

NOT YET HOME

**EVIDENCE AND
RECOMMENDATIONS ON
SYRIAN REFUGEE
RETURNS FROM TÜRKIYE**

May 2026



FORCE 4 REFUGEES

FORCE4Refugees brings together 7 Syrian, Turkish, and European civil society and refugee-led organizations advocating for the protection, rights, and leadership of refugees. Through research, targeted advocacy, and the combined expertise and lived experiences of our partners, we work to shift policies, funding practices, and decision-making structures so that refugees are not only protected, but meaningfully shape the systems that affect their lives.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BY THE NUMBERS:

- **Return intentions are declining:** Between December 2024 and August–September 2025, the share of Syrian refugees in Türkiye planning to remain increased from 53% (n=460)¹ to 68.4% (n=1218), while those intending to return fell from 18.9% (n=460) to 13.2% (n=1218).
- **Returns are often not fully informed:** Only 2% (n=363) of returnees reported having sufficient information or support to make their decision, while 75% said they did not. Just 5% (n=363) said conditions in Syria matched their expectations.
- **Returns are often driven by pressure, not opportunities:** 45% (n=363) cited financial hardship as key drivers of return, 32% cited legal precarity in Türkiye, and 32% cited desire to reunite with family.
- **Gendered pressures shape return decisions:** Mothers report returning to Syria due to discrimination against their children in Türkiye and the loss of gender-sensitive services, including the closure of specialised support centres for children with disabilities following the relocation of international NGOs.
- **Livelihoods are largely unavailable upon return:** 76% (n=363) reported no income-generating opportunities, and 48% lacked sufficient financial means to sustain themselves.
- **Access to basic services is severely constrained:** 86% (n=363) said services were worse than expected; 92% reported electricity for less than five hours per day, 82% water access for less than five hours per week, 81% said healthcare is unaffordable, and 90% of families were dissatisfied with available education services.
- **Housing remains a critical barrier:** 48% (n=363) lost property documents, 36% returned to damaged homes, and 14% lost their homes entirely. 93% identified housing, land and property issues as a major obstacle to sustainable return.
- **Reintegration is limited:** Only 8% (n=363) felt fully accepted in their communities, while 41% (n=363) reported non-acceptance.
- **Psychological distress is widespread:** 60% (n=363) of families reported anxiety symptoms and 31% depression among at least one member.
- **Few would recommend return to Syria:** Only 5 out of 36 respondents said they would advise others to return.
- **Some are thinking to leave Syria again:** 13% (n=82) of returnees plan to return to their previous country of residence and 17% to move onward to a third country, while 27% remain undecided. 11% say their return may have been premature (n=363).

¹ Sample sizes in parentheses indicate the total number of respondents who answered the question, i.e., in this case, 53% of 460 respondents were planning to remain in Türkiye.

The fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 marked the beginning of a new precarious phase for Syria's displaced population. According to UNHCR figures published in April 2026,² over 600,000 Syrians have returned from Türkiye to Syria since December 2024. Yet, evidence shows how these return movements are often taking place against the backdrop of shrinking protection space in host countries and insufficient reconstruction inside Syria. In Türkiye, home to the world's largest Syrian refugee population, legal protections are eroding, economic conditions for refugees are deteriorating, and key services have been discontinued following global aid cuts that started to escalate in early 2025.

This report, produced by FORCE4Refugees (F4R) and Upinion, draws on data collected between August 2025 and April 2026 to **shed light on the lived experiences of Syrian refugee returnees from Türkiye, and to propose concrete recommendations for decisionmakers to protect the rights of those who return, and those who do not.**

Data was collected through a mixed-methods survey and focus group discussions by Olive Branch (OB) with 363 refugee returnees across six Syrian governorates (January–February 2026); two-way digital conversations by Upinion with 90 Syrian refugee returnees from Türkiye (December 2025–April 2026); a large-scale survey by Support to Life (STL) with 1,218 Syrian refugees in Türkiye (August–September 2025), building on a first round conducted in December 2024 to track shifts in return intentions over time; Women Now for Development (WND)'s qualitative research with 10 Syrian women returned from Türkiye (April 2026), offering a gender sensitive perspective of refugees' experience of the return process to Syria; and a digital conversation by Upinion with 158 Syrian refugees residing in Türkiye and 28 who have permanently returned or been deported to Syria (October 2025), capturing legal needs and protection risks. The report adopts a triangulation approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to identify general trends and patterns. These datasets are analysed comparatively rather than statistically combined, and findings are indicative of trends rather than generalisable as representative of Syrian returnees or refugees in Türkiye.

Together, these findings tell a consistent story: **return is not the end of the journey of displacement, but the beginning of a long and difficult phase of reintegration and socio-economic reconstruction.** This was explicitly acknowledged by Syrian government officials themselves at the Global Refugee Forum Progress Review in December 2025, who stressed that **restoring basic services, ensuring security, and rebuilding livelihoods are non-negotiable prerequisites for return**, and warned that, in lack of such guarantees, large-scale returns can become premature and unsustainable and result in renewed cycles of displacement.

The return process. Serious concerns remain about the voluntariness, informed decision-making, and protection safeguards underpinning returns from Türkiye. Only 2% (n=363) of OB respondents (January-February 2026) said they had sufficient information to make an informed return decision, and 95% reported a mismatch, whether partial or total, between their expectations and the reality they encountered upon arrival. 42% (n=363) of respondents reported experiencing harassment or difficulties at border crossing points. In contrast, WND's female respondents (April 2026) described the administrative procedures as

² Reported by UNHCR Operational Data Portal, available [here](#).

streamlined and respectful, but reported an underlying sense that this efficiency was driven by the host country's desire to expedite departures rather than ensure informed consent. The discontinuation of "go-and-see" visits from Türkiye to Syria in July 2025 removed a critical safeguard for informed return, and meaningful consultation with refugees and refugee-led organisations in the design of return programmes has been absent.

Shrinking protection space and the decision to return. Syrian refugees in Türkiye face a progressively narrowing set of options. Upinion data collected in October 2025³ documented widespread challenges: restricted freedom of movement, financial exclusion, inflated rents and neighbourhood closures, threats of forced return, arbitrary detention, or loss of protection status, and inability to afford legal representation, constraints that have since deepened with the withdrawal of automatic health coverage in January 2026 and the scaling down of INGO and UN services. Against this backdrop, OB data (January-February 2026) reveal that financial hardship (45%, n=363) and legal precarity (32%) in host countries are key drivers of return, alongside refugees' desire to reunite with their families and contribute to reconstruction (32%).

WND's qualitative data (April 2026) adds a critical gendered layer: for women, remaining in Türkiye is increasingly challenging due to discrimination against their children in school; the closure of specialised support services for parents of children with disabilities; housing precariousness as women are often not able to open utility contracts in their own names and suffer from frequent rent increases and the constant threat of eviction; and in some cases the threat of forced separation from their children under collective shelter regulations. STL's longitudinal data (December 2024-September 2025) adds an important complementary picture: while economic and housing hardship features prominently, the primary driver of intended return among refugees still in Türkiye was longing for home and a sense of belonging, underscoring that for many, this is a deeply personal decision shaped by years of displacement.

Conditions upon return. Across every dimension of returnees' lives, the data paints a consistent and concerning picture. Returnees arrive in areas where basic infrastructure has collapsed, with electricity available for fewer than five hours a day for the vast majority, and limited access to water supply, and where the scarcity of jobs and livelihoods leaves most households unable to meet their basic needs. Housing and property emerge as one of the greatest barriers to sustainable return, with documentation lost, homes damaged or destroyed, and the means to rebuild largely absent. Beyond the material, returnees struggle to reconnect with communities they feel fundamentally changed from, and the psychological toll, marked by widespread anxiety and depression, is profound.

Overall, our data shows that **return programming, reconstruction, and the protection of refugees in host countries are interlinked processes that cannot be addressed in isolation. As of today, Syria lacks those basic services, livelihood opportunities, and infrastructure that constitute key preconditions for safe and dignified returns.** The Syrian diaspora represents an invaluable resource for rebuilding the country. But their contribution will depend on renewed trust in decision-makers and a return process that is genuinely voluntary, safe, and sustainable. **As long as these conditions are not in place, the protection**

³ To learn more, access Upinion's Practical guide to Syrian refugees' legal needs in Türkiye, available [here](#).

obligations towards refugees in host countries must not be sidelined in favour of return programming.

Our **recommendations** (for a detailed list, see pages 26-32) call on four groups of decision-makers to act:

- **UNHCR** should strengthen information provision to returnees, invest in and formalise partnerships with RLOs and Syrian women-led organisations, establish independent return monitoring frameworks, and create transparent accountability mechanisms for affected populations.
- **Donor states** should maintain and scale up protection funding in Türkiye, channel resources directly and flexibly to local and refugee-led actors, support independent monitoring of return programming, and significantly increase investment in reconstruction and basic services in Syria.
- **Turkish authorities** should reinstate protections under the temporary protection regime, including healthcare access and go-and-see visits, streamline work permit procedures, and establish a formal Refugee Advisory Board to ensure meaningful refugee participation in return programming.
- **Syrian authorities** should prioritise transparency on conditions in areas of return, restore civil documentation systems, establish accessible mechanisms for housing and property dispute resolution, and create enabling conditions for civil society, including women-led organisations, to contribute to reintegration efforts.

1. INTRODUCTION

The fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 marked the beginning of a new precarious phase in Türkiye, characterised by a shrinking protection space, a shift of international resources towards Syria, and mounting pressure for Syrian refugees to return. In this context, FORCE4Refugees and Upinion join forces to present findings **on the experiences of Syrian refugee returnees from Türkiye, alongside key messages and recommendations** for decision-makers. Through this report, we argue that return programming, reconstruction, and the protection of refugees in host countries are interlinked processes that cannot be treated as separate policy tracks: **returns cannot be voluntary where protection is shrinking or where refugees struggle to access the information needed to make informed decisions, and they cannot be safe and dignified without substantive progress on reconstruction in Syria to restore basic services, rebuild infrastructure, and create livelihood opportunities.**

The data presented here tells a consistent story: **return is not the end of the journey of displacement, but the beginning of a long and difficult phase of reintegration and socio-economic reconstruction.** Return by itself does not guarantee stability: it requires a comprehensive response that supports economic recovery, rehabilitates services and infrastructure, and strengthens social cohesion and psychosocial support for returnees. Addressing these challenges is not optional: it is a prerequisite for sustainable return that genuinely contributes to the long-term rebuilding of Syrian society. **If these issues are not addressed, return movements can become premature and unsustainable, resulting in renewed cycles of displacement within Syria or to its neighbouring host countries once again.**

This report presents recently collected data on the challenges faced during and upon return by Syrian returnees from Türkiye, alongside a set of recommendations to better inform return programming and protect the rights of those who return, and those who do not. It is structured as follows: a methodological section detailing the data sources and collection methods; a findings section examining the return process from Türkiye, the shrinking protection space and its role in return decisions, and the challenges faced upon return; and conclusions and recommendations addressed to UNHCR, donor states, Turkish authorities, and Syrian authorities.

2. METHODOLOGY

This note draws on different complementary data sources and relies on partners' direct engagement with affected communities and field-based knowledge in Türkiye and Syria.

Data collected by Olive Branch (OB) with 363 refugee returnees across six Syrian governorates (January–February 2026), through surveys and focus group discussions, produces insights on the return process and conditions faced by refugees upon return. Upinion contributes data on conditions upon return (including safety, mobility, access to basic services, and reintegration), collected through its Digital Engagement Platform in two conversations held with 90 Syrian

returnees from Türkiye (December 2025–April 2026). Support to Life (STL) offers longitudinal analysis of shifts in return intentions among Syrian refugees still residing in Türkiye, through two large scale surveys carried out in December 2024 and between August and September 2025. Women Now for Development (WND) provides qualitative, gender-specific perspectives from 10 Syrian women who recently returned from Türkiye, interviewed in April 2026. And another Upinion conversation with 158 Syrian refugees in Türkiye and 28 who have permanently returned or been deported to Syria, conducted in October 2025, captures the legal needs and protection risks faced by Syrian refugees remaining in Türkiye.

The report adopts a triangulation approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data from different sources to identify consistent patterns. These datasets are not statistically combined but rather analysed comparatively to identify converging trends and complementary insights. Importantly, the datasets cannot be treated as interchangeable: they were collected by different partners, in different geographic areas, at different moments in time, and using different sampling strategies and methodologies. As a result, findings are indicative of trends and patterns rather than statistically generalisable as representative of all Syrian returnees or refugees in Türkiye.

The five data sources are described in detail below (see also Table 1). Throughout the report, percentages are accompanied by the total number of respondents who answered the relevant question in parentheses (e.g., 74%, n=87 means that 74% of 87 respondents gave a specific response), allowing the reader to contextualise each finding accordingly.

1. OB survey on Syrian returnees. Between January and February 2026, OB's Studies and Research Department conducted a mixed-methods data collection exercise targeting Syrian returnees, with a particular focus on those returning from Türkiye. The exercise combined six focus group discussions (average group size: 8.5 participants) with individual interviews with 312 returnees, for a total of 363 participants. Respondents ranged in age from 22 to 57 (average: 39 years); 43% (n=363) were women and 57% men. The majority (79%, n=363) had returned from Türkiye, with the remaining returning from Egypt (3%), Lebanon (9%), Jordan (7%), and Europe (2%). 67% (n=363) of all respondents are heads of household / primary caregivers for their families. Data was collected across six governorates: Damascus, Rural Damascus, Daraa, Aleppo, Latakia, and Tartous.

2. Upinion conversations with Syrian returnees from Türkiye. This report contains data collected through a conversation held with 90 Syrian returnees from Türkiye between December 2025 and April 2026, covering social reintegration, safety and security, freedom of movement, access to basic services, and mobility intentions. Syrian returnees were onboarded through a two-pronged approach: targeted Facebook advertisements were complemented by outreach activities conducted by partner organisations. Some returnees were also engaged in Upinion conversations while residing in Türkiye, i.e., prior to their return to Syria.

74% (n=87) of respondents were male. 92% (n=89) permanently returned to Syria, and 8% reported being there temporarily. The majority (74%, n=90) returned from December 2024 onwards, i.e., after the fall of the Assad regime. Respondents mainly originated from Aleppo (28%, n=89), Idlib (26%), Latakia (11%), Hama (8%), and Deir-ez-Zor (6%) governorates, and

the majority of them (79%, n=89) reported returning to the same city, town, or village they lived in prior to leaving Syria. Among respondents, 43% participated in a follow-up conversation between March and April 2026 addressing economic reintegration and livelihoods, access to civil documentation, housing, land, and property, as well as the receipt of support in Syria. This report presents key findings and selected data points from these two conversations.

3. STL research on intentions to return of Syrian refugees in Türkiye. Between August and September 2025, STL, in collaboration with its local partner organisations Hevi LGBTİ, MOKID, ARSA, EKSI25, and Lider Kadın Derneği, conducted mixed-methods research (combining a survey, focus group discussions, and a field visit to Syria) to understand shifts in voluntary return intentions among Syrian refugees in Türkiye, eight months after the regime change.⁴ The research involved 1,218 Syrian refugees over the age of 18 living across the provinces of Adıyaman, Hatay, İzmir, Kahramanmaraş, Şanlıurfa, İstanbul, Mardin, Kayseri, Kütahya, and Diyarbakır. This study was prepared in comparison with the results of the first round of research conducted by Support to Life in December 2024; the data obtained was evaluated in a way that allows for trend analysis.

4. WND qualitative research with Syrian women recently returned from Türkiye. The data was collected in April 2026 through a targeted questionnaire designed to capture qualitative insights and personal narratives regarding the return process. The sample consisted of 10 Syrian women recently returned to Syria from Türkiye, including 3 widows, 2 divorcees, and 5 women who returned with their families. The group was purposefully selected to represent diverse social backgrounds and protection needs, and, despite the small sample size, the depth of the stories provided a unique look at the specific challenges women face when returning to Syria, which are often lost in larger statistics. The selection of women from WND's own network, with whom the organisation has established a bond of longstanding mutual trust, allowed for honest and meaningful conversations about sensitive topics. Their experiences as widows, divorcees, and mothers offer a vital snapshot of the intense pressures refugees have been navigating in early 2026.

5. Upinion conversation on the protection space in Türkiye. Data on the legal needs of Syrian refugees in Türkiye and the protection risks they face were drawn from an Upinion conversation⁵ conducted in October 2025 with 158 Syrian refugees residing in Türkiye and 28 who have permanently returned or been deported to Syria.

⁴ To learn more, access STL's survey report, available [here](#).

⁵ To learn more, access Upinion's Practical guide to Syrian refugees' legal needs in Türkiye, available [here](#).

Data Source	Methodology & Sample	Population	Timeframe	Analytical Contribution
Olive Branch (OB)	Mixed methods: FGDs + interviews; 363 respondents	Returnees (79% from Türkiye)	Jan–Feb 2026	Field dataset providing ground-level evidence on return process, conditions upon return, reintegration
Upinion	Digital engagement (two-way conversations); 90 respondents	Returnees from Türkiye	Dec 2025–Apr 2026	Captures perceptions and lived experiences on conditions upon return (including safety, mobility, access to basic services, and reintegration)
Support to Life (STL)	Survey + trend analysis; 1,218 respondents	Syrian refugees in Türkiye	Aug–Sep 2025	Provides a longitudinal perspective on return intentions and decision drivers among those still in Türkiye
Women Now (WND)	Qualitative interviews; 10 respondents	Women returnees	Apr–26	Adds gender-specific analysis, focusing on women’s experience of the return process and return intentions
Upinion	Digital engagement (two-way conversation); 186 respondents	Syrian refugees in Türkiye and returnees	October 2025	Captures perceptions and lived experiences regarding the situation for Syrian refugees in Türkiye (including protection risks, housing, banking access, legal needs, and rights violations)

Table 1: Overview of datasets informing the report

3. FINDINGS: THE REALITY OF RETURN

3.1. THE RETURN PROCESS FROM TÜRKIYE

According to UNHCR figures published in April 2026, over 600,000 Syrians have returned from Türkiye to Syria since 8 December 2024.⁶ In Türkiye, UNHCR has been supporting the state-led return programme, monitoring returns at six border crossings in south-eastern Türkiye. Syrians wishing to return schedule an appointment with their local Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM), which verifies their legal status and issues a voluntary return form and a travel permit to reach their designated border crossing. Ahead of departures, returnees can ask for material support, including transport assistance and cash grants for those with specific needs. At the border, UNHCR funds the case workers at the PDMM and acts as a third-party observer: verifying identity, matching biometric data, observing organised movements, and providing assistance. Upon crossing, the individual's Temporary Protection Identity Card is collected, and UNHCR maintains a presence on the Syrian side to manage reception, match databases, and provide onward transport to major cities.

Yet concerns remain about the **voluntariness, informed decision-making, and protection safeguards underpinning these returns**. When UNHCR published its Operational Framework for Voluntary Return in February 2025,⁷ both the FORCE4Refugees and Refugee Protection Watch⁸ coalitions warned that **the shift to large-scale return facilitation was launched prematurely, without the legal guarantees, protection thresholds, and evidence base that UNHCR's own return frameworks⁹ require**. The decision rested largely on a single intentions survey – one that excluded Türkiye (the country hosting the largest share of Syrian refugees), did not provide disaggregated data per gender despite explicitly noting that women express lower return intentions, and conflated that 80% of Syrian refugees "hope to return one day" with active intent to return within twelve months.

Indeed, **alternative data collected at the time already pointed to significantly lower readiness to return for Syrian refugees in Türkiye**: in December 2024, STL surveyed¹⁰ 460 Syrian refugee households across multiple Turkish provinces and found that, contrary to UNHCR's survey, 53% (n=460)¹¹ of the respondents stated that they would like to stay in Türkiye, 18.9% would like to return to Syria, 19% were undecided, and 8.9% hoped to settle in a third country. Among those planning to return, over a third were waiting to observe the situation in Syria (35.6% n=87), while about one in five remained undecided (19.5%). Seasonal factors –

⁶ Reported by UNHCR Operational Data Portal, available [here](#).

⁷ Access UNHCR Operational Framework, available [here](#).

⁸ Refugee Protection Watch (RPW) is a coalition established in 2019. It comprises 6 Syrian, Lebanese and European organisations carrying out joint research and advocacy on protection issues and living conditions of Syrians and host communities in Lebanon, and on the conditions for safe, voluntary, informed and dignified return to Syria. Visit its website, available [here](#).

⁹ Specifically, the 2018 Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy and the 2019 Regional Operational Framework for Refugee Return to Syria.

¹⁰ To learn more, access STL survey, available [here](#).

¹¹ Sample sizes in parentheses indicate the number of respondents who answered the question, i.e., in this case, 53% of 460 respondents were planning to remain in Türkiye.

end of winter (13.8%) or school season (11.5%) – guided another quarter of respondents, with only a small minority planning at the time to return within three months (13.8%) or sooner (5.7%). Follow-up research conducted eight months later confirmed that this was not a temporary hesitation, but a consolidating trend: between August and September 2025, **STL found that the proportion of respondents planning to remain in Türkiye had increased from 53% (n=460) to 68.4% (n=1218), while the share of those intending to return declined from 18.9% (n=460) to 13.2% (n=1218).** The majority of those wishing to return either did not know when they would return (26.1%, n=161), were planning to save money and return later (28.6%,), or were considering it after observing the situation in Syria (14.3%). At the same time, the proportion of undecided respondents dropped from 19.1% (n=460) to 9.1% (n=1218), suggesting that intentions were becoming more defined over time.

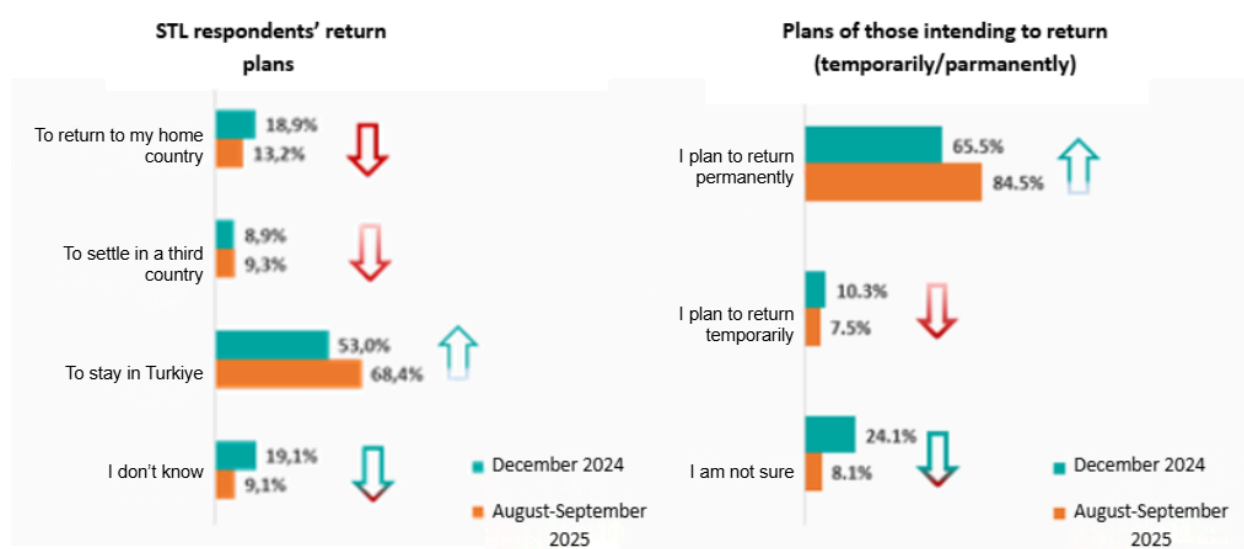


Figure 1: STL respondents' return intentions (December 2024-September 2025)

Taken together, **these findings indicated not only low but declining willingness to return in the early stages of the return programming**, raising serious questions about the evidence base underpinning the early shift toward large-scale return facilitation. Critically, return programmes **were designed without meaningful consultation with Syrian refugees or refugee-led organisations**, who were subsequently invited to support only at the implementation stage.

The concerns have not diminished as programmes have been implemented. **Many refugees are returning without reliable information on the situation they are going back to:** insufficient information-sharing by both governments and UNHCR has left returnees without clear knowledge of security conditions, service availability, or property rights in areas of return. This information gap worsened after July 2025, when Türkiye discontinued "go-and-see" visits that had allowed refugees to temporarily travel to Syria while retaining their legal status in Türkiye – a key safeguard for genuinely informed return decisions.

According to data collected by OB (January-February 2026), **when asked whether they had sufficient resources, data, or institutional support to make their return decision, only 2%**

(n=363) of respondents said yes, while 75% said no, and 23% said only partially. This points to a severe gap in pre-departure information provision and institutional accompaniment. WND's qualitative survey (April 2026) with ten Syrian women who recently returned from Türkiye also highlights the lack of comprehensive information provided to women regarding protection safeguards and the actual conditions they would face upon arrival in Syria. Crucially, the lack of information prior to departure translates into a profound mismatch between expectations and reality upon return. **Only 5% (n=363) of OB respondents reported that conditions in Syria matched their expectations, while 55% said they did not, and 40% said they did so only partially** (Figure 2). This expectation gap – affecting 95% of respondents to some degree – underscores the severity of the information deficit and the structural challenges returnees encounter upon arrival.

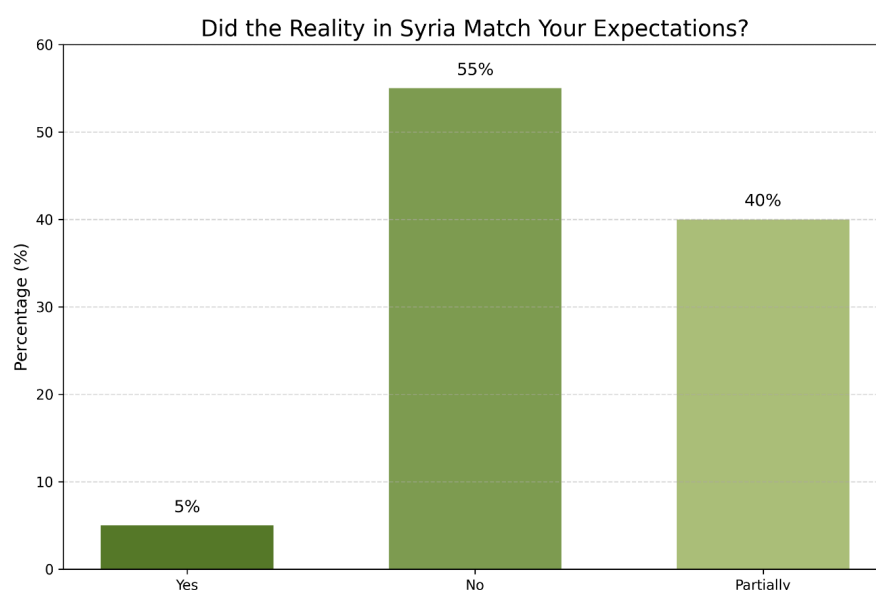


Figure 2: OB respondents' expectations/reality upon arrival (January-February 2026)

These gaps extend into the return journey itself. **When asked about the return journey, 42% (n=363) of OB respondents reported experiencing harassment or difficulties at border crossing points, 47% did not, and 12% responded partially** (Figure 3). This data suggests that a significant group of returnees faced protection-relevant incidents at the point of crossing, reinforcing the need for systematic monitoring at border points.

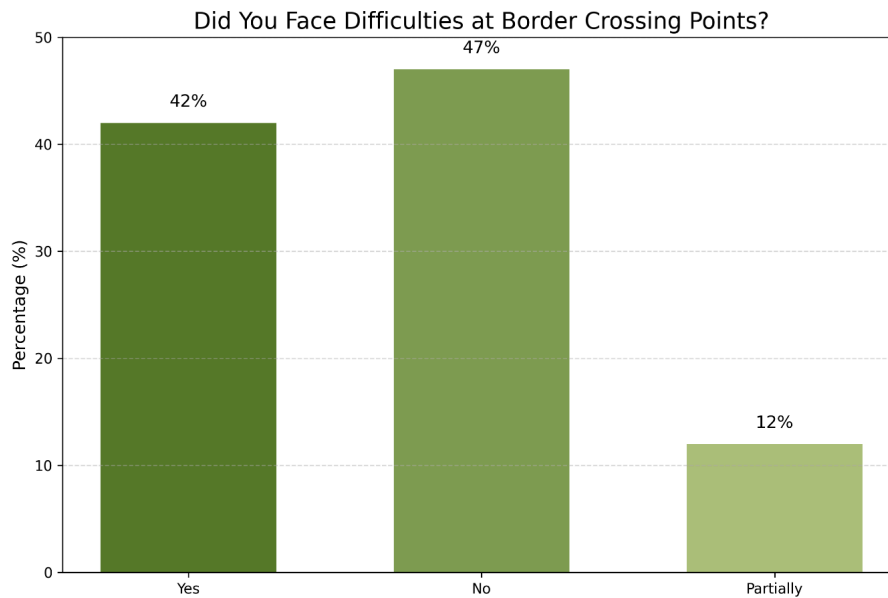


Figure 3: OB respondents' difficulties faced at crossing points (January-February 2026)

Finally, it should be noted that challenges are not experienced equally amongst Syrian refugees. Female returnees interviewed by WND described the administrative procedures as "easy, streamlined, and clear," with no direct harassment or ill-treatment reported. However, this efficiency was often experienced with skepticism and ambivalence. Several women noted an underlying sense that the smoothness of the process was primarily driven by the host country's desire to expedite Syrian departures. In one of the respondent's words: "they just wanted to be done with us."

3.2. SHRINKING PROTECTION SPACE & THE CHOICE TO RETURN

In the meantime, **faced with the shrinking protection space in Türkiye and the uncertain security and humanitarian conditions in Syria, Syrian refugees are confronted with a difficult decision whether to stay or return.**

In the conversation conducted by Upinion in October 2025 on the legal needs of Syrian refugees, 62% (n=157) of respondents in Türkiye reported struggling with restricted mobility and freedom of movement, and 41% reported being unable to receive aid or access support due to their legal status. Most faced housing market manipulation or inflated rental prices (62%, n=156), as well as neighbourhood closures to address registrations for Syrians under temporary protection (56%), and difficulties opening a bank account (66%, n=157). Access to healthcare and work permits remained out of reach for many, and 66% (n=157) of respondents in Türkiye reported being unable to afford legal representation, despite widespread and interconnected legal needs around housing, employment, and documentation. Respondents reported facing systemic financial exclusion in Türkiye, including banks' rejection of the Kimlik as sufficient identification for opening accounts. The loss of social security contributions for those returning before retirement age also undermines their ability to re-establish their lives in Syria. Perhaps most strikingly, around half of respondents in Türkiye (49%, n=155) were completely unaware of

how to report rights violations or mistreatment, pointing to a systematic gap in access to justice and institutional accountability.

Since then, conditions in Türkiye have deteriorated further. As of January 2026, Syrian refugees under temporary protection lost automatic health coverage. Throughout 2025, camps hosting Syrian refugees were closed, displacing residents with no alternative housing or resources. New regulations targeting employers who hire informally – a common practice given refugees' restricted access to the formal labour market – have imposed higher fees and penalties, further marginalising refugees economically. The impact of global aid cuts has led to significant downscaling of services by INGOs and UN agencies, including UNHCR's own referral and case management services, further reducing refugees' access to legal aid and psychosocial support. Together, **these developments mean that many refugees who would choose to remain in Türkiye may feel compelled to leave – not because conditions in Syria have improved, but because conditions in Türkiye have become harder to sustain.**

OB and STL data on return decision dynamics reflect this reality. According to OB's survey (January-February 2026), the most influential factor in the decision to return was financial, followed by legal precarity: **45% (n=363) of respondents cited their financial situation and the unavailability of income sources in the host country as a driver of return, 32% cited an unclear legal situation and insufficient documentation as a reason for returning, and 32% citing a desire to reunite with family and contribute to reconstruction (Figure 4).**

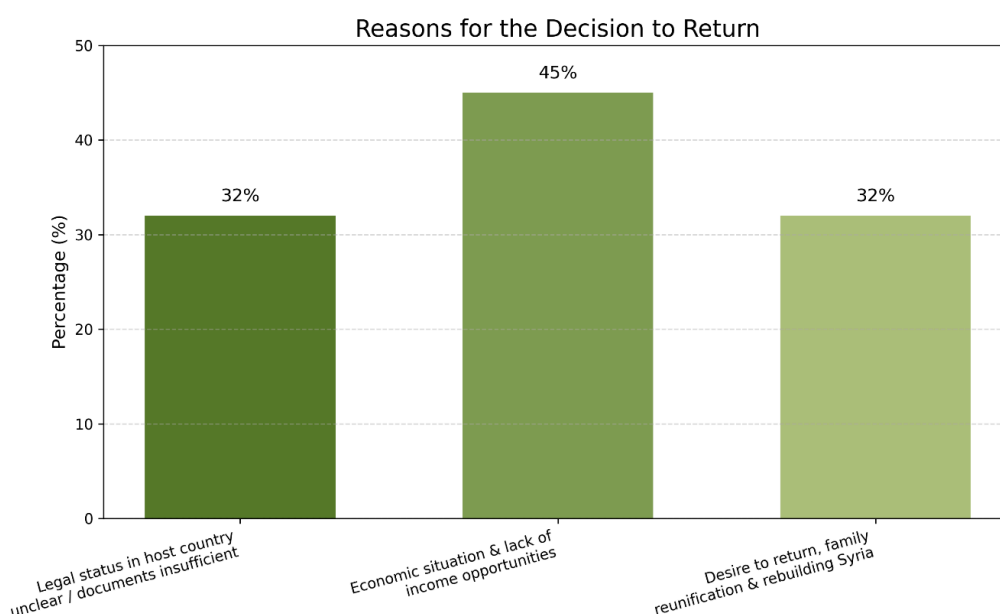


Figure 4: Reasons to return among OB respondents (January-February 2026)

OB data also shows that the **return decision-making process was predominantly informal and family-led rather than institutionally supported: 82% (n=363) of respondents made their decision in consultation with relatives and contacts in Syria; 34% cited hope and optimism as a driving factor; 12% described themselves as forced by pressures in the host**

country and unable to stay longer; and 3% returned suddenly without prior planning or preparation (Figure 5). These response options were not mutually exclusive and may overlap.

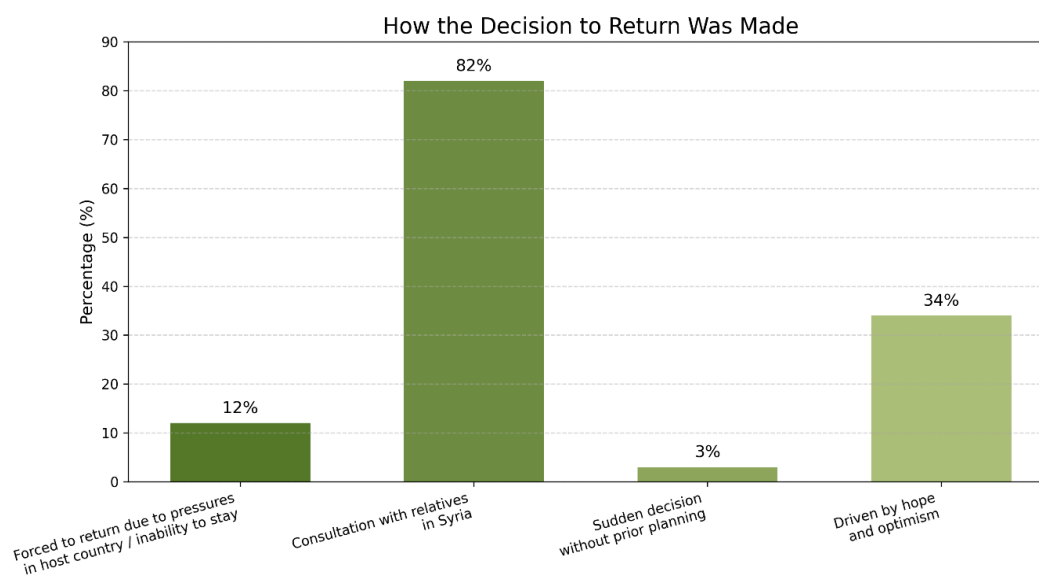


Figure 5: Decision-making process among OB respondents (January-February 2026)

Taken together, these findings depict a multi-causal picture, suggesting that while some Syrian refugees might have returned voluntarily and optimistically, a large number of returns were driven by a combination of push factors from Türkiye (such as economic hardship, legal insecurity, and lack of institutional support) rather than genuine pull factors from Syria. The dominance of informal information channels and family networks over official guidance and planning mechanisms raises concerns about access to and quality of pre-return counselling, as well as accurate, impartial information prior to return.

WND's qualitative data (April 2026) adds a critical gendered dimension to this picture, revealing **specific factors that make remaining in Türkiye particularly challenging for women**. Mothers reported that discrimination against their children in schools and public spaces, where children are treated as "inferior," drove a desire to return to Syria so their families could grow up with a sense of belonging rather than "second-class" status. Women also described the progressive loss of gender-sensitive support systems as international NGOs relocated their operations inside Syria: mothers of children with disabilities, in particular, reported returning because the specialised support centres they had relied on in Türkiye had closed.

Housing vulnerability was another defining feature: women described the inability to open utility contracts in their own names, frequent rent increases, and the constant threat of eviction, with the feeling of being "constantly vulnerable" (*mustadha'fat*), making the prospect of returning to a family home in Syria, despite the risks, feel like a more dignified option. A further gender-specific factor involved mothers living in collective shelters: regulations requiring the separation of boys from their mothers upon reaching age 12 or 13 led some women to return to Syria rather than face losing custody of or being separated from their children. Finally, the loss of health insurance as of January 1, 2026, and job opportunities, combined with pressure from

male family members who argued that "the fear of the regime is over," further constrained women's agency in taking a truly voluntary choice. As one female returnee in Douma, Rural Damascus, put it:

“إن تراكم الضغوطات، بدءاً من التمييز في المدارس وصولاً إلى العجز حتى عن تسجيل عقود المياه بأسمائنا، جعلنا نشعر بأننا 'أدنى شأنًا'. كانت العودة بالنسبة لنا هي رحلة البحث عن الكرامة والانتماء اللذين فقدناهما في المنفى.” (عائدة مقيمة في دوما)

“The accumulation of pressures, from discrimination in schools to the inability to even put a water contract in our names, made us feel 'less than.' Returning was about seeking the dignity and belonging that we lost in exile.” (Female Returnee in Douma).

STL’s data adds a complementary perspective from refugees still in Türkiye. In its August–September 2025 survey, the primary drivers of intended return included longing for home and a sense of belonging (59.6%, n=161), followed by the high cost of living and poverty in Türkiye (47.2%), and poor housing conditions (31.7%). Compared to December 2024, when reuniting with family was the leading factor (48.3%, n=87), the growing prominence of belonging and homesickness – alongside economic hardship – (Figure 6) underlines that for many, the decision is a deeply personal one, shaped by years of displacement, and cannot be reduced to material circumstances alone.

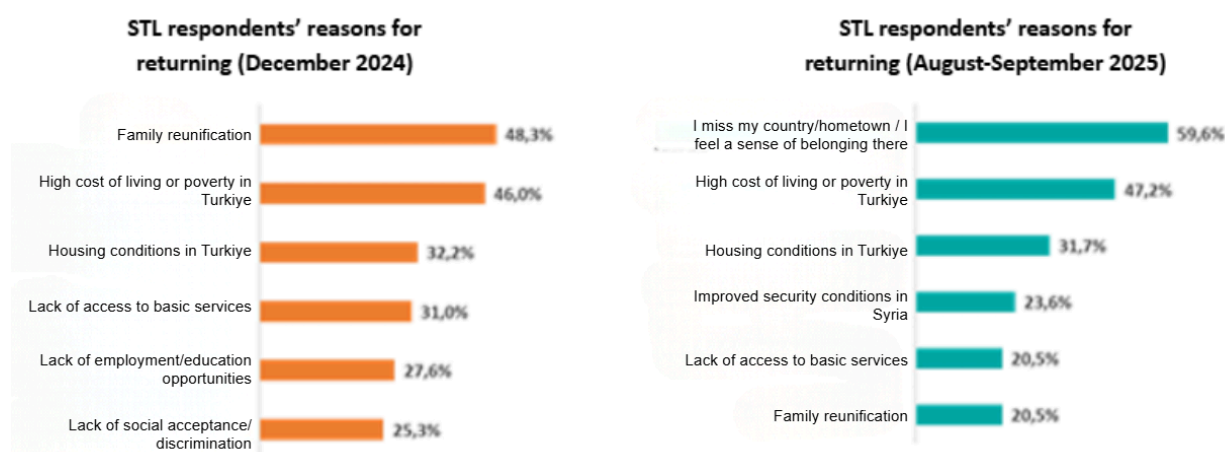


Figure 6: STL respondents’ reasons for returning (December 2025-September 2026)

3.3. CHALLENGES UPON RETURN

As people go back, they then realize that **conditions inside Syria do not yet meet the threshold for safe, voluntary, and dignified return**. This is increasingly documented by Syrian and international civil society, but has also been explicitly acknowledged by Syrian authorities. At the Global Refugee Forum Progress Review in December 2025, **Syrian government officials stressed that restoring basic services, ensuring security, and rebuilding livelihoods are non-negotiable prerequisites for return**, and warned that rushed, large-scale return movements risk exacerbating social tensions, overwhelming fragile services, and generating new waves of internal displacement.

The data collected by OB (January-February 2026) and Upinion (December 2025-April 2026) confirm this picture across every dimension of returnees' lives. The main challenges reported relate to **safety, access to livelihoods and basic services, housing and property, and social and psychological reintegration.**

Safety

Returns are taking place in conditions of widespread insecurity. Upinion respondents (December 2025-April 2026) mainly returned to Idleb (29%, n=90), Aleppo (26%), Lattakia (11%), Hama (8%), Rural Damascus (7%), and Deir-ez-Zor (6%) governorates. Some also returned to Damascus, Ar-Raqqa, Homs, Dar'a, and Al-Hasakeh. Among them, **42% (n=89) reported facing incidents that threatened their safety or that of their households, and 58% reported feeling unsafe in their area of return at least sometimes** (Figure 7).

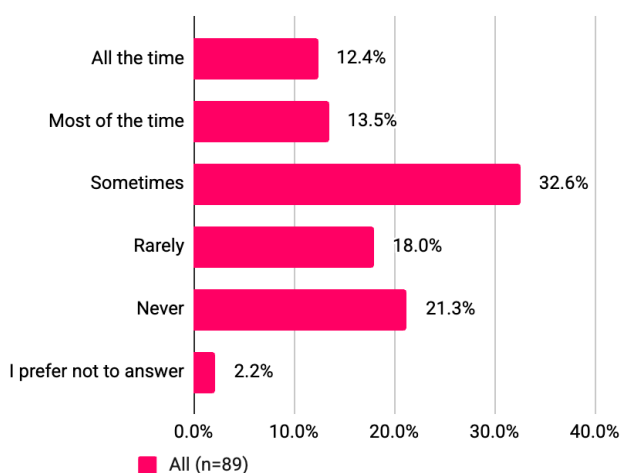


Figure 7: Upinion respondents' feeling unsafe in the area of return (December 2025-April 2026)

Reasons behind this extend beyond armed conflict (24%, n=68), and include thefts (43%), murders (25%), as well as discrimination or persecution (10%) (Figure 8).

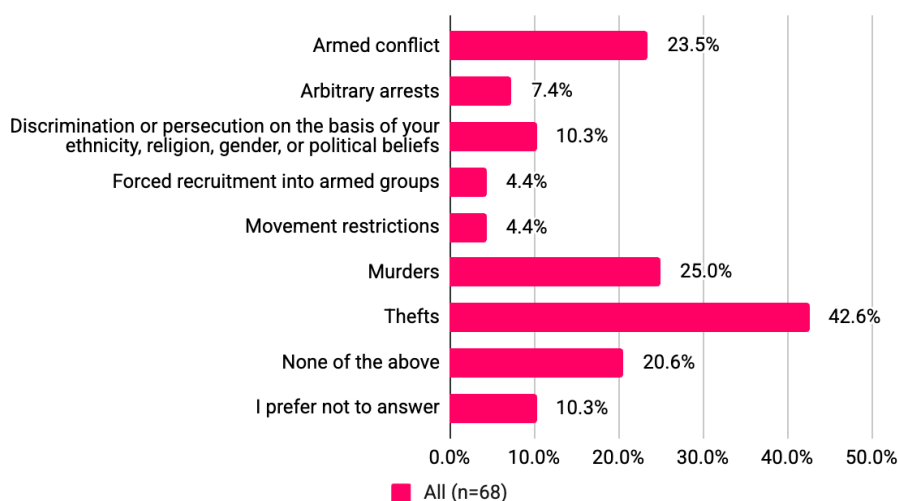


Figure 8: Reasons behind risk perceptions among Upinion respondents (December 2025-April 2026)

Safety perceptions may also be shaped by the high cost of living and weak or absent social ties in areas of return, as illustrated by one respondent residing in Lattakia:

"بسبب عدم وجود أمان في سوريا، وعدم الصدق والأمان بين الناس، وكل شيء في سوريا يحتاج إلى وساطات ومال، وعدم الأمان في مناطق العيش، والغلاء الفاحش، وعدم وجود صلة الرحم بين الناس." (عائد مقيم في اللاذقية)

"Due to the lack of safety in Syria, the absence of honesty and trust among people, the fact that everything in Syria requires connections and money, the insecurity in living areas, the exorbitant cost of living, and the absence of kinship ties between people." (Male returnee in Lattakia)

Freedom of movement remains severely constrained: 10% (n=89) reported being unable to move safely inside Syria, and 45% could do so only within or to specific governorates.

Among those who indicated they cannot safely move inside Syria, some elaborated on the reasons. These included the widespread presence of armed groups affiliated to the Syrian authorities or remnants of the Assad regime:

"بالنسبة لي، الخوف هو من السلاح المنتشر، إن كان مع عناصر للدولة أو من الفلول والطاقنيين." (عائد مقيم في إدلب)

"For me, the fear comes from the widespread presence of weapons, whether held by state elements, remnants [of the Assad regime], or sectarian groups." (Male returnee in Idleb)

Livelihoods

The economic crisis and the scarcity of job opportunities represent one of the biggest challenges for returnees. According to OB data (January-February 2026), **76% (n=363) of respondents stated there are no income-generating opportunities available to them; 14% found opportunities to generate income that, however, are not enough to account for monthly needs; and only 10% found sufficient opportunities to meet their needs.** The barriers to economic reintegration are both structural and compounding. The vast majority of respondents reported having lost their previous jobs (98%, n=362), many also lacked the capital to start new ventures (80%), and faced a general absence of job opportunities in the Syrian labour market (79%). In addition, 64% (n=363) reported having lost their professional networks upon return, and 58% cited a lack of broader investment opportunities. These individual constraints are exacerbated by systemic factors: 90% (n=363) of respondents stated that international sanctions imposed on Syria have significantly disrupted the economy, and 69% reported that the government has not yet established an enabling investment environment. The collapse of productive sectors, the high cost of living, and the absence of an enabling investment environment leave most returning families in acute economic vulnerability.

As a result, returning households face acute financial vulnerability from the outset. **Nearly half of OB respondents (48%, n=363) reported not having sufficient financial means to sustain themselves upon return,** while only 36% said they did and 16% only partially (Figure

9). Notably, 27% reported having received financial assistance from the host country to facilitate their return.

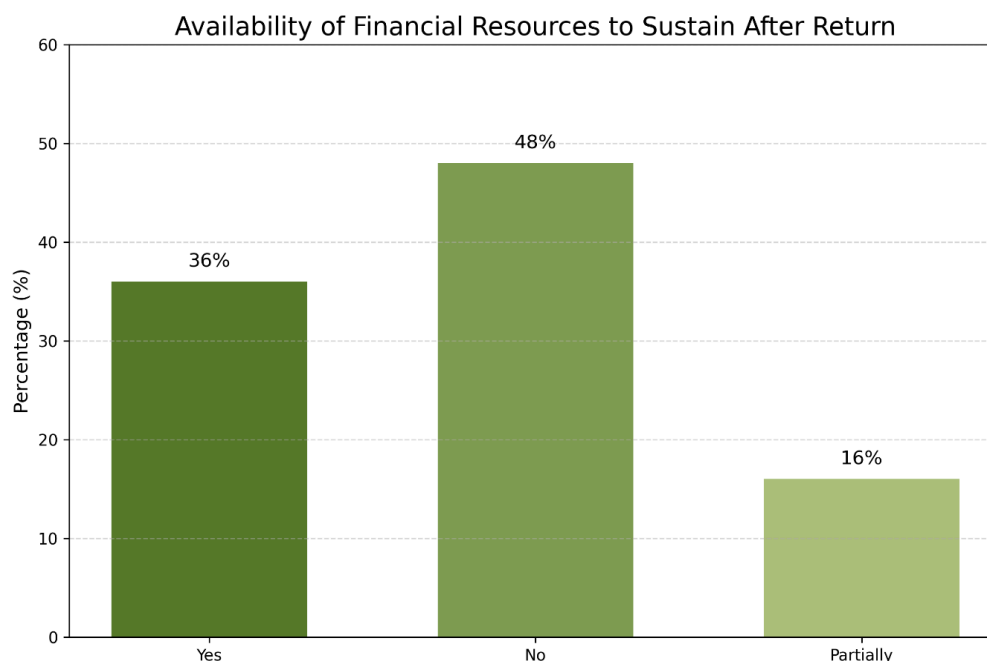


Figure 9: Availability of financial resources among OB respondents (January-February 2026)

Evidence from Upinion further illustrates the severity of livelihood challenges upon return. Out of 39 respondents participating in a follow-up conversation between March and April 2026, only 10 were engaged in full-time, part-time, or occasional and seasonal income-generating activities, and 38 reported facing some or significant difficulties reestablishing their livelihood. Cited challenges included again lack of job opportunities, low wages, and health issues affecting their ability to work. The consequences for household welfare are severe. Out of the 39 respondents, 38 reported they were unable to meet their basic needs or could only meet some of them. More alarmingly, for most, the situation has worsened since returning to Syria. As one respondent in Aleppo noted:

"فرص العمل قليلة جداً، الأجور منخفضة، ارتفاع المواد الغذائية وارتفاع إيجار المنازل. الأجر 40 دولاراً في الأسبوع فقط، ماذا تكفي؟" (عائد مقيم في حلب)

"Job opportunities are extremely scarce, wages are low, and the costs of food and rent are increasing. Wages are only \$40 a week; what is that supposed to cover?" (Male returnee in Aleppo)

Similarly, a returnee in Hama explained:

"في تركيا كنا نأخذ بعض المساعدات الإنسانية إلى حد ما. أما الآن لا نستطيع الحصول على أدنى مساعدة، لا خدمات ولا مساعدات." (عائد مقيم في حماة)

"In Türkiye, we used to receive some humanitarian aid. But now, we can't get even the slightest bit of help—no services and no aid." (Male returnee in Hama)

To cope with these conditions and meet their basic living needs, respondents mainly relied on borrowing money, while a smaller share relied on work, remittances, or support from family and friends inside Syria.

Basic services

Access to basic services is largely inadequate across areas of return: 54% (n=85) of Upinion respondents (December 2025-April 2026) lacked reliable access to water supply, with the situation worse for sanitation (56%), waste collection (67%), and electricity (69%) (Figure 10).

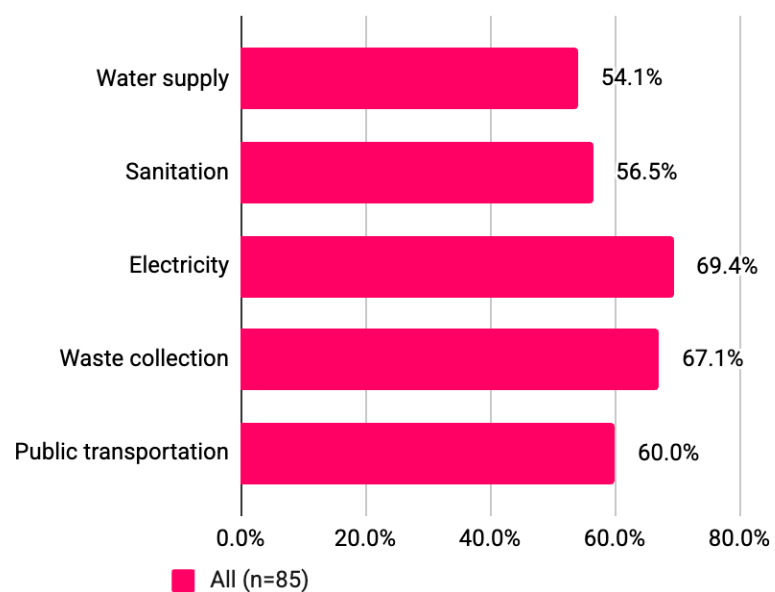


Figure 10: Percentage of Upinion respondents lacking access to basic services (December 2025-April 2026)

OB data (January-February 2026) paints an equally concerning picture (Figure 11): **92% (n=363) of respondents reported electricity availability of less than five hours a day.** All respondents indicated a need for a generator or battery backup, though and 63% of them do not have a generator or battery with sufficient capacity to cover the daily electricity need. 82% of respondents receive water through government supply networks for less than five hours per week.

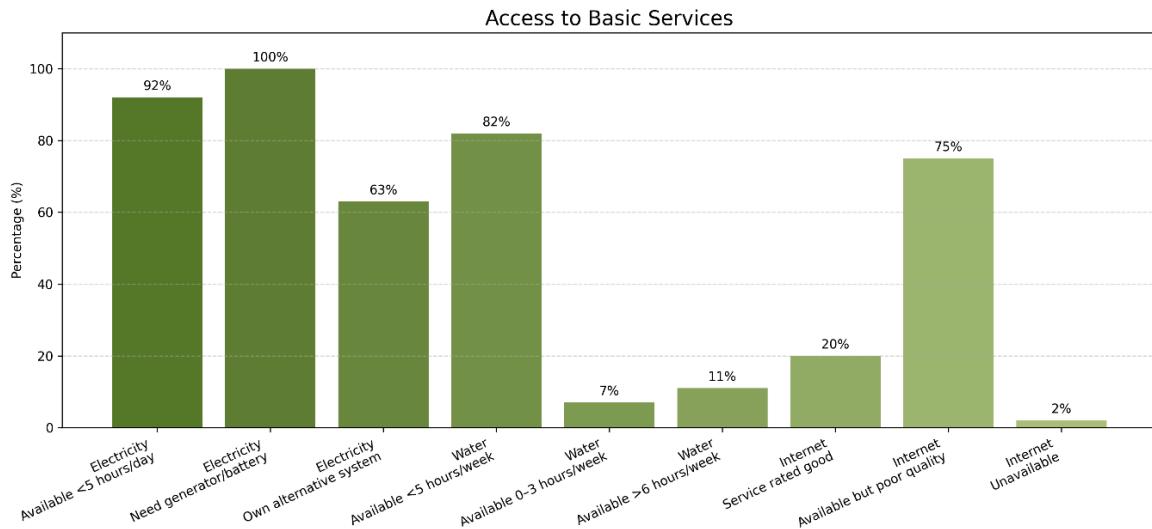


Figure 11: Access to basic services for OB respondents (January-February 2026)

Healthcare access is severely constrained, with 81% (n=363) of OB respondents saying medical treatment is unaffordably expensive, and 40% reporting no equipped hospital within 10 kilometres (Figure 12).

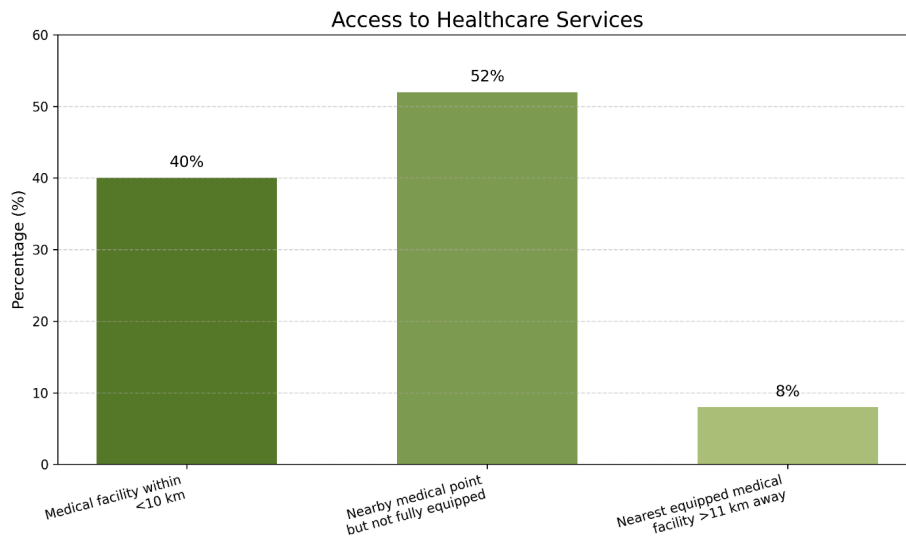


Figure 12: Access to healthcare for OB respondents (January-February 2026)

On education: **of the 243 heads of household with school-age children (502 children in total) interviewed by OB, 90% were dissatisfied with available education services** – citing damaged or unsafe school infrastructure (35%, n=363), shortage of educational materials (65%), and critically, 72% flagging their children’s inability to integrate into the Syrian curriculum after years in different education systems (Figure 13).

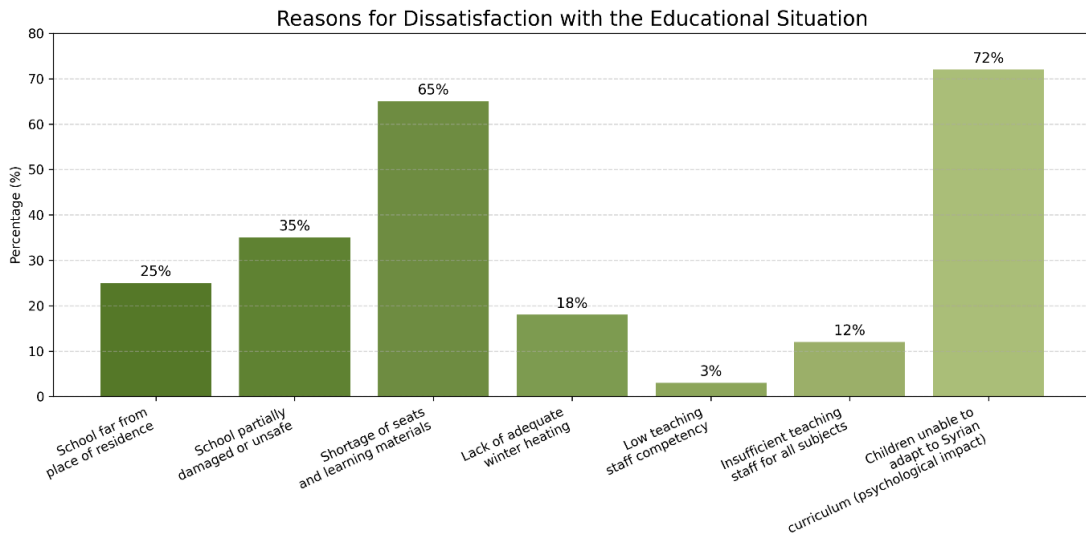


Figure 13: Dissatisfaction with the education system among OB respondents (January-February 2026)

Overall, 86% (n=363) of OB respondents stated that, despite already low expectations, services upon return were worse than anticipated.

Housing, land, and property

Housing and property issues represent one of the most prominent obstacles to sustainable returns, compounded by widespread destruction and the loss of legal documentation. Among OB respondents (January-February 2026, Figure 14), **48% (n=363) reported losing some or all property ownership documents, 36% returned to partially damaged homes, and 14% had lost their homes entirely. 72% are in rented accommodation, and 28% reported living with relatives.**



Figure 14: Housing and property challenges among OB respondents (January-February 2026)

Most strikingly, **93% (n=363) of OB respondents identified housing, land, and property assistance as one of the biggest barriers to sustainable return** – the highest-rated barrier across all categories surveyed. Upinion data (December 2025-April 2026) reflects a similar picture, with 69% (n=86) facing moderate or severe challenges in securing adequate housing after returning to Syria.

Reintegration and psychological toll

Beyond material conditions, returnees face challenges reconnecting with their communities. Among Upinion respondents (December 2025-April 2026), **64% (n=89) described their overall reintegration experience as difficult or very difficult (Figure 15), and 66% (n=89) reported challenges reconnecting with the local community** – citing a lack of community support networks (58%, n=59), difficulties reestablishing social ties (37%), and feeling unwelcome (15%) (Figure 16).

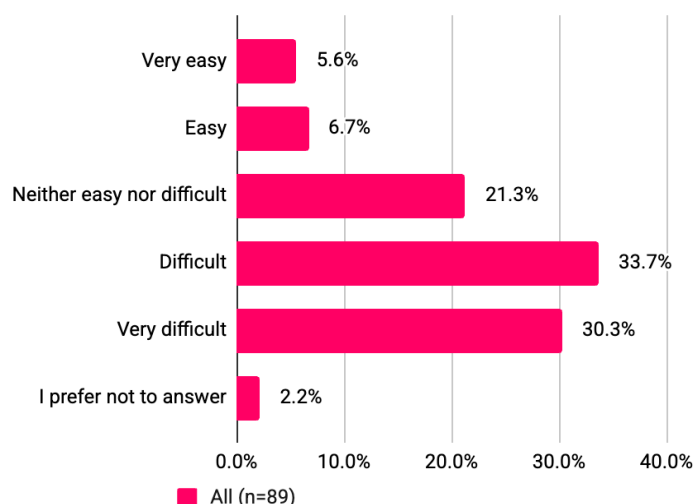


Figure 15: Reintegration experience among Upinion respondents (December 2025-April 2026)

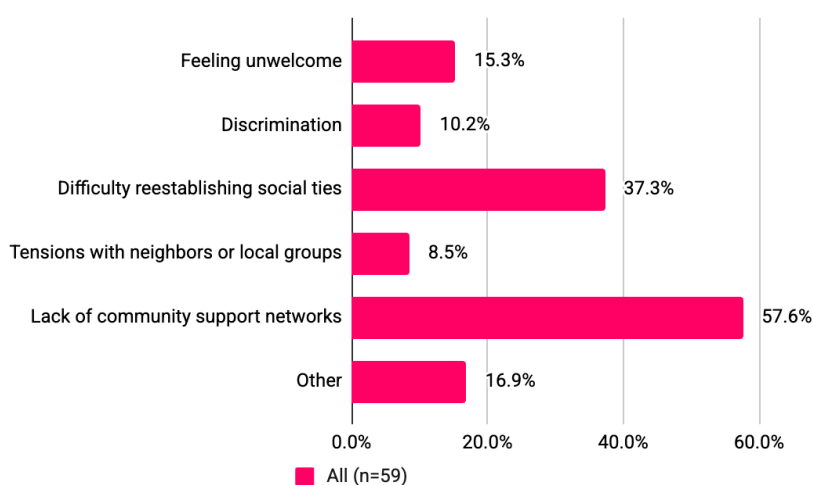


Figure 16: Social challenges among Upinion respondents (December 2025-April 2026)

These constraints directly affect returnees' ability to rebuild their lives. Out of 37 Upinion respondents participating in the follow-up conversation, 24 reported being unable to rebuild their lives and reintegrate in Syria, and 12 said they had only partially done so. Reflecting this, **only 5 out of 36 respondents would recommend to their friends and relatives to return to Syria.**

Findings from OB data (January-February 2026, Figure 17) reinforce and deepen this picture, pointing to reintegration as a structural and often underestimated challenge. A majority of respondents (61%, n=363) reported feeling fundamentally different from the communities they returned to, while 32% felt partially different and only 6% reported no difference. These perceptions are closely linked to changes experienced during displacement: 69% (n=363) stated that their social values had significantly evolved while living abroad. As a result, acceptance within local communities remains limited. **Only 8% (n=363) of respondents reported feeling fully accepted, while 41% expressed a sense of non-acceptance from their surrounding community, and 30% experienced partial acceptance.**

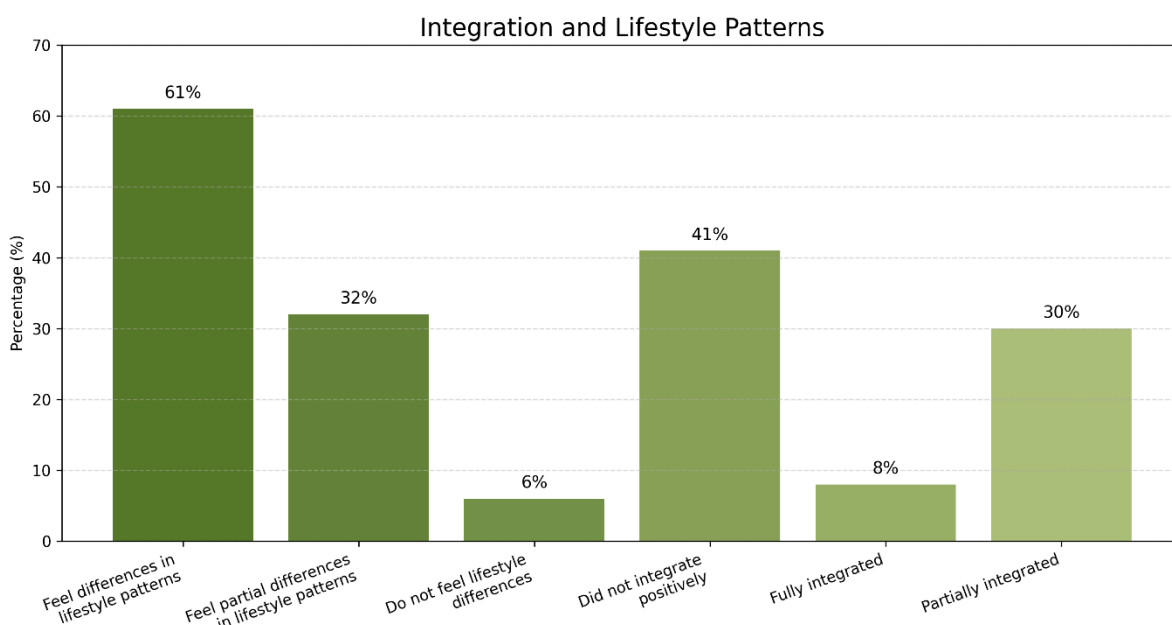


Figure 17: Integration and lifestyle patterns for OB respondents (January-February 2026)

OB data also highlights significant regional variation: returnees in Damascus, Daraa, Lattakia, and Tartous reported more positive reception, while in other areas tensions are more pronounced due to competition for limited resources and the economic gap between residents and returnees. At the same time, a critical programme gap persists: 90% of respondents were unaware of any reintegration or social cohesion initiatives in their area.

The human cost of these conditions is profound. Return is often accompanied by multiple, compounding traumas – the trauma of war, of displacement, and of return itself. Among OB respondents (January-February 2026), **60% (n=363) of families interviewed reported anxiety symptoms in at least a family member, 31% reported symptoms of depression, and 61% reported a sense of loss of security** (Figure 18). These figures point to a return process that,

for many, is experienced not as relief or homecoming, but as the beginning of a new and difficult chapter of hardship.

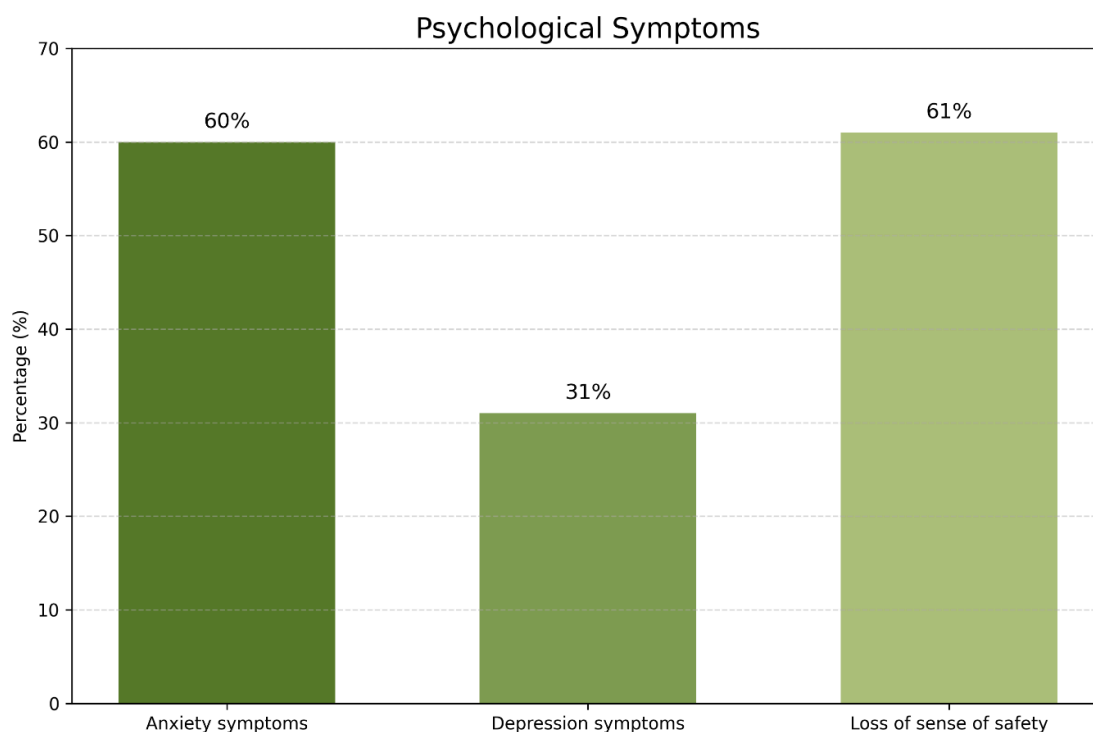


Figure 18: Psychological symptoms for OB respondents (January-February 2026)

Future mobility plans

These conditions, and the absence of livelihood and employment opportunities in particular, are in some cases driving intentions to leave Syria again. **When asked whether they planned to leave Syria in the coming six months, 13% (n=82) of Upinion respondents (December 2025-April 2026) said they planned to return to their previous country of residence¹², 17% planned to leave for a third country, and 27% were undecided.** The most frequently cited reasons for planning to leave were: lack of employment and livelihood opportunities, unsustainable housing, limited access to basic services, e.g., water supply and electricity, and safety concerns. A few respondents reported planning to leave Syria to receive humanitarian aid and financial assistance elsewhere.

OB data (January-February 2026) also provides a more nuanced picture of re-emigration dynamics. **While a majority of respondents (77%, n=363) stated that they were not currently considering leaving Syria again, 12% reported plans to re-emigrate, and a further 11% indicated that they felt their decision to return had been premature and were reconsidering their options.**

¹²Upinion will stay engaged with this group, enabling us to follow up on their situation after a potential re-return to Türkiye as well.

Taken together, these findings point to a meaningful risk of secondary displacement with implications beyond Syria. This is also why rushed and large-scale returns that are not accompanied by adequate conditions for reconstruction and reintegration risk generating cyclical displacement patterns, which could place renewed pressure on already strained protection and reception systems in host countries (including Türkiye), and possibly also impact third countries outside the region.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Return programming, reconstruction, and the protection of refugees in host countries are interlinked processes that must be addressed together. Indeed, reconstruction efforts will define whether refugees feel safe and confident to return in a dignified way: it is important to recognise that, as of today, Syria lacks those basic services, livelihood opportunities, and infrastructure that constitute key preconditions for safe and dignified returns. And, while the Syrian diaspora is a critical resource for rebuilding the country (through skills, remittances, and social capital) their contribution will depend on renewed trust in decision-makers as well as a return process that is genuinely voluntary and sustainable.

In the current context, rushed and pressured returns risk doing more harm than good: exposing people to risk, overwhelming already fragile services, and generating renewed cycles of displacement. As many Syrian refugees will not be in a position to return in the short to medium term, they must not be forgotten: protection obligations in Türkiye must not be sidelined in favour of return programming.

Through the recommendations below, we call on decision-makers to adopt a comprehensive approach that links continued protection in refugee-hosting countries with intensified reconstruction support inside Syria, creating the conditions under which safe, voluntary, and dignified return can become a genuine choice.

4.1. RECOMMENDATIONS TO UNHCR

On the protection space in Türkiye:

1. Maintain protection and development support within Türkiye alongside return programming, recognising that a significant number of Syrian refugees will remain in Türkiye for the foreseeable future.

On refugee participation and localisation:

2. Institutionalise the meaningful participation of RLOs, Syrian women-led organisations, and refugee-focused Turkish CSOs in the design, implementation, monitoring, and review of return-related policies and programmes – including by enabling RLO partners to lead the design and implementation of UNHCR return programming where they have the capacity and willingness to do so.

3. Invest in and strengthen partnerships with RLOs, Syrian women-led organisations, and refugee-focused Turkish CSOs, including through increased funding and capacity support.
4. Adopt a UNHCR Türkiye country-level localisation strategy in line with UNHCR's 2025 Localisation Guidelines, drafted in meaningful consultations with RLOs, Syrian women-led organisations, and refugee-focused Turkish CSOs, to ensure that humanitarian programming is designed and delivered through actors with direct proximity to and accountability towards affected communities.

On return voluntariness and informed decision-making:

5. Ensure that refugees considering return have access to accurate, transparent, and regularly updated information on return procedures and their legal rights and safeguards – through publicly accessible communication channels, official guidelines, or direct briefings provided during appointments at the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM).
6. Establish a monitoring framework to continuously assess whether conditions inside Syria are conducive to safe, voluntary, and dignified return, and make findings publicly available.

On return monitoring and accountability:

7. Conduct a thorough and independent review and evaluation of return programming since February 2025, placing the views of refugees and RLOs at the centre of any such process, and incorporating their feedback and lessons learnt into the design and scaling of future programming.
8. Establish a transparent complaints and feedback mechanism for refugees participating in return programmes, allowing them to safely report violations, misinformation, or coercion, in line with the principle of Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP). Ensure confidential channels through which women and girls can safely report protection concerns, service gaps, documentation barriers, or experiences of coercion before, during, or after return.
9. Beyond UNHCR's own mechanisms, establish a refugee-led information and feedback network, identifying Syrian CSOs within Syria as well as Syrian RLOs active in Türkiye and the wider region, to collect regular updates on conditions in areas of return and channel community feedback to UNHCR programming. This would ensure that the AAP principle moves beyond centralized, tick-the-box exercises and becomes localized and truly accountable.

4.2. RECOMMENDATIONS TO DONOR STATES

On the protection space in Türkiye:

1. Maintain and, where possible, scale up financial support for the protection space in Türkiye, including legal aid, psychosocial support, and community-based services for

women and girls – recognising that a significant number of Syrian refugees will remain in Türkiye for the foreseeable future.

2. Ensure that funding frameworks and political messaging do not unintentionally incentivise premature or large-scale return movements, but instead prioritise protection standards, informed decision-making, and sustainable reintegration conditions.

On refugee participation and localisation:

3. Create funding mechanisms to channel resources as directly, flexibly, and equitably as possible to RLOs, Syrian women-led organisations, and refugee-focused Turkish CSOs – or expand existing grant frameworks that already do so, in line with Grand Bargain and localisation commitments.
4. Condition funding to the PDMM on the inclusion of sub-granting requirements to refugee-led or refugee-focused organisations, ensuring that resources reach actors with direct proximity and accountability towards affected communities.
5. Provide dedicated funding to support the establishment of a national Refugee Advisory Board in Türkiye, with a formal mandate to advise the PDMM on return programming and refugee protection more broadly.

On returns to Syria:

6. Actively encourage and support UNHCR in establishing a monitoring framework to assess whether conditions inside Syria are conducive to safe, voluntary, and dignified return.
7. Support independent monitoring of return programming, as well as legal assistance programmes that enable refugees to understand their rights and make genuinely informed decisions.
8. Urge the Government of Türkiye to reinstate 'go-and-see' visits – or equivalent mechanisms allowing Syrians to travel to Syria and return to Türkiye without loss of status – as an essential safeguard for informed and voluntary return decisions. In the longer term, engage in dialogue with Turkish authorities on establishing a framework for greater freedom of movement between Syria and Türkiye for temporary protection beneficiaries.
9. Engage in constructive diplomatic dialogue with the Government of Türkiye to reaffirm the shared commitment to voluntary, safe, and dignified returns, as well as ensure that concerns of involuntary and unsafe returns are properly investigated in line with international protection standards.

On reconstruction and reintegration in Syria:

10. Significantly scale up investment in sustainable reconstruction, basic services, and livelihoods inside Syria – including support for civil documentation and legal identity restoration for returnees, covering birth registration, marriage and divorce documentation, guardianship, and housing, land, and property claims, and recognising the disproportionate impact that documentation gaps have on women and children.

4.3. RECOMMENDATIONS TO TURKISH AUTHORITIES

On the protection space in Türkiye:

1. Maintain the necessary protection space, legal status, and access to services for Syrian refugees – including legal aid, psychosocial support, and gender-based violence response services – to allow for genuinely voluntary returns and mitigate the risks related to renewed cycles of displacement from Syria (re-returns).
2. Maintain protection from loss of status under the temporary protection regime, reinstate automatic access to healthcare, ease restrictions on freedom of movement, simplify work permit procedures, and reduce the barriers to formal employment.
3. Streamline and centralise updates on government practices relevant to persons under temporary protection by systematically publishing them in the Official Gazette.
4. Re-activate and strengthen the role of the Human Rights Institute of Türkiye, and offer cultural sensitivity training to public servants working with refugee populations, to ensure more effective and rights-compliant service delivery.

On refugee participation and localisation:

5. Urge UNHCR Türkiye to broaden its base of implementing partners beyond national NGOs to include the full diversity of RLOs and Syrian women-led organisations active in Türkiye – ensuring that localisation commitments translate into meaningful partnerships with actors directly accountable to affected communities.
6. Establish a national Refugee Advisory Board with a formal mandate to advise the PDMM – including on the design, implementation, and monitoring of protection, durable solutions, and return programmes – ensuring that refugees, RLOs, and Syrian women-led organisations have a structured and meaningful role in shaping the policies that affect them.
7. Ease administrative and operational constraints on RLOs, Syrian women-led organisations, and refugee-focused Turkish CSOs – whether engaged in return programming or in protection and humanitarian work inside Türkiye more broadly – ensuring they can operate independently and sustainably.

On return voluntariness and informed decision-making:

8. Ensure that Syrians have continued access to accurate legal information related to return procedures, their rights under the temporary protection framework, and available appeal mechanisms – and that the legal framework for return procedures provides for due process rights, including access to legal representation and the right to appeal. Facilitate independent monitoring of return procedures by civil society organisations, to enhance transparency and build confidence in the voluntary return process.
9. Step up coordination with Syrian authorities by establishing a Cross-Border Returnee Programming Working Group bringing together the PDMM, relevant Syrian authorities, and Turkish and Syrian CSOs, to improve information-sharing on conditions in areas of return, including security, service availability, and housing and property rights.

10. Reinstate "go-and-see" visits, or equivalent mechanisms, enabling refugees to make informed return decisions while retaining their legal status in Türkiye.
11. Ensure that return programmes are gender-sensitive by establishing structured, CSO-led consultation and feedback mechanisms that include Syrian women-led organisations and refugee women themselves, conducting separate and confidential consultations with women and girls, and integrating their feedback into programme design, monitoring, and evaluation.

4.4. RECOMMENDATIONS TO SYRIAN AUTHORITIES

On return voluntariness and informed decision-making:

1. Increase transparency and information-sharing on conditions in areas of return (including security situations, service availability, and housing and property rights).
2. Strengthen coordination with UNHCR, refugee-hosting governments, refugee-led organisations, and Syrian women-led organisations – including through the establishment of a Cross-Border Returnee Programming Working Group bringing together the PDMM, relevant Syrian authorities, and Turkish and Syrian CSOs – to improve information-sharing on conditions in areas of return and ensure that refugees have access to accurate, up-to-date, and area-specific information before making return decisions.

On conditions for safe and dignified returns:

3. Prioritise the conditions necessary to enable safe, voluntary, and dignified return – including guarantees of safety, access to services (including healthcare, electricity, clean water, and shelter), civil documentation, and sustainable reintegration.
4. Prioritise the restoration and accessibility of civil documentation systems, including mechanisms for issuing or replacing IDs, birth certificates, marriage and divorce records, and guardianship documentation – recognising their critical importance for returnees' access to services, mobility, and legal protection, and the disproportionate impact of documentation gaps on women and children.
5. Strengthen mechanisms to address housing, land, and property disputes affecting returnees, ensuring transparent and accessible processes that protect the rights of women and vulnerable households.
6. Facilitate cooperation with refugee-led, Syrian women-led organisations, UNHCR, and civil society on monitoring and protection frameworks that support sustainable reintegration and build confidence among refugees considering return.

On civil society:

7. Define clear, transparent guidelines for the registration and operation of national and international NGOs in Syria, as well as for Turkish NGOs providing in-kind assistance and humanitarian aid to Syrian partners – enabling a well-functioning humanitarian and civil society ecosystem.

8. Enable Syrian civil society organisations, including women-led organisations, to operate freely and contribute to community-based reintegration efforts addressing protection risks, psychosocial wellbeing, and social cohesion in areas receiving returnees.

FORCE 4
REFUGEES

 **upinion**