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4.2. Return trends

According to UNHCR estimates, between 8 December 2024 and 12 June 2025, some 577 266 Syrians returned to Syria from abroad. In total, 938 106 returned from abroad since the beginning of 2024. The main intended locations of return were the governorates of Aleppo (206 938), Damascus (107 346), Rural Damascus (106 396) and Idlib (98 557).712

UNHCR estimated that around 200 000 individuals returned from Türkiye and 68 000 from Jordan. The profiles of returnees monitored by UNHCR included mostly working-age adults, including women, female-headed households but also children and older individuals returning from Türkiye, while women and girls where the main returnees from Jordan, followed by children and men of military age (18-40).713 As of 31 May, UNHCR estimated that 174 112 Syrians have crossed back to the country from Lebanon since 8 December 2024 using official and unofficial border crossings.714

It is not clear if all the returns are permanent. According to humanitarian workers in Lebanon, since December 2024 many Syrians residing in Lebanon have reportedly crossed back into Syria irregularly for short visits to reunite with family, assess their property, and the overall situation in the country following Assad's departure, before returning to Lebanon.715 UNHCR monitored the arrival of 106 290 Syrians to Lebanon between 8 December 2024 and 31 May 2025.716 An UNCHR survey carried out in January 2025 noted that 80 % of Syrian refugees expressed their desire to return but only 27 % consider returning within the next year. Around 60 % of refugees stated their interest in having a go and see visit to their homes before deciding to return.717 Türkiye announced that it will allow Syrians under temporary protection to carry out up to three 'go and see' visits before 1 July 2025 to Syria before deciding to return.718

Approximately 8 million Syrians were previously on wanted lists of the former government's security agencies. According to returnee testimonies cited by the New York Times, individuals returning from abroad after the fall of the Assad government have generally not faced repercussions from current authorities. Some were even able to verify their former 'wanted' status under the previous regime. The interim government has announced that individuals wanted for military or reserve service will not face any issues. However, those with prior civil court judgments or civil charges will still be subject to assessment.719 The Immigration and Passport Office in Damascus claimed to have lifted over 50 % of the travel bans imposed by the Assad government on more than 8 million Syrians. The travel bans affected those who were viewed as opponents of the Assad government and were wanted criminally and judicially.720 The arrest warrants issued by any of the four intelligence agencies of the former regime or by the military police for the military service are not being enforced.721

Testimonies from Syrians living abroad who travelled to the country after the fall of Assad on the roads from Lebanon to Damascus,[722] Amman to Damascus,[723] and Beirut to Damascus and to Sweida[724] indicated the interaction with security authorities at the borders to be brief and welcoming.[725]

According to SJAC, it has not been documented any mistreatment or targeting of returnees from abroad. The interim government has annulled all arrest warrants issued by Assad-era security agencies for political reasons but retained those related to criminal cases. During the release of detainees from Assad-era prisons, individuals accused of serious crimes such as murder and robbery were also released. Arrest warrants for these individuals remain in place, reportedly in the hope that they can be apprehended if they attempt to flee the country through border crossings. However, SJAC noted that the Assad government had often used criminal charges, such as possessing a forged passport, commonly used by those fleeing the country, to target activists. With the judiciary still not functioning, many returnees remain in legal limbo due to unresolved criminal charges and are often prevented from leaving the country again. SJAC added that the authorities are working to establish a mechanism to revoke such warrants issued on false grounds by the former criminal police.[726]

According to an NRC report, emerging tensions between returnees and host communities have begun to surface, primarily driven by perceived political or religious affiliations. In former government-controlled areas, resident communities have expressed fears of religious extremism and potential reprisals based on assumptions about returnees' loyalties, concerns that are often mutual. Instances of bullying in schools between host community children and returnee children have been reported, rooted in perceptions of political affiliation linked to areas of displacement.[727]

According to an IOM report based on an assessment of 1 100 communities and 3 508 key informant (KI) interviews across locations in Syria, approximately 78 % of returnees from abroad have returned to their areas of origin. The main challenges to sustainable return cited by returnees were the worsening economic conditions (94 %), unemployment (74 %), and limited access to services (55 %). Concerns related to tensions in the community were noted by 33 % of KIs interviewed by IOM across locations, with Hasaka (93 %) and Tartous (78 %) being the governorates where KIs reported the highest concerns. In contrast, the majority of respondents in Damascus (83 %), Dar'a (76 %), and Aleppo (75 %) reported no such concerns.[728]

At the governorate level, Homs (3.4) and Damascus (3.2)[729] were assessed as being 'partially conducive'[730] for the return and reintegration of IDPs and returnees. In contrast, Rural Damascus (2.1) and Hasaka (2.5) had the least conducive conditions. No governorate or location assessed reached an overall index scoring to be labelled 'mostly conducive' or 'fully conducive' for return and reintegration.[731]

A NRC report based on over 4 300 interviews and surveys carried out between December 2024 and February 2025 with refugee returnees, IDPs and humanitarian staff identified six main barriers to sustainable return: destroyed infrastructure and lack of services, disrupted education, economic collapse and livelihood insecurity, housing, land and property challenges; safety, and social cohesion concerns.[732] Lack of essential services and infrastructure including access to electricity, schools, hospitals, water and sewage systems was reported by the majority of

interviewees but was more pronounced in Aleppo, Rural Damascus, Homs and Dar'a governorates.733 Over 40 % of returnees interviewed reported no access to housing and issues related to HLP rights such as lacking ownership documents. Destruction of houses was reported by almost half of the respondents, and was particularly higher in Rural Damascus, Aleppo and Homs cities.734 Safety and security was deemed slightly lower than the overall average by respondents from Damascus while those from Idlib had a higher feeling of safety. According to NRC, the respondents' perceptions of safety are linked to the broader security context, regional dynamics and economic factors such as lack of employment opportunities and limited access to basic services.735

According to SJAC, to its knowledge, the interim government does not screen the past activities of Syrian returnees carried out abroad. The source noted that many returnees either hold European passports or have residency status in their host countries. Some have visited Syria and returned without being questioned about their activities while abroad.736

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  NRC, Beyond Return: Ensuring sustainable recovery & (re)-integration in Syria, 15 May 2025, url, p. 13

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  IOM, Syrian Arab Republic — Communities of Return Index — Round 1 (15 March - 05 April 2025), 13 May 2025, url, p. 4

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  IOM uses a five-tier scoring index to indicate the relative conduciveness of conditions for return and sustainable reintegration. The criteria assessed are: safety and security; adequate standards of living; access to livelihoods; housing, land and property; access to documentation. An unweighted average of the five criteria scores is calculated to produce a single composite index for each location, on a 0–5 scale, where higher scores indicate more conducive conditions for return and reintegration. IOM, Syrian Arab Republic —

Communities of Return Index — Round 1 (15 March - 05 April 2025), 13 May 2025, url, p. 17

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  A score between 2.6 – 3.5 indicates that the conditions are ‘partially conducive’ – some conditions support return, but notable barriers remain.

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  IOM, Syrian Arab Republic — Communities of Return Index — Round 1 (15 March - 05 April 2025), 13 May 2025, url, p. 15

- 732

  NRC, Beyond Return: Ensuring sustainable recovery & (re)-integration in Syria, 15 May 2025, url, p. 1

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