



الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

On World Refugee Day: Despite the Fall of the Assad Regime, the Return of Refugees Remains Hostage to Intertwined Challenges that Require Genuine National and International Commitment

Achieving a Safe and Dignified Return Requires a Vision that Addresses the Legacy of Years of Destruction and Violations

Friday 20 June 2025



The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

Every year, on June 20, the Syrian Network for Human Rights issues [a special report or statement](#) on the occasion of [World Refugee Day](#). The report addresses the reality of asylum and forced displacement in Syria, reviews the latest developments related to the conditions of refugees and displaced persons, and ways to support their right to a safe and dignified return. In this context, the network contributes, in cooperation with several immigration offices in countries of asylum, as well as international and local organizations, to preparing reports and analyses on Syria as a country of origin for displacement and assesses the availability of conditions for return.

A heavy legacy of more than a decade of displacement

By 2024, before the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in December of that year, more than **6.8 million Syrian refugees** had fled the country, most to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq, with hundreds of thousands more in the European Union and North America. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) exceeded **6.9 million, living in dire conditions**, often without legal protection or adequate basic services.

These numbers have exceeded the humanitarian response capacity and have had profound economic, social, and psychological impacts on millions of Syrians, making the Syrian displacement crisis one of the largest forced displacement crises in the world.

With the political transformation that the country witnessed with the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime, there were early signs of the return of displaced persons. According to official data issued by host countries, border crossing authorities, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, approximately **500,000** refugees from countries of asylum and **1.2 million** internally displaced persons returned to their areas of origin between December 2024 and mid-2025.

Although these figures reflect a glimmer of hope that some semblance of stability may be restored, they still represent a limited percentage of the total number of displaced persons. At the same time, they highlight the magnitude of the challenges facing a safe and voluntary return. Field observations indicate that a large portion of returnees face difficult living conditions due to poor infrastructure, a lack of employment opportunities, and the scarcity of reintegration or compensation programs for those affected, in addition to ongoing security tensions in some areas.

Continuing Obstacles After the Fall of Bashar al-Assad's Regime:

Multidimensional Challenges Hindering Return

Despite the removal of the most prominent political and security obstacles with the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime in December 2024, the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of Syrians to their areas of origin continues to face a host of complex challenges that go beyond the traditional security dimension and extend to legal, administrative, economic, and service-related aspects.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights has previously documented these obstacles in previous reports and statements.

Most notable these challenges:

- **Legal and administrative obstacles related to property recovery:** A large number of returnees suffer from the absence of clear and fair mechanisms to prove their property ownership or to recover their confiscated or damaged homes, in light of the lack or destruction of official records, the overlapping of powers between local authorities, and the multiplicity of legal authorities in some areas.
- **High fees for official travel documents:** Fees for passports and civil documents remain extremely high, representing a real obstacle to hundreds of thousands of refugees wishing to return, especially since many of them lack the financial resources to renew or obtain these documents.
- **The full financial burden on returnees:** Return is associated with enormous financial costs that are almost entirely borne by returning families. These costs include transportation, temporary accommodation, rebuilding or renting housing, and securing the minimum necessities of life. These costs are beyond the capabilities of many families, given the absence of effective support programs at the national and international levels.
- **Extensive destruction of housing, infrastructure, and basic services:** The extensive destruction of housing and infrastructure is one of the most significant challenges facing returnees. Years of conflict have left entire neighborhoods devastated, with reconstruction costs skyrocketing. According to a survey conducted by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), nearly half of returnees reported that their homes were either completely destroyed or uninhabitable, while 40% said they no longer owned a home or any documentation proving ownership. The situation appears to be particularly dire in areas such as rural Damascus, where up to 70% of respondents reported that their homes had been destroyed. Many return areas lack drinking water, electricity, schools, and health centers, deepening the returnees' sense of instability and increasing the likelihood of further displacement.

- **Unexploded ordnance and damaged infrastructure:** The presence of unexploded ordnance in many areas poses a grave threat to the lives of returning refugees. Since the beginning of the year, the Syrian Network for Human Rights has documented the deaths of at least 220 civilians, including 41 children and 10 women (one adult female), and the injury of others due to cluster munition remnants or landmines. This threat is particularly acute in areas that witnessed violent clashes during the years of conflict.
- **Challenges associated with transitional justice processes:** Transitional justice processes are still in their preliminary stages, and measures related to revealing the fate of the forcibly disappeared, providing justice to victims, or holding those responsible for serious crimes accountable have not yet been implemented. On April 17, 2025, the Network issued an expanded [vision for the transitional justice process](#).
Weak public reconstruction policies: Large areas of the country suffer from a lack of effective intervention to rehabilitate them or compensate those affected, as a result of the weakness of the public reconstruction policies adopted.
- **Fragile economic conditions:** The country is experiencing deteriorating economic conditions characterized by high unemployment rates and limited job opportunities, limiting the ability of returnees to settle down and reintegrate into their communities.
- **Response varies between regions:** The capacity of Syrian regions to absorb returnees varies according to several factors, most notably:
 1. The varying levels of stability of local authorities and the diversity of their administrative and security authorities.
 2. The lack of comprehensive spatial planning for reconstruction and the distribution of basic services.
 3. The existence of disputes over ownership or land use, particularly in areas that witnessed forced demographic changes or real estate encroachments during the conflict.
 4. The varying capacity of local communities to absorb returnees due to weak infrastructure and limited resources.
 5. The persistence of security challenges in some areas. Despite the end of the former regime, some areas continue to experience localized security disturbances. It manifests itself in:
 - Local clashes and recurring security incidents due to the activity of undisciplined armed groups or remnants of the former regime, which undermine the sense of security and hinder the provision of a stable environment for return.

- Individual or collective acts of revenge, especially in areas that were hotbeds of violations or forced displacement.
- The continued presence of remnants of war, including weapons and mines, which cause dozens of casualties in various areas.

Economic and Living Challenges

- **Widespread poverty and economic instability:** The Syrian economy has been severely affected by the conflict, with widespread unemployment and limited economic opportunities for returnees. More than 90% of Syria's population lives below the poverty line, and an estimated 12.9 million people are food insecure. These deteriorating economic conditions complicate returnees' ability to rebuild their livelihoods and achieve self-sufficiency.
- **Lack of employment opportunities:** The lack of job opportunities is one of the most prominent challenges facing returnees. Many have reported being unable to find jobs since their return, undermining their ability to support themselves and their families.
- **Challenges facing the financial and banking system:** The country is experiencing a severe liquidity crisis resulting from the collapse of the banking infrastructure and the economic isolation imposed by international sanctions, which has weakened Syria's foreign exchange reserves.
- **Deterioration of the healthcare system:** The conflict has destroyed or damaged many hospitals and medical centers. The displacement of health workers has also weakened the system's ability to provide adequate services.
- **Challenges in the education system:** The education sector has suffered significant damage during the years of conflict, with many schools out of service, reducing educational capacity and leaving hundreds of thousands of children outside the education system. The displacement of qualified teachers has exacerbated the crisis, as salaries have declined and some have been forced to seek alternative livelihoods. Particular difficulties arise in integrating returning children who received education in foreign curricula during their time as refugees.
- **Psychosocial Reintegration:** Many Syrian refugees suffer profound psychological impacts from their experiences of conflict and displacement, requiring specialized interventions in the areas of psychological support and mental health.

- **Challenges of International Support and Funding:** Despite the vast needs, international funding for Syria's recovery and refugee return remains below the required level. UNHCR launched a plan to assist 1.5 million refugees and 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return in 2025, at an estimated cost of \$575 million. However, pledges as of April 2025 have only reached \$71 million. This severe shortage has led to a 30% reduction in UNHCR's workforce inside Syria, significantly impacting its ability to provide the necessary support to returnees.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights' vision: Return as a national process supported internationally

Given the legal, administrative, economic, and security challenges that continue to hinder the voluntary and safe return of Syrian refugees and displaced persons, the Syrian Network for Human Rights believes that facilitating this process requires a comprehensive national plan based on the following principles:

1. Creating a legal and safe environment for return, through the independence of the judiciary and parliament, addressing obstacles related to property restitution, and providing official documents at affordable prices and without discrimination.
2. Rehabilitating infrastructure and basic services in areas of return, with a focus on damaged or marginalized areas, in accordance with the priorities of the local population.
3. Activate the Transitional Justice Commission established by the Syrian Transitional Government, and expand its role in uncovering the truth, providing justice to victims, and promoting accountability, with the effective participation of civil society.
4. Address security challenges by controlling weapons, dismantling unruly groups, and ensuring the protection of civilians in all areas of return, under the supervision of accountable national security institutions.
5. Launch fair economic policies aimed at providing job opportunities, supporting local initiatives, and facilitating the social and livelihood reintegration of returnees.
6. Involve refugees and displaced persons in formulating policies related to their return, and ensure their voices are represented in national arrangements related to reconstruction, justice, and reconciliation.
7. Ensure independent UN oversight of return programs, and close coordination with UN agencies and donors to ensure the application of standards of dignity, freedom, and safety at all stages of return.

SNHR emphasizes that achieving this vision requires an effective partnership between the transitional government, the international community, and Syrian civil society to ensure a safe and sustainable return that restores Syriansc right to reside in their homeland without fear or deprivation.

Recommendations

Based on the reality on the ground and an analysis of ongoing challenges, the Syrian Network for Human Rights recommends taking a set of urgent and comprehensive measures to facilitate the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of Syrian refugees and displaced persons:

First: To the Syrian Transitional Government

1. Adopt a national return policy based on international human rights principles, ensuring transparency, non-discrimination, and the effective participation of displaced persons in policy formulation and implementation.
2. Issue clear and fair legislation to address property restitution issues, providing appeal and proof mechanisms that cater to the most vulnerable groups.
3. Review financial policies related to official documents, reduce passport and civil documentation fees, and facilitate procedures for obtaining them abroad.
4. Launch immediate support programs for returnees, including cash assistance, temporary housing, and livelihood support, linking these programs to local recovery plans.
5. Enhance local security in areas of return by deploying disciplined civilian security forces, dismantling outlaw groups, and seizing unregulated weapons.
6. Ensure equitable representation of women and survivors of violations in decision-making processes related to return, justice, and reconciliation.
7. Ensure transparency in the management of international funding by issuing periodic reports on the expenditure of resources allocated for reconstruction and cooperating with independent oversight bodies.

Second: To the United Nations and its agencies

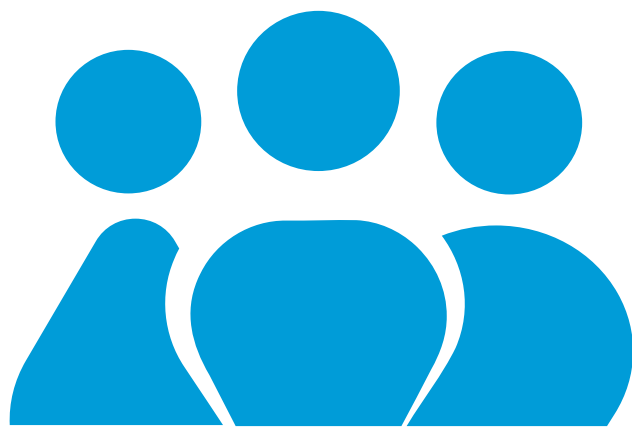
1. Establish an independent UN monitoring mechanism to monitor return conditions and issue periodic reports based on reliable field data.
2. Provide technical and technological support to the Syrian Transitional Justice Commission and support efforts to document and expose violations, particularly cases of enforced disappearance and unlawful detention.
3. Fund comprehensive reintegration programs that include psychological support, education, legal support, and economic empowerment, particularly in the most affected areas.
4. Expand partnerships with independent Syrian human rights organizations and leverage their expertise in documentation, monitoring, and accountability.
5. Develop special protection plans for the most vulnerable groups of returnees, such as widows, unaccompanied children, and people with disabilities.

Third: To the countries hosting Syrian refugees

1. Commitment to the principle of non-refoulement and refraining from taking any deportation measures before the conditions for safe return are met.
2. Providing a safe legal environment for refugees, ensuring their access to services, protection from discrimination, and providing them with effective mechanisms to challenge deportation decisions.
3. Coordination with Syrian state missions to facilitate the issuance of official documents and simplify consular procedures.
4. Supporting awareness-raising programs for refugees about their rights and conditions of return, in cooperation with local and Syrian community organizations.
5. Providing protection for returnees at border crossings and providing humanitarian support, particularly during periods of mass return or in times of crisis.

Fourth: To donor countries and the international community

1. Providing technical and financial support to the Syrian transitional government in its reconstruction efforts, facilitating return, and achieving justice, within a partnership based on mutual respect and the promotion of human rights.
2. Linking funding for return and reconstruction to the principles of justice and accountability, so that it does not constitute interference or guardianship, but rather serves as a guarantee of sustainable solutions.
3. Using political and diplomatic means to lift international obstacles to return, such as sanctions affecting civilians or regional restrictions on freedom of movement.
4. Supporting local initiatives aimed at promoting community reconciliation and funding peacebuilding projects in areas that have witnessed severe divisions or forced displacement.





SYRIAN NETWORK
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



info@snhr.org
www.snhr.org

No justice without accountability

© Syrian Network For Human Rights (SNHR).
June, 2025

