



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



UNHCR/Ayham Al Kady



UNHCR, together with its partners, provides humanitarian assistance to returnees from Lebanon at Jousieh Border Crossing Point. ©UNHCR/ A.Alkady

Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights

Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026)

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Purpose of the Report	4
Methodology and Scope	4
Data collection Partners	4
Returnee and Host Communities Profiles	5
Return Trends	8
1. Returnee’s Family Composition	9
2. Modality of Return	9
3. Factors Influencing Return	10
4. Barriers to Return	11
5. Returnees’ Intentions	11
6. Access to Information Prior to Return	12
Protection Risk Analysis	12
1. Safety and Security Considerations	12
1.1 Security Concerns	12
1.2 Freedom of movement	13
1.3 Explosive Ordnance Contamination	14
2. Legal Barriers	15
2.1 Lack of civil documentation	15
2.2 Housing, Land and Property Concerns	16
3. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support	17
4. Gender-Related Protection Risk	18
5. Children-at-Risk	19
6. Risks to Social Cohesion	21
7. Adoption of Harmful Coping Mechanisms	21
8. Unmet basic needs	22
Recommended Actions for Protection Partners	23
UNHCR response to returns	24

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from **7,120 household interviews** conducted across all 14 governorates in Syria during the first quarter of 2026. The analysis examines return dynamics, reintegration conditions, and protection risks affecting **refugee returnees, IDP returnees, and host communities**, against a backdrop of large-scale returns, economic deterioration, and renewed security incidents.

Since December 2024, an estimated **1.6 million refugees and 1.9 million IDPs** have returned to Syria, primarily to Aleppo, Idleb, Hama, Homs, and Damascus. While **82% of returnees** express an intention to remain in their current location, reintegration remains fragile and highly contingent on access to livelihoods, housing, and basic services. Recent regional instability—including cross-border movements from Lebanon and armed confrontations in northern and north-eastern Syria—has further strained already limited absorption capacity in areas of return.

Economic insecurity remains the dominant driver of vulnerability. Approximately **30% of respondents are unemployed**, with most employment concentrated in informal and unstable work. Food insecurity and livelihoods are consistently reported as the top unmet needs across all population groups, followed by shelter. Returnees, in particular, face acute housing challenges due to property damage, high rental costs, and limited rehabilitation support. More than half of households reported reliance on negative coping mechanisms, including depletion of savings, de-prioritisation of essential needs, and, to a lesser extent, child labour and child marriage.

Protection risks remain widespread and multidimensional. Explosive ordnance (EO) contamination continues to pose a grave threat, with **239 EO incidents recorded in Q1 2026**, resulting in **153 fatalities and 299 injuries**, disproportionately affecting men and children. While some operational progress was made through the lifting of administrative barriers affecting mine action partners, clearance needs remain immense and far exceed current response capacity, underscoring the need for sustained investment and strengthened national clearance systems.

Legal and administrative barriers, particularly those affecting issuance of civil documentation, continue to constrain access to services, education, and freedom of movement. Documentation gaps were reported by **19% of refugee returnee households**, with civil registry backlogs and limited institutional capacity persisting in several governorates. Housing, land, and property (HLP) disputes and damage further undermine tenure security and pose barriers to sustainable return.

Women and children face heightened protection risks. Gender-based violence continues to be reported predominantly within the household, driven by economic stress, overcrowded living conditions, and entrenched dependency dynamics. The proportion of female-headed households remains high, particularly among recent returnees from Lebanon, increasing exposure to exploitation and violence. Children's protection concerns are equally pronounced, with **uneven school attendance** driven by poverty, child labour, lack of documentation, and displacement-related barriers.

Psychosocial needs are widespread, with **47% of respondents** reporting stress-related symptoms and **31% unable to access support services**, primarily due to service unavailability, lack of information, and affordability barriers. Existing mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services remain limited in scope and coverage, with insufficient access to specialised care.

Overall, despite strong return intentions, **sustainable reintegration in Syria remains constrained** by persistent economic hardship, protection risks, legal barriers, and limited service delivery. Addressing these challenges requires **integrated, area-based responses** that prioritise livelihoods, shelter rehabilitation, civil documentation and HLP support, mine action, child protection, gender-based violence prevention, and expanded mental health and psychosocial support as a key enabler of safe return and reintegration, alongside sustained investment in national and local institutional capacity.

Purpose of the Report

The report provides a protection-focused analysis of return trends, returnee profiles, alongside the risks and challenges affecting reintegration and impacting host communities. It aims to inform decision-making and operational responses, while enhancing understanding of evolving protection trends, needs, and priorities across Syria.

Methodology and Scope

The findings in this report are based on 7,120 structured household interviews with refugee and IDP returnees, and host community members, including internally displaced persons, conducted during the first quarter of 2026. The sampling methodology applied a random selection of interviewees through UNHCR-supported Community Centres or Outreach Volunteers (ORVs), following an Age, Gender, and Diversity approach.

Covering all the **14** Governorates in Syria and **136** sub-districts¹, this report findings are representative at the governorate level², with the exception of Idleb and Damascus. Of the households interviewed, 52% were refugee returnees, 25% IDP returnees, and 23% host community members. In addition, 58% of households were located in rural areas, while 42% were in urban areas.

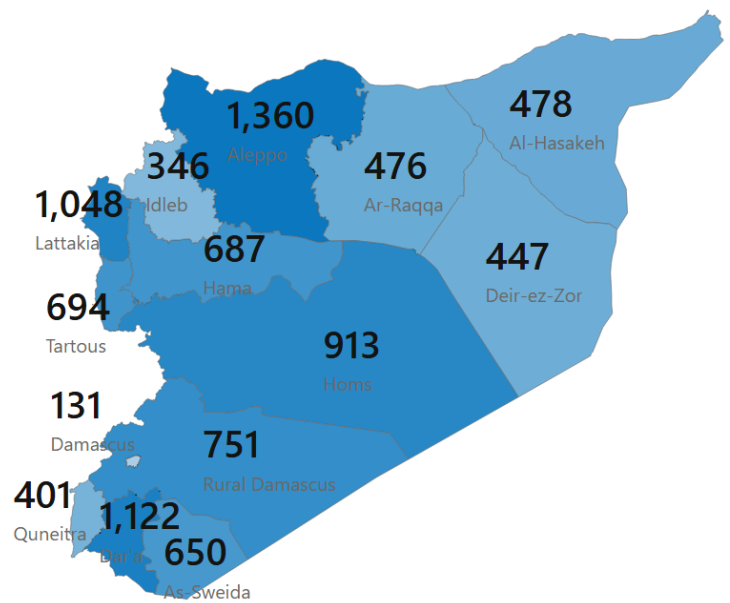
To enhance understanding of the protection context nationwide, focus group discussions were also conducted with communities and partners across the country. The findings were also supported by over **1,000** interviews with families newly arrived from Lebanon throughout March 2026, following the escalation of hostilities in this country.

While the analysis provides a robust snapshot of key protection trends and priorities, limitations in coverage, representativeness, and access to informal crossing points should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Data collection Partners

Data collection was implemented through a coordinated multi-partner approach. A total of 11 UNHCR partners contributed to data collection, including the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), Bara'em Association for Children Care (BARAEM), the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East (GOPA), Al-Batoul, Child Care Society (CCS), Charity ALEHSAN Aleppo, Al Nada Association (NADA), St. Ephrem Patriarchal Development Committee (EPDC), Social Care Society in Hama (SCS), Namaa Association for Development (NAMAA), and UNHCR.

Geographical distribution of interviews per governorate



¹ There is a total of 270 sub-districts in Syria.

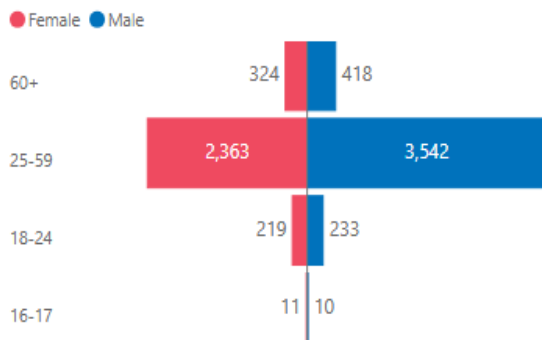
² A sample of 350 household interviews at governorate level is required to ensure representative results.

Returnee and Host Communities Profiles

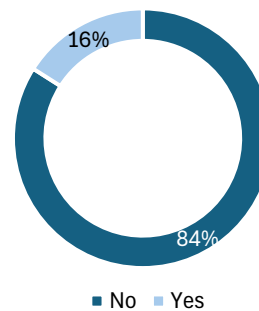
Among the **7,120** households interviewed, 52% were refugee returnees, 25% IDP returnees, and 23% host community members. Moreover, 59% of respondents were men and 41% were women, of whom 59% identified as heads of household. In terms of age distribution, 83% of respondents were between 25 and 59 years of age, 10% were aged 60 years or older, and 6% were between 18 and 24 years.

One in six respondents (15%) reported having a family member with a disability. Among these cases, physical disabilities were most commonly reported (65%), followed by sensory disabilities—including hearing or visual impairments (25%), intellectual disabilities (20%), and mental or psychosocial disabilities (5%).

Age and gender distribution

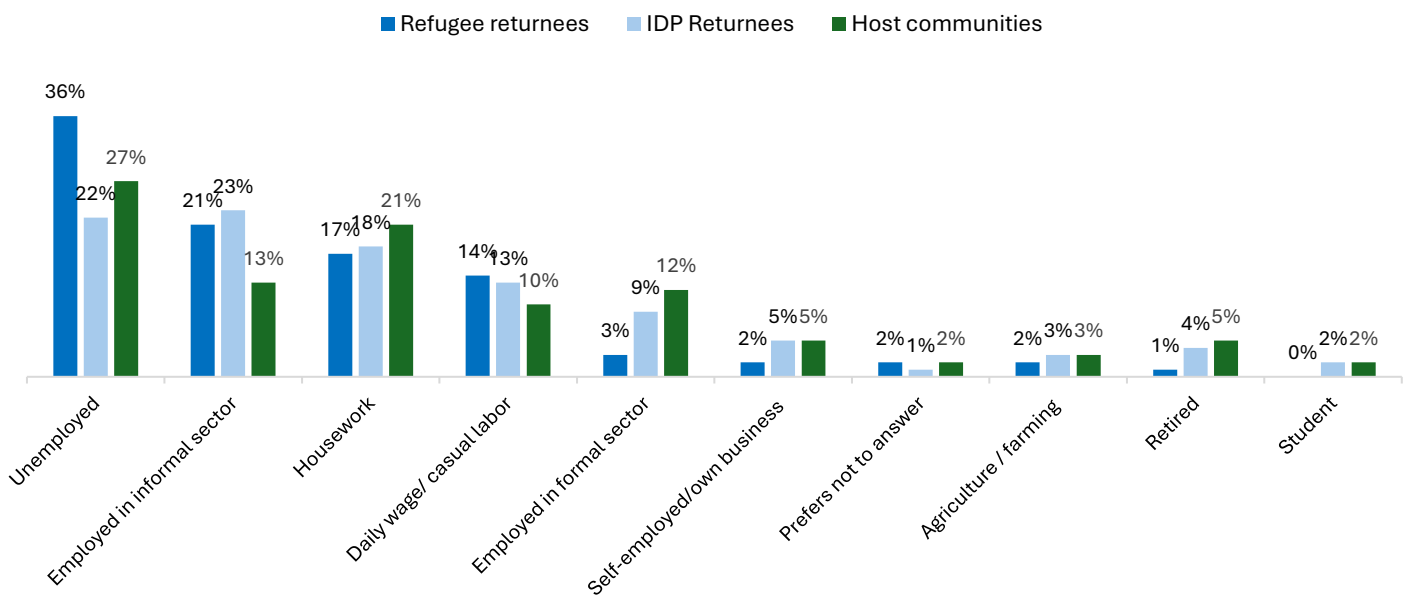


Family members with disability



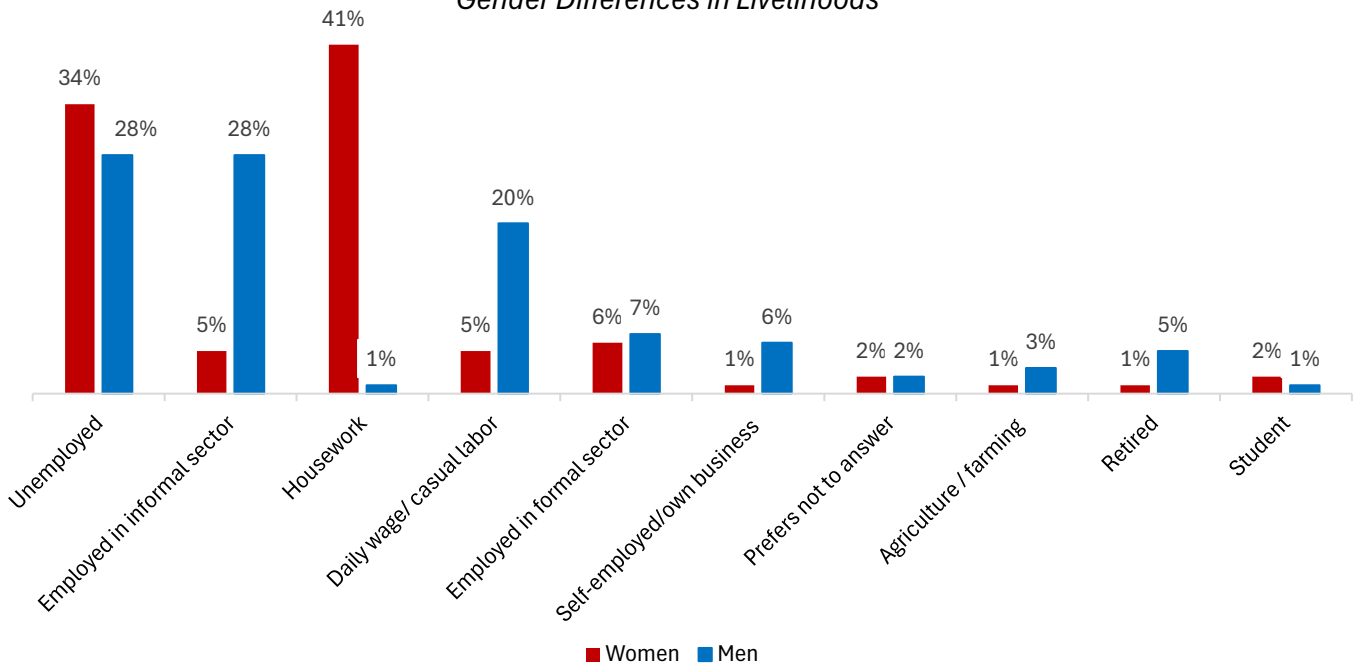
Livelihood findings indicate persistently high unemployment, with 30% of respondents of working age reporting no employment and broadly similar rates across population groups. Unemployment was slightly higher among women (33%) than men (28%). Access to formal employment remained very limited, at only 6–7%, underscoring constrained opportunities for stable income. While overall livelihood patterns are similar across population groups, noteworthy differences persist, including higher unemployment among refugee returnees and relatively better access to formal employment among host communities.

Current area of work/profession



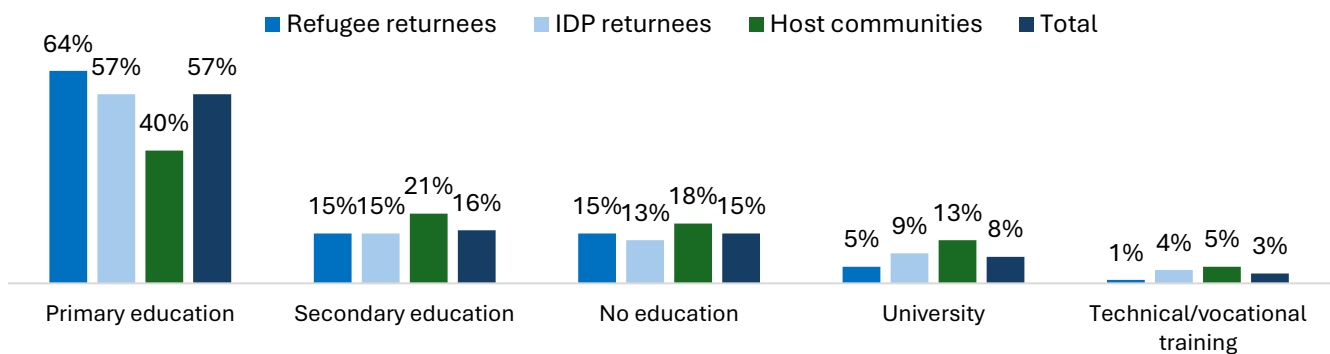
Clear gender disparities are evident in the type of economic engagement. Men were predominantly engaged in informal work (30%) and daily wage or casual labour (19%), whereas women were largely concentrated in unpaid domestic work (44%), with minimal participation in informal employment (5%) or casual labour (4%). These trends point to entrenched gendered divisions of labour and limited economic opportunities affecting both returnee and host community populations.

Gender Differences in Livelihoods



With regard to **education**, the majority of refugee and IDP returnees interviewed reported having attained at least primary-level education (64% and 57%, respectively), compared to 40% of host community members. Secondary and higher education levels were more prevalent among host community respondents (21%), compared to 15% among both IDP and refugee returnees. At the lower end of the spectrum, 13% of IDP returnees reported having no formal education, with slightly higher proportions recorded among refugee returnees (15%) and host community members (18%).

Education level

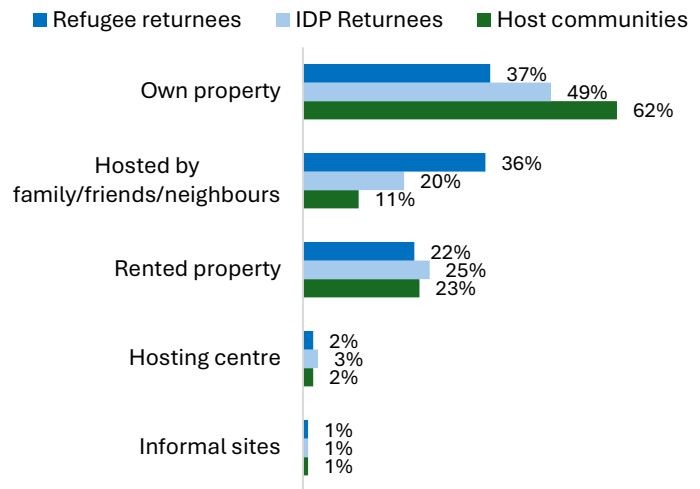


Concerning **housing**, returnees experience lower housing stability compared to host communities. While most host community households reside in their own property (62%), this proportion is notably lower among IDP returnees (49%) and refugee returnees (37%).

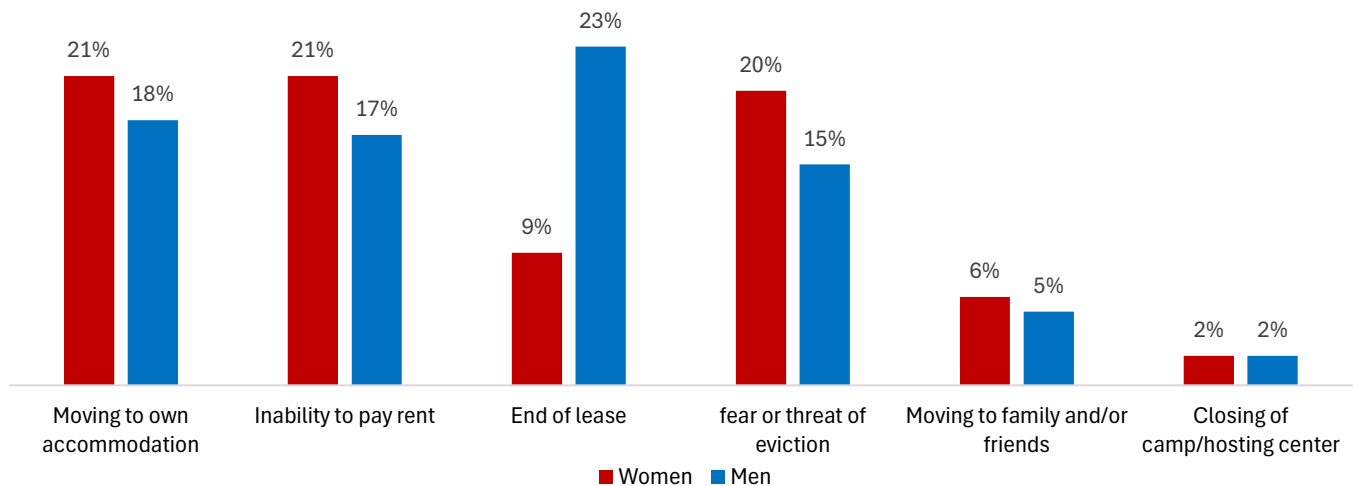
Refugee returnees in particular rely heavily on hosting arrangements with family or friends (36%), while rental accommodation remains common across all groups (around one quarter), indicating persistent housing vulnerability among returnees. UNHCR engagement further indicates that many households living in their own properties face substandard conditions due to significant rehabilitation needs.

When asked about their ability to remain in their current accommodation over the next six months, 73% of respondents said yes, 23% said no, and 4% were unsure or preferred not to answer. Among those unable to stay, financial and tenure insecurity emerged as the main drivers, notably the inability to pay rent, expiry of lease agreements, and fear of eviction. Gender differences were evident. For men, the expiry of lease agreements was the primary reason cited (23%), whereas this was far less common among women (9%), who more frequently reported inability to pay rent and plans to move to their own accommodation as key reasons.

Types of dwellings



Barriers to staying in current housing-Gender Differences



Overall, these patterns indicate that housing stability for returnees remains fragile, highly dependent on affordability, rental market conditions, and the capacity to transition to sustainable, self-secured accommodation.

Return Trends

According to official figures shared by the Syrian General Authorities for Ports and Customs, more than 1.6 million Syrian refugees have returned since the fall of the previous regime on 8 December 2024, with over 250,000 returning during the first quarter of 2026. Since December 2024, the majority returned from Türkiye (40%), followed by Lebanon (38%) and Jordan (18%), with smaller proportions returning from Iraq (3%), Egypt (2%) and other countries³.

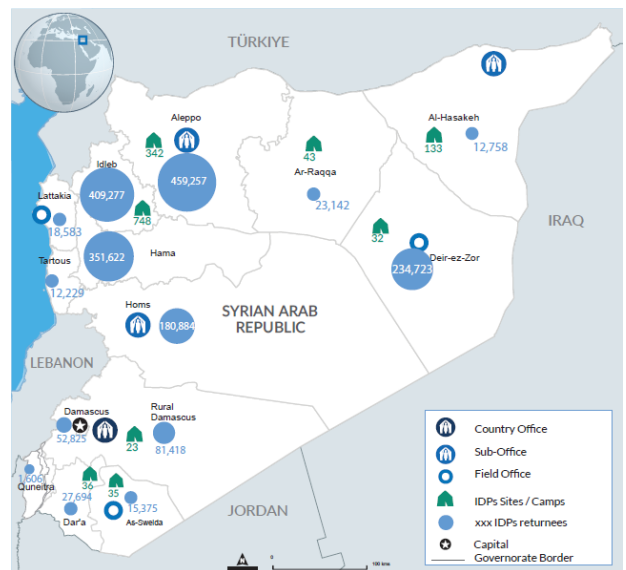
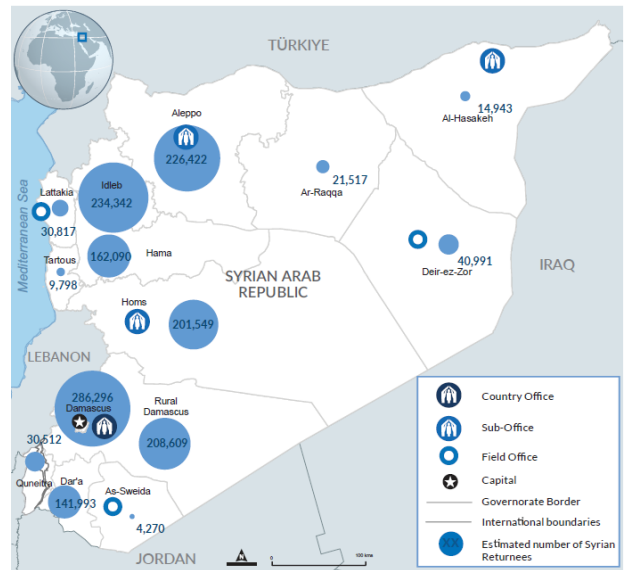
The main governorates of return are illustrated in the map, with Damascus, Idlib, and Aleppo continuing to figure as the primary destinations.

The recent escalation of hostilities in Lebanon since early March has triggered a wave of movements to Syria of Syrian refugees and, in a smaller scale, Lebanese nationals with family links in Syria. Syrian authorities have reported that **207,630** people crossed the Syria–Lebanese border in March, with figures reaching **over 300,000** by the time of reporting. Of these, approximately 83% are Syrians, 1% Syrian Palestinians, while ≈16% are Lebanese.

According to the OCHA-led Population Task Force, more than 5.5 million people currently remain internally displaced across Syria as of the time of reporting, including over one million IDPs residing in displacement sites. Between December 2024 and the time of reporting, over 1.8 million IDPs have returned, including more than one million departures from IDP sites. Returns have primarily originated from Idlib, Rural Damascus, and Aleppo governorates, with Aleppo, Idlib, and Hama emerging as the main areas of return, as illustrated in the map.

Concerning the intentions of those interviewed, 76% of refugee returnees reported returning to the same location they had lived in prior to fleeing, while 21% returned to a different location, and 2% preferred not to answer. Among IDP returnees, this trend was more pronounced, with 85% indicating a return to their pre-displacement location, compared to 13% who did not, while the remaining respondents either did not know or preferred not to answer.

The higher likelihood of IDP returnees returning to their original locations may reflect relatively stronger physical proximity, maintained housing ties, or greater familiarity with local conditions during displacement.



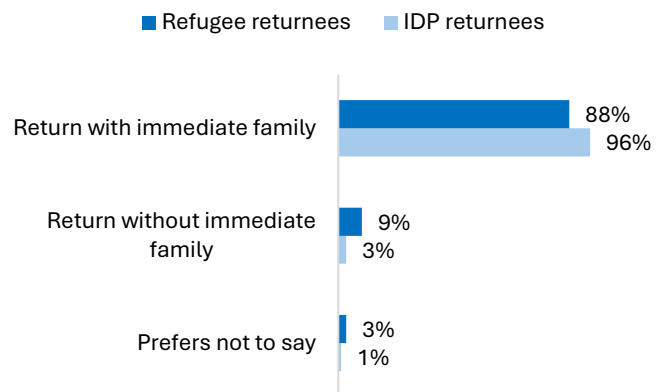
³ For more information on return trends, please visit [UNHCR Data Portal](#)

1. Returnee’s Family Composition

Family composition patterns among returnees highlight distinct return motivations and risk-management strategies between refugees and IDPs. The majority of refugee returnees (88%) returned with their immediate family. However, among those who did not, spouses—predominantly women—and children were frequently left behind. This suggests a continued pattern of phased return, with men often returning first to assess security, housing, and livelihood conditions before facilitating family reunification. This approach contrasts with displacement dynamics observed during the recent escalation in Lebanon, where economic considerations more often led men to remain behind while women and children returned.

In comparison, IDP returnees demonstrate a stronger tendency toward family-unit return, with 96% returning alongside immediate family members. This sustained difference (96% vs. 88%) points to comparatively stronger family cohesion and fewer constraints for IDPs, as well as lower logistical, and economic barriers to coordinated return. Overall, these patterns suggest that refugee returns are more likely to be cautious and sequential, while IDP returns reflect greater confidence in conditions and feasibility of reintegration as family units.

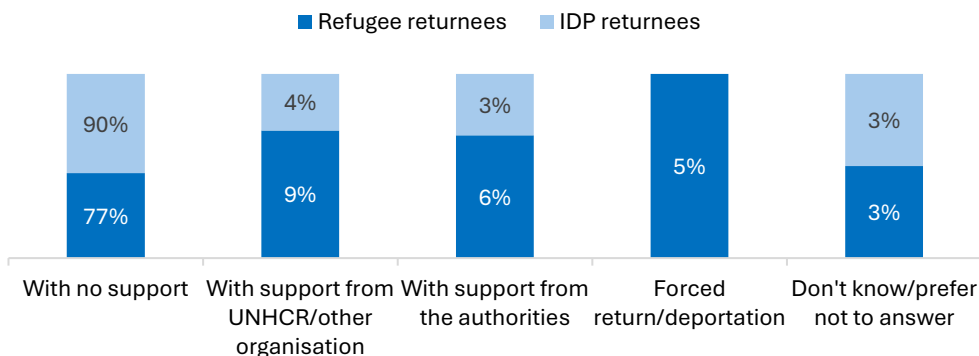
Family composition during return



2. Modality of Return

Regarding the modality of return, 78% of refugee returnees reported spontaneous return, followed by 14% through organised return facilitated by UNHCR, IOM, or host governments, and 5% as forced returns or deportations. Among those forcibly returned or deported, the primary reason cited was irregular or illegal entry and/or stay. Overall, this indicates a decrease in spontaneous returns (85% previously) and an increase in organised returns (6% previously). This shift may be linked to the recent escalation in Lebanon, which contributed to increased pressure and some unplanned returns of Syrians from Lebanon.

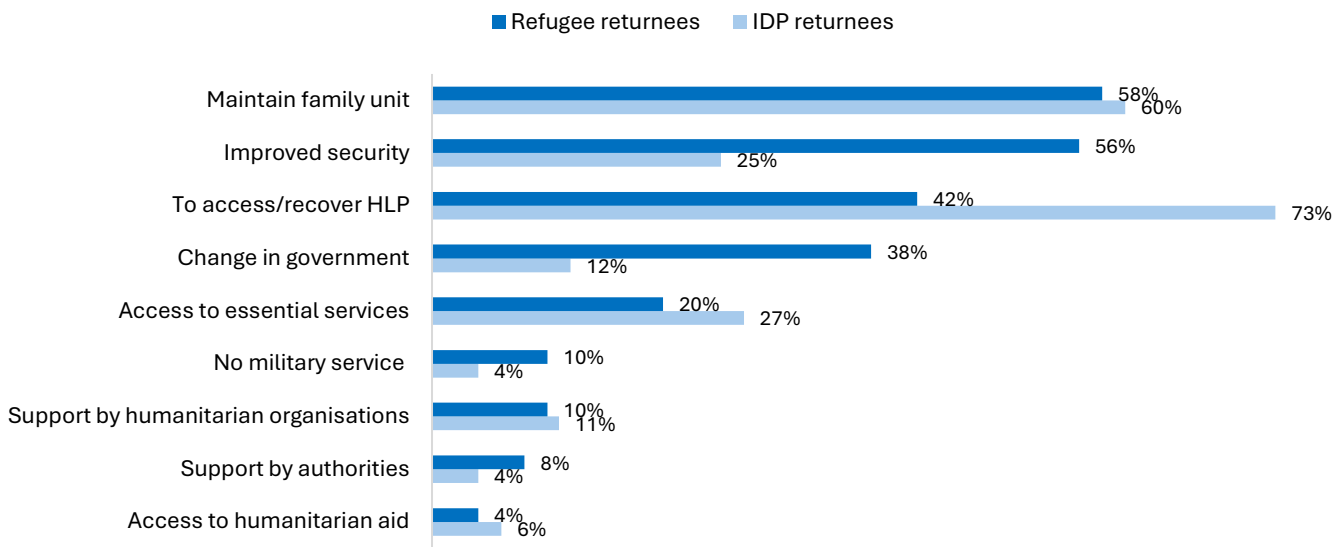
How did you return?



3. Factors Influencing Return

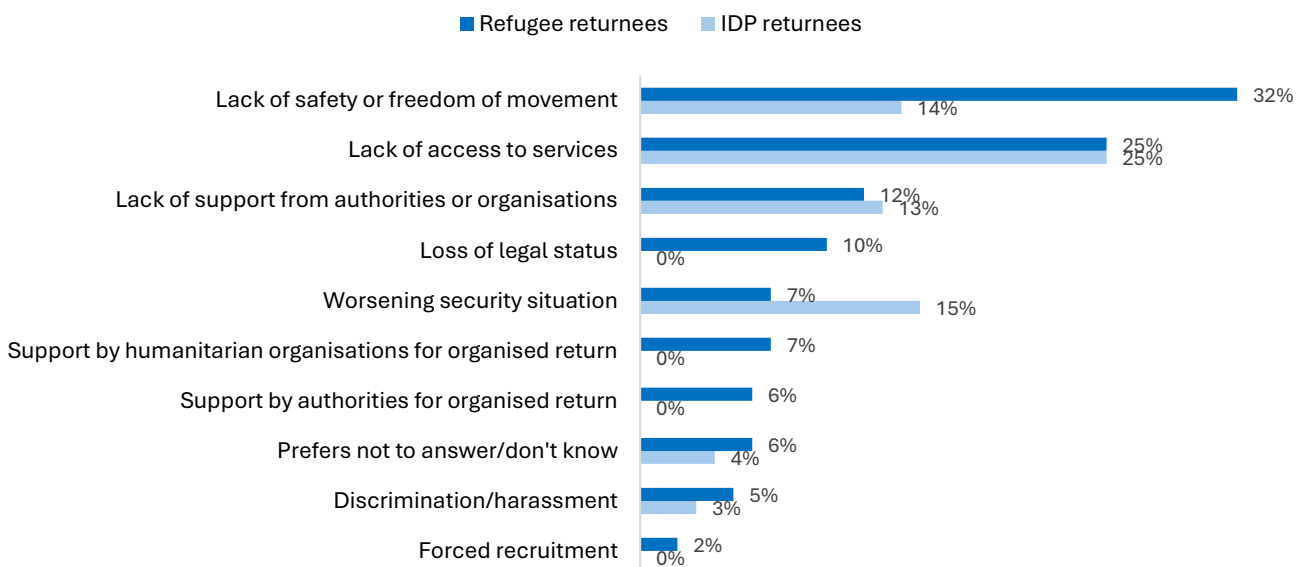
The main factors influencing refugee returns remain largely unchanged compared to last year trends, with family unity and reunification continuing to be the primary pull factors, followed by perceived improvements in security, the desire to access or recover housing, land and property, and changes in governance. Improved security and changes in government were more frequently cited by refugee returnees, while HLP-related considerations were reported at significantly higher levels among IDP returnees.

Pull factors for return



When examining push factors in areas of displacement, lack of access to essential services was cited by one quarter of both refugee and IDP returnees. Safety concerns and restrictions on freedom of movement were more frequently reported by refugee returnees, particularly those who returned recently from Lebanon.

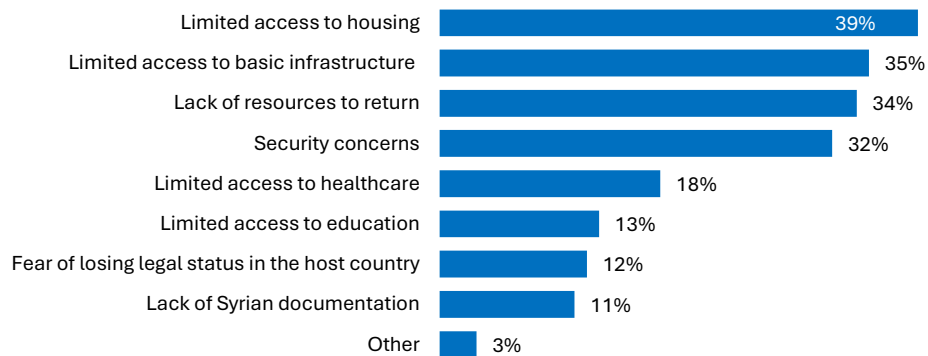
Push factors for return



4. Barriers to Return

Barriers to return continue to persist. Limited access to housing and basic infrastructure (including electricity and water), coupled with resource constraints and ongoing security concerns, were cited by the respondents as the **main factors preventing Syrian refugees from returning to Syria**.

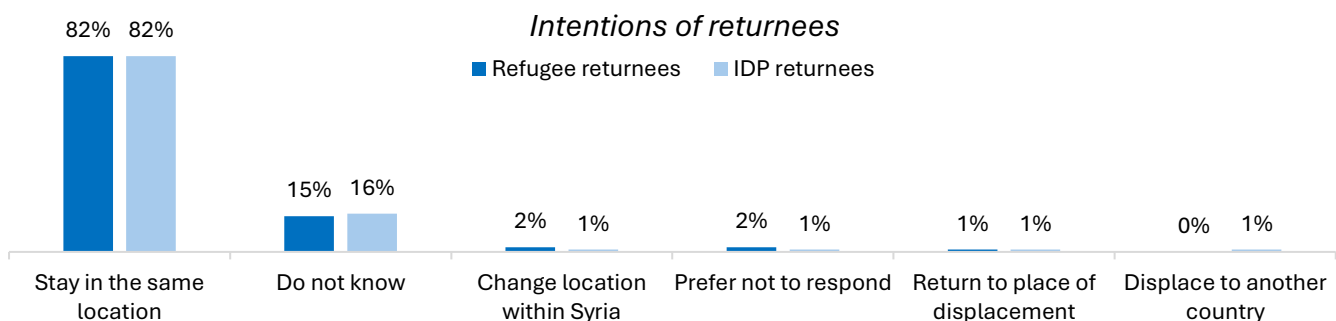
Barriers to return for refugee returnees



While the majority of refugee and IDP returnees reported having returned to their areas of origin (76% and 85%, respectively), a smaller proportion were unable to do so. Among those unable to return, the main barriers were broadly consistent across both groups and included damage or destruction of property, limited employment and livelihood opportunities, prevailing security concerns, and insufficient access to essential services.

5. Returnees' Intentions

When asked about their prospects over the next six months, 82% of both refugee and IDP returnees reported plans to remain in their current location in Syria. In contrast, 15% of refugee returnees and 16% of IDP returnees were uncertain, while smaller proportions indicating intentions to change location in Syria, return to their previous place of displacement, or displace to another country. Thus, this indicates a strong intention to remain among most returnees, likely reflecting perceived stability in areas of return and/or limited alternatives, with a minority remaining uncertain or considering onward movement.



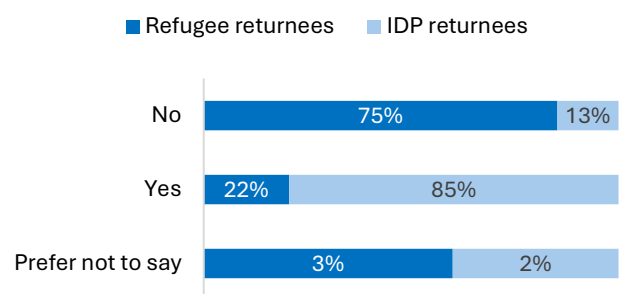
In contrast, 55% of Syrian families newly arrived from Lebanon indicated that they plan to remain in Syria permanently, while one-third intend to stay temporarily, contingent on improvements in Lebanon's security situation and often citing livelihood opportunities as a key reason for potential return to Lebanon, with the remaining 15% being uncertain.

6. Access to Information Prior to Return

Findings indicate that most returnee households felt sufficiently informed to make their return decision, though information sources differed across groups. Overall, 84% of IDP returnees and 79% of refugee returnees reported having adequate information prior to return. Family and community networks were the primary information sources for most respondents, followed by social media and prior visits to areas of origin. Prior visits were particularly important for IDP returnees (61%), while refugee returnees more often relied on family and community networks (71%). Among those reporting information gaps, both refugee and IDP returnees most commonly cited insufficient information on security conditions, livelihoods, and access to essential services.

Regarding visits to Syria prior to return, most refugee returnees interviewed (75%) reported not having visited the country before returning, whereas most IDP returnees (85%) had done so. Among those who had visited Syria prior to return, 75% were returning from Lebanon, 17% from Turkey, and 5% from Jordan. Furthermore, 87% of refugee returnees and 94% of IDP returnees indicated that these visits supported their decision to return permanently.

Visits prior to return



Protection Risk Analysis

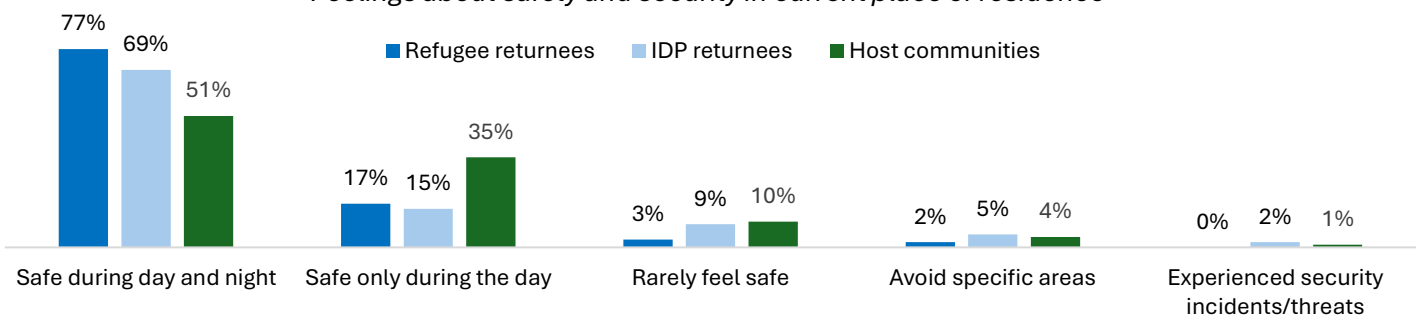
1. Safety and Security Considerations

1.1 Security Concerns

The security situation in Syria remained volatile and complex in 2026. Armed confrontations between Syrian forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) escalated in early January in parts of Aleppo city before spreading to Raqqa and Al-Hasakeh, resulting in civilian casualties and the displacement of over 190,000 people, primarily to Qamishli and Al-Malakiyeh. Most displaced families were hosted by local communities, while others sought shelter in collective centres and Newroz camp. Following a ceasefire agreement reached on 29 January, hostilities subsided, displacement movements decreased, and many families began returning to their areas of origin.

Security situation was also negatively impacted by broader regional instability with the war between the US, Israel and Iran, leading to the escalation of hostilities in Lebanon in early March. Missile activity through Syrian airspace and heightened tensions, security concerns along border areas and military incursions into Syrian territory.

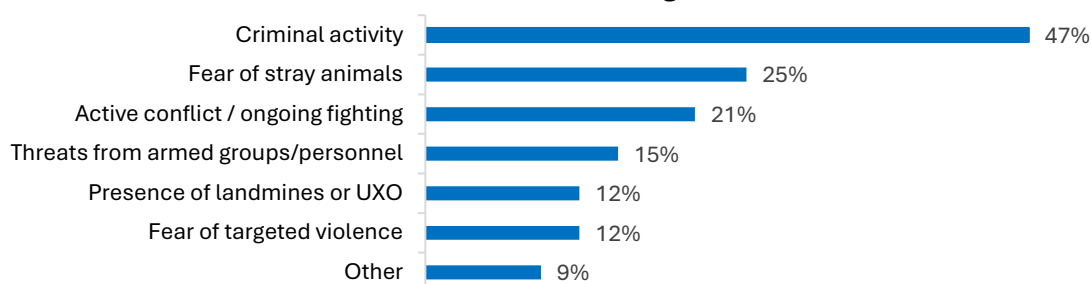
Feelings about safety and security in current place of residence



Despite ongoing volatility, most surveyed returnees reported feeling safe, including 77% of refugee returnees and 69% of IDP returnees, compared to 51% of host community members. A smaller share of respondents reported feeling unsafe and avoiding certain areas, with feelings of insecurity more pronounced at night. These responses were concentrated in As-Sweida, Quneitra, Ar-Raqqa, Tartous, and Latakia governorates — areas that experienced incidents of violence in 2025, as well as Israeli military operations in southern governorates this year.

Among those reporting feelings of insecurity, they were primarily associated with criminal activities, fear of stray animals, and active conflict, with criminality accounting for nearly half of reported concerns. Rising levels of criminality are driven by factors such as deteriorating economic conditions, widespread unmet needs, and limited law enforcement capacity, further undermining overall safety.

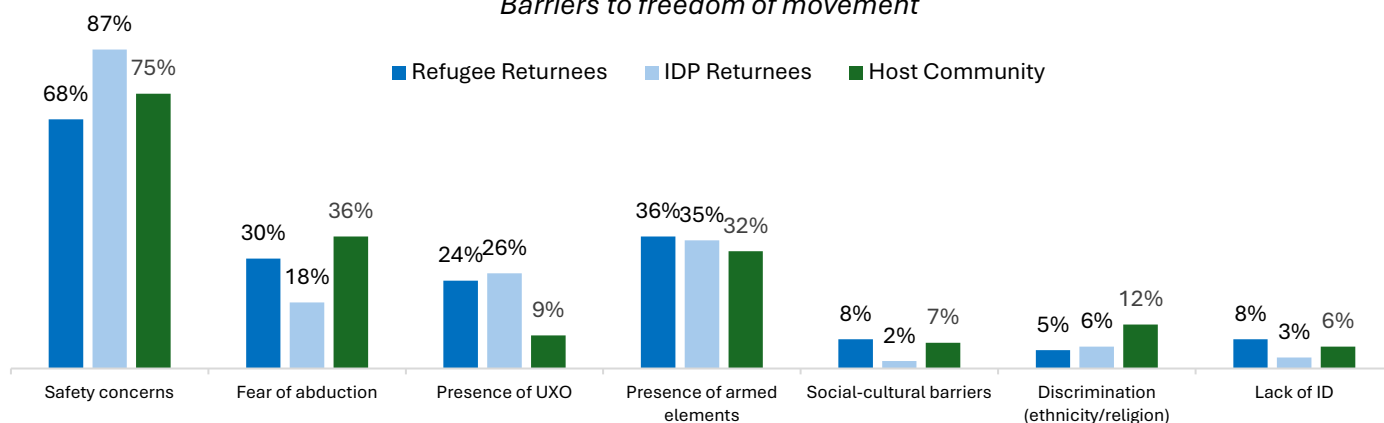
Reasons for not feeling safe



1.2 Freedom of movement

Most respondents reported being able to move freely within their area of residence, including 94% of returnees and 82% of host community members. However, barriers to freedom of movement were reported by 6% of returnees and 18% of host community members, reflecting a 4% increase compared to previous reports. Among affected households, safety and security concerns were identified as the primary constraint, followed by fear of abduction, the presence of explosive ordnance (EO), and armed actors. EO contamination, lack of ID and socio-cultural barriers were reported slightly more often by returnees, indicating a comparatively greater impact on their mobility.

Barriers to freedom of movement

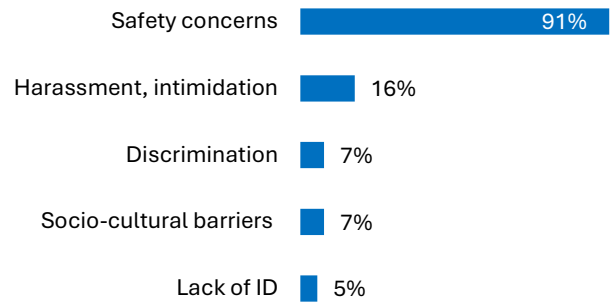


Findings indicate notable geographic disparities among families reporting barriers to freedom of movement. In contrast to previous findings, As-Sweida recorded the highest level of restrictions (36%), followed by Tartous (29%), Latakia (13%) and Al-Hasakeh (11%), with the proportion of affected households in the Coastal Area declining when compared to previous reports, suggesting modest improvements in freedom of movement. As reported above, these same locations also reported higher perceptions of insecurity, pointing to a possible correlation between safety concerns and movement restrictions.

Control by de facto authorities persists in parts of As-Sweida, alongside ongoing tensions between Bedouin and Druze communities. The presence of checkpoints along key routes between As-Sweida and Damascus continues to significantly limit travel, which remains largely confined to essential or emergency purposes.

When asked about factors limiting women’s and girls’ freedom of movement, safety concerns were most frequently cited (91%), followed by harassment and intimidation (16%). Other reported barriers included discrimination (7%), socio-cultural norms (7%), and lack of civil documentation (5%).

Barriers to women and girls' movement



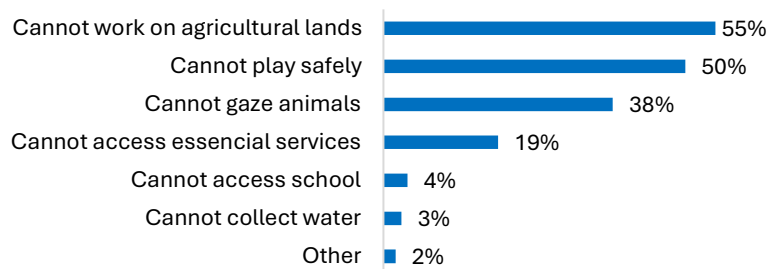
1.3 Explosive Ordnance Contamination

Explosive ordnance (EO) contamination continued to pose a widespread and severe threat across Syria, with incidents reported nearly every day throughout the country. According to the Mine Action Area of Responsibility, 239 EO incidents, including unexploded ordnance, explosive remnants of war, and mines, were recorded during the first quarter of 2026, affecting 452 people and resulting in 153 fatalities and 299 injuries. Men and children were disproportionately affected, accounting for 62% and 34% of casualties, respectively. The highest shares of fatalities were reported in Deir ez-Zor, Aleppo, and Idleb, with Hama, Homs, and Dara’a also heavily affected. Notably, 72% of all EO incidents continue to occur in agricultural and grazing areas, underscoring that the pursuit of livelihoods remains one of the most dangerous activities.⁴

Compared with the first quarter of 2025, when 310 EO incidents affected 638 people, the reporting period shows a modest decline of 23% year-in incidents.

The report findings further reflect these risks. While 56% of surveyed households reported no EO contamination in their area, 31% reported no knowledge of whether EO contamination is present, and 13% confirmed its presence. Among those reporting contamination, the main impacts included inability to cultivate agricultural land (59%), restrictions on children’s safe play (47%), limitations on livestock grazing (38%) and access to service (19%).

Impact of explosive ordnance contamination



While most respondents reported that contaminated areas were marked (78%) and that they knew how to report EO contamination (76%), gaps remain, with 22% noting a lack of markings and 24% unaware of reporting channels, highlighting the continued need for risk education and improved information dissemination.

While some operational progress was recorded during the reporting period—most notably the lifting of administrative barriers affecting three mine action partners, which allowed the resumption of activities—the scale of EO contamination across Syria remains extensive. Clearance needs far exceed current response capacity, underscoring the urgent need for sustained investment and enhanced technical and financial support to national

⁴ Syria explosive ordnance weekly casualty update dd. 10.04.2026 & [UNHCR Syria Protection Monitoring Report December 2025-ext.pdf](#).

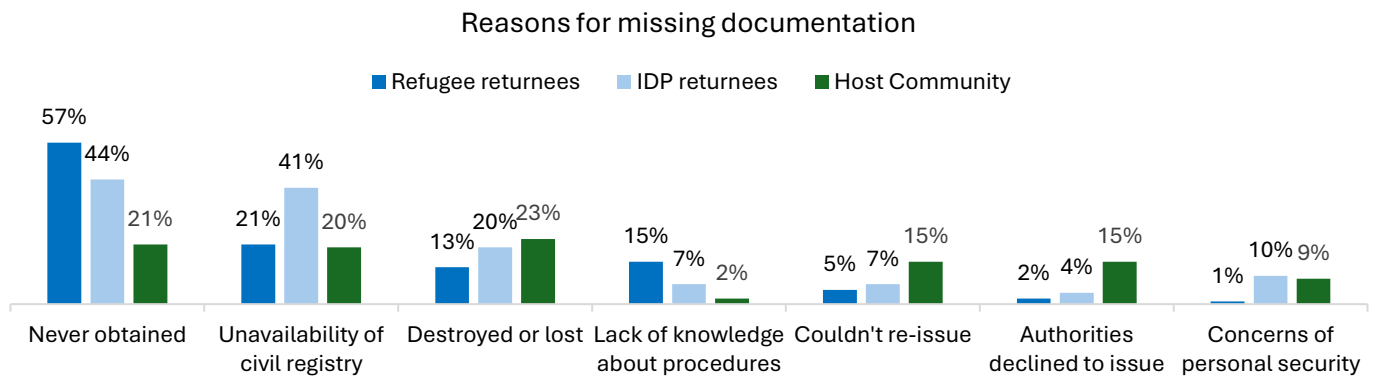
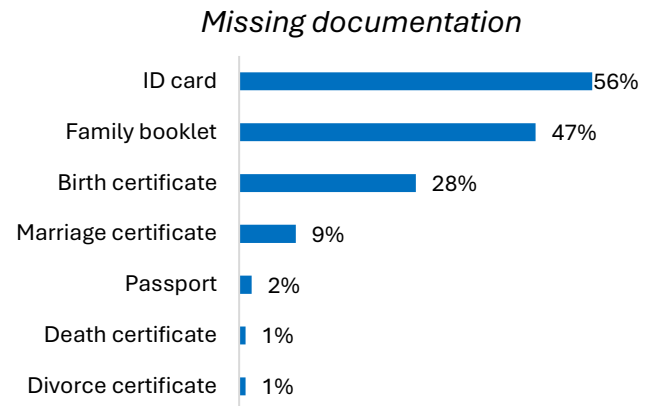
authorities. Strengthening the Government of Syria’s clearance capacity, alongside ensuring consistent and unhindered access for all mine action partners, is essential to enable a timely, effective, and nationwide response.

2. Legal Barriers

2.1 Lack of civil documentation

Lack of civil documentation remains a significant concern. Documentation gaps were reported by 19% of refugee returnee households, compared to 11% of IDP returnees and 5% of host community families. Among households lacking documentation, ID cards, family booklets and birth certificates were the most commonly missing documents.

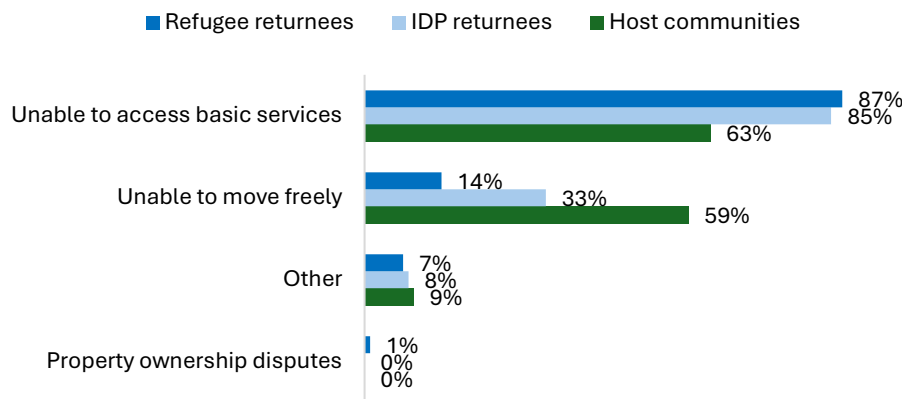
Moreover, more than half of refugee and IDP returnee households with documentation gaps reported that the required documents had never been obtained. The absence of functioning civil registries, loss or destruction of documents, and limited awareness of procedures were cited among the main reasons.



The issuance of national ID cards and family booklets remains suspended pending the adoption of a new standardized format. While UNHCR has actively worked through its legal partners to facilitate registration through court procedures, it has also engaged in sustained advocacy with the authorities to reduce prohibitive consular costs—currently set at USD 50 per civil event or document—and to seek exemptions for families with heightened vulnerabilities. In addition, the availability and operational capacity of civil registries remain limited in several locations, particularly in areas newly under the control of Syrian authorities, including Raqqa, Hasakeh, and Idlib governorates, eastern Deir-ez-Zor, and northern Aleppo. In these areas, the registration of civil events is constrained by significant documentation backlogs, underscoring the need for support to the reactivation of civil registries and courts.

Among affected families, nearly 85% identified challenges in accessing basic services as the primary consequence of missing documentation, followed by 22% who also cited restricted freedom of movement. A smaller share (8%) cited other challenges, including registering their children in school and accessing financial services], while 1% reported property ownership disputes.

Impact of lack of documentation

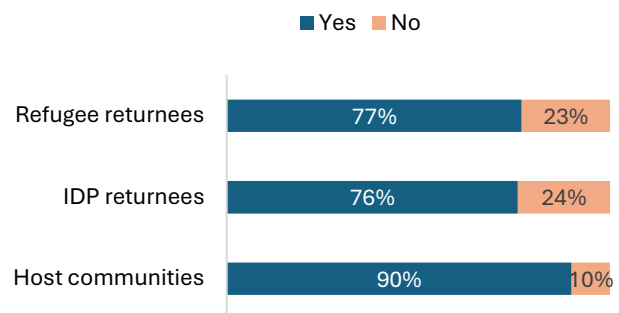


In light of extensive civil documentation needs nationwide, sustained support is essential to maintain the functionality of civil registries and expand legal aid to address barriers to documentation.

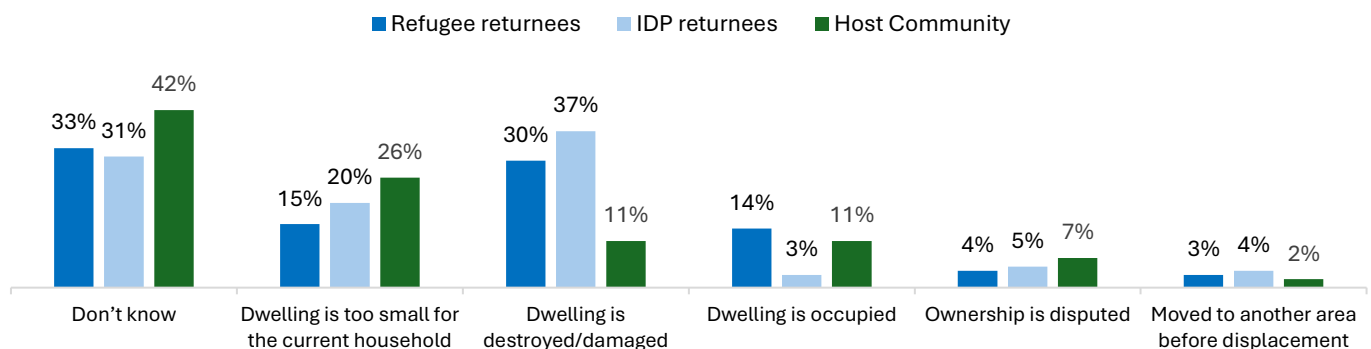
2.2 Housing, Land and Property Concerns

While most respondents reported holding documentation proving ownership or tenure of housing, land, and property, around one quarter of both refugee and IDP returnees reported lacking such documentation. In contrast, host community households demonstrated higher documentation coverage, with only 10% reporting the absence of HLP documentation. Among those without documentation, the main reasons were destroyed or damaged dwellings, followed by dwelling size issues, occupation of the property, disputed ownership, and having moved prior to displacement.

Do you have any HLP documentation?



Why not?



When asked about additional HLP-related challenges, 89% of respondents reported none, while 11% indicated experiencing further issues. Among those reporting HLP concerns, housing damage or destruction was the most frequently cited problem, disproportionately affecting returnees—67% of refugee returnees and 79% of IDP returnees—compared to 25% of host community households. In contrast, host community members were significantly more affected by inheritance-related issues, with over half reporting this as a key concern.

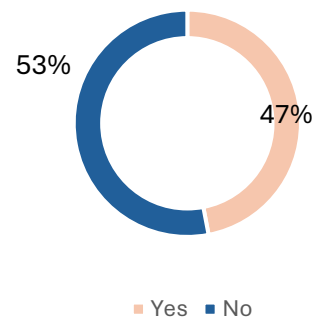
HLP-related concerns underscore the need for sustained investment in shelter rehabilitation and legal assistance to support the restoration of HLP documentation, alongside strengthened community-based dispute resolution mechanisms to enable the resolution of issues at the local level without over-reliance on the formal judicial system. Continued support to institutional capacity remains essential. In this regard, UNHCR has engaged jointly with the Inter-Agency HLP Technical Working Group to support national recovery efforts and advocate for the legislative reforms required to simplify the HLP legal framework, adapt it to displacement and return realities, and ensure that HLP issues remain a key priority within the transitional justice process.

3. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

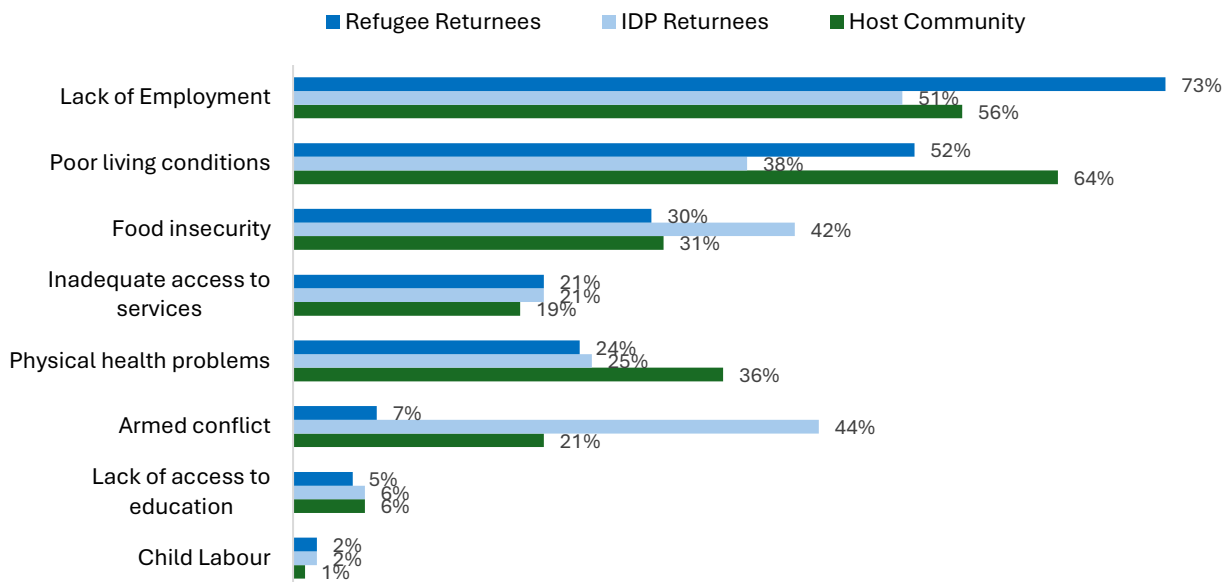
Psychosocial needs remained widespread in 2026 and were among the most commonly reported concerns among both returnees and host communities across Syria, with 47% of respondents reporting stress-related symptoms.

Findings indicate that stress in Syria is primarily driven by economic hardship, with lack of employment emerging as the most significant cause across populations, particularly among refugee returnees. Poor living conditions and food insecurity also feature prominently, reflecting widespread material deprivation and limited access to basic needs. For IDP returnees, exposure to armed conflict remains a major stressor, underscoring the continued impact of insecurity on daily life. Together, these factors highlight the close interlinkage between economic vulnerability, insecurity, and psychosocial distress among returnee populations in Syria.

Have you or your family experienced stress that affected your day-to-day life?



Reasons for stress



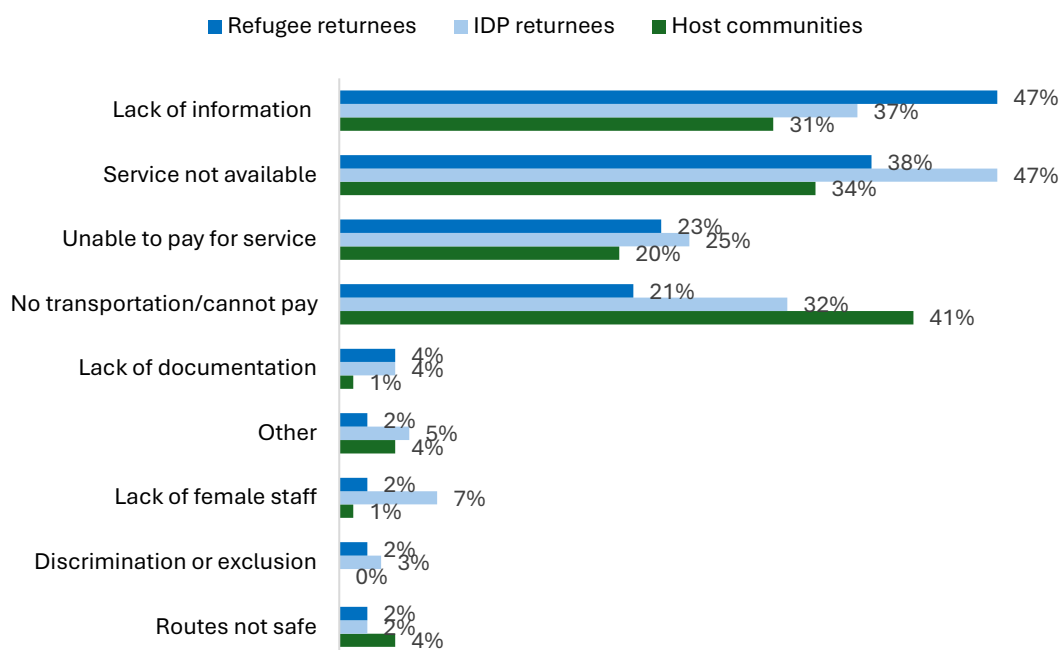
Nearly 27% of respondents reported negative changes among household members over the past three months, including signs of stress or sadness, disordered eating, aggression, and, in a small number of cases, self-harm.

Despite these needs, nearly one third of respondents (31%) reported being unable to access psychosocial support services. Women and girls were disproportionately affected, accounting for 73% and 43% respectively, alongside

around one third of men and boys, 15% of older persons, and 7% of persons with disabilities. Structural barriers—rather than individual reluctance—are the primary constraints to accessing psychosocial support, with clear variations across groups.

The most frequently reported barriers relate to information and service availability: lack of information on services is particularly high among refugee returnees (47%), while service unavailability is most acute for IDP returnees (47%). Affordability and mobility constraints are also significant, especially for the host community, alongside inability to afford services (19–23% across groups). By contrast, documentation barriers (around 1–4%) and lack of female staff (around 1–6%) are less commonly reported, but remain relevant for targeted, gender-sensitive programming—particularly given the broader access constraints and the protection implications of unmet MHPSS needs.

Barriers to access to MHPSS services



The scale of psychosocial needs, combined with persistent barriers to access, highlights the need for tailored, context-specific interventions that address diverse vulnerabilities and reintegration challenges while strengthening individual and community coping capacities. However, MHPSS response capacity remains constrained, with services predominantly focused on basic psychosocial support and awareness-raising, and limited availability of specialized mental health care and complementary services across Syria.

4. Gender-Related Protection Risk

Community engagement indicates that gender-based violence (GBV) against women and girls continues to be reported, predominantly within the household, with intimate partners and family members identified as the primary perpetrators. Psychological and emotional abuse, as well as deprivation of resources and services, remain the most commonly reported forms, highlighting entrenched dependency dynamics within households.

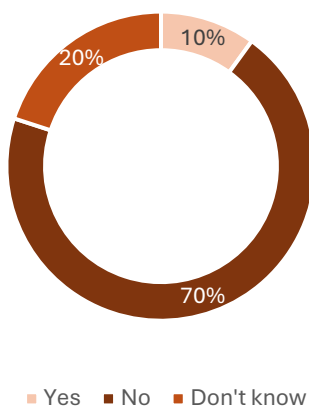
Distress linked to prolonged hardship, poverty, and deteriorating living conditions is frequently cited as a key driver of domestic violence and child marriage. Overcrowded and inadequate housing—including shared accommodation among multiple families, tents, and unfinished buildings—further exacerbates GBV risks by reducing privacy and increasing stress within households. In addition, refugee returnee women are reported to

face heightened exposure to GBV in certain areas, linked to negative perceptions and social stigma, including views of them as more “liberal,” which can increase risks of harassment and violence.

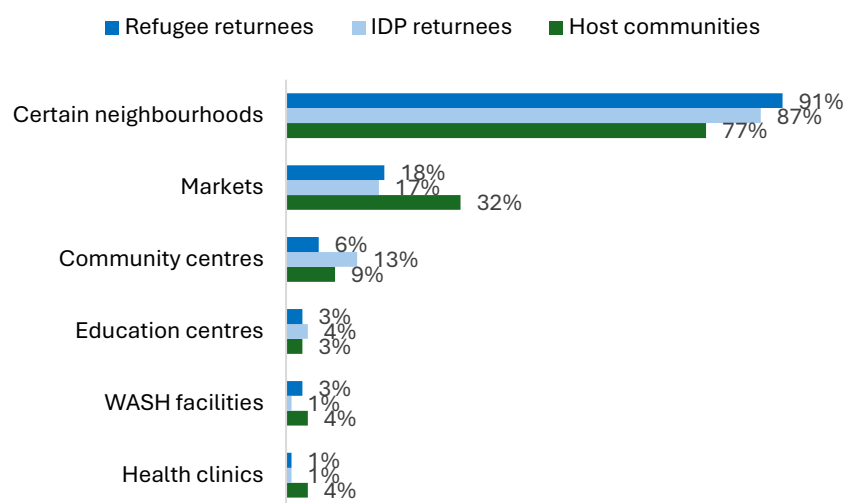
The proportion of female-headed households remains high, with women representing 41% of respondents, of whom 61% reported serving as heads of household—factors that further heighten vulnerability and protection risks, including exploitation. Recent returns from Lebanon reinforce this trend, as many households reported that male family members, including spouses, fathers, and brothers, remain abroad for livelihood-related reasons, increasing the economic and social burden on women-headed households.

This report findings indicate that 10% of respondents—reported at similar levels among women and men—indicated the presence of locations within their communities perceived as unsafe for women and girls. These included specific neighbourhoods, markets, as well as community and education centres.

Are there places where women and girls avoid due to safety?



If yes, what places?



Access to comprehensive response services remains uneven, with persistent gaps in livelihood opportunities in particular constraining survivors’ ability to achieve longer-term safety and recovery, thereby reinforcing cycles of dependency and exposure to further harm.

5. Children-at-Risk

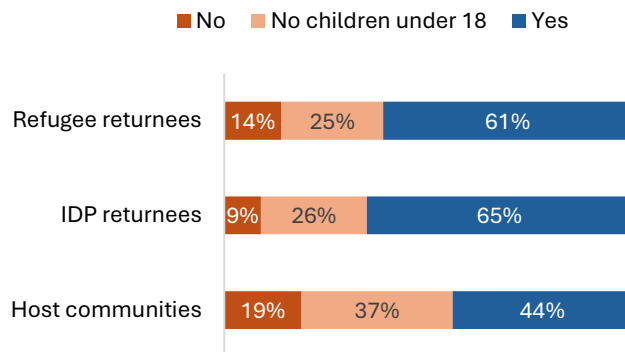
Community engagement indicates a growing reliance on negative coping strategies, including child marriage and child labour, as households face acute economic pressure driven by rising prices, unemployment, and limited access to assistance. The persistence of the worst forms of child labour remains a critical concern, alongside risks of violence, neglect, and maltreatment.

Psychosocial distress among children—linked to trauma exposure, loss of support networks, integration challenges, and ongoing uncertainty—further heightens vulnerability and undermines emotional well-being and social integration. These protection risks are closely intertwined with poverty, cumulative stress, and diminished caregiver capacity, particularly in areas of return where reintegration challenges remain acute.

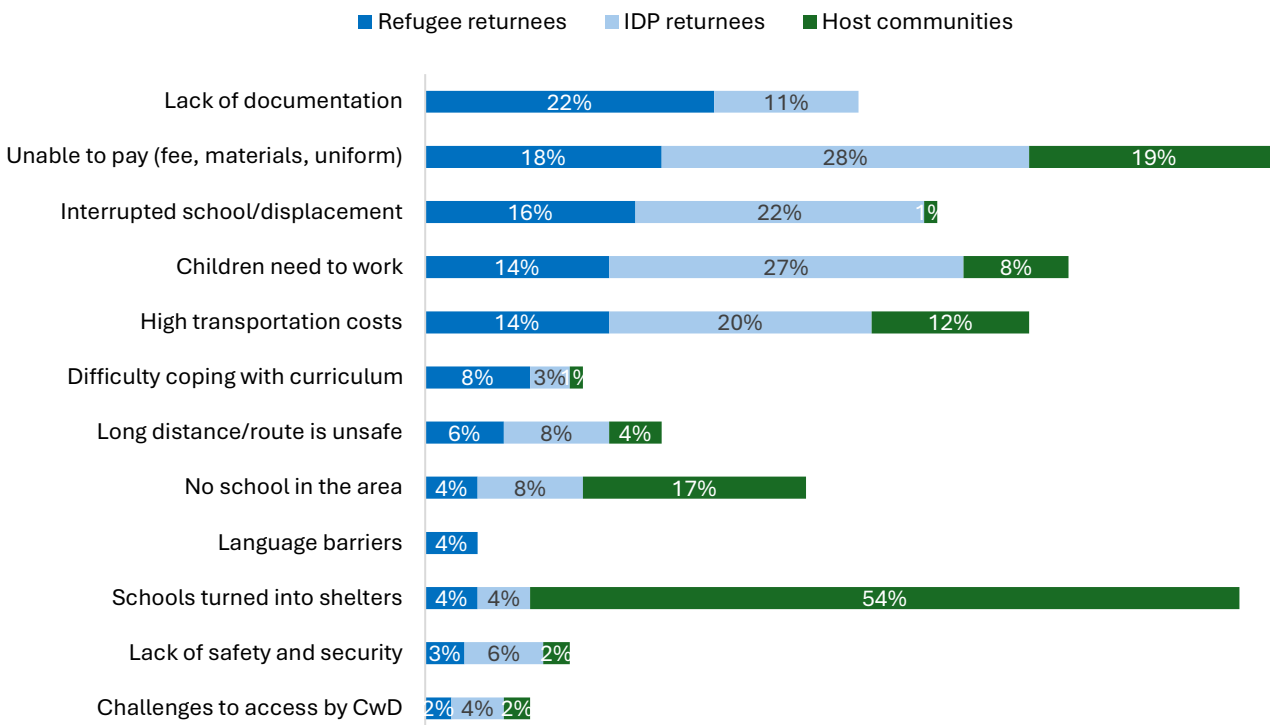
School attendance among population groups is uneven, with 14% of refugee returnees, 9% of IDP returnees and 19% of host community members reporting that not all the children in their family attend school.

School non-attendance among returnee children is primarily driven by economic hardship and administrative barriers. Inability to afford school-related costs and transportation is widespread across groups, reflecting broader livelihood constraints. Child labour remains a key factor, particularly among IDP returnees (27%), while lack of documentation disproportionately affects refugee returnees (22%). Displacement-related factors, including interrupted schooling, curriculum challenges, and language barriers, further compound exclusion, creating heightened protection risks and long-term implications for reintegration and child well-being.

Do all children in your family attend school?



Reasons for children's non-school attendance



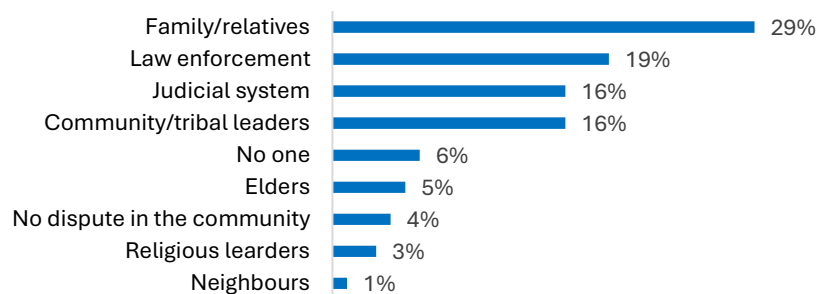
Language barriers to education are increasing among children returning from Türkiye and Lebanon with limited Arabic proficiency, where schooling was primarily provided in Turkish or French. Differences in curricula and language requirements have resulted in the placement of some returnee children in lower grades, negatively affecting their confidence and mental well-being. These challenges continue to hinder reintegration into the national education system, contribute to learning gaps, and increase the risk of exclusion and school dropout.

These findings underscore the need for integrated child protection responses that combine psychosocial support, caregiver and livelihood assistance, community-based protection, and equitable access to education with targeted language support. Sustained investment remains critical to promote social integration and enable the safe, meaningful, and long-term reintegration of returnee children.

6. Risks to Social Cohesion

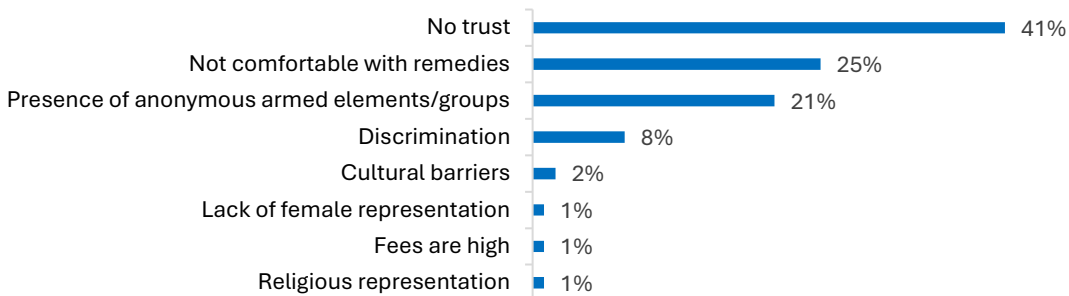
Community tensions continued to rise in areas experiencing high levels of return across several parts of Syria, driven by poverty, limited livelihood opportunities, and constrained access to assistance and basic services. This has increased pressure on housing, services, and employment, heightening competition with host communities. Ongoing insecurity and renewed displacement in some areas have further exacerbated these tensions. When addressing community disputes, both returnees and host community members most frequently relied on family or relatives (29%), followed by law enforcement, the justice system, and community or tribal leaders. Only 4% of the respondents reported no issues in the community.

If you have any issues in your community, how do you resolve them?



Among respondents who used community-based dispute resolution mechanisms, 91% reported being satisfied, while 9% expressed dissatisfaction. Reported reasons included lack of trust in the mechanism (41%), discomfort with the dispute resolution process (25%), and the presence of anonymous armed elements or groups (21%).

Reasons for DRM Dissatisfaction

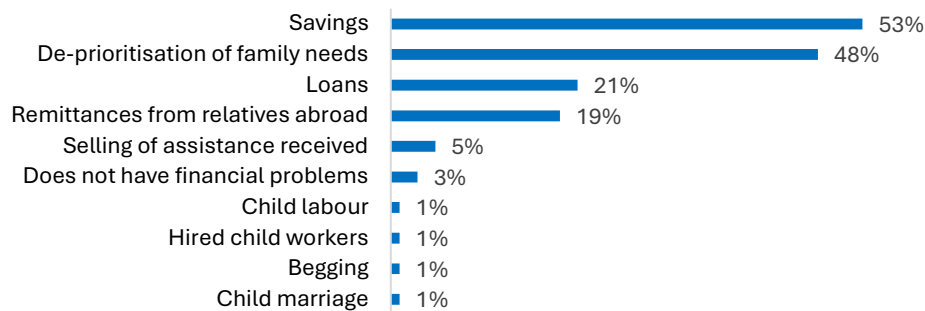


To address social cohesion challenges, interventions should be grounded in local dynamics and designed to be inclusive, needs-based, and accessible. Priorities include equitable access to services, strengthening dispute-resolution mechanisms, and supporting social cohesion initiatives to build trust, reduce insecurity, and mitigate risks of exploitation and instability.

7. Adoption of Harmful Coping Mechanisms

Findings indicate widespread reliance on negative coping mechanisms to manage financial hardship over the past six months, reflecting heightened economic vulnerability and associated protection risks. Over half of households reported depleting savings (53%) or deprioritizing essential needs (48%), signalling erosion of household resilience. Others relied on loans (21%) or remittances from relatives abroad (19%), indicating limited access to sustainable livelihoods. More concerning, harmful coping strategies were reported, including the onward sale of assistance (5%), child labour (3%), and, to a lesser extent, begging, and child marriage (1% each).

What did you do in the past six months to cope with your financial difficulties?



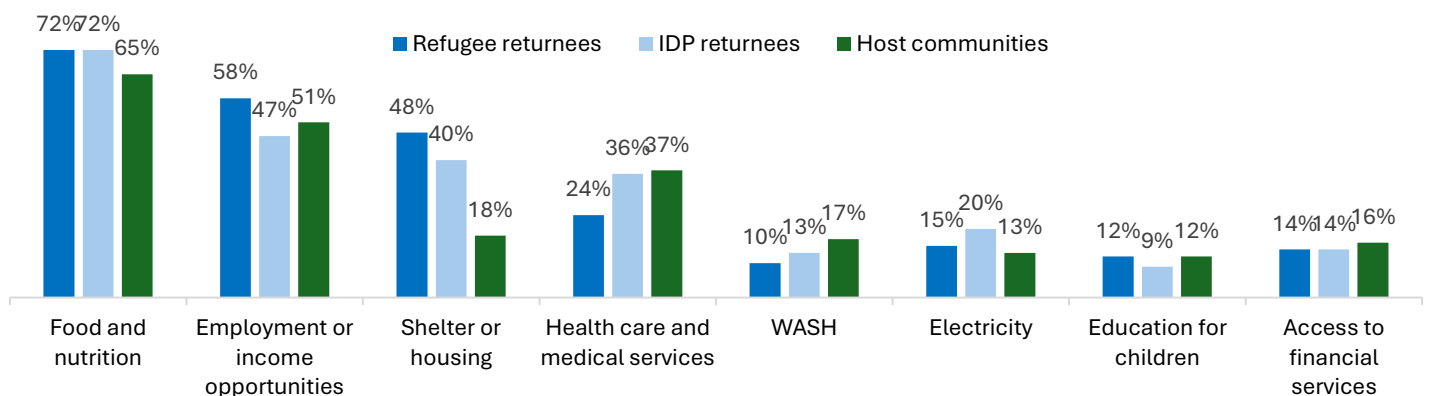
These practices expose households—particularly children—to increased protection risks, including exploitation, exclusion from education, and long-term negative impacts on wellbeing, underscoring the intersection between economic deprivation and protection concerns.

8. Unmet basic needs

When asked about unmet needs, food security and livelihoods emerged as the top priorities across all population groups. Food and nutrition were consistently reported as the most pressing unmet need, followed by employment or income opportunities, underscoring economic insecurity as a primary driver of vulnerability. Shelter and housing remain a particularly acute concern for returnees—reported by 48% of refugee returnees and 40% of IDP returnees—compared to 18% of host community households, reflecting challenges linked to return and reintegration. Housing damage or destruction, along with high rental costs, were frequently cited as the main shelter-related constraints.

Beyond these core priorities, health care and medical services were more frequently cited by host communities (37%) and IDP returnees (36%), while needs related to WASH, electricity, education for children, and access to financial services, though reported at lower levels, point to layered deprivations that continue to compound reintegration challenges.

Unmet Basic Needs



Among interviewed households, 45% reported being able to access humanitarian services to meet their needs, while 55% reported being unable to do so. Among those who accessed assistance, support was most commonly provided by INGOs/NGOs (38%) and community groups (36%), followed by UN agencies (15%) and government actors (11%). However, among respondents who were unable to access humanitarian services, the main barriers were the unavailability of needed services (72%), lack of information on available support (23%), and the absence of service providers (17%).

Recommended Actions for Protection Partners

Based on the findings of this report, protection partners are encouraged to pursue **integrated, area-based, and profile-specific interventions** to address the interlinked protection risks affecting returnees, internally displaced persons, and host communities, particularly in locations experiencing high return pressure.

- 1. Strengthen livelihoods, basic services, and inter-sectoral referral pathways as core protection interventions.** Given the strong correlation between economic insecurity, unmet basic needs, and exposure to protection risks, partners should expand livelihood opportunities, cash-based assistance, and access to food, health, WASH, and shelter services, with a particular focus on recent returnees and female-headed households. These efforts should be underpinned by strengthened **inter-sectoral referral mechanisms** between protection, livelihoods, shelter, health, and MHPSS actors to ensure that vulnerable households are systematically referred to complementary services that mitigate protection risks and support reintegration.
- 2. Scale up legal assistance and civil documentation and HLP support,** prioritising areas with high return rates and limited or newly reactivated civil registry capacity. Targeted interventions are needed to address documentation and HLP gaps that restrict access to services, education, housing, and freedom of movement, including through mobile legal services, legal counselling, court-based procedures, and sustained advocacy to reduce financial and administrative barriers. **Expanding legal counselling to cover return-relevant issues** such as education access and protection risks, including GBV and child protection, is also critical to strengthen protection outcomes. In parallel, **continued advocacy and institutional support** to civil registries, cadastral offices, courts, and relevant authorities are essential to enhance service-delivery capacity, particularly in areas with overstretched or reactivated administrative structures.
- 3. Scale up MHPSS services as a key enabler of safe return, reintegration, and protection risk mitigation.** Given the high prevalence of psychosocial distress and its direct links to gender-based violence, and violence against children, partners should prioritise the expansion of **accessible, community-based and specialised MHPSS services**. MHPSS programming should be integrated across protection, health, education, and livelihoods interventions and supported by clear referral pathways. Strengthening MHPSS services is essential not only to support individual coping and recovery, but also to reduce protection risks, improve family functioning, and reinforce social cohesion in areas of return.
- 4. Reinforce child protection and GBV prevention and response services,** particularly in return areas marked by economic stress, overcrowded housing, and limited service availability. This includes child protection case management, GBV survivor-centred services, safe spaces, parenting support, and prevention activities, alongside targeted education support and livelihood assistance for caregivers to reduce reliance on harmful coping mechanisms such as child labour and child marriage.
- 5. Enhance explosive ordnance risk mitigation and community safety measures,** through expanded EO risk education, community awareness, and referral mechanisms, while continuing advocacy for sustained investment in mine action and institutional clearance capacity to support safe livelihoods and freedom of movement.
- 6. Support social cohesion and community-based protection mechanisms,** particularly in areas experiencing increased competition over services, housing, and employment. Interventions should promote inclusive access to assistance, strengthen trusted local dispute-resolution mechanisms, and support community dialogue to mitigate tensions and reduce risks of exploitation and violence.

UNHCR response to returns

In response to increasing returns of refugees and IDPs, and in line with its protection mandate and the 2025 Operational Framework on Voluntary Return, UNHCR has expanded support for voluntary, safe, and dignified returns. UNHCR provided a comprehensive package of protection and assistance services. UNHCR also strengthened border and community monitoring and, in coordination with UN agencies and partners, enhanced support at border points, including referrals to protection, legal aid, and shelter services in areas of return.

For more information on UNHCR's response in Syria, please visit [Document - UNHCR-Syria-operational-update - March 2026](#)

