have also faced severe persecution at the hands of the HTS government, with its tacit approval, or without meaningful government protection.

### **Druze**

The Druze faith is one of the main religious minorities of the Levant, with approximately 800,000 to one million adherents primarily in Lebanon, Syria, and Israel. Druze make up about three percent of Syria’s population and live primarily in and around Jabal al-Druze in the south of Syria. Druze individuals in Syria face serious risks of persecution at the hands of the new regime and affiliated groups. In April 2025, fighting broke out between pro-government armed groups and

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<sup>15</sup> “A Critical Examination of Syria’s Religious Landscape After the Regime’s Fall: Exclusion, Extremism, and Coercion,” *Syrians for Truth and Justice*, July 24, 2025, <https://stj-sy.org/en/a-critical-examination-of-syrias-religious-landscape-after-the-regimes-fall-exclusion-extremism-and-coercion/>

Druze factions in southern Damascus, resulting in the deaths of more than 100 people.<sup>16</sup> In July 2025, sectarian fighting erupted in the southern governorate of Sweida between Druze and Bedouin armed groups, with government intervention and Israeli airstrikes exacerbating the violence.<sup>17</sup> In addition, while the Syrian interim government alleged it intervened to restore order, numerous credible reports have surfaced regarding government units engaging in looting, home burning, summary executions (including of women and children), and SGBV against Druze civilians during the period of intense clashes between April and July 2025.<sup>18</sup>

Amnesty International collected evidence, including verified videos of armed men in security and military uniforms, some bearing "General Security" insignia, executing unarmed Druze people in homes, a public square, a school, and a hospital in July 2025.<sup>19</sup> The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) further reported the abduction of at least 105 Druze women and girls by armed groups affiliated with the Syrian interim authorities in July and August 2025.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "Syria Monitor Says 15 Druze Fighters Killed in Ambush near Damascus," *France24*, May 1, 2025, <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20250501-syria-monitor-says-15-druze-fighters-killed-in-ambush-near-damascus>.

<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW), "Syria: Abuses, Humanitarian Emergency Amid Sweida Clashes," News Release, July 22, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/07/22/syria-abuses-humanitarian-emergency-amid-sweida-clashes>.

<sup>18</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW), "Syria: Abuses, Humanitarian Emergency Amid Sweida Clashes," News Release, July 22, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/07/22/syria-abuses-humanitarian-emergency-amid-sweida-clashes>;

Amnesty International, "Syria: New Investigation Reveals Evidence Government and Affiliated Forces Extrajudicially Executed Dozens of Druze People in Suwayda," September 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/09/syria-new-investigation-reveals-evidence-government-and-affiliated-forces-extrajudicially-executed-dozens-of-druze-people-in-suwayda/>; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Syria: UN Experts Alarmed at Attacks on Druze Communities, Including Sexual Violence," Press Release, August 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/08/syria-un-experts-alarmed-attacks-druze-communities-including-sexual-violence>.

<sup>19</sup> Amnesty International, "Syria: New Investigation Reveals Evidence Government and Affiliated Forces Extrajudicially Executed Dozens of Druze People in Suwayda," September 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/09/syria-new-investigation-reveals-evidence-government-and-affiliated-forces-extrajudicially-executed-dozens-of-druze-people-in-suwayda/>.

<sup>20</sup> OHCHR, "Syria: UN Experts Alarmed at Attacks on Druze Communities, Including Sexual Violence," Press Release, August 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/08/syria-un-experts-alarmed-attacks-druze-communities-including-sexual-violence>.



The future of Druze civilians remains largely uncertain, and their fear of persecution upon returning to Syria is well-founded in light of recent deadly targeting of the Syrian Druze community by Syrian authorities and affiliated groups.

### **Christians**

Prior to the regime's fall, HTS forces in Idlib confiscated homes and properties of Christians, and SNA and ISIL targeted Christians with extrajudicial killings and kidnappings.

While Syria's new president promised a more inclusive country, Christian communities remain at risk. This risk is especially high for converts from Islam to Christianity who are often deemed by their family, tribe, or community to have committed the sin of apostasy and to require punishment by death. In June 2025, a suicide bomber opened fire on worshippers before blowing himself up at a Christian church in Damascus, killing 25 churchgoers and injuring 63.<sup>21</sup> Further, there have been reports of the transitional government subjecting Christians to discrimination in relation to the school curriculum, and reports indicating a rise in targeted incidents against Christians.<sup>22</sup> Christians may therefore face significant risks upon return to Syria.

**Yousef\*** is a Syrian man living in Lebanon, and is a convert from Islam to Christianity. After a year of theological debate and conversation with a friend who had also converted, covert attendance at church, and reading scripture and theology, Yousef was baptized in a private ceremony in Lebanon. He now holds Bachelors and Masters degrees from Christian institutions and cautiously practices his faith in Lebanon.

Several of Yousef's colleagues in Lebanon took note of his growing interest in Christianity and reported it to his family. During a phone call with his parents in

<sup>21</sup> Kersten Knipp, "Attack on Christians Threatens Syria's Postwar Cohesion," *DW.com*, October 26, 2025, <https://www.dw.com/en/attack-on-christians-threatens-syrias-postwar-cohesion/a-73021750>.

<sup>22</sup> Tamara Qiblawi, "Changes to Syria's School Curriculum Spark Online Outrage," *CNN.com*, January 2, 2025, [cnn.com/2025/01/02/middleeast/changes-to-syrias-school-curriculum-spark-online-outrage](https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/02/middleeast/changes-to-syrias-school-curriculum-spark-online-outrage); EUAA, *Interim Country Guidance, Christians* (last updated, June 2025), <https://euaa.europa.eu/interim-country-guidance-syria/christians>.

Syria, his father directly confronted him, and he admitted to having converted, knowing it would mean he could never return home and that he would be at risk in Lebanon. His father at once told him that he was no longer his son, and that he must kill him. A few days later, his brother in Syria also threatened to kill him, noting that he would do so without allowing any of Yousef's unclean blood to touch him. News of Yousef's conversion spread throughout his village in Syria and he began to receive more threats, both from people in Syria and in Lebanon. These threats from the community and from his family have been frequently repeated over time, and grew more intense when a sheikh in his village in Syria delivered a sermon calling on the community to take action against anyone who left Islam. Jabhat Al-Nusra visited Yousef's family twice, once in 2018 and once shortly after the fall of the Assad regime, demanding information about Yousef's conversion and whereabouts.

Yousef is afraid to return to Syria, where he believes his family or other community members would kill him with impunity. He lives in hiding in Lebanon, afraid of being detained by Lebanese authorities and deported to Syria due to his lack of legal status, and afraid of family members finding him in Lebanon and killing him. Yousef is even more afraid of family members in Lebanon (especially his brother) finding him now than he was before the fall of the Assad regime. His brother in Lebanon had been very cautious about his movements for fear of being detained by Lebanese authorities and deported to Syria where he feared regime persecution – that fear of deportation has now lessened, and so Yousef is afraid that his brother will be unrestricted in his ability to search for him.

### **Yazidis**

Yazidis have been subjected to atrocities by ISIL in Iraq and Syria, as well as forced displacement as a result of incursions by Turkish allied forces in northeastern Syria during the civil war.<sup>23</sup> This persecution targeted their religious

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<sup>23</sup> Bassam Alahmed, "Yazidis in Syria: Decades of Denial of Existence and Discrimination," Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), September 5, 2022, <https://stj-sy.org/en/yazidis-in-syria-decades-of-denial-of-existence-and-discrimination/>; Karzan Aziz Mahmoud, "Resolving the Ongoing Suppression of the Yazidis," *E-IR*, October 20, 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/resolving-ongoing-suppression-yazidis>; OHCHR, "Ten Years After Yazidi Genocide, UN Syria Commission of Inquiry Calls for Justice," Press Release, August 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/08/ten-years-after-yazidi-genocide-un-syria-commission-inquiry-calls-justice>; EUAA, *Country Guidance, Yazidis* (last updated, September 2020),

customs and identity.<sup>24</sup> Thousands of Yazidis targeted by ISIL remain unaccounted for, and many continue to face psychological trauma.<sup>25</sup> Currently, there is limited information available on the situation of Yazidis in Syria, such that a case-by-case assessment is warranted when analyzing the feasibility of return for Yazidis to Syria.

### **Kurds**

Before the fall of the regime, the SNA subjected Syrian Kurds to persecution including illegal detention, abduction, torture, and ill treatment.<sup>26</sup> There are no indications that the SNA has changed its approach towards this ethnic minority. In areas that remain under SNA control (primarily two areas on the border between Syria and Türkiye, one in Northern Aleppo and the other in Northern Raqqa and Hasaka), Kurds thus continue to face risks of serious harm at the hands of the SNA based on their ethnicity and/or based on their actual or perceived political opinion.

As to the current government, its stance towards Kurds remains unclear. While the government expressed the intention to create an inclusive new regime, as of the time of writing, only a preliminary agreement has been reached with the Kurdish-led SDF, and the status of Kurds in the country remains uncertain, with fears of sectarian violence affecting this group.<sup>27</sup> As such, Kurds returning to Syria may still face targeting by government authorities, depending on the outcome of negotiations between the SDF and the new regime.

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<https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-syria/4106-yazidis>; EUAA, *Interim Country Guidance, Yazidis* (last updated, June 2025), <https://euaa.europa.eu/interim-country-guidance-syria/yazidis>.

<sup>24</sup> Karzan Aziz Mahmoud, "Resolving the Ongoing Suppression of the Yazidis," *E-IR*, October 20, 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/resolving-ongoing-suppression-yazidis>.

<sup>25</sup> "Yazidis: A Decade after ISIS's Genocidal Campaign," *PBS Frontline*, accessed October 26, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/yazidis-decade-after-isis-genocidal-campaign/>;

Karzan Aziz Mahmoud, "Resolving the Ongoing Suppression of the Yazidis," *E-IR*, October 20, 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/resolving-ongoing-suppression-yazidis>.

<sup>26</sup> EUAA, *Interim Country Guidance, Kurds* (last updated, June 2025), <https://euaa.europa.eu/interim-country-guidance-syria/kurds>.

<sup>27</sup> Jiyar Gol, "We are still at war': Syria's Kurds battle Türkiye months after Assad's fall", *BBC*,

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4g0w0x28yxo> ; Hala Qaisi, "Are Syria's Kurds Next at Risk of Sectarian Violence?," *DW.com*, October 26, 2025,

<https://www.dw.com/en/are-syrias-kurds-next-at-risk-of-sectarian-violence/a-73412807>; "Syrian Kurdish Leader Says Reached 'First Deal' on Merging Forces with Regular Army," *France24*, October 13, 2025,

<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20251013-syrian-kurdish-leader-says-reached-first-deal-on-merging-forces-with-regular-army>.

## Imputed support for the Assad regime

### Alawites

Under Assad's rule, Alawites maintained a large presence in state agencies and institutions. As a result, in post-Assad Syria, Alawites are viewed with suspicion, as they are perceived as supporters or remnants of the former regime, and may also be targeted due to their religion.<sup>28</sup>

In March 2025, Alawite communities near the Syrian coast were subjected to brutal attacks by government forces and other government-aligned armed groups.<sup>29</sup> The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) estimated the killing of over 800 people during these incidents.<sup>30</sup> Further, numerous reports of kidnappings and abductions of Alawite women and girls by unidentified individuals continue to surface.<sup>31</sup> Despite promises to build a Syria for all, the government has consistently failed to investigate these incidents and hold perpetrators

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<sup>28</sup> UK Government, "Country policy and information note: Alawites and actual or perceived Assadists, Syria, July 2025 (accessible)," July 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/syria-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-alawites-and-actual-or-perceived-assadists-syria-july-2025-accessible>; Human Rights Watch, "Syria: March Atrocities Demand Senior-Level Accountability," News Release, September 23, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/23/syria-march-atrocities-demand-senior-level-accountability>; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Syria's Alawites: A Minority in a Postwar, Post-Assad Era," by Joseph A. Rabil, July 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/07/syria-alawites-minority-postwar-post-assad?lang=en>.

<sup>29</sup> Amnesty International, "Syria: Authorities must investigate abductions of Alawite women and girls," News Release, July 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/07/syria-authorities-must-investigate-abductions-of-alawite-women-and-girls/>; HRW, "Are You Alawi?": Identity-Based Killings during Syria's Transition," Report, September 23, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/09/23/are-you-alawi/identity-based-killings-during-syrias-transition>; UK Government, "Country policy and information note: Alawites and actual or perceived Assadists, Syria, July 2025 (accessible)," July 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/syria-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-alawites-and-actual-or-perceived-assadists-syria-july-2025-accessible>; Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), "803 Individuals Extrajudicially Killed between March 6-10, 2025," Blog post, March 11, 2025, <https://snhr.org/blog/2025/03/11/803-individuals-extrajudicially-killed-between-march-6-10-2025/>.

<sup>30</sup> Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), "803 Individuals Extrajudicially Killed between March 6-10, 2025," Blog post, March 11, 2025, <https://snhr.org/blog/2025/03/11/803-individuals-extrajudicially-killed-between-march-6-10-2025/>.

<sup>31</sup> Amnesty International, "Syria: Authorities must investigate abductions of Alawite women and girls," News Release, July 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/07/syria-authorities-must-investigate-abductions-of-alawite-women-and-girls/>.

accountable.<sup>32</sup> Lastly, government-mandated forced evictions of Alawite residents in al-Sumaria in western Damascus in August 2025 were viewed as part of a deliberate campaign to displace and impoverish Alawites.<sup>33</sup> As a result, Alawites in Syria face high levels of insecurity and a risk of persecution upon return.

### ***Other civilians perceived to support the Assad regime***

Perceived 'Assadists' or supporters of the previous regime may also face serious harm by government or government-affiliated forces. HTS had, prior to coming to power, subjected perceived Assadists to persecution, including in the form of detention, killing, and execution. Since coming to power, it is reported that massacres against perceived Assad supporters in Syria's coastal areas were perpetrated by a variety of assailants including HTS-affiliated groups and members.<sup>34</sup> Thus there is no indication at present that the new government has changed its approach toward these individuals, suggesting that they would remain at serious risk of persecution in Syria.

Return policies for any of these groups should be carefully assessed, as they may put these individuals at serious risk of persecution in Syria, ranging from severe discrimination and rights restrictions, to torture, SGBV, or honor and other extrajudicial killings.

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<sup>32</sup> Amnesty International, "Syria: Authorities must investigate abductions of Alawite women and girls," News Release, July 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/07/syria-authorities-must-investigate-abductions-of-alawite-women-and-girls/>; Human Rights Watch, "Syria: March Atrocities Demand Senior-Level Accountability," News Release, September 23, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/23/syria-march-atrocities-demand-senior-level-accountability>

<sup>33</sup> Lamiyaa Ibrahim, "Forced Evictions Target Alawite Residents in Al-Sumaria Neighborhood," *Al-Akhbar*, accessed October 26, 2025, <https://en.al-akhbar.com/news/forced-evictions-target-alawite-residents-in-al-sumaria-neig?utm>.

<sup>34</sup> UK Government, "Country policy and information note: Alawites and actual or perceived Assadists, Syria, July 2025 (accessible)," July 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/syria-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-alawites-and-actual-or-perceived-assadists-syria-july-2025-accessible>; EUAA, *Interim Country Guidance, Former Assad government officials, and civilians perceived to be supporting the Assad regime* (last updated, June 2025), <https://euaa.europa.eu/interim-country-guidance-syria/former-assad-government-officials-and-civilians-perceived-be-supporting-assad-regime>.



## **B) Security Risks, Unstable Protection, and Humanitarian Needs**

For Syrians outside of these key high-risk groups, the question of return is more complex, but many factors continue to weigh against return. In particular, safety throughout the country remains uneven and partial. Large swathes of Syria remain unsafe, especially for minority or marginalized groups.

As of August 2025, the new government had yet to regain control of areas including Sweida province, controlled by Druze forces, and the Golan Heights and surrounding areas occupied by Israel, as well as northeastern areas under SDF control. Mercy Corps' Crisis Analysis reports that ISIL presence is still a threat in areas throughout the country. Despite efforts to arrest ISIL members, ISIL has carried out at least 153 attacks since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, killing SDF fighters and civilians.<sup>35</sup> Further, in September 2025, Israeli forces continued to conduct airstrikes, including near Homs, Latakia, and Southern Damascus. Israeli strikes over Southern Damascus in particular have reportedly continued over several days.<sup>36</sup>

Despite efforts to stabilize the southern region, Druze leadership and local factions have resisted these plans due to mistrust of the new government and lack of accountability for the July 2025 incidents. Similarly, the relationship between the new government and SDF remains uncertain, with recent clashes in Deir-ez-Zor and Aleppo between SDF and government forces and arrests by SDF of government supporters in SDF-controlled areas further weakening cooperation prospects.

Landmines and explosive remnants of over a decade of war present a serious threat to Syrians, with over 600 people, including children, being killed or injured by these devices across the country since December 2024.<sup>37</sup> The Syria Justice and Accountability Center reports that between 100,000 and 300,000 explosive devices are believed to contaminate critical infrastructure such as roads, bridges,

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<sup>35</sup> CA-SYR, "September 2025 Monthly Report," September 2025, <https://ca-syr.org/periodical/september-2025-monthly-report>.

<sup>36</sup> CA-SYR, "September 2025 Monthly Report," September 2025, <https://ca-syr.org/periodical/september-2025-monthly-report>.

<sup>37</sup> HRW, "Syria: Landmines, Explosive Remnants Harming Civilians," News Release, April 8, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/04/08/syria-landmines-explosive-remnants-harming-civilians>; Handicap International (HI), "Syria: HI Aware on the Risk of Explosive Devices," February 4, 2025, <https://www.hi.org/en/news/syria-hi-aware-on-the-risk-of-explosive-devices->.

hospitals, schools, and residential areas.<sup>38</sup> This poses extensive and “fatal risks to civilians returning home to urban and rural areas.”<sup>39</sup>

Even where security is formally improved, governance, law enforcement, and justice remain unstable, and protections for those facing persecution remain unimproved. Observers expressed concern about the newly approved constitutional declaration centralizing powers in the executive branch, with the potential of undermining judicial and legislative powers and, with them, the enforcement and protection of human rights.<sup>40</sup>

Ongoing clashes, service gaps, damaged infrastructure, and protection risks continue to make returns unfeasible, and threaten to turn returns into “renewed displacement” and “renewed humanitarian crises.”<sup>41</sup> Poverty rates in Syria remain extremely high, with a quarter of the population living in extreme poverty, 90 per cent living below the poverty line, and 12.9 million experiencing food insecurity.<sup>42</sup> These factors indicate that for many Syrians, returning home would represent a major risk to their well-being and ability to live in safety.

Disabilities and medical needs may also render return disproportionately harmful, impossible, or dangerous. Healthcare infrastructures in Syria have faced destruction and deterioration during the war, with shortages of supplies,

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<sup>38</sup> Syria Justice & Accountability Centre, “Conditions for Safe and Dignified Voluntary Return Currently Absent in Syria,” September 11, 2025,

<https://syriaaccountability.org/conditions-for-safe-and-dignified-voluntary-return-currently-absent-in-syria/>.

<sup>39</sup> HRW, “Syria: Landmines, Explosive Remnants Harming Civilians,” News Release, April 8, 2025,

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/04/08/syria-landmines-explosive-remnants-harming-civilians>.

<sup>40</sup> HRW, “Syria: Constitutional Declaration Risks Endangering Rights,” News Release, March 25, 2025,

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/25/syria-constitutional-declaration-risks-endangering-rights>; SNHR, “The Syrian Constitutional Declaration: Between Requirements for Stability and Principles of Good Governance,” Blog post, September 20, 2025,

<https://snhr.org/blog/2025/09/20/the-syrian-constitutional-declaration-between-requirements-for-stability-and-principles-of-good-governance/>.

<sup>41</sup> CA-SYR, “September 2025 Monthly Report,” September 2025,

<https://ca-syr.org/periodical/september-2025-monthly-report> at 29-30.

<sup>42</sup> Arab Center Washington DC, “Refugees’ Return to Syria: Challenges and Uncertainties,” by Mohamad Katoub, accessed October 26, 2025, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/refugees-return-to-syria-challenges-and-uncertainties/>; World Bank, *Syria Macro-Fiscal Assessment*, June 2025,

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/0998444407042516353/pdf/IDU-6adac64c-c9b1-472e-8183-ae600f64fa78.pdf>; SNHR, “Post-Assad Syria: The Complex Structure of Refugee Return and Reintegration Challenges,” Blog post, June 28, 2025,

<https://snhr.org/blog/2025/06/28/post-assad-syria-the-complex-structure-of-refugee-return-and-reintegration-challenges/>.

personnel, and functioning facilities.<sup>43</sup> Individuals with disabilities are at highest risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse, and less likely to access remedies. This is particularly the case for women and girls with disabilities, and those with mental health conditions, or intellectual disabilities. They are also disproportionately excluded from the labor market as well as education opportunities in Syria, further exacerbating their social and economic marginalization and weakening their prospects of reintegration upon return<sup>44</sup>. It is estimated that just prior to the fall of the Assad regime 17% to 28% of the population in Syria had a disability<sup>45</sup>. In Northwest Syria, 47% of persons with disabilities reported a lack of access to basic services; half reported a lack of access to transport services; and 41% reported a complete lack of access to assistive devices, suggesting that dire conditions would await Syrian refugees with disabilities returning home<sup>46</sup>. Furthermore, Syrian refugees with disabilities or medical needs would face serious threats to their health and well-being not only within Syria, but in the course of the journey home itself, during which lack of access to services, assistive devices, and medical care multiply risk.<sup>47</sup> Many of these risks apply to older people as well, in particular lack of access to healthcare, essential services and assistive devices, and inadequate and damaged housing and other infrastructure.<sup>48</sup>

It is unsurprising then that many groups of Syrians cannot safely return, either due to the risks of persecution they would face in Syria or due to a lack of basic

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<sup>43</sup> Handicap International (HI), *Advocacy Factsheet 2025: Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities - Syria*, 2025, 3, [https://www.handicap-international.de/sn\\_uploads/document/Advocacy-Factsheet-2025.-Inclusion-of-Persons-with-Disabilities---Syria.pdf](https://www.handicap-international.de/sn_uploads/document/Advocacy-Factsheet-2025.-Inclusion-of-Persons-with-Disabilities---Syria.pdf); “Syria: ‘The health system is on the ground after years of war,’” *Medecins Sans Frontieres*, January 24, 2025, <https://msf.lu/en/articles/syrie-le-systeme-de-sante-est-terre-apres-des-annees-de-guerre>.

<sup>44</sup> Handicap International, *Advocacy Factsheet*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Handicap International, *Advocacy Factsheet*, 1.

<sup>46</sup> “Persons with Disabilities Protection Barriers Report in North-West Syria (August 2024),” Reliefweb, posted August 27, 2024, [https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/persons-disabilities-protection-barriers-report-north-west-syria-august-2024-enar?\\_gl=1%2A11sy3m%2A\\_ga%2AMTIyMTA4NDI2MC4xNzMyNzMI1MDMy%2A\\_ga\\_E60ZNX2F68%2AMTczNzYxOTY2NS40Ni4wLjE3Mzc2MTk2NjUuNjAuMC4w](https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/persons-disabilities-protection-barriers-report-north-west-syria-august-2024-enar?_gl=1%2A11sy3m%2A_ga%2AMTIyMTA4NDI2MC4xNzMyNzMI1MDMy%2A_ga_E60ZNX2F68%2AMTczNzYxOTY2NS40Ni4wLjE3Mzc2MTk2NjUuNjAuMC4w).

<sup>47</sup> “Global Disability Inclusion Report: Accelerating Disability Inclusion in a Changing and Diverse World,” 2025, *UNICEF*, 110-111, [https://www.globaldisabilitysummit.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/GIP03351-UNICEF-GDIR-Full-report\\_Proof-4.pdf](https://www.globaldisabilitysummit.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/GIP03351-UNICEF-GDIR-Full-report_Proof-4.pdf).

<sup>48</sup> HelpAge International, *Syria at a crossroads: SEMA’s vision for rebuilding healthcare and supporting older people*, January 22, 2025, <https://www.helpage.org/news/syria-at-a-crossroads-semas-vision-for-rebuilding-healthcare-and-supporting-older-people/>.

infrastructure and significant challenges to accessing life saving health care, assistive devices, or protection against violence and abuse.

**Shireen\*** is a nine-year-old Syrian girl living in a refugee camp in Jordan with her parents and siblings. She was born with a severe heart defect and has undergone heart surgery three times in Jordan. She and her family were referred for resettlement by UNHCR to the United States in order to undergo another surgery and receive care that would correct her condition, but this lifesaving measure was interrupted by the Trump administration's suspension of the US Refugee Admissions Program. Doctors have told her parents that if she does not have the surgery soon, her condition could end her life at any moment, and they sometimes wake up at night to check on her and make sure she is still breathing. Shireen frequently requires ambulance visits to the home or trips to the emergency room to receive oxygen, and it is not unusual for her to have blood oxygen levels as low as 58% when she is at home. Her heart condition has prevented her from growing normally, and she is frequently subjected to bullying by other children who call her names because of her small size. Her lack of oxygen also prevents her from undertaking normal childhood activities like playing actively, singing, and sometimes even speaking.

Shireen's parents consider return to Syria impossible in light of their daughter's precarious medical condition and the lack of basic humanitarian services and medical care in Syria. They have also spoken with family members in Syria who have reported general insecurity to them, including that a man in their village was shot by a stranger passing by in a vehicle. Shireen's father is also afraid of being targeted by people in his village who were affiliated with rebel groups during the war and who suspect him of having been pro-Assad – he did not initially participate in anti-regime protests when many members of his community did, and he had a friend whose father was believed to be a government informant. Due to this association, even after he was arrested by the regime, held for months, and tortured, many members of his community remained suspicious of him, and he is afraid that they might retaliate against him if he were to return to Syria.

**Abu Ibrahim\*** is a Syrian father and husband living with his family in Jordan. During the civil war, he was detained by the Assad regime for six months and subjected to rape, humiliation, and severe torture and beatings. Shortly after his release from detention, he was shot in the head by a regime sniper and lost the ability to move one side of his body for years. He was able to receive some treatment for his condition and to partially restore mobility, but his physical impairment remains significant and he has not been able to receive further treatment since 2020. Abu Ibrahim's condition, which prevents him from working and supporting his family, has left them in a situation of extreme material deprivation and homelessness. In case of return to Syria, Abu Ibrahim would face severe hardship fulfilling his very basic needs due to the lack of medical care, social protection, and the resulting exclusion of persons with disabilities from the labor market and many sectors of society. Were he to be resettled to a third country, doctors in Jordan believe that physical therapy and surgery to remove shrapnel could further restore his mobility. Even without further improvement in his medical condition, he would be accessing basic needs such as assistive devices, personal assistance to fulfill his daily needs such as bathing or dressing, and social protection programs which would allow him to live in safety and dignity, and contribute to his community.

## **II. Risks Remain High – So Why Are Projected Resettlement Needs for Syrians Significantly Reduced?**

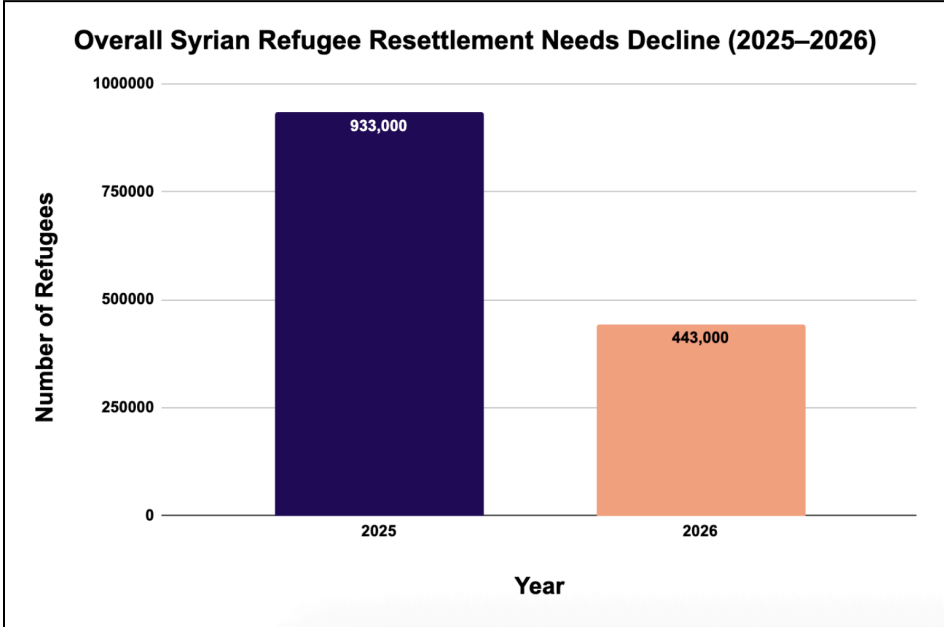
### **The Changing Landscape of Global Resettlement Needs:**

According to UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2026, the overall number of refugees expected to need resettlement has decreased from 2.9 million in 2025 to 2.5 million in 2026<sup>49</sup>. While these refugees come from 45 countries of origin and are hosted in 77 countries of asylum,<sup>50</sup> the sharpest decline in the projected resettlement needs is concentrated in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Türkiye. In these two regions, the numbers have fallen substantially, with UNHCR projecting that approximately 322,200 refugees in the MENA region

<sup>49</sup> UNHCR, *Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2026: Report* (2025), 5, [https://www.unhcr.org/uk/sites/uk/files/2025-06/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2026\\_1.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/uk/sites/uk/files/2025-06/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2026_1.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

will need resettlement in 2026<sup>51</sup> (down from 703,700),<sup>52</sup> and 258,100 refugees in Türkiye<sup>53</sup> (down from 350,600).<sup>54</sup> UNHCR attributes this overall drop of almost half a million refugees projected to be in need of resettlement largely to the decline in the number of Syrian refugees in need of resettlement since the collapse of the Assad regime on December 8, 2024.

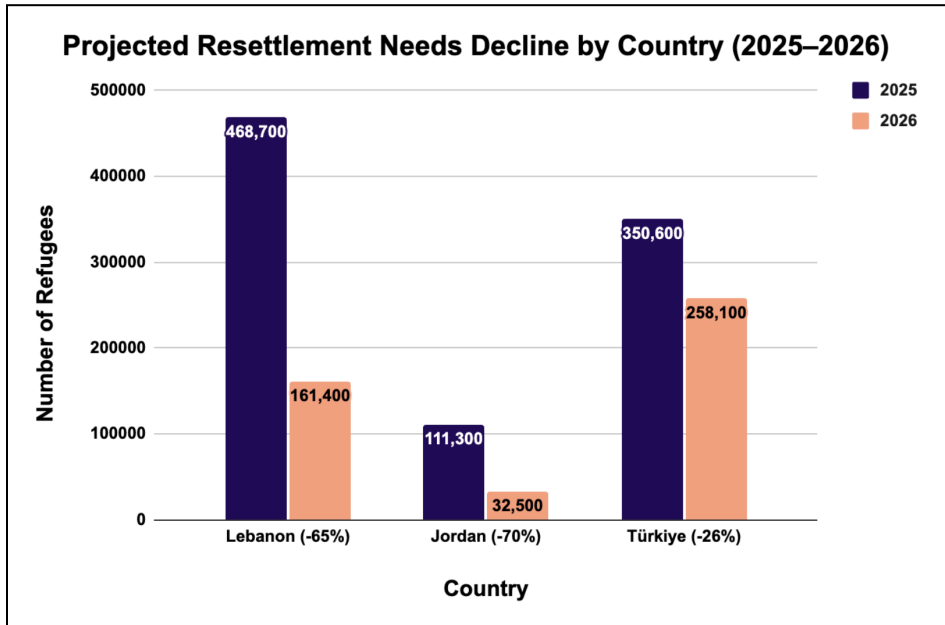


<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>52</sup> UNHCR, *Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2025: Report* (2024), 75, [https://www.unhcr.org/au/sites/en-au/files/2024-05/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2025\\_9.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/au/sites/en-au/files/2024-05/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2025_9.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> UNHCR, *Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2026*, 79.

<sup>54</sup> UNHCR, *Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2025*, 67.



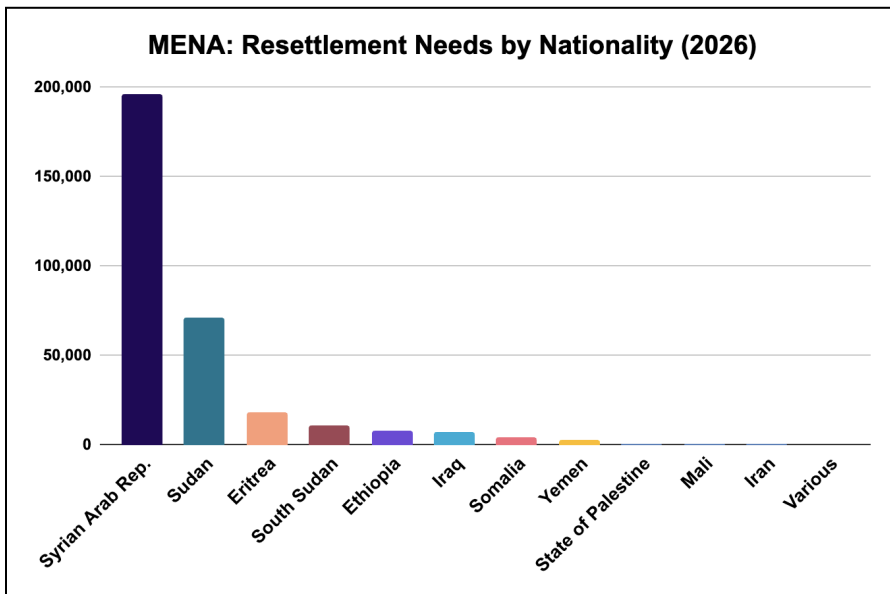
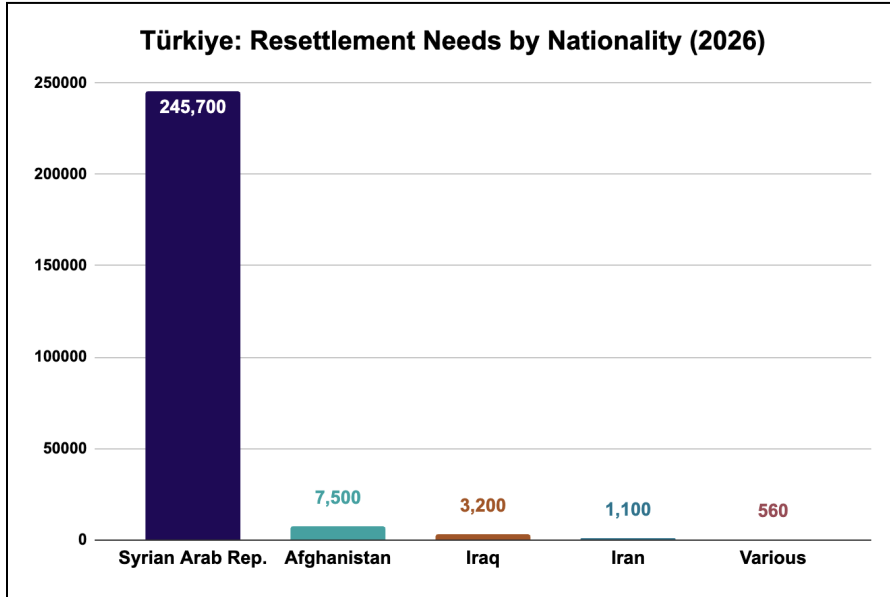
**Figure 1.** Decline in projected resettlement needs between 2025 and 2026. The first chart illustrates the overall global decline in Syrian refugee resettlement needs, which fell by more than half in one year. The second chart highlights Lebanon, Jordan, and Türkiye, where the vast majority of cases are Syrian refugees, showing sharp reductions in projected resettlement needs.

Source: UNHCR, *Projected Global Resettlement Needs: Reports 2025 and 2026*. Accessed on October 27, 2025.

Syrians had been the largest refugee nationality requiring resettlement for the ninth consecutive year and remained so through 2025, when their projected needs stood at approximately 933,000.<sup>55</sup> However, this projected number has fallen to just under 443,000 in 2026 – a drop of more than half – making this the sharpest reduction of any refugee nationality and placing Syrians second after Afghans in the list of nationalities in need of resettlement.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> UNHCR, “2025 Global Refugee Resettlement Needs Spike to Almost 3 Million,” *Press Release*, June 5, 2024, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/press-releases/unhcr-2025-global-refugee-resettlement-needs-spike-almost-3-million>

<sup>56</sup> UNHCR, *Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2026*, 12.



**Figure 2.** Resettlement Needs by Nationality in Türkiye and MENA, 2026. Syrians remain the largest refugee group requiring resettlement in both regions. *Source: UNHCR,*



*Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2026 – Interactive Data Portal* (MENA and Türkiye filters). Accessed on October 27, 2025.

### **Resettlement Projections in Jordan, Lebanon, and Türkiye:**

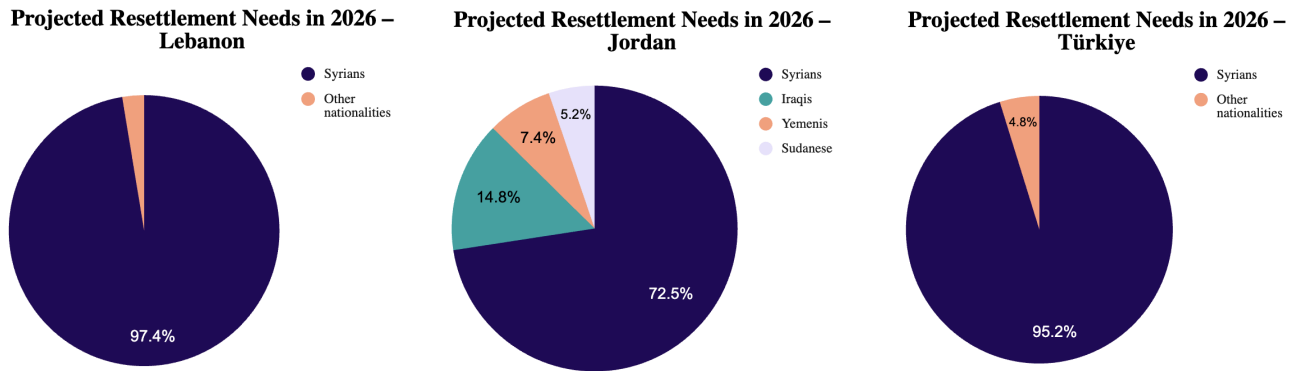
Between 2025 and 2026, the resettlement needs figure in both Lebanon and Jordan is projected to fall sharply — by 65.6% in Lebanon (from 468,700 in 2025 to 161,400 in 2026)<sup>57</sup> and by 70.8% in Jordan (from 111,300 in 2025 to 32,500 in 2026)<sup>58</sup>. In Türkiye, the decline is more modest but still significant, at 26% (from 359,600 in 2025 to 258,100 in 2026)<sup>59</sup>. While these figures represent the overall needs regardless of nationality, they are largely driven by the decline in the projected Syrian-specific needs, given that Syrians make up the overwhelming majority of refugees in need of resettlement in all three countries, as well as across the MENA region. **This downward projection of resettlement needs fails to address both the ongoing protection challenges Syrian refugees face in countries of first asylum and the reality that many still cannot return to Syria.** Even amid narratives of return, a sustained international commitment to resettlement pathways for Syrians remains urgent.

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<sup>57</sup> UNHCR, *Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2026*, “Lebanon – Persons in Need by Country of Origin,” interactive data portal, accessed October 26, 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org>. Syrians constitute 157,200 of the 161,400 refugees projected in need of resettlement from Lebanon in 2026, with smaller numbers from Iraq (1,400), Sudan (1,200), Ethiopia (670), Egypt (270), and others (680).

<sup>58</sup> UNHCR, *Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2026* (2025), Jordan country of asylum data (by country of origin), [https://www.unhcr.org/uk/sites/uk/files/2025-06/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2026\\_1.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/uk/sites/uk/files/2025-06/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2026_1.pdf). Syrians account for 23,500 of the 32,500 projected resettlement needs in Jordan, followed by Iraqis (4,800), Yemenis (2,400), and Sudanese (1,700).

<sup>59</sup> UNHCR, *Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2026: Report* (2025), 86.



**Figure 3.** Resettlement Needs by Nationality in Türkiye Jordan and Lebanon in 2026.

Source: UNHCR, *Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2026 – Interactive Data Portal*. Accessed on October 27, 2025.

### Syrian Return and Movements

Despite the fall of the Assad regime, Syria remains one of the world’s largest displacement crises, with 12 million people forcibly displaced, including roughly six million refugees hosted in neighboring countries. Syrian refugees also continue to dominate projected resettlement needs in Türkiye and MENA regions. Following the recent political changes in Syria, UNHCR, in collaboration with a wide network of local NGO partners and local authorities across the region, has moved to support Syrian refugee and IDP returnees in facilitating voluntary repatriation.<sup>60</sup> However, given the continued volatility of the situation in Syria, systematically gathering information on protection risks and return trends remains essential, as these continue to be subject to change. In the nine months following December 8, 2024, UNHCR estimated that 1,082,724 Syrians had returned to Syria from neighboring countries; however, new Syrian refugee arrivals have also been recorded and numbers will continue to fluctuate.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> UNHCR. “Syrian Arab Republic — Country Data Portal.” *UNHCR Data Finder*, accessed October 27, 2025. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/syr>

<sup>61</sup> UNHCR, *Lebanon – Syrian Returns & Movements Snapshot 30 September 2025* (Beirut: UNHCR, 2025), accessed October 27, 2025. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-syrian-returns-movements-snapshot-30-september-2025>.



## Jordan

As of mid-October 2025, an estimated 164,695 (about 25%) Syrian refugees had returned to Syria from Jordan since December 2024, following the fall of the Assad government. This surge marks the highest return movement since the border reopened in 2018.<sup>62</sup>

In response to the needs expressed by refugees, UNHCR offers several forms of assistance to those wishing to return to Syria. This support includes providing information, counseling, legal aid, and free bus transportation. Since January 2025, UNHCR has assisted over 9,500 refugees in Jordan with free bus transportation.<sup>63</sup> In September, UNHCR also launched a pilot Cash Assistance for Voluntary Returns initiative for Syrian refugees who choose to return voluntarily. Eligible refugees receive 70 JOD (approximately 100 USD) for each family member to cover their own return-related costs.<sup>64</sup>

While these returns represent a significant shift, they remain modest in proportion to Jordan's Syrian refugee population of over 650,000 registered with UNHCR, and highlight ongoing complexities of displacement and family separation. Additionally, **72% of Syrian refugees remaining in Jordan indicated that they are unwilling to return to Syria in the foreseeable future due to their continued concerns over security, economic instability, and inadequate housing.**<sup>65</sup>

## Lebanon

As of the end of September 2025, it is estimated that 362,027 Syrian refugees have returned to Syria from or via Lebanon through official and unofficial border crossings, in contrast to approximately 105,300 new Syrian arrivals.<sup>66</sup> In July 2025, the Lebanese authorities began waiving fees and overstay fines, easing bureaucratic barriers that had previously discouraged refugees from

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<sup>62</sup> UNHCR. "Return Analysis Dashboard: Jordan – Syrian Refugees' Return to Syria (8 Dec 2024 – Oct 2025)." UNHCR Jordan Dashboard, accessed October 27, 2025. <https://jordanapps.unhcr.org/dashboard/>

<sup>63</sup> UNHCR Jordan Country Factsheet — September 2025. *UNHCR, September 2025.* <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/jor>

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Weldali, Maria. "72% of Syrian Refugees in Jordan Unwilling to Return Home — Report." *Jordan Times*, June 2, 2025. <https://jordantimes.com/news/local/72-of-syrian-refugees-in-jordan-unwilling-to-return-home-report>

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

repatriating.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, UNHCR, in collaboration with IOM and local partners, scaled up its Voluntary Repatriation Program. This included counseling services, legal advice, and logistical support at border crossings. UNHCR and IOM also provided organized transportation to assist refugees in reaching crossing points safely.<sup>68</sup>

As part of these new measures, UNHCR and IOM piloted targeted assistance, such as transportation subsidies and cash support to cover basic return-related costs in the form of a \$100 cash grant per returning individual.<sup>69</sup> **While the over 360,000 returns represent a high number, they remain relatively modest compared to the overall Syrian refugee population in Lebanon, which is estimated at around 1.5 million. This overall number may further decrease as new Syrian refugees from high risk profiles arrive in Lebanon, including those who continue to face possible persecution and those whose fear of persecution is heightened after the collapse of the Assad regime.** At the same time, UNHCR's intentions surveys suggest that **only a minority (24%) of Syrian refugees remaining in Lebanon intend to return in the near future, emphasizing the tension between actual return movements, stated intentions, and ongoing new arrivals.**<sup>70</sup>

## Türkiye

According to the Turkish official figures, more than 1.24 million Syrians have returned voluntarily since 2016, and more than 500,000 Syrian refugees have returned since the overthrow of the regime in December 2024.<sup>71</sup> According to UNHCR, 700,000 Syrians (of the 2.8 million Syrians hosted in Turkey) are

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> UNHCR. "UNHCR/IOM Supported Organized Voluntary Return Programme – Lebanon." *UNHCR Help for Lebanon*. Accessed October 27, 2025.

[https://help.unhcr.org/lebanon/en/welcome/return-to-syria/unhcr-iom-supported-organized-voluntary-return-programme/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://help.unhcr.org/lebanon/en/welcome/return-to-syria/unhcr-iom-supported-organized-voluntary-return-programme/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> UNHCR. *Flash Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria*. UNHCR, 6 February 2025. [https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/UNHCR\\_Flash\\_Intention\\_Survey2025.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/UNHCR_Flash_Intention_Survey2025.pdf).

<sup>71</sup> Turkish Minute. "Türkiye Says More Than Half a Million Syrians Have Returned Home Since December." *Turkish Minute*, September 29, 2025. <https://turkishminute.com/2025/09/29/Türkiye-says-more-than-half-a-million-syrians-have-returned-home-since-december/>;

<https://turkishminute.com/2025/09/29/Türkiye-says-more-than-half-a-million-syrians-have-returned-home-since-december/>;

"Refugee Returns & Migration Dynamics after Assad," *ETANA*, June 2025,

[https://etanasyria.org/file/2025/06/STUDY\\_Refugee>Returns-Migration-Dynamics-after-Assad.pdf](https://etanasyria.org/file/2025/06/STUDY_Refugee>Returns-Migration-Dynamics-after-Assad.pdf)

expected to return to Syria from Türkiye in 2025.<sup>72</sup> Syrians who intend to return need to schedule an appointment with the Provisional Directorate of Migration and Management (PDMM) and fill out a form so they can be issued a Travel Permit. Their Temporary Protection Identity Card is collected upon exiting. Moreover, between January 1 and July 1, 2025, Syrians were also permitted to temporarily travel to Syria for up to three “go-and-see” visits to assess the situation and re-enter Türkiye,<sup>73</sup> making the tracking of the actual number of Syrian returnees from Türkiye more challenging.

Unlike in Lebanon and Jordan, UNHCR does not operate a voluntary repatriation program in Türkiye for those who want to return, and while they continue to monitor voluntary returns to Syria in a number of provinces, border crossings, and airports, UNHCR does not monitor all voluntary returns for Syrians in Türkiye.<sup>74</sup> Returns have been conducted through six border gates with a daily capacity of 3,020 until December 8, 2024, after which the capacity was increased to 19,000 returnees per day.<sup>75</sup>

In the context of discussing voluntary repatriation, the Turkish Minister of Interior, Ali Yerlikaya, stated that his government holds extensive personal data on returned Syrians, with no clear details on whether this data can be shared with the Syrian authorities or whether the individuals' consent will be required in such cases. He also acknowledged the harsh conditions in Syria, noting that the central bank has no money, and the country is struggling with a devastated healthcare system, and even government employees are not receiving their salaries.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> UNHCR. *Global Trends 2024: Forced Displacement in 2024*. UNHCR, June 2025.

<https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/global-trends-report-2024.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> UNHCR. “Movement Procedures – Voluntary Return to Syria from Türkiye.” *Help UNHCR Türkiye*. Accessed October 27, 2025. <https://help.unhcr.org/turkiye/volrep/movement-procedures/>

<sup>74</sup> Asylum Information Database. “Turkey: Temporary Protection Regime – Cessation of Temporary Protection.” *AIDA Country Reports – Türkiye*. Accessed October 27, 2025.

[https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkiye/temporary-protection-regime/qualification-temporary-protection/cessation-temporary-protection/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkiye/temporary-protection-regime/qualification-temporary-protection/cessation-temporary-protection/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

## Comparison of Predicted vs. Actual Returns

Actual returns to Syria have fallen short of predictions. In Jordan, UNHCR estimates that 200,000 Syrians will return in 2025.<sup>77</sup> The return of Syrian refugees has been significant, with an estimated 164,695 Syrian returnees.<sup>78</sup> Nonetheless, they remain below UNHCR's estimated return rate for 2025. Whether that target is reached will depend on evolving conditions inside Syria. Analysis of UNHCR return data shows that refugee return movements are highly seasonal and influenced by practical factors, including security conditions in Syria, school schedules, weather conditions, and major holidays. Return patterns in both camp and urban areas exhibit similar trends, peaking in July and gradually declining through August and September 2025.<sup>79</sup>

In Lebanon, UNHCR estimates a return rate of 400,000 for Syrians in 2025.<sup>80</sup> However, actual return movements are estimated at around 362,027 by the end of September 2025. **These returns are offset by approximately 105,300 new Syrian arrivals during the same period,<sup>81</sup> highlighting the ongoing instability, which is driving more displacement and casting doubt on the ability to meet UNHCR's estimated number.**

In Türkiye, UNHCR estimates that 700,000 Syrians will return in 2025.<sup>82</sup> Official statements claim more than 500,000 Syrians have returned to Syria since December 2024.<sup>83</sup> UNHCR does not monitor all voluntary returns but has monitored the voluntary repatriation of approximately 385,000 Syrian returnees

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<sup>77</sup> UNHCR. *Global Trends 2024: Forced Displacement*. UNHCR, June 2025.

<https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/global-trends-report-2024.pdf>

<sup>78</sup> UNHCR. “Return Analysis Dashboard: Jordan – Syrian Refugees’ Return to Syria (8 Dec 2024 – Oct 2025).” UNHCR Jordan Dashboard, accessed October 27, 2025.

<sup>79</sup> ReliefWeb. *Regional Flash Update #50 – Syria Situation, 24 October 2025*. UNHCR, 24 October 2025.

<https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/regional-flash-update-50-syria-situation-24-october-2025>

<sup>80</sup> UNHCR. *Global Trends 2024: Forced Displacement*. UNHCR, June 2025, p.16.

<sup>81</sup> UNHCR, *Lebanon– Syrian Returns & Movements Snapshot (at 30 September, 2025)*,

<https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-syrian-returns-movements-snapshot-30-september-2025>, (accessed November 25, 2025)

<sup>82</sup> UNHCR *Global Trends 2024: Forced Displacement*. UNHCR, June 2025.

<sup>83</sup> Turkish Minute. “Turkey Says More Than Half a Million Syrians Have Returned Home Since December.” *Turkish Minute*, September 29, 2025

through 23 PDMM offices through 22 provinces, six border crossings, and two airports in Istanbul and one in Ankara.<sup>84</sup>

Upon returning from neighboring countries, Syrians encounter severe obstacles, including **destroyed housing, lack of legal documentation, minimal access to basic services and employment, weak social cohesion, and ongoing security risks inside Syria**. These barriers severely limit prospects for safe, informed, dignified, and sustainable return.<sup>85</sup> **These factors are likely to result in fewer Syrians returning to Syria, or returning only to flee once more, either formally or informally**, which makes tracking their movements, and therefore net return figures, more difficult. This has been observed in Lebanon, where there are thousands of new arrivals, as well as in Jordan, where there was a spike of new returnees in July, before returns tapered off later in the summer. A similar situation is anticipated in Türkiye, although tracking is more challenging.

**The UNHCR has stated that conditions in Syria are not yet conducive to large-scale, sustainable returns,<sup>86</sup> an assessment that is consistent with that of other international organizations such as the Council of the EU and the EU Agency for Asylum<sup>87</sup>.** Without significant investment in reconstruction and consistent progress in the political process and human rights situation, the overall scale of refugee returns is expected to remain limited compared to the total refugee population outside the country.<sup>88</sup> This gap between returns, intentions, and scale of displacement and resettlement needs for Syrian refugees reinforces the need for resettlement and complementary pathways as essential protection tools for Syrian refugees, and shows that meaningful efforts to help Syrian refugees voluntarily repatriate should not come at the expense of a robust resettlement process.

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<sup>84</sup> AIDA Country Reports – Türkiye. Accessed October 27, 2025.

[https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkiye/temporary-protection-regime/qualification-temporary-protection/cessation-temporary-protection/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkiye/temporary-protection-regime/qualification-temporary-protection/cessation-temporary-protection/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>85</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council, *Beyond Return: Ensuring Sustainable Recovery and (Re)Integration in Syria* (May 2025).

<sup>86</sup> UNHCR, *International Protection Considerations with Regard to People Fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic* (2025). <https://www.refworld.org/policy/countrypos/unhcr/2021/en/123694>

<sup>87</sup> “Conditions for safe and dignified voluntary return currently absent in Syria,” *Syria Justice and Accountability Centre*, September 11, 2025,

<https://syriaaccountability.org/conditions-for-safe-and-dignified-voluntary-return-currently-absent-in-syria/>

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

This is particularly true in light of the fact that resettlement has never been considered the key solution for most Syrian refugees. Resettlement priorities have always focused on those at greatest risk of facing continued persecution, protection threats, or other forms of severe harm in the country of first asylum, such that they are in continued need of international protection and should be offered resettlement in a safe third country. **The categories or profiles of refugees likely to face harm in the country of first asylum and therefore likely to be in need of resettlement overlap significantly with those categories or profiles of refugees likely to face persecution if they were to return to Syria—women at risk, LGBTQIA individuals, religious converts and (in some but not all locations) religious and ethnic minorities, and persons with serious medical needs and/or disabilities.** This means that **resettlement needs should not be expected to decrease even as return rates increase, because the majority of those refugees choosing to return would not have been identified in the first place as being in need of resettlement.**

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### **III. Interpreting the Discrepancy: Why Declines in “Need” May Overstate Safety and Understate Risk**

#### **Return Intentions vs Safe Return**

The power of the desire to return to one’s homeland cannot be underestimated, even in the face of clear and apparent dangers, uncertainty, and risk. Many Syrian refugees express a wish to return, and many more hope to do so one day. However, **the number of refugees reporting an *intention* to return has decreased significantly as the initial euphoria of political change in Syria has begun to be overtaken by a sober assessment of the harsh and in some cases dangerous realities that individuals could face upon return.**

Following the December 2024 fall of the Assad regime, UNHCR undertook a regional survey of Syrian refugees to understand their intentions of returning to Syria. After more than 50 years in power, the Assad family and the infrastructure supporting their regime were deposed. In light of the political changes, Syrians who had sought refuge in countries across the region clearly indicated a strong desire to return home.



The UNHCR regional flash survey on Syrian intentions to return conducted in January 2025 reflected that initial euphoria. Just eight months prior, the UNHCR longitudinal intentions survey asked a cohort of Syrian refugees if they intended to return in the next 12 months, and only 1.7% responded affirmatively. Following the regime change, in January 2025, 27% of surveyed participants indicated that they intended to return in the next 12 months. The country-level breakdown of this regional average is the following: of Syrian refugees surveyed, 40% in Jordan had the intention to return within the next 12 months; in Lebanon, 24% indicated this intent; in Egypt, 42%; followed by Iraq, where only 12% responded affirmatively. The more than 25% increase in the intent to return from May 2024 to January 2025 indicated a seismic shift and renewed hope 13 years after the Syrian refugee crisis began.

**In June 2025, UNHCR conducted another intentions survey. The regional survey of Syrians gauging their intent to return clearly illustrated a shift away from intent to return.** In June, 18% of surveyed participants indicated an intent to return within the next 12 months; roughly 33% fewer than those who reported this intent in January. When broken out by country of asylum, we see that the intent to return in the next 12 months for Syrians in Jordan is now 22% (a 45% decrease), in Lebanon now 14% (approximately 41% decrease), in Egypt now 29% (approximately 31% decrease), and in Iraq now 4% (approximately 66% decrease). **The most significant concerns weighing against return for refugees (as reported in the surveys) are housing and employment, continuing safety and security concerns, funds to return, and adequate services in Syria.** (Survey results do not include the intention to return to Syria within the next 12 months for Syrian refugees in Türkiye, due to the refugee management structure within Türkiye.)

While the survey outcomes may have been impacted by the fact that some former survey respondents had already followed through on their expressed intention to return to Syria, the June survey outcomes provide a snapshot of the intention to return within the next 12 months of the nearly 2.2 million remaining Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Iraq. The UNHCR survey and international non-governmental organization surveys, further described in the Prospects of Return section below, indicate clear reasons related to infrastructure needs such as housing, employment, and medical facilities. In addition, Syrian

refugees express that the absence of safety and security in the new Syria is a strong factor in their decision not to return.

#### IV. Risks in Relying on Projections

Based on the above, projections of reduced resettlement needs seem to disregard barriers to return, as they assume that many refugees who wish to return will be able to do so safely and permanently.

Furthermore, if return fails (by exposing returnees to persecution, leaving their basic needs unmet, or causing further displacement), humanitarian needs in Syria are likely to spike again, causing destabilization in a country that is only now beginning to recover from over a decade of conflict.

In March 2025, IOM reported that **about 7 million Syrians remain internally displaced**, and one in five of them live in harsh conditions in tents or makeshift shelters.<sup>89</sup> Of those who returned to their places of origin across Syria, about 28 percent were still residing in damaged or unfinished buildings.<sup>90</sup> **Recent military operations and shifts in control over territory are causing new waves of internal displacement, displacing hundreds of thousands of people.**<sup>91</sup> Further, the **lack of basic services, frequent disease outbreaks, water scarcity, and food insecurity are contributing to making Syrians more vulnerable.** If these needs are not addressed, essential services risk further deterioration. Syrians will be unable to return, and those who have already returned may face secondary displacement.<sup>92</sup>

The SNHR warns that effective and sustainable return policies need to take into account several intertwining issues facing Syria and Syrian returnees today. The difficulty in obtaining property documentation to enable returnees to reclaim

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<sup>89</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), "Nearly 750,000 Displaced Syrians Have Returned to Their Places of Origin, New IOM Data Reveals," News Release, accessed October 26, 2025, <https://www.iom.int/news/nearly-750000-displaced-syrians-have-returned-their-places-origin-new-iom-data-reveals>.

<sup>90</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), "Nearly 750,000 Displaced Syrians Have Returned to Their Places of Origin, New IOM Data Reveals," News Release, accessed October 26, 2025, <https://www.iom.int/news/nearly-750000-displaced-syrians-have-returned-their-places-origin-new-iom-data-reveals>.

<sup>91</sup> IOM, *Flash Appeal for Syria - Dec 2024 - May 2025*, December 2024, <https://crisisresponse.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11481/files/uploaded-files/IOM%20Flash%20Appeal%20for%20Syria%20-%20Dec%202024%20-May%202025.pdf>.

<sup>92</sup> IOM, *Flash Appeal for Syria - Dec 2024 - May 2025*, December 2024, <https://crisisresponse.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11481/files/uploaded-files/IOM%20Flash%20Appeal%20for%20Syria%20-%20Dec%202024%20-May%202025.pdf>.

abandoned homes, for example, is closely connected to the large-scale destruction of infrastructure in Syria, making the issuance of property documents extremely challenging and thus creating barriers to return, in what the SNHR has called the “infrastructure of displacement.”<sup>93</sup>

The SNHR also highlighted the role of collective psychological phenomena affecting return. Syrian refugees display high rates of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), (at 55.5.%) and depression (33.5%).<sup>94</sup> Further, years of war and displacement have eroded social trust, community solidarity mechanisms, and transformed social identities.<sup>95</sup> SNHR warns that all these elements are intertwined: **without restoring property rights, rebuilding institutions, guaranteeing security, addressing collective trauma, and promoting transitional justice, return policies will remain one-dimensional and ultimately ineffective or harmful.**

In sum, return policies that do not take into account poor conditions in Syria, fail to adopt an age, gender, disability and diversity approach, and ignore specific challenges faced by returnees due to their extended experience of displacement and years of conflict, risk exposing Syrian returnees to further harm and insecurity. Projections that assume high rates of return without taking into account these challenges or factors influencing Syrians’ decisions to return obscure the actual needs in Syria and in host countries, diverting resources away from other essential solutions and interventions.

Most significantly, if the only focus is returning Syrians home without simultaneously rebuilding institutions and infrastructure, restoring security, legal frameworks, and protection mechanisms, and addressing the continued protection

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<sup>93</sup> SNHR, "Post-Assad Syria: The Complex Structure of Refugee Return and Reintegration Challenges," Blog post, June 28, 2025, <https://snhr.org/blog/2025/06/28/post-assad-syria-the-complex-structure-of-refugee-return-and-reintegration-challenges/>.

<sup>94</sup> SNHR, "Post-Assad Syria: The Complex Structure of Refugee Return and Reintegration Challenges," Blog post, June 28, 2025, <https://snhr.org/blog/2025/06/28/post-assad-syria-the-complex-structure-of-refugee-return-and-reintegration-challenges/>.

<sup>95</sup> SNHR, "Post-Assad Syria: The Complex Structure of Refugee Return and Reintegration Challenges," Blog post, June 28, 2025, <https://snhr.org/blog/2025/06/28/post-assad-syria-the-complex-structure-of-refugee-return-and-reintegration-challenges/>.

needs of Syrian refugees outside Syria, the consequences could be dramatic: from fostering structural inequalities and creating further displacement, to ushering in another period of instability and conflict in the country.

## **V. Recommendations and Conclusion: How Should the International Community Respond?**

Although the Assad regime has fallen, many Syrians in the region remain in need of international protection. In a context in which many resettlement country governments are limiting quotas, pausing processes, and excluding Syrians from relocation programs, it is all the more important to highlight the continued needs of especially at-risk Syrian refugees within the region to ensure that the geopolitical changes in Syria and the world more broadly do not result in the abandonment of vulnerable populations who should be protected under international refugee law.

### **1) Maintain or Expand Resettlement for High-Risk Syrians**

While the fall of the Assad regime has resolved the international refugee protection needs for some Syrians, many Syrians in Lebanon, Jordan, and other neighboring countries remain at high risk and unable to return home. For some individuals, the risk has increased after the fall of the Assad regime. Therefore, groups with specific, high risk refugee profiles, such as women and girls at risk, ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTQIA+ persons, and those with urgent medical needs must be urgently prioritized for relocation and resettlement. National resettlement programs must remain available and accessible for Syrians and should explicitly prioritize Syrians from these high risk groups.

### **2) Strengthen Complementary Pathways**

While refugee resettlement pathways must be protected, they are only one category of international protection available to vulnerable Syrians who cannot return home. Other durable solutions, such as family reunification, educational visas, work permits, residency permits, private sponsorship and community sponsorship programs, humanitarian visas and asylum visas, education and labor pathways aimed at refugees, and other relocation pathways should be

strengthened rather than paused, cancelled, or restricted to exclude Syrians. Recent decisions from countries like Germany<sup>96</sup> and Italy<sup>97</sup> to limit or pause these pathways must be reversed, given the reality of the insecure situation on the ground in Syria and the grave dangers continuing to face significant groups of high-risk Syrians outside Syria. Decisions to exclude Syrians, such as Italy's recent removal of Syrians from a labour mobility program<sup>98</sup>, should be reversed to allow Syrian applications.

### 3) Reverse Bans and Restrictions That Exclude or Threaten to Deport Syrians

Where travel bans (e.g. in the United States) or suspension of family reunification for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection (e.g. in Germany) have limited Syrian refugees' access to pathways, including family reunification, these policies should be reversed. Family reunification should remain accessible to Syrian refugees – to protect the legal rights of the family members, to maintain an important pathway to safety for Syrians, and to significantly improve integration outcomes for the family unit.<sup>99</sup> The U.S. decision to end Temporary Protected Status for Syrians effective November 21, 2025<sup>100</sup> should be reversed in light of the significant dangers and insecurity that Syrians would face upon returning to Syria under current conditions. Even Syrians who fall outside of the high-risk categories that constitute the focus of this paper would continue to face a significant threat of armed conflict and dire humanitarian conditions were they to be deported to Syria.

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<sup>96</sup> Benjamin Bathke, “Syrians in Germany have to wait over a year for their asylum decision,” *Infomigrants*, July 23, 2025,

<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/65958/syrians-in-germany-have-to-wait-over-a-year-for-their-asylum-decision>

<sup>97</sup> Angelo Amanti, “Italy pauses asylum applications from Syria,” *Reuters*, December 9, 2024,

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/italy-pauses-asylum-applications-syria-2024-12-09/>

<sup>98</sup> “New programmes and policy developments on migrant integration in Italy,” *European Commission Migration and Home Affairs*, October 24, 2025,

[https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/new-programmes-and-policy-developments-migrant-integration-italy-2025-10-24\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/new-programmes-and-policy-developments-migrant-integration-italy-2025-10-24_en)

<sup>99</sup> Anne Staver, “Family Reunification: A Right for Forced Migrants?” *Refugee Studies Centre*, Working Paper Series, no. 51 (2008): 28, <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/files-1/wp51-family-reunification-2008.pdf>

<sup>100</sup> “Dahlia Doe v. Noem: Challenging the government’s termination of TPS for Syrians,” *International Refugee Assistance Project*, accessed November 13, 2025,

<https://refugeerights.org/news-resources/dhalia-doe-v-noem-challenging-the-governments-termination-of-tps-for-syrians>

#### 4) Improve Collection & Disaggregation of Return Data

The fall of the Assad regime has triggered a significant amount of migration to and from Syria on both a temporary and longer-term basis. However, in many cases, these migration movements have been chaotic and difficult to track. Since the fall of the Assad regime, an approximately one million people have returned to Syria from abroad<sup>101</sup>. However, during the same time, an estimated 800 thousand were newly displaced (some internally, some across international borders) due to new and increased conflicts within Syria. While an estimated 362,027 had returned to Syria from Lebanon by the end of September 2025, these returns are offset by approximately 105,300 who arrived in Lebanon from Syria<sup>102</sup>. It has, in some cases, been difficult to track the true numbers of arrivals and departures. Tracking has been hindered by funding limitations, among other factors, and has been complicated by the fact that many of those who are counted as either returnees or new arrivals were individuals who went on 'go and see visits' to Syria and, having encountered dire circumstances there, have since returned to the country of asylum.

Aside from challenges relating to tracking the numbers of returns and arrivals themselves, there are additional concerns regarding the voluntary nature of returns that are taking place. Despite the projections of returns in 2025, conditions across different regions in Syria are still deemed unsafe for return. While many returns are described as voluntary, the reality of funding slashes in host countries and the cutting of service provision are clear push factors that are forcing many to return to gravely unsafe conditions<sup>103</sup>.

Accurate data regarding Syrians who return to Syria, either on a temporary or more permanent basis, is gravely needed. Data collection and disaggregation should therefore be greatly improved, clearly distinguishing between voluntary, forced, and partial returns, and should take into account the different factors mentioned above. Return intentions surveys and other forms of data collection

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<sup>101</sup> "Lebanon - Syrian Returns & Movements Snapshot (at 30 September 2025)," *ReliefWeb*, October 16, 2025, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-syrian-returns-movements-snapshot-30-september-2025>

<sup>102</sup> "Regional Flash Update #50 – Syria Situation, 24 October 2025," *ReliefWeb*, October 24, 2025, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/regional-flash-update-50-syria-situation-24-october-2025>

<sup>103</sup> Refugee Returns & Migration Dynamics after Assad," *ETANA*, June 2025, [https://etanasyria.org/file/2025/06/STUDY\\_Refugee>Returns-Migration-Dynamics-after-Assad.pdf](https://etanasyria.org/file/2025/06/STUDY_Refugee>Returns-Migration-Dynamics-after-Assad.pdf)



should ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities. Conditions within return areas should be closely monitored, looking at safety, viability of infrastructure, and adherence to the rule of law.

## Addendum: List of Acronyms (in order of appearance)

HTS	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
UN	United Nations
LGBTQIA	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SNA	Syrian National Army
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics
OHCHR	The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
SNHR	Syrian Network for Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (the UN Refugee Agency)
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IOM	International Organization for Migration
PDMM	Provisional Directorate of Migration and Management
EU	European Union
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
GDP	Gross Domestic Product