

Eighth Regional Survey on

Syrian Refugees' Perceptions & Intentions on Return to Syria

Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan

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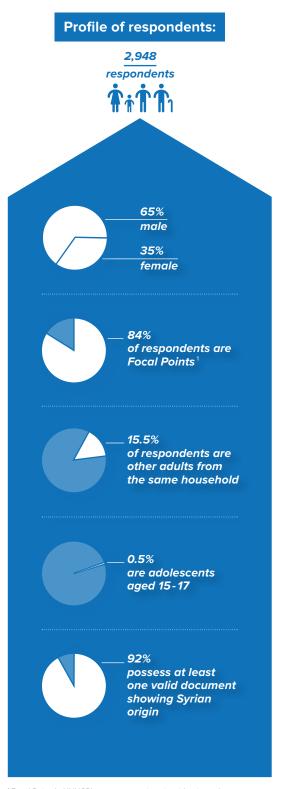
Executive Summary

This report presents the key findings of UNHCR's eighth Return Perceptions and Intentions Survey (RPIS) among Syrian refugees. UNHCR conducted this survey in Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq between January and February 2023. Due to the operational context, Türkiye did not take part in the RPIS exercise. The findings of this report represent an aggregation of country survey findings, with country specific findings highlighted in the report where relevant.

Pursuing durable solutions to displacement is integral to UNHCR's work and mandate, including through voluntary return in safety and dignity, which is the fundamental right of every refugee. UNHCR firmly believes in listening to refugees and being guided by their hopes, intentions, and choices when it comes to securing durable solutions.

UNHCR has been carrying out the RPIS among Syrian refugees in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq since 2017 to ensure the centrality of refugee voices in discussions about their future, as well as to inform planning and programming. Over 2,900 Syrian refugees were reached in this round of the RPIS. The survey was conducted in a challenging context amidst political, security, humanitarian, economic, and social challenges in Syria and throughout the region, compounded by the economic ramifications of the war in Ukraine. Data collection for the RPIS coincided with the devastating earthquakes of 6 February in Türkiye and Syria.

The results of the survey are broadly comparable to previous iterations. Overall, it was observed that the majority of refugees still hope to return home to Syria one day. This year's survey also highlighted the declining socio-economic conditions in the region, much like the sixth and seventh RPIS conducted in 2021 and 2022, respectively. Similar to the findings of the 2022 survey, about nine out of ten respondents expressed their inability to meet their basic needs in the host countries notwithstanding the generous support afforded by host governments and communities, as well as the international donor community. Compared to the findings of last year's survey, an increasing percentage of respondents who do not intend to return to Syria in the next 12 months indicated a hope to move to a third country.



¹ Focal Point: In UNHCR's corporate registration, identity and case management tool proGres, Individuals are registered into Registration Groups. A Registration Group contains one or more Individual(s). The first Individual registered into a group is designated as the Focal Point. There can be only one Focal Point in a Registration Group.

Key findings of this survey included:

Overall, most Syrian refugees still hope to return one day despite the current challenges inside Syria.

A sizeable number of Syrian refugees expressed their hope to return within the next five years.

In this year's survey, and in line with the results of the sixth and seventh RPIS conducted in 2021 and 2022 respectively, only a small fraction of Syrian refugees indicated their intention to return in the next 12 months.

Respondents cited a lack of safety and security, lack of livelihood/work opportunities, as well as inadequate basic services and lack of adequate housing in Syria as the key factors influencing their decision-making about return.

Around 90 percent of respondents stated that they were facing challenges in meeting their basic needs in host countries.

Compared to last year's findings, an increasing number of respondents who did not intend to return in the next 12 months expressed their hope to move to a third country. Although the overall results are similar to those of previous surveys, there are some notable patterns. The intention to return in the next 12 months remains low and has decreased slightly compared to last year's survey, although it still corresponds with the actual return trends that UNHCR is monitoring. A quarter of the respondents expressed their hope to return within five years and a sizeable number mentioned a hope of returning to Syria one day.

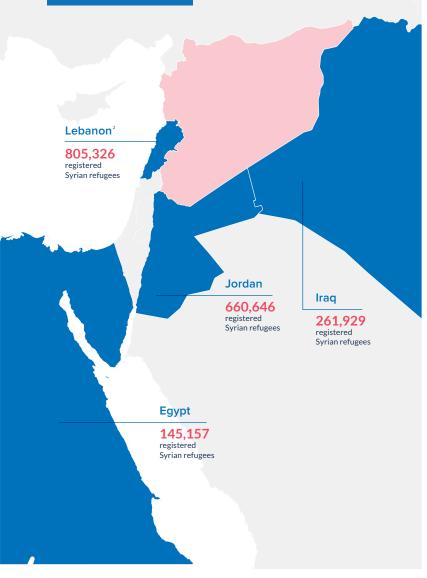
The survey continues to reveal that, at present, prevailing conditions in Syria tend to be the primary driver for deciding on return, rather than the circumstances in the host countries.

Based on the results of this survey, UNHCR stresses the continued importance of the international community maintaining a comprehensive protection and solutions approach to the Syria crisis. This entails assisting host countries and communities in preserving a favourable asylum and protection environment, enhancing medium-term support to strengthen host country resilience, and further enabling refugee self-reliance, as well as expanding access to resettlement and other safe pathways to third countries.

As outlined in UNHCR's Protection Thresholds and Parameters for Refugee Return to Syria (2018), while UNHCR is not currently facilitating or promoting refugee return to Syria, all refugees have the fundamental human right to return to their country of origin at a time of their own choosing. The decision to return must be made on a voluntary basis by refugees, based on up-to-date and reliable information, and not coerced either overtly through forced return, or indirectly through policies that restrict refugees' rights, or by limiting assistance to refugees in the host country. At the same time, some Syrian refugees are already taking steps to return; that is their right and support to them must be enhanced.

Given that a majority of Syrian refugees maintain hope to return one day, and many within a five-year horizon, it is also vital that collective efforts remain focused on addressing the factors that refugees say are inhibiting their return in a systematic and comprehensive manner. This survey outlines the range of factors which refugees identified as obstacles to returning. Addressing obstacles to returning is also increasingly important in the context of the large Syrian refugee youth population, many of whom have spent the majority of their lives in a host country. UNHCR calls on all stakeholders to support the ability of Syrian refugees to make free and informed decisions about their future. As the Syria crisis continues well beyond a decade, the need to sharpen the focus on all possible durable solutions for Syrian refugees is vital to bring an end to their displacement and enable them to start rebuilding their lives in safety and dignity.

Number of registered Syrian refugees as of 30 April 2023



These figures refer to refugees registered by UNHCR. Latest and official figures are available here: <u>UNHCR data portal</u>

² The Government of Lebanon estimates that the country hosts 1.5 million Syrians who have fled the crisis in Syria. (Including 805,326 registered with UNHCR as of 31 March 2023).

Note on methodology:

While intention surveys can provide valuable insights into refugees' hopes, intentions and concerns and are a useful tool, they have limitations including the fact that the reflection of refugees' intentions represents a given point in time only and may subsequently change depending on a wide range of factors.

Most respondents interviewed were Focal Points who are often the Heads of Household and primary decision makers concerning return. Only 0.5 per cent of respondents were between the ages of 15-17. Intentions among the youth cohort, who represent up to half of the Syrian refugee population and who have spent most of their life in displacement, may differ from those interviewed for the report.

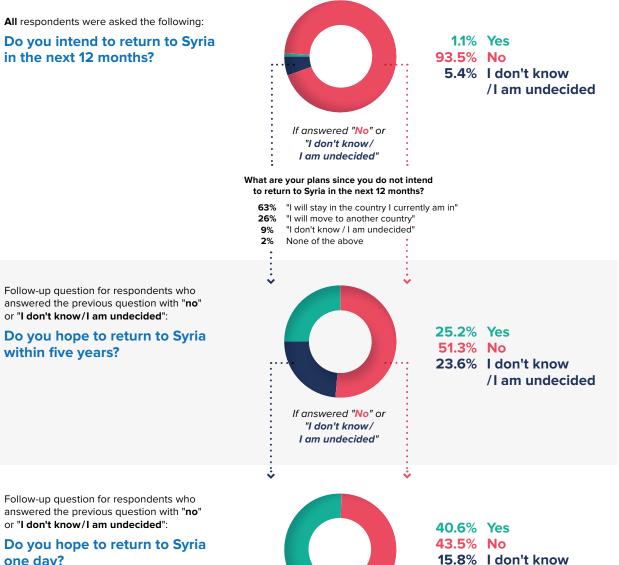
Slight differences in methodology and questionnaires between surveys, as well as the statistical margin of error, mean undue reliance should not be placed on trends over time.

Since 2017, over 21,900 Syrian refugees have been reached through perceptions and intentions surveys, including 2,948 in this eighth round.

At a Glance

All respondents were asked the following:

Do you intend to return to Syria Q1. in the next 12 months?



Do you hope to return to Syria one day?

within five years?

Q2.

03



"Overall hope to return" comprises of who hope to return one day.





/I am undecided

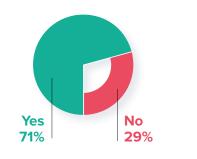
Context

The survey was conducted in a challenging environment amidst a range of political, security, humanitarian, economic, and social challenges in Syria and across the region.

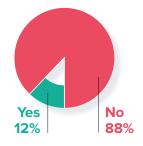
During the past year, the region has been further impacted by the war in Ukraine and its economic consequences, such as the rise in cost of basic household needs. Data collection for the RPIS coincided with the earthquakes that occurred in Türkiye and Syria on 6 February 2023.

As in the 2022 survey, Syrian refugees were asked questions about their ability to meet basic needs in their host country, as well as the main challenges they face.

Do you and your family face challenges in the host country in your daily life?



Is your income enough for you (and your family) to meet basic needs?



The findings from the survey illustrate an extremely difficult situation for the vast majority of refugees, in line with the more comprehensive vulnerability or multi-sectoral needs assessments that take place at the country level each year. The proportion of Syrian refugees that indicated they do not currently have a source of income that allows them to cover their and their families' basic needs remains at around 90 per cent, as in 2022 and 2021. The percentage was highest among refugees residing in Egypt, reaching 95 per cent. Lebanon and Jordan followed closely, with 91 and 86 per cent of respondents respectively mentioning that they could not meet their and their families' basic needs.

Respondents said they struggled to meet the costs related to housing, food, basic commodities (such as clothes, hygiene items, and minimum furniture), and medical services and medication. In Egypt, food was the most mentioned basic need that refugees struggle to afford, while in Jordan, both housing and basic commodities were identified as significant struggles. In Lebanon, refugees reported facing equal difficulties with housing and food, and in Iraq, refugees indicated that they struggled equally with housing, basic commodities, and food. This could be partially explained by the inflationary pressures of recent crises, such as the war in Ukraine. For example, as Egypt is one of the largest wheat importers in the world, sourcing most of its wheat and grain from Russia and Ukraine, inflationary pressures led to increased costs of daily necessities, especially impacting vulnerable populations.

According to the survey findings, humanitarian assistance is an important source of income for refugees, highlighting a high level of vulnerability.

The main challenges of living in the host countries related to the lack of employment/livelihood opportunities, lack of financial assistance and health services, as well as the threat of eviction. Follow-up question for respondents who answered the question "Do you and your family face challenges in your daily life in the host country?" with "yes":

What are the main challenges you and your family are facing in the host country in your daily life?

Lack of employment/livelihood opportunities

No access to financial assistance

Having aquired debts

Lack of access to health services

Threat of eviction

Tensions with the host community

Lack of access to education

Physical safety / security issues

Challenges with legal residency or in accessing documentation in host country

Lack of freedom of movement

My family has been separated

Country-specific Context



LEBANON

2021 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR)



JORDAN

VAF Population Survey of Refugees Living in Host Communities 2022





JORDAN

VAF Population Survey of Refugees Living in Camps 2022





IRAQ

*5

2022 MSNA VI of Syrian Refugees and Host Communities in Iraq



Snapshot of Findings

Despite the current challenges inside Syria, overall, most refugees still hope to return one day.

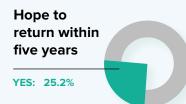


Note: "Overall hope to return" comprises of participants who intend to return to Syria within the next 12 months, those who hope to return within five years and also those who hope to return one day.

- Similar to the results of last year's survey, around 56 per cent of respondents indicated their overall intention to return, whether in the next 12 months, or five years, or one day.
- In Jordan, 65 per cent of refugees surveyed indicated an overall desire to return to Syria, whether in the next 12 months, five years, or one day, the highest share, followed by Lebanon and Iraq.
- Some 32 per cent of refugees indicated they have no hope to return to Syria, whether in the next 12 months, five years, or one day, while some 12 per cent remain unsure about their longer-term intentions.

					10% 20%	12% 30%	12% 32%
Overall hope	YES DON'T KNOW /UNDECIDED				20%	30%	32%
to return over the years	NO		2018	2019	2021	2022	2023
-		Note: Changes in survey design and methodology mean direct comparisons over time are not fully reliable					

A sizeable number of Syrian refugees expressed a hope to return within the next five years.



Note: This question was only asked to respondents who do <u>not</u> intend to return in the next 12 months.

About one quarter of the refugees surveyed expressed their hope to return to Syria within five years.

- The percentage of those hoping to return within five years was highest in Jordan (38 per cent).
- Lebanon had the second highest percentage of those hoping to return within five years (25 per cent), followed by Iraq (11 per cent).

An increasingly small number of Syrian refugees expressed an intention to return in the next 12 months.

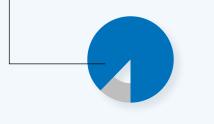
Intention to return in the next 12 months YES: 1.1%

- Some 1.1 per cent of Syrian refugees surveyed expressed an intention to return in the next twelve months, as compared to 1.7 per cent in 2022 and 2.4 per cent in 2021.
- The biggest change in intentions compared to last year's survey was in Jordan where the intention to return in the next 12 months decreased from 2.4 per cent to 0.8 per cent.
- The share of refugees answering the question about their intention to return in the coming 12 months with 'I don't know/I am undecided' continues to show a slight downward trend.

Concerns over safety and security, livelihoods, basic services and housing in Syria are cited as key factors influencing refugees' return decision-making.

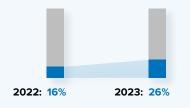
- A range of safety and security issues continue to heavily impact decision-making, including active conflict, the presence of armed actors, and a lack of enforcement of laws.
- The lack of livelihood/work opportunities remain an important obstacle to returning, and was the most cited factor in this year's survey.
- Lack of access to adequate basic services, such as health, water, and power, and the lack of adequate housing also remain among the most important obstacles to returning.

Around 90 per cent of respondents are facing challenges in meeting their basic needs in host countries.



- In this year's survey, the most frequently cited challenges faced by refugees in host countries include lack of employment/livelihood opportunities, barriers to accessing financial services and having acquired debts.
- Some 24 per cent of respondents in Iraq reported that their income was enough to meet their basic needs. In contrast, only 14 per cent of respondents in Jordan, 9.4 per cent in Lebanon, and 5.1 per cent in Egypt said that their income was sufficient to meet their and their families' basic needs.

Compared to last year's findings, a higher percentage of respondents who are not intending to return in the next 12 months expressed a hope to move to a third country.



Note: This question was only asked to respondents who do <u>not</u> intend to return in the next 12 months.

- While 16 per cent of respondents in 2022 indicated a hope to move to another country, this percentage has increased to 26 per cent in 2023.
- The largest shares of refugees that expressed a hope to move to a third country were in Egypt (33 per cent), Lebanon (27 per cent), Jordan (26 per cent), and Iraq (19 per cent) respectively.
- Almost 68 per cent of respondents who indicated a hope to move to a third country said they are seeking better living conditions.

Country Spotlight

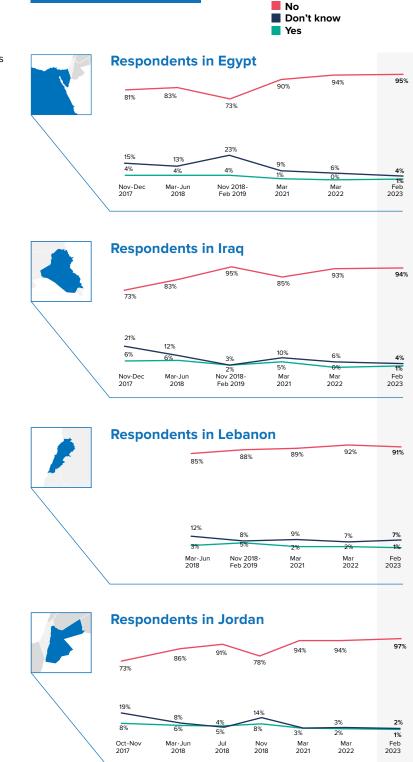
While trends related to return intentions are largely consistent across the four countries, some context specific variations were identified as part of the data analysis.

Overall, the intention to return in the next 12 months remained at low levels across the region.

In Jordan and Egypt, the highest percentage of respondents said they did not intend to return to Syria in the next 12 months (97 per cent and 95 per cent respectively), closely followed by respondents in Iraq (94 per cent) and Lebanon (91 per cent). While the majority of respondents in Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon indicated that they plan to stay in their respective host country for the time being, an important share of respondents suggested they hope to move to a third country, primarily for better living conditions, to join family members who are already living abroad, or for studies. An increasing number of respondents compared to last year's survey indicated a hope to move to a third country through resettlement.

Overall, the five-year and long-term hope to return remained highest in Jordan, but at a level which was only marginally greater than the regional average.

Do you intend to return to Syria in the next 12 months?



Disclaimer: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

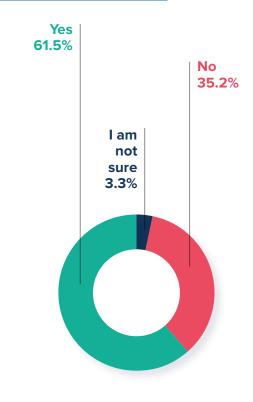
Access to Information and Knowledge

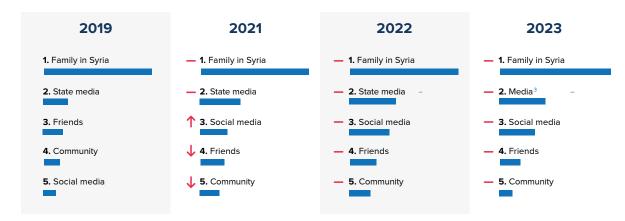
To ensure safe, voluntary, and dignified returns, access to information remains crucial. In this year's survey, the number of refugees who felt they have sufficient information to decide on whether or not to return has slightly increased, to 61 per cent from 53 per cent in 2022, although it is lower than the 73 per cent reported in 2021.

Respondents indicated that they receive information about Syria mainly from family/relatives in Syria, and through media (such as TV, newspapers, and online media) and social media, which is similar to the results from the last years. Generally, the information that refugees said was the most useful for their decision-making in 2023 concerned the security situation, employment and livelihood opportunities, and basic services and humanitarian assistance in Syria (such as education, health, food and water), with information about employment and livelihood opportunities increasing in the order of importance compared to last year's survey.

A notable trend over the years is that the number of refugees who expressed that they are not sure about having sufficient information has steadily decreased. This may mean that refugees have an increasingly better understanding of the information they require in terms of decision-making on return.

While there is currently no official 'go and see visit' programme in place for refugees to visit Syria, a sizeable number of refugees felt that it is important for them to do so prior to deciding on return. Do you feel you have sufficient information to decide on whether or not to permanently return to Syria in the next 12 months?





Main sources of information over time

³ In 2023, the answer options "State Media" and "Non State Media" have been merged into one category titled "Media".

Return Decision-Making

This section explores the reasons and motivations for return. It is presented according to three broad groups to facilitate analysis.

These are 1) those who intend to return in the next 12 months; 2) those who do not intend to return in the next 12 months; and 3) those who are undecided.

1. Refugees intending to return in the next 12 months

Among the survey respondents, some 1.1 per cent expressed their intention to return to Syria in the next 12 months, which is slightly lower than the 1.7 per cent reported in last year's survey. It is worth noting that over the years, the intention to return in the next 12 months has consistently remained low.

Among the small number who have expressed an intention to return in the next 12 months, living conditions in the host countries were listed as key motivators, followed by the wish to reunite with their family in Syria.

Overall, both male and female respondents showed a similar inclination towards returning in the next 12 months, as 1.2 per cent of male respondents and 1 per cent of female respondents stated that they intend to return within this time frame.

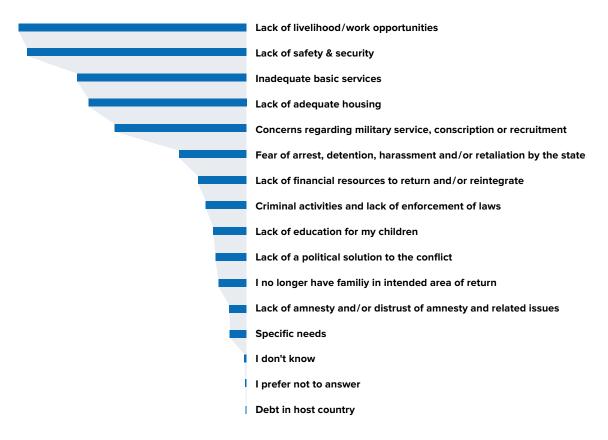
2022 2023 Regional 92.8% 93.5% 5.6% 5.4% 1.1% Yes Undecided No Yes Undecided No 2022 2023 Countries 94% 94.9% Egypt 6% 3.8% 1.3% 0% 93.3% 94.4% Iraq 6.4% 4.3% 0.3% 1.3% 94.2% 96.8% Jordan **2.4**% 3.4% 2.4% 0.8% 91.7% 91.3% Lebanon 6.5% 1.2% 7.5% 1.8%

Intention to return in the next 12 months

2. Refugees not intending to return in the next 12 months

As in previous surveys, most respondents – 94 per cent – stated that they do not intend to return to Syria in the next 12 months. It should be noted that among those who do not intend to return in the next 12 months, 54 per cent expressed their hope to return either within five years, or one day. While direct comparisons over time must be treated carefully given adjustments in the survey methodology and questionnaire, a downward trend was observed in the intention to return in the next 12 months and in the hope to return within 5 years, while the hope to return one day remains comparable with 2022 findings. When respondents were asked about their reasons for not intending to return to Syria in the next 12 months, the most cited factors were concerns about the lack of safety and security and the lack of livelihood/work opportunities. Other important factors that were mentioned included inadequate basic services, lack of adequate housing or concerns over respondents' properties in Syria, as well as concerns about military service, conscription, or recruitment.

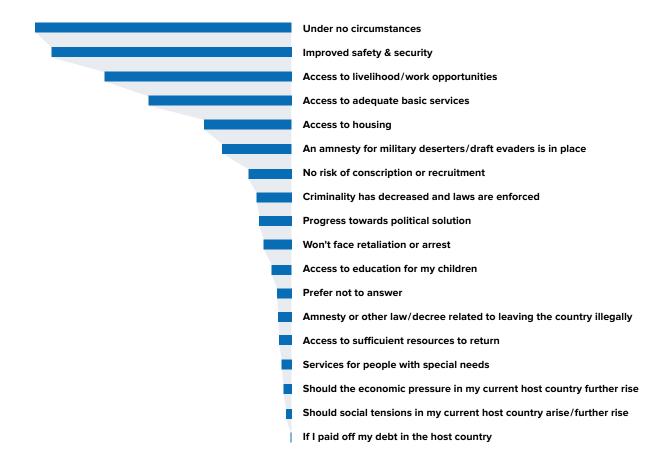
What are the main reasons why you are not intending to return to Syria in the next 12 months?



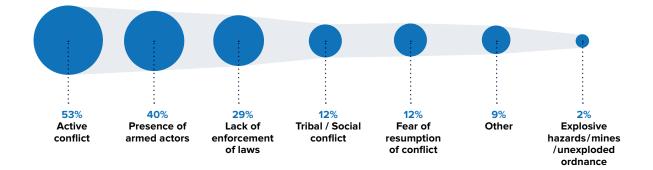
Note: This question was only asked to respondents who do not intend to return in the next 12 months.

Under what circumstances would you consider changing your current decision and returning to Syria?

Note: This question was only asked to respondents who do not intend to return in the next 12 months.



Main safety and security issues



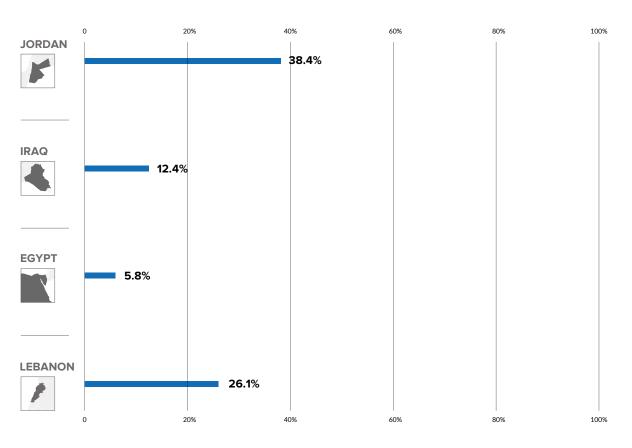
Hope to return within the next five years

For the second time, respondents were asked about their medium-term hope to return to Syria, namely within the next five years. Of all those not intending to return in the next 12 months or undecided, 25 per cent expressed a hope to return within five years. This marks a slight decline from the 2022 findings, which recorded a figure of 29 per cent.

Based on this year's and past survey findings, a sizeable number of refugees is considering return and may be ready to return in the coming years if progress is made in removing obstacles to return.

Breakdown: Hope to return within the next five years

Note: This includes invididuals who intend to return within 12 months



3. Undecided about Return

The percentage of respondents answering 'I don't know/I am undecided' concerning their return intention in the next 12 months has decreased for the eighth time in a row, from 18 per cent in 2017 to 5.4 per cent in 2023. The lowest rate of respondents who were unsure were in Jordan (2.4 percent) and the highest in Lebanon (7.5 per cent).

When asked about the main issues that could help them decide, respondents indicated that improved safety and security, access to livelihood/work opportunities, and certainty over being able to access adequate basic services in Syria, such as health, water, power, and infrastructure, were the main factors that could help them in their decision-making.

The finding that the percentage of refugees who are undecided concerning their intention to return in the next 12 months is decreasing may indicate that Syrian refugees have an increasingly clear picture of their return intentions. Trends in the last few years indicate that the main sources of information concerning refugees' decision-making are family/relatives in Syria, media (such as TV, newspapers, and online media), and social media. Increased access to information through digitalization and communication technologies over the years could perhaps explain the ability of refugees to have a more definitive position on their intention to return or not, although this explanation would have to be further explored.

Living conditions in host countries and intention to return

It remains important to further explore the relationship between the ability to meet basic needs and return intentions. In this year's survey, factors related to conditions in host countries were mentioned as the most common consideration by the very few refugees who intend to return in the next 12 months.

Nevertheless, despite almost 90 per cent of Syrian refugees saying that they and their families were unable to meet basic needs, the intention to return in the short term remained low. This appears to imply that for those not intending to return in the next 12 months and those who are undecided, concerns over the situation in Syria outweigh the on-going challenges in host countries, or do not seem to notably affect their decision-making.

The findings from this year's survey reveal an association between the ability of refugees to meet their basic needs in their host country and their hope to move to a third country. Among those who stated that their main sources of income are not enough to meet their (and their family's) basic needs, the share of respondents who have expressed a hope to move to a third country is slightly higher than those who stated that their income is sufficient to meet their basic needs. However, the association would have to be further explored in future survey iterations, taking additional factors into account that may have an influence in order to draw definitive conclusions.

Annex: Methodology

During the eighth round of the RPIS, conducted between January and February 2023, a total of 4,173 Syrian refugees residing in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan were contacted. Out of these, 2,948 were successfully reached and consented to being interviewed. The survey was paused for a few days in Lebanon following the earthquakes of 6 February, with about 900 respondents reached before, and about 2,000 after the earthquakes throughout the region.

Profile of Respondents

2,948 respondents

65% male and 35% female

84% of respondents are Focal Points

15.5% of respondents are other adults from the same household

0.5% are adolescents aged 15-17

92% possess at least one valid document showing Syrian origin

Sampling strategy and data analysis

The RPIS is conducted through a common questionnaire which is used by all participating country operations. The sampling approach adopted for this survey was to generate a representative sample of the overall population of Syrian refugees known to UNHCR in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. A random sample was drawn from UNHCR's databases in the four participating countries, with the sample size per country proportionate to their share of the Syrian refugee population known to UNHCR. A 40 per cent nonresponse rate was considered when setting the sample size.

Who answered the survey?

The procedure once a respondent is contacted and answers the call includes the check by the enumerator of the respondent's name and file number. The adult Focal Point is the person that is interviewed. In case the Focal point is absent, his/her adult spouse or another adult member of the same household registered under the same case number as the Focal Point is interviewed. In case another adult member of the household answers the call, it is double-checked that these individuals are the spouse or another adult registered under the same case as the Focal Point. In the case of a child-headed household, a Focal Point registered under the case number who is 15 years old or more can also be interviewed. The majority (84 per cent) of the respondents reached were Focal Points of the case, most of whom were male. The remaining 16 per cent were either the spouses, other adult

household members or children aged 15 years or above. About 27 per cent of the respondents were female and Focal Points.

Limitations

Survey findings reflect refugees' intentions at a given point in time only and may subsequently change. Due to the reliance on phone interviews, it was more difficult to reach refugees with specific needs.

Of those sampled for the survey, 70 per cent could be reached. Data from a sample, in comparison to a census, will add some uncertainty about the point estimates, which is explained below. Given the sample size of 2,948 respondents, the uncertainty around the estimates for the main variables of interest is rather low.

Although data collected through previous surveys provides an interesting perspective of trends over time, the survey methodology and questionnaire varied slightly across the different rounds of the survey. Therefore, the analysis focused on the current data, comparing only the most reliable indicators over time.

Use of the Survey Data

UNHCR will continue to use the data generated from the survey and associated analysis to generate insights and inform its operational response, programming, and policy and advocacy efforts in the region, in line with its Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy.

Methodology: Margin of Error and Confidence **Interval Calculation**

The margin of error (half the width of a confidence interval) for a proportion under simple random sampling has been calculated using the formula:

$$e = \sqrt{\frac{z_{1-\frac{a}{2}}^{2}\hat{p}(1-\hat{p})}{n}}$$

This expression formalizes the fact that with sampling theory, it is possible to statistically generalize findings from a sample to a population, but a degree of uncertainty must be taken into account due to the fact that not everyone in the population group was interviewed.

$Z^{2}_{1-\frac{a}{2}}$

in this formula is the critical value of the standard normal distribution reflecting the confidence interval desired, 1.96 for 95 per cent in this case.

p

is the proportion of the sample for which the outcome indicator is true, and n

is the sample size. For the intention to return in the next 12 months, this results in a margin of error, on the regional level, of 0.0038. The 95 per cent confidence interval therefore is 0.7 to 1.5 per cent. For the questions related to the overall hope to return, the 95 per cent confidence interval, using the same formula, ranges from 54.3 to 57.9 per cent.



Photo credit:

Cover image: UNHCR / Hameed Maarouf Page 16: UNHCR / Joelle Abou Chabke Page 18: UNHCR / Vivian Tou'meh

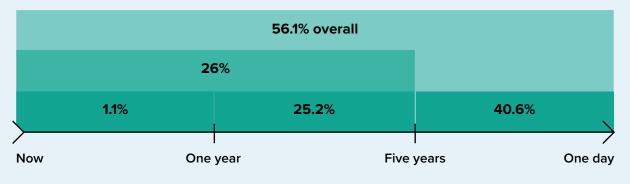
Design: UNHCR / Klement

Annex: Aggregates

The below is a simplified visualization.

To understand the sequence of questions asked and the calculation of figures, please refer to page 5 for details.

Hoping to return



Undecided on return

		11.7% overall	
	5.4%	23.6%	15.8%
Now	One	l year Five	years One day

Not hoping to return 32.2% overall 93.5% 51.3% 43.5% Now One year Five years One day

The RPIS was produced by the UNHCR MENA Regional Bureau. For more information, please contact: Rachel Manning, <u>manning@unhcr.org</u>



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