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2. Displacement and return movements

COMMON ANALYSIS | Last update: December 2025

This section uses the terms ‘return’ and ‘returnee’ in their usual meaning in everyday language and should not be understood as a reference to Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals (Return Directive).

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI reports: COI Update, 7.; Country Focus July 2025, 4.1., 4.2., 5.6.; Country Focus March 2025, 4.5.5., 4.5.6.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

Internal displacement and return

Conflict-related displacement surged after 27 November 2024, peaking at 1.1 million on 12 December 2024, before stabilising at around 650 000 by 5 February 2025. Significant displacement waves were recorded in December 2024 in northern Syria. Serious security incidents in coastal areas in March 2025 also caused significant displacement, most of those IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) having returned since then. Additionally, clashes between pro-government and Druze armed groups in Rural Damascus in late April 2025 and early May 2025 led to the displacement of 15 000 people.

Between 27 November 2024 and 12 June 2025, approximately 1.34 million IDPs returned to their areas of origin, with over 533 000 departing from IDP sites since 8 December 2024. Most returns occurred in Aleppo, Hama, Idlib, and Homs governorates. Despite this, according to UNHCR, an estimated 7.4 million individuals remain displaced within Syria.

These patterns reflect the ongoing volatility and insecurity in the country, underscoring the challenges to sustainable return and the need for stabilisation and protection measures in affected regions.

Returnees from abroad

As of 18 September 2025, UNHCR estimated that 988 134 Syrians returned from abroad since 8 December 2024. The top countries of departure for returnees were Türkiye (41 %), Lebanon (32 %) and Jordan (20 %). The top intended governorates of return were Damascus (170 624), Aleppo (159 450), Idlib (134 436) and Homs (128 531). Returnees from neighbouring countries are reported to be working-age adults, including women, female-headed households, children, men of military age (formerly 18-40 years of age), and older individuals.

However, the sustainability of these returns is severely limited. Many returnees encounter major obstacles in accessing basic services, legal documentation, and livelihood opportunities. The main challenges to sustainable return cited by returnees were unemployment (77 %), high cost of living (74 %), poor infrastructure and living conditions (57 %) and lack of humanitarian or development support (52 %).

Requirements and conditions upon return

Syrian nationals returning to Syria must present valid identification, such as a national passport or ID card. Documents issued by the former government remain accepted. Those registered in Syria's civil registries but lacking documentation may be admitted after identity verification via the Civil Affairs database. Syrian diplomatic missions abroad can issue temporary travel documents to facilitate returns.

Since the fall of the Assad regime, returnees have generally not faced repercussions from authorities. Arrest warrants issued by former intelligence agencies or military police are reportedly not enforced. However, individuals with civil court judgments or charges remain subject to assessment, contributing to a more permissive return environment despite unresolved criminal charges and a non-functioning judiciary.

Testimonies from returnees via Lebanon, Jordan, and other neighbouring countries describe border interactions as brief and welcoming, with no systematic mistreatment reported. Nonetheless, tensions with host communities have emerged, often linked to perceived political or religious affiliations.

Authorities do not screen returnees past activities abroad. According to an IOM (International Organization for Migration) study, 78 % of returnees have returned to their areas of origin. Key challenges to sustainable return include deteriorating economic conditions (94 %), unemployment (74 %), limited access to services (55 %), and community tensions (33 %). Another study highlights housing and property issues, particularly the lack of ownership documentation, as significant barriers to reintegration.

Please note that an assessment on returns in the context of the Return Directive falls outside the mandate of the EUAA and therefore also outside the scope of the country guidance documents.

The reader may refer to the UNHCR Position on Returns to the Syrian Arab Republic, still valid at the time of writing of this guidance.

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