4.2. Employment

Syria's labour market remains highly precarious,971 with significant lack of employment opportunities.972 According to a 2026 UNHCR study based on household interviews with refugee returnees, IDP returnees, and host communities across all governorates, high unemployment was reported across all categories, with about 30 % of working-age respondents jobless and only 6-7 % accessing formal employment. Around 21 % of refugee returnees and 23 % of IDP returnees worked in the informal sector, while 14 % and 13 % respectively relied on daily or casual labour. Women (33 %) face slightly higher unemployment than men (28 %), and while patterns are broadly similar across groups, refugee returnees experience higher unemployment (36 %) and host communities have somewhat better access to formal jobs (12 % employed in formal sector).973

An April 2026 report by IOM found that 76 % of respondents identified lack of livelihoods as one of the main risks and barrier to return. Most communities identified agriculture and livestock as the primary source of income (74 %), followed by employment in the public sector (7 %), daily labour (6 %), small business (6 %) and trade (6 %).974 Damascus recorded an average score of 2.9 out of 5 on access to livelihoods, tying with Aleppo governorate and ranking second highest in the country after Tartous governorate. The score is classified as 'partially conducive' for the return and sustainable reintegration of IDPs and returnees, according to IOM's indicators.975

A study commissioned by the Country of Origin Information Unit of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, based on a survey of Syrians aged 16–35 conducted in May 2025, 976 found that continuous employment was most prevalent in Damascus (33 %), followed by Aleppo (31 %) and Homs (25 %). Occasional work was most common in Homs (23 %), compared with Aleppo (14 %) and Damascus (13 %). Unemployment or non-participation in the labour market was highest in Aleppo (26 %), followed by Homs (16 %) and Damascus (15 %). It should also be noted that the proportion of students in the respondents' sample was relatively high, with the highest proportion in Damascus (26 %), followed by Aleppo (19 %) and Homs (17 %). 977

According to a Danish Refugee Council study,978 informality dominates the agriculture, construction and textile sectors, with over 80 % of small and micro-enterprises operating without registration or formal labour arrangements, limiting their access to finance, insurance, and legal protection. Youth under 30 make up the majority of the workforce in these sectors, largely engaged in daily or temporary jobs, with generally low skill levels. Women's participation to this workforce remains largely informal. Wages across these fields are low, irregular, and often insufficient to cover basic living costs, with construction workers earning about USD 7–12 per day and factory and agricultural workers typically under USD 100 per month, while payment delays are frequent.979

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  AT, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Staatendokumentation Country Report Syria, 28 February 2026, url, p. 364

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  Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, url, p. 144; UNDP, Syria’s Economy After the 2024 Transition: Jobs, Enterprise, and a Path Forward, 25 February 2026, url

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  The study is based on 7 120 household interviews with refugee (52 %) and IDP returnees (25 %), and host community members (23 %), conducted across all 14 governorates in Syria during the first quarter of 2026. UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights. Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, url, p. 4

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  IOM, Syrian Arab Republic — Communities of Return Index — Round 4 (1 January - 4 February 2026), 3 April 2026, url, pp. 4, 12

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  IOM, Syrian Arab Republic — Communities of Return Index — Round 4 (1 January - 4 February 2026), 3 April 2026, url, p. 21

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  The survey consisted of a total 600 respondents aged between 16 and 35 years: 200 residents of Damascus, 200 residents of Aleppo, and 200 residents of Homs. AT, Country of Origin Information Department of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration, Statistics Lebanon: Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2025, 27 October 2025, url, p. 1

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  AT, Country of Origin Information Department of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration, Statistics Lebanon: Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2025, 27 October 2025, url, pp. 10-11

- 978

  The study was conducted across the governorates of Aleppo, Homs, Dar’a, Damascus and Rural Damascus between August and November 2025, and examines three sectors: agriculture, construction, and textile. DRC, Syria: Labour Market Assessment Report, 17 March 2026, url, p. 4

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DRC, Syria: Labour Market Assessment Report, 17 March 2026, url, p. 6

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