

Update: Durable Solutions for Syrian Refugees

The March/April update on durable solutions for Syrian refugees focuses on UNHCR’s Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy for Syrian refugees, and on resettlement for Syrians.

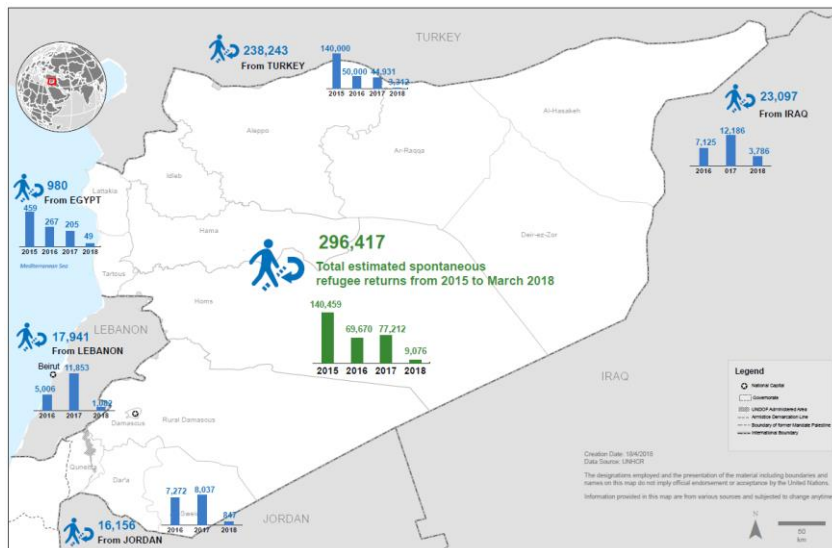
Introduction and Intentions

Ongoing hostilities in Syria continue to drive the largest displacement crisis in the world. There are over 5.6 million refugees across the region and over 6.6 million people remain internally displaced. While fighting continues in parts of Syria, recent developments on the ground have also meant that people have returned to areas where fighting has receded.

Across the main refugee-hosting countries in the region, refugees’ intentions vis-à-vis durable solutions continue to demonstrate that the great majority wish to one day return to Syria – and to their areas of origin. However, an even greater majority – despite their wish to return one day - does not plan to return within the next 6-12 months. In all countries, refugee intentions surveys are being updated – and early results show relative consistency with previous surveys. Safety and security in Syria remain the top drivers for decision making – cited as the key consideration for those who plan to return (improved security) and those who state they will not return (too much insecurity). Status of property/housing, family unity, and access to livelihoods and basic services were the other key reasons driving an intention to return and not to return.

Key Figures: Return and Resettlement

Self-Organized Syrian refugee returns from 2015 to March 2018



Resettlement needs and targets

10% Of Syrian refugees are in need of and meet resettlement criteria.

<0.7% Of Syrian refugees are resettled

As of April 2018

	Target*	#Refugees
Lebanon	9,500	991,165
Turkey	14,500	3,578,246
Jordan	8,908	661,859
Iraq	1,350	248,382
Egypt	2,500	128,507
Total	36,758	5,608,159

 **77,312** refugee returns in 2017

*“Targets” are based on 2018 resettlement quotas/places set by countries receiving resettled refugees. These are subject to change/increase, but remain well below needs.

Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy for Syrian Refugees

UNHCR's overall approach toward Syrian refugees is anchored in a comprehensive protection and solutions strategy, and is aligned with the four pillars of the Global Compact for Refugees and Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework¹ to: i) support host country resilience; ii) enable refugee self-reliance; iii) expand access to resettlement and other safe pathways to a third country, and; iv) prepare for an eventual facilitated voluntary repatriation when conducive conditions emerge, while responding to urgent and immediate needs of self-organized returnees.

UNHCR recently issued its *Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy: Protection Thresholds and Parameters for Refugee Return to Syria*. UNHCR's position continues to be that present conditions in Syria are not conducive for voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity. Significant risks remain for civilians in much of the country. UNHCR is neither promoting nor facilitating refugee returns at this stage. However, as people are returning on their own, it is crucial to continue supporting them in areas of return, where feasible, while planning for potential facilitation of voluntary repatriation when conditions for a safe and dignified return are in place. The Strategy sets out UNHCR's policy and operational response for current and future refugee returns, both self-organized and organized by governments and/or UNHCR, back to Syria.

UNHCR's planning for refugee return in Syria is characterized by two phases. Phase 1 is the current phase, where the necessary conditions are not in place for safe and dignified return, but there are some self-organized returns occurring. During this phase, return should not be encouraged. In refugee-hosting countries, UNHCR and the humanitarian community's engagement on Phase 1 return is limited to planning, monitoring, counselling, advocacy, and ongoing analysis of obstacles to and conditions necessary for return, and identifying the necessary actions to address them. Inside Syria, the humanitarian response for returnees responds to their immediate and urgent needs through inclusion in ongoing humanitarian programmes - encompassing humanitarian assistance and community-based protection services in the framework of the inter-agency Humanitarian Response Plan, while at the same time monitoring and preparing for eventual facilitated returns. Phase 1 assistance and engagement is done in a manner which avoids incentivizing returns.

Phase 2 would occur when conditions have substantially changed and large-scale voluntary repatriation can be facilitated. Consistent with practices applied globally, engagement in a facilitated voluntary repatriation would be governed by the following four criteria: 1. Legal framework(s), guaranteeing rights of returnees and unhindered access to them and return areas, is in place; 2. There is clear evidence of protection thresholds (which are common humanitarian standards for return) being met in the place(s) of return; 3. There is a durable improvement in conditions in return areas, and; 4. Refugees actively request support from UNHCR to return, in large numbers.

Refugee Resettlement

Resettlement of refugees from a host country to a third country is - by virtue of its criteria - protection and needs-driven, targeting the most vulnerable among refugees including: survivors of violence and torture, persons with severe medical and physical protection needs, and women and children at risk. While ten per cent of Syrian refugees meet resettlement criteria, only 37,179 places were provided in 2017 (0.68 per cent of the population). The impact of reduced resettlement places has been significant and it is worrisome that 2018 resettlement places might be even lower.

This reduction impacts refugees' protection needs, as dwindling national resources, strain on hosting communities and depletion of refugees' savings may further jeopardize vulnerable refugees' ability to cope with their increasingly difficult situations. There is furthermore a real danger that the main countries hosting Syrian refugees will perceive the decrease in resettlement opportunities as the international community not living up to previous commitments to burden-sharing. In order to change the situation, UNHCR and partners are advocating for an innovative and adaptive response for Syrians currently in need of resettlement, including the expansion of resettlement programmes as a priority.

CONTACT: For more details, please contact hepps@unhcr.org
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria_durable_solutions

¹ For more information on the Global Compact and CRRF, see <http://www.unhcr.org/towards-a-global-compact-on-refugees.html>