Precarious Futures: Sustaining Syrian Refugee Rights in Lebanon and Beyond

Refugee Protection Watch Report 2025

refugeeprotectionwatch.org

REFUGEE PROTECTION WATCH

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DISCLAIMER

Refugee Protection Watch (RPW) made all possible efforts to represent only accurate data, crosscheck all the information in this report, and translate all Arabic data obtained during the research phase into English as carefully as possible. This does not rule out the possibility of inaccuracies or oversights, for which the team hereby expresses its regrets.

Cover photo by Ahmed Akacha

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. Introduction

The fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 marked a critical juncture in the history of Syria, reshaping the landscape for millions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and other host countries. This report demonstrates that despite initial optimism, the conditions necessary for safe, voluntary, dignified, and informed returns are far from met, with persistent and complex barriers severely limiting sustainable return.

The primary aim of this report is to present an analysis of the current conditions, perceptions, challenges, and needs experienced by Syrian refugees in Lebanon, particularly in the context of evolving circumstances following the fall of the Assad regime. Drawing from extensive data and direct testimonies collected by Refugee Protection Watch (RPW) member organizations (Upinion, ACHR, CLDH, and B&Z), the report provides a clear and nuanced understanding of the complex realities Syrian refugees face. This includes examining the conditions influencing refugees' decisions around returning to Syria, exploring economic and security challenges, documenting access to humanitarian aid, and assessing the meaningfulness of refugee participation and inclusion in policymaking processes.

The report's data findings indicate consistently low rates of actual and intended returns. Furthermore, ongoing security threats, including sectarian violence and reprisals (including but not limited to the massacres that took place after 6 March 2025, which preceded the drafting of this report), coupled with severe economic instability, remain critical deterrents for return. Over a third of surveyed refugees rated the security and economic conditions inside Syria as poor, expressing profound apprehensions about safety, employment, and infrastructure. Lack of reliable information about conditions inside Syria also continues to exacerbate uncertainty and hinders informed decision-making on return.

Within Lebanon, the report identifies refugees' and host communities' human rights concerns as refugees face intensifying threats to their safety and dignity. Findings reflect systemic gaps in Lebanon's implementation of its legal obligations under international human rights law. Political narratives and disinformation campaigns have heightened social tensions and xenophobia, further marginalizing refugee communities. Additionally, inadequate humanitarian support—marked by critical gaps in cash assistance, shelter, food security, healthcare, and education—exacerbates vulnerabilities, compounded by structural inefficiencies within the overall aid response.

This report informs stakeholders, policymakers, and humanitarian actors on critical areas requiring immediate attention and sustained intervention. Given the urgency created by the landscape after the Assad regime's fall in December 2024, the RPW coalition underscores the acute necessity of well-informed, context-sensitive, and responsive policy and humanitarian interventions to address ongoing and emerging needs effectively and sustainably.

The data collection process and the development of this report were guided by the RPW coalition's mission, anchored in four primary objectives:

- **Ensuring safe, voluntary, dignified, and informed returns:** RPW advocates for return processes that uphold refugees' rights, ensuring they are conducted safely, voluntarily, and with full access to pertinent information.

- **Ensuring inclusive return, recovery, and reconstruction processes:** The coalition emphasizes the creation and implementation of return, recovery, and reconstruction policies that are attuned to the varied needs of Syrian refugees.

- **Upholding the humanitarian and protection space for Syrian refugees in host countries:** RPW is committed to maintaining and protecting humanitarian spaces for Syrian refugees and supporting civil society in host countries, ensuring that fundamental rights and protections are preserved.

- **Promoting meaningful refugee participation and inclusion in shaping global refugee policies:** The coalition strives to ensure that Syrian refugees have a substantive role in shaping international policy dialogues and debates, fostering policies that are relevant, sustainable, and responsive to their lived experiences.

1.2. Methodology

The comprehensive insights presented in this report are drawn from multiple primary and secondary sources collected by several RPW member organizations, employing both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to ensure robust and representative findings. This methodology section outlines the diverse approaches used in each contributing dataset:

Upinion's two-way digital engagement: survey-style conversations and real-time engagement meetings

- **Data collection method:** 9 structured online chat-style conversations and 4 real-time engagement meetings via Upinion's Digital Engagement Platform (DEP), which allows for a two-way exchange of knowledge with displacement-affected communities, enabling their direct engagement, the collection of real-time insights, as well as responding with timely, relevant information.

- **Data collection period:** November 2024 - February 2025.

- **Sample size and demographics:** Around 430 respondents per conversation; primarily Syrians and Lebanese, with a smaller representation from other nationalities. Slightly more male respondents than female. Predominantly aged between 26-55 years, with an underrepresentation of elderly individuals.[1]

- **Focus area:** Return movements and intentions, economic conditions, humanitarian needs, security concerns, and community cohesion.

- **Data analysis:** Quantitative data was descriptively analyzed, while qualitative data was thematically analyzed to extract key trends and narratives.

ACHR Qualitative Approach:

- **Data collection method:** Semi-structured interviews.

- **Data collection period:** December 2024-January 2025.

- **Sample size:** 8 returnees who re-entered Syria from Lebanon, all of Syrian nationality, two female and six male aged between 24- 55 years.

- **Focus areas:** housing, employment, infrastructure, and personal safety challenges faced by returnees.

- **Data analysis:** Narrative analysis emphasizing lived experiences and human rights violations encountered by returnees.

CLDH Qualitative Approach:

- **Data collection method:** Comprehensive desk review and synthesis of reports, direct frontline worker interviews, observations from CLDH's ongoing humanitarian work, and documentation of legal cases and human rights violations.

- **Data collection period:** Throughout 2024, with specific emphasis on conditions for Syrian refugees after 8 December 2024 in Lebanon.

- **Focus areas:** Deportation practices, political manipulation, hate speech campaigns, and refugee protection issues.

- **Data analysis:** Qualitative analysis of documented cases and narratives.

1 For detailed demographic breakdowns (e.g., gender, age groups, nationality) for each conversation, please contact Upinion at info@upinion.com.

Basmeh & Zeitooneh combined Quantitative & Qualitative Approach:

- **Data collection method:** Quantitative surveys, qualitative focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews. Data collection period: January and February 2025

- **Sample size and demographics:** The study employed a mixed-methods approach. A quantitative survey was conducted with 120 Syrian refugee participants—50 men and 70 women—across Beirut, Tripoli, and Beqaa. The higher number of female respondents is attributed to the survey being carried out in the morning, when many men were at work. Participants represented diverse age groups, with the 26–35 age range being the most represented (42 respondents), followed by those aged 36–45 (36 respondents). Seniors over 60 were the least represented, with only 10 participants. In terms of marital status, the majority were married (100 individuals).

- Complementing the survey, qualitative insights were gathered through six focus group discussions—each with 10 Syrian refugees—and nine in-depth interviews, including six with representatives of refugee-led initiatives and three with microbusiness owners.
- **Focus areas:** The study primarily focused on perceptions of the situation inside Syria and the correlation between these perceptions and individuals' intentions to return, particularly concerning security, access to education, employment opportunities, and the receipt of aid or support.

- **Data analysis:** The quantitative survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify general trends and correlations between participants' perceptions of conditions in Syria and their intentions to return, with particular focus on variables such as education, employment status, and receipt of aid or support. Crosstabulations were used to explore potential relationships between these factors.

  For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns across the focus group discussions and interviews. This approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the emotional, social, and practical dimensions influencing return decisions, integration experiences, and community dynamics.

These combined methodologies ensure comprehensive coverage and robust triangulation of findings, capturing a holistic view of the complex and dynamic context of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their perspectives regarding potential returns to Syria.

2. MAİN DATA FİNDİNGS

2.1 Safe, Voluntary, Dignified, and İnformed Returns

The fall of Assad's regime on December 8, 2024, marked a pivotal turning point in the history of Syria, significantly altering the landscape for Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon and across the region. While this political shift initially sparked optimism and hope among many refugees, who anticipated improved security conditions and prospects for economic recovery and reconstruction within Syria, the reality on the ground remains extremely challenging. Uncertainty persists, highlighting **the critical need for carefully coordinated, internationally monitored return processes that prioritize refugee rights, informed decision-making, and robust safety measures and legal guarantees for refugees who want to return.**

Low number of return movements and return intentions among Syrian refugees in Lebanon

Persistent low actual return movements and return intentions among Syrian refugees in Lebanon reflect the nuanced and challenging reality. Many Syrians remain hesitant to return due to ongoing security concerns, economic instability, and uncertainty about the future. Upinion data from November 2024 indicated that only 3% (n=419) of respondents had returned from Lebanon to Syria. Primary reasons for return were fleeing Israeli attacks, severe economic hardship, and escalating social tensions in Lebanon. Similarly, in February 2025, only 4% (n=198) reported having returned to Syria, citing reasons such as Assad's fall, and rising anti-refugee sentiment, restricted access to education, and inadequate housing in Lebanon. Temporary visits to Syria were also limited; among those who had made (7%, n=280), were making (6%, n=281), or were planning a visit within the next three months (16%, n=279), the primary motivations were visiting family (38%), checking on properties (25%), or other unspecified reasons (24%). **Significant legal and informational barriers persisted among those planning to make a temporary visit within the next three months,** with 48% of those currently visiting or planning a visit (n=63) lacking legal documentation to re-enter Lebanon and 13% uncertain about their legal status.

Data consistently highlights that return intentions remain low, despite a seeming increase in long-term return intentions. In December 2024, only 6% (n=156) planned to return within six months according to Upinion data, increasing slightly by February 2025 to 15% (n=185) intending to return within a year.[2] A significant proportion of refugees continued to seek alternatives, with those planning to move to a third country consistently forming the largest group (45% in December and 57% in February). Key motivations for returning to Syria included hopes for peace and family reunification, while safety concerns and access to education were primary drivers for seeking migration elsewhere.

2 This number is significantly lower than the 24% of respondents in Lebanon who indicated an intent to return within the next 12 months in UNHCR's January 2025 survey. There are many possible explanations for this difference, including the timing of the data collection amidst a rapidly evolving situation. Overall, the relatively low percentages and heterogeneity of responses in different datasets are reason to exercise caution in drawing conclusions around return intentions.

The lack of access to sufficient, reliable information remains a major barrier to return. Many refugees in Lebanon are unsure whether they have the necessary information to make an informed decision, even among those actively considering return.

In December 2024, only 32% (n=168) of Upinion's Syrian respondents in Lebanon felt they had access to reliable information on their area of origin in Syria, 43% reported uncertainty about whether they had such access, and 20% stated they did not.

In February 2025, when Upinion's respondents were asked about their sources of information, personal testimonies from people who had visited or returned were cited most frequently (27%, n=179), followed by media reports on security, economic, and political conditions (23%) and government or NGO updates on refugee policies (21%). Notably, 22% reported not using any information at all to inform their future plans. Humanitarian aid, job opportunities, housing and property, and safety and security conditions emerged as the most critical information gaps among those who felt inadequately informed.

Challenges inside Syria

Persistent security threats and instability continue to shape refugees' decisions regarding return. Ongoing sectarian violence, targeted reprisals, and the absence of reliable security guarantees create an environment of fear and uncertainty, a key factor preventing safe returns. B&Z data collected in January and February 2025 indicates that 38% (n=120) of respondents living in Lebanon rated their perception of the security conditions in Syria as "bad," reflecting widespread concerns about violence and persecution. Social cohesion issues further complicate matters: Refugees voiced apprehension about societal acceptance upon return, particularly related to gender and political affiliations, further heightening their hesitation to consider returning. Reports of significant social divisions stemming from the massacres that took place in Syria on and after 6 March 2025 are likely to have exacerbated this.

Economic hardship also remains a significant barrier to sustainable return. Stability in both Syria and Lebanon has yet to materialize, heightening hesitancy among displaced Syrians. B&Z data shows that 63% of respondents (n=120) in Lebanon rated the economic situation in Syria as "bad." The highest concentrations were among those originally from Aleppo (27), Raqqa (12), and Idlib (7), with an additional 29 respondents from other regions of Syria. Employment opportunities remain limited, and participants consistently emphasized that economic stability is essential for sustainable return. Many refugees expressed unwillingness to return unless both the economic and security conditions improve significantly.

Housing and damaged infrastructure present another major challenge for returnees. Of the 120 respondents, 48% reported owning assets in Syria, including houses, agricultural land, or shops. Among these, 66% indicated their properties are either destroyed, partially damaged, or occupied by others. The widespread destruction and legal challenges surrounding property ownership represent major obstacles to resettlement. Furthermore, critical infrastructure across many regions remains heavily damaged or destroyed.

According to B&Z data, education is a critical factor influencing return decisions, beyond economic and security concerns. Many refugee families hesitate to return, citing disruptions in

schooling and fears that inadequate educational infrastructure may jeopardize their children's future. Among households surveyed with children (n=101), only 11 households expressed a clear willingness to return to Syria.

"We have no home to go back to. Our house was bombed. Where would we live?"
(Female Refugee, FGD Nabaa, Lebanon)

"Give me a job, and I'll go back tomorrow. But I won't return to die from hunger."
(Male refugee, Nabaa, Lebanon)

"There aren't even enough teachers in some schools. What kind of future would my children have there?"
(Female refugee, FGD Tripoli, Lebanon)

"We have the experience of Iraq and Lebanon after the war to draw from, and we're unsure whether violence or assassinations will occur."
(Female initiative Founder Bekaa, Lebanon)

"Even a simple place to stay while we rebuild would be enough. But right now, we have nothing."
(Male Refugee, FGD Tripoli, Lebanon)

"Even if I go back, my old street doesn't exist anymore. The whole area was flattened."
(Male Refugee, FGD Bekaa, Lebanon)

"I tried to go back. I stayed for a few days, but there was nothing—nothing -no electricity, no work, no way to live. So I came back to Lebanon."
(Male Refugee, FGD Bekaa, Lebanon)

2.2 Humanitarian and Protection Space for Syrian refugees in host countries

While the conditions for safe, voluntary, dignified, and informed returns are far from being met in Syria, it is important to highlight that the humanitarian and protection landscape for Syrian refugees and civil society organizations in Lebanon also remains critically compromised.

Persistent threats of deportation, discriminatory practices, and hostile narratives are propagated through political rhetoric and media. **Political actors and media outlets frequently leverage disinformation campaigns, exaggerating refugee numbers and their perceived impact on local resources, thereby fueling xenophobia and social hostility.** As a result, refugees become more vulnerable to exploitation and violence, and social cohesion weakens. As reported by CLDH, disinformation and political manipulation through social media and mainstream news outlets intensify these negative perceptions, with campaigns like "UNDO THE DAMAGE" falsely claiming that refugees make up 40% of Lebanon's population." This hate speech also

targets recent arrivals of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, who are further stigmatized as "pro-regime," leading to increased marginalization and weakened communal support structures, according to CLDH.

In this anti-refugee climate, the lack of legal protection makes people extremely vulnerable and underscores the total absence of humanitarian and protection space for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. 59% (n=177) of Syrian respondents in Upinion's sample lack formal residency status, making them more susceptible to exploitation, detention, and forced deportation. Fear of deportation remains prevalent, affecting approximately 64% (n=139) of Upinion respondents in the most recent data from February 2025. These fears are mostly linked to Lebanese authorities.

Meanwhile, **the prolonged economic instability in Lebanon exacerbates vulnerabilities,** as refugees compete with host communities for increasingly scarce resources, employment, and public services, often finding themselves disproportionately impacted by economic downturns. Economic exploitation is widespread, as refugees report working under exploitative conditions with inadequate wages, excessive hours, and insecure employment arrangements.

In February 2025, only 13% (n=287) of Syrian respondents from Upinion's community reported feeling completely safe in Lebanon—a figure comparable to 2023, when 10% felt completely safe (n=325) prior to the escalation of war in the country. While this marks a relative improvement from wartime perceptions of safety, when only 3% (n=237) reported feeling completely safe, economic hardship (26%, n=238), workplace exploitation (26%), and lack of economic opportunities (24%) remain key drivers of insecurity in 2025.

Key drivers of insecurity in 2025.

The inadequacy of humanitarian assistance, due to both insufficient funding and structural inefficiencies, leaves critical humanitarian needs unmet, further amplifying the distress and insecurity faced by refugees. According to a Upinion conversation in December 2024, around 60% (n=373) of Syrian and Lebanese respondents in Lebanon reported significant unmet humanitarian needs. Major gaps identified include essential cash assistance, adequate food and water supplies, secure shelter, protection and security, as well as education opportunities for children. In February 2025, these needs remained unmet amongst Upinion respondents, with 65% (n=138) needing cash assistance, 34% lacking health and nutrition, 33% education, and 29% shelter and housing.

A notable lack of preparedness among humanitarian organizations to effectively manage evolving refugee dynamics following political developments in Syria has left many recent arrivals without adequate support. The B&Z data collected between January and February 2025 and CLDH research indicate that newly arrived refugees frequently report receiving inadequate assistance and support, exacerbating their vulnerability and integration challenges. There is also widespread distrust towards humanitarian aid actors, particularly international organizations, largely stemming from systemic issues such as inadequate communication, insufficient transparency, limited accountability, and inconsistent responsiveness to refugee needs. **Refugees repeatedly expressed frustration with unclear and frequently changing eligibility criteria for aid programs, infrequent and ambiguous updates from aid agencies, and irregular provision of essential assistance** such as cash support, shelter, and educational resources.

Psychological and emotional health needs remain consistently under-addressed, and are among the most significant yet overlooked dimensions of refugee wellbeing, worsened by ongoing economic instability, prolonged displacement, compounded trauma from conflict and persecution, and relentless social stressors. Humanitarian organizations and refugee respondents highlight insufficient mental health and psychosocial support services to meet these complex needs. The B&Z data in particular highlights this gap, with refugees and humanitarian workers consistently calling for increased emotional and psychosocial support interventions.

Finally, **civil society organizations operating in Lebanon, crucial in mitigating these challenges, are increasingly constrained by restrictive governmental policies, limited resources, and rising security threats,** significantly hampering their operational capacities and effectiveness. This complex scenario demands urgent international attention and action to reinforce protection mechanisms, support humanitarian responses, and strengthen the resilience and capacities of civil society in Lebanon.

"You work 12 hours a day and still don't make enough to feed your family."
(Male Refugee, FGD Nabaa, Lebanon)

"Lebanon is no longer an option. Syrians are being pushed out."
(Female refugee, FGD Bekaa, Lebanon)

"Before, it was already difficult, but now? There are no jobs. Even the Lebanese are struggling, so what about us?"
(Male Refugee, FGD Tripoli, Lebanon)

"I used to find work in construction or cleaning, but now, nothing. Employers say they don't have money to hire anyone."
(Female refugee, FGD Nabaa, Lebanon)

"When businesses start closing, we are the first ones to be let go. No one will choose a Syrian over a Lebanese worker now."
(Male Refugee, FGD Tripoli, Lebanon)

"We left because there was no life left in our city—everything was destroyed, and we had no food or medicine. It was either leave or die."
(Male Refugee, FGD Tripoli, Lebanon)

These conditions have compelled refugees to make decisions about returns under pressure and severe constraints. These decisions are frequently driven more by the immediate necessity to escape economic hardship, social discrimination, threats of forced deportation from Lebanon, or even consistent Israeli aggression, rather than genuinely voluntary and informed choices.

"I would rather live in a tent in Syria than be humiliated here. At least in Syria, I am home."
(Female refugee, FGD Tripoli)

2.3 Promoting Meaningful Refugee Participation and İnclusion in Shaping Global Refugee Policies

With a shifting political landscape in Syria and growing uncertainty for many refugees who are and will remain stuck in Lebanon, their meaningful participation and inclusion in policy dialogue remains critically limited. Refugees consistently report exclusion from decision-making processes that affect their lives, and when participation opportunities exist, they are frequently perceived as tokenistic, superficial, or ineffective. **There is a significant gap between the intent and the implementation of meaningful participation and inclusion, reducing the effectiveness and legitimacy of policies and interventions aimed at supporting Syrian refugees.**

In January 2025, 69% (n=402) of Upinion's Lebanese and Syrian respondents reported feeling excluded from decisions that directly affect them. This sentiment was notably stronger among Syrian refugees, with 75% (n=199) expressing exclusion, compared to 59% (n=107) of Lebanese nationals. Refugees frequently describe existing participation opportunities as tokenistic or symbolic, with their input rarely translating into tangible outcomes or effective policies. B&Z data confirms this, with participants expressing concerns that their inputs are rarely translated into tangible outcomes or effective policies, undermining trust and effectiveness. Additionally, refugee-led initiatives identify barriers such as a lack of accessible platforms for dialogue, inadequate communication on how input influences decisions, and limited accountability mechanisms in policy design.

Refugees emphasize the need for authentic, inclusive engagement in policymaking. Respondents from refugee-led initiatives interviewed by B&Z stress the necessity of international oversight, indicating they would have a higher level of trust in international entities such as the UN if these bodies demonstrated transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to refugee concerns. Additional suggestions on how to include affected communities, coming from Upinion's respondents in January 2025, mainly centered on more direct engagement with decision-makers, keeping communities in the loop about how their input is being used, making participation accessible in terms of language, as well as focusing on boosting refugees' confidence to participate and make their voices heard.

"We need security to ensure any future change, as development can only happen when security is in place."
(Male refugee, Initiative Founder, Tripoli, Lebanon)

"Give us a real voice, not just consultations that lead nowhere. We want to be part of creating solutions, not just receiving them."
(Female refugee, FGD Nabaa, Lebanon)

"We are still assessing the situation, but we believe that youth empowerment should be our role in rebuilding Syria."
(Female refugee, Initiative Founder, Tripoli, Lebanon)

"We don't know if the situation will remain stable. Many regions in Syria have been under oppressive conditions for a long time. When violence and repression are prevalent, women's rights are often stripped away."
(Female refugee, Initiative Founder, Bekaa, Lebanon)

"Our goal is to build a peaceful society and promote justice in Syria, and for this, we must have a seat at the table."
(Female refugee, Initiative Coordinator, Bekaa, Lebanon)

"They come, ask us questions, and then leave. It feels like nothing ever changes. We want to be truly involved, not just asked to participate for the sake of formality."
(Male refugee, FGD, Tripoli,)

3. CONCLUSION

The data presented in this report underscores the complex and multi-layered challenges faced by Syrian refugees in Lebanon, particularly in light of the recent political changes following the fall of the Assad regime. Despite some optimism, significant barriers to safe, voluntary, dignified and informed returns remain, including security concerns, economic instability, widespread infrastructure destruction, and profound social divisions. Furthermore, critical humanitarian needs remain unmet, exacerbated by economic hardship and shrinking humanitarian and protection spaces within Lebanon.

A significant gap continues to exist between refugees' lived realities and current policies and interventions, emphasizing the urgent need for more inclusive, transparent, and responsive approaches. Genuine and meaningful participation and inclusion of refugees in international policy dialogues are essential for creating sustainable and effective solutions. Comprehensively addressing these challenges requires sustained international cooperation, robust humanitarian interventions, strategic investments in recovery and reconstruction efforts, and an unwavering commitment to human rights and refugee protection.

Moving forward, stakeholders must prioritize transparent communication, comprehensive legal protections, meaningful refugee participation and inclusion, and strengthened humanitarian assistance frameworks. Durable solutions can only be achieved through such holistic and rights-based approaches, ensuring dignity, safety, and well-being for Syrian refugees and their host communities.

4. RECOMMENDATİONS

4.1. Ensuring Safe, Voluntary, Dignified, & İnformed Returns

- UNHCR and donor countries should adopt a careful, gradual, phased pilot approach, fully respecting the principle of non-refoulement, and anchored within an updated UN Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy framework.

- UNHCR should establish a structural international mechanism to continuously monitor conditions in Syria, providing timely updates on the suitability for safe, voluntary, and dignified returns.

- The government of Lebanon should facilitate safe, unhindered, and legally recognized re-entry for returnees to Lebanon, removing bureaucratic and discriminatory barriers.

- Organizations in Lebanon and their donors should explicitly address gender-based violence risks during returns through strengthened protection mechanisms.

- EU member states and host countries should ensure full compliance with the principle of non-refoulement, ending all pushbacks of Syrians exercising their right to asylum, including on the Mediterranean Sea and land routes to Europe. Enhance search and rescue operations and guarantee predictable ports of safety.

- EU and UN member states must advocate with the Lebanese government to cease forced deportations in the absence of internationally verified conditions of safety in Syria.

- Host countries should allow “go-and-see” visits to Syria without compulsory commitment to permanent return and suspend negative asylum decisions for Syrian nationals until the safety and sustainability of returns are assured.

- UNHCR should provide Syrian refugees with accessible, verified information about conditions in Syria, establishing responsive feedback channels to address evolving concerns.

4.2. Designing İnclusive Returns, Recovery, & Reconstruction Policies

Funding:

- In close coordination with other relevant stakeholders, including Syrian civil society, the EU and EU member states should initiate preparations for the establishment of a Syria Reconstruction Fund and the creation of a conflict-sensitive and human rights due diligence strategy that will guide the work of the Fund.

- The EU and EU member states should ensure enhanced, predictable, flexible, and multi-annual humanitarian, development and peacebuilding funding, taking into account the 2019 OECD DAC recommendation regarding the "triple nexus" between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts. As part of these efforts, the EU should increase support to locally led initiatives that implement the "triple nexus".

- Throughout all humanitarian, recovery and reconstruction efforts, the EU and EU member states should actively apply the principle of "Accountability to Affected Populations" (AAP) in funding strategies and requirements, and take action to ensure the meaningful participation of Syrian civil society actors in policymaking and program design at the most senior levels of the response.

- The EU and EU member states should provide political and financial support to initiatives that amplify voices of Syrian women in Syria's political transition and in reconstruction efforts, and support efforts to ensure Syrian women's participation in political transition processes, e.g. by advancing the inclusion of female-led CSOs, facilitating community-led decision-making and supporting training programs on women's leadership and participation.

- The EU and EU member states should ensure the active integration of a comprehensive gender analysis in early recovery projects and funds to ensure understanding of how women, men, girls, and boys are affected differently and have different needs.

- In line with their commitments under the Grand Bargain, the EU and EU member states should accelerate and increase their efforts to work with, and provide financial and capacity-sharing support to, Syrian civil society and refugee-led organizations, who have shouldered a major part of the humanitarian, protection, and resilience efforts since 2011. They have played a significant role in addressing the needs of Syrian communities, including refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and they will continue to play a key role in shaping the country's future, advocating for the rights of all Syrians in Syria and the neighboring countries.

- EU and EU member states should guarantee the right to adequate housing, allowing refugees to return to Syria by allocating funds and ensuring secure, accessible, and durable solutions for housing, land, and property rights (HLP), addressing the key barriers to return in line with international human rights standards.

Programmatic and Diplomatic Support:

- Host countries, the EU, and EU member states must ensure the active and meaningful participation of Syrian refugee-led organizations, youth, and displaced Syrians in shaping international policy dialogues and reconstruction discussions.

- Donor countries, in close coordination with Syrian civil society partners, should mobilize technical support to the planned National Dialogue Conference and actively promote an inclusive and participatory political transition process.

- Donor countries should advocate for Syrian civil society's meaningful engagement in the political transition, urging new Syrian authorities to repeal restrictive laws, such as the 1958 Law on Associations and Private Societies (Law No. 93).

- Donor countries should actively apply "Accountability to Affected Populations" (AAP) in funding and intervention strategies, integrating comprehensive gender analysis in recovery efforts to address differentiated impacts on women, men, girls, and boys.

4.3. Upholding Humanitarian and Protection Spaces in Lebanon

Humanitarian Support:

- Organizations operating in Lebanon and their donors should systematically integrate a trauma-informed Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) approach into humanitarian aid strategies and funding.

- Donors should provide sustained and flexible financial support to Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs), with targeted efforts to include women and youth.

- The EU and EU member states should continue to stress the importance of aid agencies increasing their accountability to the affected populations they support. The EU and EU member states must increase their efforts to apply the principle of "accountability to affected populations" (AAP) in their funding strategies and requirements to ensure that funding recipients meaningfully involve refugees in the design, implementation, and evaluation of interventions.

- The government of Lebanon should guarantee that all refugee children, regardless of their status, have the right to education as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- Organizations supporting refugees in Lebanon should provide protection, as well as medical, mental health, and shelter support for refugee survivors of gender-based violence (GBV).

Protection Space:

- Countries outside the affected region should respect and strengthen resettlement to third countries as a fundamental international responsibility-sharing measure, particularly for those facing heightened protection risks.

- Donor countries should foster local initiatives to develop targeted communication strategies to debunk misinformation and xenophobic narratives against refugees prevalent in local media and social media platforms.

- Donor countries should review funding to Lebanese security agencies implicated in forced deportations, ensuring adherence to enhanced human rights due diligence assessments.

- Donors should establish dedicated funding mechanisms for security, safety training, legal representation, and rapid-response assistance for civil society and community activists at risk due to their protection work.

- The Government of Lebanon should strengthen the legal identity framework for refugees, including facilitating access to birth registration, providing clear pathways for obtaining official documentation, and ensuring refugees' legal recognition.

4.4. Meaningful Participation in İnternational Policy Dialogues

Facilitation and Funding for Participation:

- UNHCR and donor countries should allocate dedicated budget lines to facilitate refugee participation, ensuring provision of translation services, travel support, and relevant training.

- Donor countries should increase sustained financial commitments to Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs) and initiatives like the Refugee Leadership Fund and Refugee-Led Innovation Fund during key policy forums (UNHCR ExCom, HLOM).

- Donor countries should employ "Accountability to Affected Populations" (AAP) as a core principle within funding strategies, ensuring meaningful refugee involvement in intervention cycles.

- The EU and EU member states should actively promote and facilitate the meaningful participation of Syrian refugee-led organizations, Syrian civil society organizations and social movements, Syrian youth-led organizations, and displaced Syrians in European and international policy discussions and venues on the future of Syria and the region.

Agenda and Priorities:

» Donor countries should explicitly commit to prioritizing meaningful refugee participation, locally led "triple nexus" approaches (between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts), equal partnerships with Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs), and strengthened "Accountability to Affected Populations" (AAP) mechanisms at significant international policy gatherings.

» Donors should provide direct funding to refugee-led coalitions for organizing inclusive policy convenings, ensuring refugee representation in historically exclusive policymaking spaces.

UNHCR İnternal Practice:

» UNHCR should appoint a Special Advisor on Meaningful Refugee Participation within the Office of the High Commissioner, ensuring representation from individuals with lived experience of displacement.

» UNHCR should promote active participation and co-leadership of Refugee-Led Organizations within inter-agency coordination mechanisms, including within the Syria 3RP framework.

» UNHCR should implement monitoring systems within UNHCR to transparently report annually on how refugee participation initiatives are translated into tangible policy outcomes and improvements.

Annex 1: The Refugee Protection Watch (RPW) coalition: overview and objectives

Refugee Protection Watch (RPW) is a coalition established in 2019, uniting the expertise and efforts of organizations dedicated to addressing the complex challenges faced by Syrian refugees and returnees.

The coalition comprises a diverse group of organizations, each contributing unique strengths:

Basmeh & Zeitooneh for Relief and Development (B&Z): A Syrian refugee-led organization providing relief, education, and development programs to Syrian refugees and vulnerable communities in Lebanon.

Women Now for Development: A Syrian feminist organization empowering Syrian women through programs in protection, education, and advocacy.

Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR): A refugee-led organization dedicated to defending and promoting human rights in the Middle East and North Africa, with a particular focus on refugee rights.

Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH): A local non-profit, non-partisan Lebanese human rights organization. Complementary components include advocacy, public mobilization, rehabilitation for victims of torture and families of victims of enforced disappearances, and the provision of pro-bono legal services for vulnerable groups.

PAX: PAX is a Dutch peace organization working on protecting civilians from the violence of war, ending armed conflict, and building inclusive peace. We work in conflict zones with local partners and people who share our belief that everyone has the right to a dignified life in a peaceful society.

Upinion: A social enterprise specializing in two-way communication with refugee communities, facilitating direct engagement and the collection of real-time insights into their needs and perspectives.

11.11.11: The coalition of NGOs, unions, movements, and various solidarity groups in Flanders (Belgium) working together for a fair world for international solidarity.

Collectively, we leverage our diverse expertise in human rights, peacebuilding, development, humanitarian assistance, real-time participation, and innovative data collection to monitor and advocate for the protection, humanitarian needs, and human rights of Syrian refugees and returnees. Through comprehensive research and targeted advocacy, RPW aims to influence policies and practices that affect Syrian refugees, ensuring their rights and needs are central to all interventions.

REFUGEE PROTECTION WATCH

@RPW2019

BASMEH & ZEITOONEH
RELIEF & DEVELOPMENT

upinion

Strength in numbers

ACHR

Peace. Are you in?

CLDH

النساء الآن
WOMEN NOW
FOR DEVELOPMENT