

Update: Durable Solutions for Syrian Refugees

The August/September update on durable solutions for Syrian refugees focuses on the findings from UNHCR regional Return Perception and Intention Surveys (RPIS) conducted in March-June 2018, and ongoing efforts to expand access to resettlement and other complementary pathways.

Introduction

The conflict in Syria continues to drive the largest displacement crisis in the world. Over six million people remain internally displaced and there are over 5.6 million refugees across the region. As per the findings of UNHCR return intention surveys, voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity remains the preferred durable solution for Syrian refugees in the region. All refugees have the fundamental human right to return in safety and dignity to their country of origin at a time of their own choosing and UNHCR supports all action that contributes to the full exercise of that right. The free and informed decision of Syrians to return is fundamental.

While some will return, the return intention surveys also highlighted that many Syrian refugees are likely to remain in host countries for the medium term. In line with the commitments made in the Syria Brussels II conference, these refugees, and the governments and communities who generously host them, require sustained support. Similarly, and recognizing that some refugees will not be able to return, the international community needs also to expand alternative solutions, such as increasing access to resettlement and complementary pathways.

Key Figures: Return and Resettlement

Resettlement needs, targets, and submissions

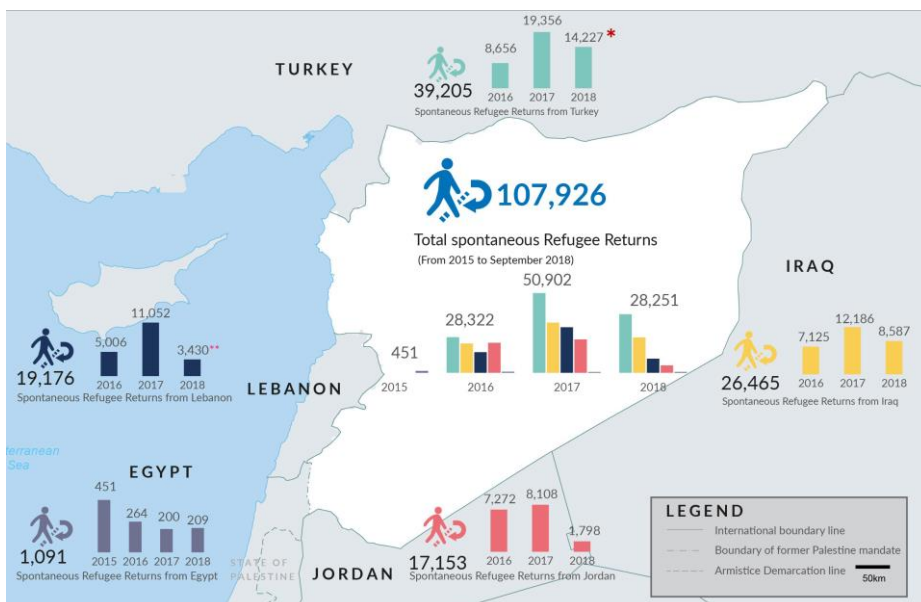
	Target*	Cumulative RST Submissions Jan. - Sep. 2018
Lebanon	8,500	6,293
Turkey	14,000	8,580
Jordan	4,885	4,162
Iraq	790	610
Egypt	1,600	1,326
Total	29,775	20,971

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

0.5% Of Syrian refugees will be submitted for resettlement

* "Targets" are based on 2018 resettlement quotas/places set by countries receiving resettled refugees. This table presents revised resettlement targets for 2018 reflecting updated country quotas. It represents a decrease from 36,758 to 29,775 compared to the last update. It remains well below needs.

Self-Organized Syrian refugee returns in 2018 as verified by UNHCR



50,902
Refugee returns in 2017

28,251
Refugee returns so far in 2018**

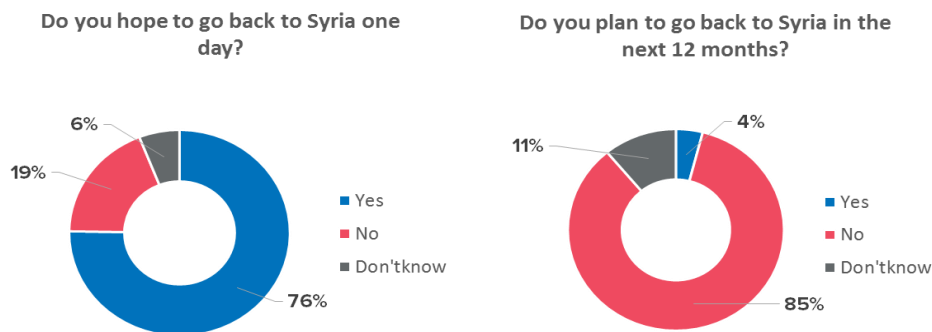
* Reflects return interviews monitored by UNHCR

** Reflects only returns verified by UNHCR. In addition, from January to September 2018, approximately 4,068 people returned to Syria in 26 group movements organized by the GSO. In September 2018 alone, 1,360 persons returned as part of these group movements. Number of individuals is based on lists provided by GSO. Exact number of refugees known to UNHCR is under verification.

Intentions of Syrian Refugees for the future

Since the beginning of 2017, UNHCR operations in host countries neighbouring Syria have been conducting Return Perception and Intention Surveys (RPIS) as well as Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with Syrian refugees on their future return intentions. During the fourth round of return intention surveys conducted between March and June 2018, 4,283 Syrian refugees residing in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan were interviewed. Due to operational context, Turkey did not take part on the 2017-2018 RPIS exercises and the intentions to return were collected through dedicated focus group discussions with refugees.

The RPIS conducted in 2018 found that 76 per cent of Syrian refugees hoped to return to Syria one day. This percentage has increased by about a quarter from 51 per cent in 2017 to 76 per cent in 2018. Nevertheless, 19 per cent of refugees noted that they do not plan to ever return to their country. This further confirms that voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity remains the preferred durable solution for Syrian refugees. For most, the intention to return will however not materialize in the next year as 85 per cent of respondents stated they do not have intentions to return to Syria in the next 12 months, 11 per cent were undecided, and 4 per cent intended to return.



Since the first round of RPIS in January 2017, the majority of refugees have consistently stated they did not intend to return to Syria in the next year before observing a significant improvement in safety and security, access to services and livelihood opportunities, and availability of shelter/housing.

Among the obstacles to return, the lack of predictable and sustainable physical safety in Syria is the primary factor influencing refugees' plans for the future. This has been a consistent trend throughout all the surveys conducted so far. Among refugees not intending to return to Syria within 12 months, almost half of the reasons provided to explain their intentions were related to the prevalence of indiscriminate violence or the risk of targeted reprisals (45 per cent). Other key reasons not to return in the next 12 months were the lack of livelihood opportunities and adequate housing in Syria.

Four per cent of refugees stated their intention to return in the next 12 months. The main three reasons for intention to return selected by this group were an improvement in the security situation, family reunification, and having livelihood opportunities in Syria. 60 per cent of this group still noted concerns or fears in relation to their upcoming return, mainly the security situation, limitations to freedom of movement, lack of a political solution or of progress in the political process, and shortage of livelihood opportunities.

If conditions allowed, the preferred destination of return for 90 per cent of refugees considering going back within 12 months, is their place of origin. Others were undecided (three per cent) or were considering another area (7 per cent) due to safety, because it was their last place of residence prior to their flight, or because it is the area of their spouse's family. Family considerations and especially the preservation of the family unity continue to take an important part in the decision to, and modalities for, return to Syria. In line with the results from previous surveys, 83 per cent of refugees with the intention to return in the coming 12 months said they wished to return with all their family members, 11 per cent alone, and six per cent with some family members while others remain in the country of asylum.

In light of the context changes, a rapid RPIS was undertaken in July in Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Egypt to review findings from the fourth round of RPIS. Overall, the exercise found that the recent developments had a limited impact on intentions to return and confirmed the findings from the fourth round of return intention surveys.

Expand Access to Resettlement and other Complementary Pathways

Faced with an overall reduction in the number of resettlement places expected to be available for Syrians in 2018 and beyond – from a high of 76,693 in 2016 to a projected 35,000 in 2018 – and with 580,000 persons identified to be in need of resettlement, it is more crucial than ever to expand access to resettlement as well as complementary pathways. Anchored in its comprehensive protection and solutions strategy for Syrian refugees, UNHCR, in collaboration with international partners, has endeavoured to expand such opportunities by” 1) assisting States to provide more resettlement and complementary pathway opportunities; 2) enhancing collaboration with 3RP Partners to advocate for more places, while improving identification and referrals, and; 3) expanding complementary pathways. As a result and despite the overall reduction in resettlement places, 24 resettlement countries continue to have resettlement programmes in 2018, demonstrating a high degree of public support and commitment to respond to the region’s humanitarian needs.

In parallel to regular resettlement activities, and in relation to the work of the Syria Core Group (i.e. an alliance of over 30 states that work together to shape the resettlement process for Syrian Refugees), UNHCR will be holding consultations in the last quarter of 2018 with 3RP partners on leveraging the strategic use of resettlement. During the consultations, colleagues from across the response will identify, discuss, and document as appropriate: 1) the positive impacts the resettlement of Syrian refugees has had in the MENA region; 2) further identify specific profiles of Syrian refugees, where protection benefits may be expanded for Syrian refugees remaining in host countries through evidencing the [strategic] use of resettlement, and; 3) ensure strong advocacy narratives, aimed at maintaining and expanding resettlement opportunities for Syrian refugees.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria_durable_solutions