



POLICY BRIEF - Bridging Policy and Practice 2026

Returning to Syria: Supporting safe and inclusive returns from Jordan and Lebanon

“Sometimes, I feel that we survived the war, but we are still losing pieces of our lives every day after returning.”

A. Al-Othman 24 years, Unemployed, Mari'yeh Village – Deir Ezzor

Returns are increasingly framed as a policy priority across the Syria response. Yet the conditions required for safe, dignified, voluntary, and sustainable returns are still not in place. Explosive ordnance contamination, unresolved housing and land rights, weak livelihoods, and limited access to essential and inclusive services continue to expose returnees to serious and preventable risks.



Photo caption: Mahmoud Ali Al Khalaf, 6, was severely injured when a cluster grenade he mistook for a toy exploded near his home in eastern Deir ez-Zor. © T. Nicholson / HI

The long-term impact of conflict and explosive ordnance contamination have also contributed to increased rehabilitation needs and barriers to participation among affected populations. Ensuring accessibility, access to rehabilitation and assistive technologies, and the meaningful inclusion of

persons with disabilities is essential to enabling safe, dignified, and sustainable returns and facilitating recovery processes.

Under current conditions, returns risk becoming a continuation of displacement in another form rather than a durable solution. Sustainable reintegration remains constrained by insecurity, widespread destruction of infrastructure and housing, limited access to services and livelihoods, explosive ordnance contamination, and unresolved housing, land and property issues. Without stronger alignment between policy choices and realities on the ground, return may reproduce vulnerability rather than resolve it.

Returns should therefore not be understood as a single event, but as a non-linear process shaped by pre-return conditions, the return journey, and post-return realities. Sustainable reintegration ultimately depends on continued safety, access to services, economic opportunity¹ and social cohesion.

Context

The December 2024 overthrow of the Assad-led government has had a myriad of consequences for prospects for peace and stability in Syria, raising cautious hope for pathways towards durable solutions for internally displaced persons and refugees, including 5.5 million Syrians in neighbouring countries. After more than a decade of large-scale, protracted displacement, conditions in refugee-hosting countries are deteriorating, while governments of refugee-hosting countries, the transitional government of Syria and donors are all looking to support pathways for return.

Syria's fragile transition is unfolding against the backdrop of almost 14 years of conflict, marked by widespread devastation of infrastructure and services, and an almost complete economic collapse. More than 90 percent of the population lives below the poverty line², and civilians returning to displacement-affected areas face major threats, including widespread contamination from explosive hazards. Return movements have increased significantly following December 2024 events, with over one million refugees returning from abroad alongside large-scale internal returns. However, some returnees have subsequently experienced renewed displacement, while others remain unable to return, reflecting persistent instability, insecurity, and unmet needs³.

Against this backdrop, humanitarian and recovery actors face the dual challenge of addressing urgent needs while preparing for sustainable early recovery and reconstruction. Recent field assessments and Mine Action Area of Responsibility (AoR)⁴ reports, corroborated by Humanity & Inclusion (HI)⁵, indicate that explosive hazards are a threat in and of themselves but also remain a

1 MMC, Home, under strain: return and reintegration in Syria, April 2026.

2 Ibid.

3 OCHA, Syria HRP 2025

4 Syria Mine Action AoR, Situation Update No.7, Dec 2025–Mar 2026

5 Humanity&Inclusion, Lives at the Intersections, 2025; Snapshot – HI Intervention in Syria 2025

pervasive constraint on freedom of movement and access to essential services and livelihoods. These hazards not only threaten physical safety but also compromise the pace and quality of recovery interventions, undermining early stabilisation efforts, long-term resilience, as well as the safe reintegration of returnees.

As of April 2026, new UN Development Programme (UNDP) estimates suggest that further regional escalation could highly increase the potential economic loss (\$120-194 billion)^{6 7}. While the lack of consistency of data on return movements raises concerns among Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), these figures nevertheless emphasize the urgent need for a coherent strategy among international aid response actors and donors to invest in resilience and recovery strategies and plans for Syria.

However, the context in which Syria's transition is taking place complicates joint strategising among donors and aid response actors. In the past decade, migration and displacement have been a central topic in politics and elections in traditional donor countries, and a significant portion of countries that historically championed human rights and the rights of displaced persons are now led by governments that do not follow a rights-based domestic and foreign policy agenda. As a result, the past years have seen a trend in resources being shifted from humanitarian work to development and stabilisation work, and in overt political pressure for refugee returns to countries of origin with uncondusive conditions.

Evidence shows that return decisions are not driven solely by improvements in Syria. Deteriorating conditions in host countries, including legal insecurity, economic hardship and reduced access to services, are increasingly shaping return decisions. As a result, return is often a constrained choice rather than a fully voluntary one⁸.

As of 2026, approximately 15.6 million people in Syria require humanitarian assistance; more than 12 million Syrians are forcibly displaced, with over 5.5⁹ internally displaced, while approximately 6.6 million refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless persons are targeted for assistance under the 2026 regional refugee and resilience response plan¹⁰.

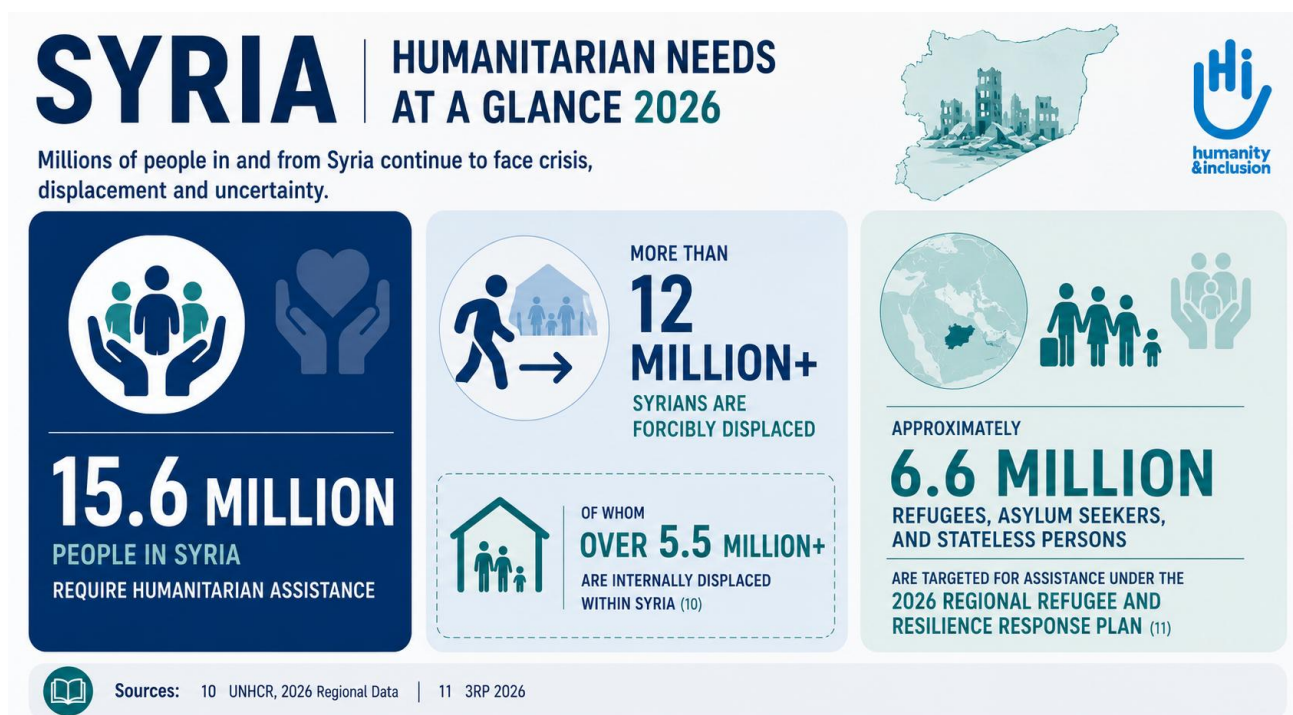
6 UNHCR, Regional Flash update #44

7 IOM, Population mobility and baseline assessment August 2025

8 MMC, Home, under strain, 2026.

9 UNHCR, 2026 regional data

10 3RP 2026



In Jordan alone, the Regional Refugee Plan (3RP) 2026 planning figures estimate around 415,000 Syrian refugees and asylum seekers in need of support, alongside more than 1.27 million vulnerable host community members. In Lebanon, the response plan targets approximately 1.26 million displaced Syrians, within a broader caseload of about 1.5 million people in need of assistance and protection services, including refugees and vulnerable Lebanese populations¹¹. Meanwhile, large numbers remain internally displaced inside Syria, where humanitarian needs continue to affect millions of people requiring assistance across the country, underscoring the scale and protracted nature of the crisis. At the same time, pressure on host countries is increasing, while returns are increasingly framed within regional coordination frameworks as a potential solution, despite limited conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified returns. Available 3RP and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)'s intention surveys show that only around 1–2% of Syrian refugees report plans to return in the short term, while over 80% consistently cite lack of safety, livelihoods, and basic services as key barriers to return¹².

Recent UNHCR and inter-agency data further highlight the disability prevalence and specific needs among Syrian refugees in both Jordan and Lebanon. In Jordan, UNHCR operational data from 3. May 2026 records 388,505 registered Syrian refugees, including 91,127 individuals identified as having specific needs, representing 23.5% of the registered Syrian refugees' population. Among them are around 38,260 refugees with disabilities and 51,271 individuals with serious medical conditions¹³.

11 3RP country chapters, Jordan and Lebanon

12 UNHCR intention surveys / 3RP data

13 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/122296>

In Lebanon, the 2025 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) found that 11% of Syrian refugee population experience functional difficulties, indicating disabilities, with prevalence increasing significantly among older persons, reaching 40% among individuals aged 60 and above. The assessment further highlights that Syrian refugees in Lebanon continue facing major barriers related to healthcare affordability, access to medication, overcrowded shelter conditions and economic vulnerability, with 39% of households reporting reduced health expenditure as a coping mechanism¹⁴.

These findings, added to the most recent interviews done in Syria in May 2026, with people who decided to return from other areas in Syria where they've been displaced for more than a decade, or returning from Camps in Lebanon and Jordan, further highlight the importance of ensuring that return and recovery effort are inclusive and accessible, and that persons with disabilities have equitable access to health, rehabilitation, mental health and psychosocial support and other forms of services delivered by humanitarian actors and livelihoods.

From HI's operational perspective across Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, a growing disconnect persists between policy narratives and the lived realities of displaced populations. This policy brief seeks to examine the gap between existing policies and actual practices related to returnees and durable solutions, grounding the discussion in the experiences and conditions faced by affected communities.

“What we want is simple. We want stability. We want safety. Syrians have endured years of loss, displacement, fear, and uncertainty, but we continue to survive. We have no other choice except hope.” S. Al Hussein, Deir Ezzor

Return in practice: conditions that are not yet in place

At the regional level, returns have become increasingly central to policy and diplomatic discussions across Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, particularly within broader debates on displacement governance, stabilization, and migration management. This policy momentum has not been translated into a substantive transformation of operational conditions on the ground. In Syria, widespread explosive ordnance contamination, deteriorated infrastructure, limited access to basic services and deepening economic collapse continue to undermine the conditions necessary for safe and sustainable return. Simultaneously, in neighbouring host countries, increasing political, economic and social pressures placed on Syrian refugees are intensifying calls for return, despite the absence of corresponding improvements inside Syria. This reflects a growing disjuncture between policy narratives and humanitarian realities, whereby return dynamics are shaped less by the fulfilment of internationally recognised protection standards than by containment logics and domestic pressures within host states and among international stakeholders, including European actors. In this context, return risks are operationalised as a migration-management objective rather than a rights-based durable solution.

¹⁴ UNHCR, Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees 2025

From a protection and durable solutions perspective, return can only be considered sustainable when it is voluntary, informed, safe and dignified, and when returnees are able to meaningfully reintegrate into their communities without renewed exposure to harm, deprivation or displacement. This requires grounding policy frameworks in evidence-based assessments of conditions on the ground rather than in political timelines or assumptions of post-conflict normalization. Existing literature on protracted displacement consistently demonstrates that premature or unsupported return often reproduces cycles of vulnerability and secondary displacement^{15 16 17}.

In the Syrian context, addressing explosive ordnance contamination should therefore be understood not merely as a humanitarian priority, but as a foundational precondition for mobility, access and recovery. Equally, the restoration of housing, land and property rights, access to livelihoods, and the rehabilitation of essential services, including health, education, psychosocial support and rehabilitation services, remain indispensable to any credible reintegration process. These measures must further be implemented through inclusive and disability-responsive approaches that account for the differentiated barriers faced by persons with disabilities, women, older persons, and other marginalized groups. Return cannot reasonably be framed as a durable solution but rather risks institutionalising precariousness and transferring protection burdens back onto affected populations¹⁸ when these structural conditions are absent.

“We returned home six months ago after being displaced since 2017. We lived in the wilderness so of course we wanted to come back and have a roof above our heads. Our area was a former frontline, so everything is destroyed. There is no electricity because all the wires were stolen long ago and until now, nobody came to offer any restoration of any service in the village. Water is barely available. At night, the entire area becomes dark and silent in a frightening way.” S.S., Murrat Village

15 UNHCR, Global Trends: Forced Displacement 2020

16 Jolien Tegenbos and Koen Vlassenroot, Going Home? A Systematic Review of the Literature on Displacement, Return and Cycles of Violence, 2018

17 Human Rights Watch, Our Lives Are Like Death: Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan, 2021

18 International Crisis Group, Ways Out of Europe's Syria Reconstruction Conundrum, 2019

Explosive ordnance contamination

Syria remains among the most heavily contaminated by explosive ordnance in the world, including landmines, cluster munitions, improvised explosive devices and unexploded remnants of war. Contamination affects homes, agricultural land, roads and essential infrastructure, often in areas that are now considered for return.



Photo Caption: HI mine clearance experts perform mine and unexploded ordnance clearance activities in Deir ez-Zor, Syria. November 2025 © T. Nicholson / HI

An estimated 14.1¹⁹ million Syrians are at risk from explosive ordnance. And in 2025, explosive ordnance casualties tripled compared to previous years. Protection monitoring shows that more than 30 percent of key informants reported explosive ordnance²⁰ contamination within 10 kilometers of their community. In 80 percent of those areas' explosive ordnance -related incidents were also reported, affecting civilians, particularly children and women-headed households.

19 Syrian Arab Republic – 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan

20 OCHA, Humanitarian needs and response Plan 2025

Between 8 December 2024 and April 2026 alone, 1,208 explosive ordnance incidents were recorded nationwide, resulting in 2,199 casualties, including 784 killed and 1,415 injured.

Pursuit of livelihoods through agriculture and animal grazing to provide for families and make ends meet remains among the single continuing to place Syrian civilians at significant risks. Since December 8, 2024, and until May 1 2026, out of 1.208 incidents/accidents that took place across Syria, 779 were recorded in farmland or in grazing areas²¹.

Enabling the safe and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons in Syria requires more than goodwill and reconstruction promises. It begins with an honest and comprehensive understanding of where explosive hazards remain, how widespread contamination is, and which populations and services are most affected. Landmines and unexploded ordnance are not only a danger in themselves, they also block access to vital services, stall reconstruction, and undermine trust in institutions²².

Explosive ordnance incidents are not confined to frontlines but occur in residential areas, agricultural land and access routes, often during everyday activities such as farming, grazing, rubble removal and movement within communities—precisely the activities that returnees depend on to rebuild their lives²³. Population movements, including returns, are directly increasing exposure to explosive hazards, as households re-enter contaminated homes, farmland and infrastructure²⁴.

Returnees are especially at risk of explosive ordnance-related accidents and incidents as they will not be aware of the pattern of contamination in their area of return and might try to use buildings, infrastructure, and paths that were not used since the conflict. The simple fact of being willing to come back to their own house can therefore put a whole family at risk of death or lifelong injury. For returnees, this translates into daily exposure to life-threatening risks. Entering a house, cultivating land, or moving within communities can result in life-changing injury or death.

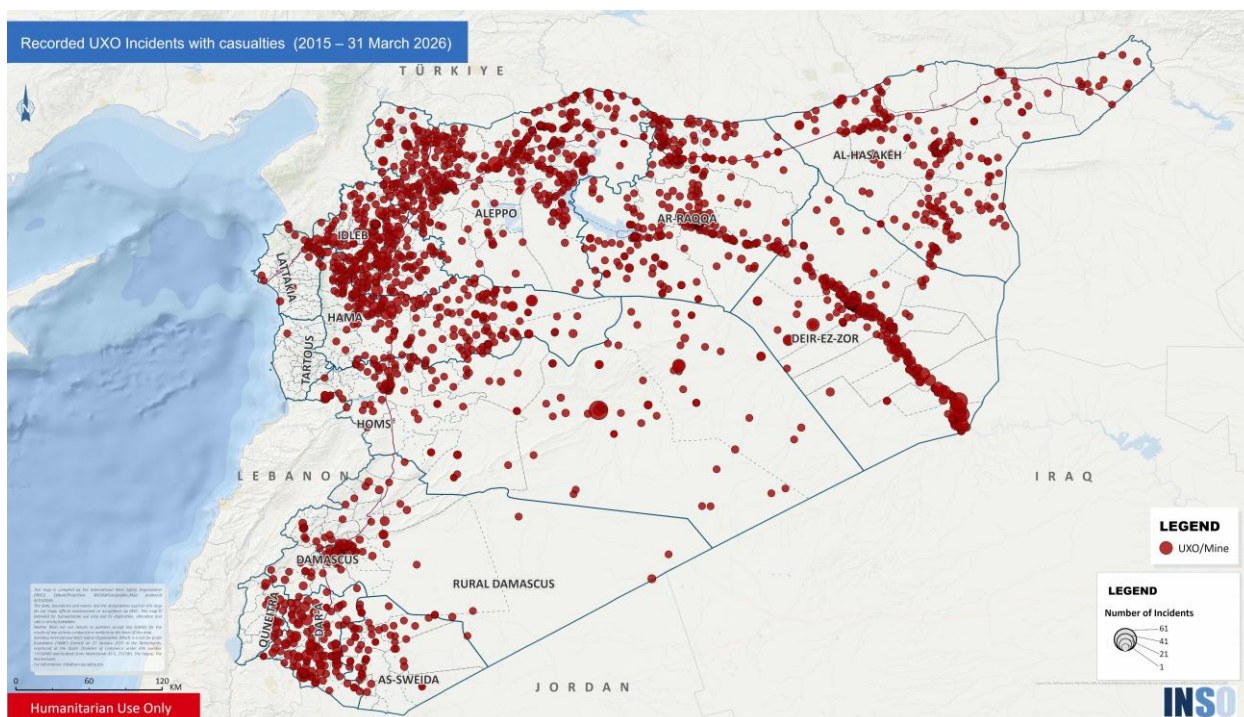
Mine action is a prerequisite for safe return and for any meaningful recovery process.

21 Source: Syria MA AoR and International NGO Safety Organisation (database on verified incidents involving mines and UXO/ERW)

22 Human Rights Watch, Syria: Landmines, Explosive Remnants Harming Civilians, 2025

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.



Map Caption: Map of mines/UXO/ERW incidents recorded and verified by INSO since 2015 till 31 March 2026. ©INSO

“The fear does not end there. The land around us is contaminated with explosive ordnance. My son was injured and has an amputated leg. Everything has changed since the accident, especially because his mental health has been severely impacted. My son is 16-years-old, but he does not want to go out and see his friends, or play with his siblings. He feels that people would judge him.” S. H., returned to her village at the end of 2024, after years of displacement in Al Areesheh Camp

Housing, land and property

Housing is often assumed to be available upon return. In reality, access to housing and land is one of the most significant barriers faced by displaced Syrians. Many people are unable to access, prove, or claim ownership of their property due to lost, destroyed or informal ownership documentation. Others return to find their homes destroyed, occupied, or subject to competing claims, and unlawful transactions.²⁵ Analysis shows that large numbers of displaced Syrians are unable to secure housing, land²⁶ uncertainty. Women face additional constraints, including legal, administrative and social barriers that limit their ability to claim, inherit or rights²⁷. As a result,

²⁵ Syria Housing, Land and Property (HLP) Technical Working Group, *Strategic Framework for 2026 - 2027*, March 2026.

²⁶ MMC, *Home, under strain*, 2026

²⁷ Ibid.

return does not necessarily lead to reintegration. In many cases, it leads to secondary displacement within areas of origin.

Under Syrian law, persons with disabilities are formally entitled to property rights on an equal basis with other citizens under the Constitution and Civil Code²⁸. However, despite Syria's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2009, domestic disability legislation remains insufficiently aligned with accessibility and non-discrimination standards. In practice, inaccessible administrative procedures, legal systems and reconstruction processes continue to limit equal access of persons with disabilities to housing, land and property restitution, documentation and compensation mechanisms²⁹.

Livelihoods

Economic conditions inside Syria remain severely constrained. Livelihood opportunities are limited, markets are fragile, and access to land or productive assets is often restricted, including due to contamination and unresolved property issues. Economic reintegration is consistently identified as the primary challenge facing returnees, with many households reporting insufficient income to meet basic needs and continued dependence on assistance³⁰.

Overall, 14.3 million people in Syria remain in need of livelihoods and early recovery assistance in 2025, while 50% of internally displaced persons in northern Syria identified lack of livelihoods as the main factor preventing return to their areas of origin³¹.

Even where families return physically, they often find themselves unable to meet basic needs. Without access to livelihoods, return cannot be sustained and quickly becomes a cycle of dependency and deprivation.

These challenges are significantly more acute for persons with disabilities. Across Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, persons with disabilities face disproportionately high barriers to accessing livelihoods, including physical inaccessibility, discrimination, limited access to education and vocational training, and the absence of inclusive employment opportunities³².

In Syria, the economic environment is particularly exclusionary for persons with disabilities. Damage to infrastructure, lack of accessible transportation, and limited availability of rehabilitation services and assistive devices further restrict access to income-generating activities. Although Syrian Law No. 34 of 2004 introduced employment quotas for persons with disabilities,

²⁸ Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, 2012, Articles 15 and 33; Syrian Civil Code, Legislative Decree No. 84 of 1949

²⁹ Syrians for Truth and Justice, [Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Syria: Untapped Legislation and Enduring Challenges](#), 2024.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ UNHCR, [Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion Factsheet](#) Syria, November 2025

³² Humanity & Inclusion, *Leaving No One Behind: Making Persons with Disabilities Visible in Lebanon's Crisis*, 2026; UNICEF / Humanity & Inclusion disability inclusion data, 2025–2026.

implementation remains limited and existing legislation does not adequately guarantee inclusive workplaces or reasonable accommodation measures³³. Structural socio-economic barriers increase exclusion risks and expose many households, including persons with disabilities, to harmful coping strategies such as debt accumulation, child and high-risk or exploitative work³⁴. Many persons with disabilities rely on informal or unstable sources of income, if any, and face heightened risks of poverty and dependency.

In neighbouring countries, similar structural barriers persist. In Lebanon, where the economic crisis has severely reduced job opportunities overall, persons with disabilities—particularly refugees—face compounded exclusion from the labour market, with limited access to formal employment and social protection mechanisms³⁵. Recent assessments in Lebanon further indicate that economic vulnerability remains severe among Syrian refugee households, with 72% unable to meet essential needs without external assistance and widespread reliance on debt and humanitarian support to cover food, rent and healthcare costs³⁶.

In Jordan, while service systems are comparatively more structured, legal and administrative restrictions, combined with limited inclusive employment opportunities, continue to constrain access to livelihoods for refugees with disabilities. Despite relatively stronger institutional frameworks, many Syrian refugees continue to experience high levels of economic vulnerability and dependency on humanitarian assistance, with approximately 67% living below the poverty line in 2024 according to the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan. Persons with disabilities face barriers related to accessibility, mobility, discrimination, and access to inclusive livelihoods opportunities³⁷.

As a result, return to Syria does not resolve these challenges. On the contrary, it often exacerbates them. The lack of inclusive economic opportunities inside Syria, combined with weakened support systems, makes sustainable reintegration particularly difficult for persons with disabilities. Without targeted investment in inclusive livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion, return risks deepening existing inequalities and reinforcing long-term dependency for persons with disabilities.

“The land around us is still dangerous. People are afraid while farming, walking, or letting children move freely because explosive remnants of war are everywhere. Even reaching agricultural land feels uncertain. In places like ours, contamination is not something distant from daily life. It shapes where you walk, where you work, and whether you survive. I tried to ask organizations for support because I want to work again. I do not want pity. I just want a cow so I can produce milk and cheese and provide for my family with dignity.” A.O., Deir Ezzor

33 Syrians for Truth and Justice, [Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Syria: Untapped Legislation and Enduring Challenges](#), 2024

34 UNHCR, [Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion Factsheet](#), November 2025

35 Humanity & Inclusion, [Leaving No One Behind](#), 2026; World Bank / UN Lebanon crisis updates, 2025–2026.

36 Inter-Agency coordination Lebanon Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees, 2025

37 3RP Jordan 2026; UNHCR Jordan disability inclusion data, 2025–2026

Essential services: health, education and survival

The degradation of essential services continues to shape the feasibility of return.

Health systems in Syria remain under severe strain, with damaged infrastructure, shortages of medical staff, and limited availability of essential care. 12.8 million Syrians³⁸ continue to lack reliable access to healthcare³⁹.

These challenges are significantly more acute for persons with disabilities. Access to specialised services, including rehabilitation, assistive devices and psychosocial support, remains limited across Syria, particularly in areas of return. Long waiting times, high costs, lack of specialised personnel and damaged facilities further restrict access, leaving many without the support needed to recover, function independently or participate in economic and social life⁴⁰.

Recent assessments highlight that many children experience interrupted learning, overcrowded classrooms, documentation gaps and limited access to academic support programmes⁴¹. Returnee children coming from non-Arabic education systems also face additional challenges related to language of instruction and curriculum adaptation, while the limited availability of bridging, catch-up and inclusive education programmes further increases risks of school dropout and long-term exclusion, particularly for children with disabilities⁴².

In neighbouring countries, access to services is also increasingly constrained. In Lebanon, the collapse of the public health system and the broader economic crisis have drastically reduced access to healthcare, including for persons with disabilities, who face additional financial, and systemic barriers to accessing services⁴³. In Jordan, while health and rehabilitation services are more structured, refugees with disabilities continue to face barriers related to cost, transportation, documentation requirements and limited availability of care⁴⁴.

Education systems face similar constraints. Damage to schools, lack of staff, and overcrowding limit access, particularly in areas of return. This directly influences return decisions and can lead to interrupted education trajectories or increased child labour risks⁴⁵. For children with disabilities, access to education is even more restricted due to physical inaccessibility of schools, lack of inclusive education systems, and limited availability of specialised support. Across Syria and neighbouring countries, children with disabilities are significantly less likely to be enrolled in

38 OCHA, 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan

39 Ibid.

40 Humanity & Inclusion, Syria programme data; WHO/OCHA health access reports, 2025–2026.

41 UNICEF, Syria Humanitarian SitRep 2025

42 Syria Development Center, [Linguistic Reintegration Options for Returning Syrian Children](#), 2026

43 Humanity & Inclusion, *Leaving No One Behind: Making Persons with Disabilities Visible in Lebanon's Crisis*, 2026.

45 3RP Jordan 2026; UNHCR Jordan disability inclusion and health access data, 2025–2026.

45 UNICEF, Syria Humanitarian Situation Report, 2024–2025; UNICEF, Education for Children with Disabilities,

school, increasing risks of long-term exclusion and poverty⁴⁶. In 2026, an estimated 6.5 million people in Syria require education support, with persons with disabilities accounting for approximately 17% of those in need. Over 8,000 schools, approximately 30% of the country's total, are non-functional⁴⁷.

As a result, return to Syria does not restore access to essential services. On the contrary, it often leads to a deterioration in access, particularly for persons with disabilities, as support systems are weaker and less accessible than in host countries. Without sustained investment in inclusive, accessible and quality health, rehabilitation and education services, return cannot be considered safe, dignified or sustainable—especially for persons with disabilities.

“I have seven children, but only my youngest still goes to school because it is the only education we can still afford. My sons try to work whenever they can with neighbors or nearby families. Sometimes they collect scrap metal just to bring home a little money. As a mother, I worry every moment they leave the house.” S. H., returned to her village at the end of 2024, after years of displacement in Al Areesheh Camp.



Photo Caption: Contextual picture, daily life in Deir ez-Zor. The Al Medjool family play on the street outside their house which the family is trying to repair after it was destroyed. © T. Nicholson / HI

46 Ibid.

47 OCHA,

Disability inclusion: a structural gap in return frameworks

The armed conflict in Syria has led to a significant increase in the number of persons with disabilities, including many who have acquired disabilities as a result of injuries from explosive ordnance. Yet access to rehabilitation, assistive devices and inclusive services remains severely limited across Syria and in neighbouring countries. Physical inaccessibility, high costs and fragmented systems continue to restrict access, leaving many without the support needed to recover, function independently or participate in economic and social life. Evidence from comparable contexts shows that when victim assistance systems are insufficient, survivors are often left without sustained access to rehabilitation, psychosocial support and socio-economic inclusion⁴⁸. Without early and intentional investment in inclusive systems, return risks deepen exclusion and reinforcing structural inequalities, particularly for persons with disabilities.

Post-return conditions remain fragile. Returnees frequently encounter damaged housing, limited services, weak livelihoods and continued protection risks, while assistance reaches only a minority and often falls short of needs⁴⁹. Return does not mark the end of vulnerability; it often represents a transition into new forms of precarity. Current returns monitoring and information systems continue to provide limited disability-disaggregated analysis on returnees, particularly regarding accessibility of infrastructure, availability of inclusive services and protection risks faced by persons with disabilities in areas of return⁵⁰. This limit informed decision-making and risks overlooking critical rehabilitation, protection and inclusion of needs during reintegration processes⁵¹.

“What stays with me the most is the feeling that we returned too early, or maybe that nobody truly understood how dangerous these areas still are. We escaped war for years, but when we came back home, the war was and is still here, under the contaminated ground, waiting for us.”

A.S., Murrat Village

Recommendations

Humanity & Inclusion calls for the following:

- Governments and policymakers should refrain from promoting, facilitating, or funding returns to Syria until conditions exist for safe, voluntary, dignified, and sustainable return in accordance with international law and protection standards. Return-related policies must be based on independent, up-to-date, and evidence-based assessments demonstrating that returnees can safely access housing, livelihoods, essential services, documentation, and protection from violence, discrimination, arbitrary detention, and other rights violations. Safeguards should be established for persons with disabilities, older persons, children, and other individuals facing heightened protection risks, ensuring their meaningful participation in decisions affecting them and their equal access to assistance, services, and protection before, during, and after return.

48 UNIDIR, From casualties to care, 2024

49 MMC, Home, under strain 2026;

50 Syria is home on line platform

51 UNHCR, Regional Flash updates on Syria situation 2025-2026

- Donors should provide predictable, multi-year, flexible funding for mine action, victim assistance and inclusive recovery programming; integrate explosive ordnance contamination benchmarks into return and reconstruction frameworks; and condition recovery investments on clearance, accessibility and service availability.
- Donors and humanitarian actors should operationalise commitments under the Global Disability Summit by scaling up dedicated funding for disability-inclusive humanitarian and recovery programming.
- UN agencies and coordination platforms should: systematically integrate EO contamination, HLP risks and service accessibility into return assessments; establish minimum safety and service thresholds to guide return frameworks; and strengthen integrated approaches linking mine action, protection, health and livelihoods.
- Humanitarian and development actors should: scale integrated victim assistance systems linking emergency care, rehabilitation and socio-economic inclusion; strengthen coordination across sectors to address returnee needs holistically; and ensure disability inclusion is systematically embedded across all interventions.

Conclusions

Return cannot be treated as an administrative outcome or a political milestone. It is a complex process that depends on safety, rights and access to essential services. As long as explosive ordnance contamination persists, housing and property rights remain unresolved, livelihood opportunities are insufficient, and essential services are fragmented, return cannot be considered safe or sustainable for many Syrians, or framed as a political success. Without alignment between policy ambition and operational reality, return risks become another layer of crisis rather than a pathway out of it.

HI in Syria

HI has been a leading humanitarian actor in Syria for more than 13 years, deploying multi-sectoral interventions to respond comprehensively to the diverse and evolving needs of conflict-affected populations across the country. Since 2012, HI has progressively expanded its humanitarian access and operational capacity in Syria. In July 2016, HI developed an integrated Syria program, allowing for a unified and coherent strategy and methodology of intervention across the whole country. HI currently works and has been working for between 5 and 13 years, across several sectors including physical rehabilitation, stimulation therapy for malnourished children and children with developmental delays, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), protection, Inclusion Humanitarian Action (IHA), and Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA). Since 2025, HI has also expanded its work into disaster preparedness and inclusive education. HI operates through two modalities in Syria: direct intervention through its own teams across all sectors, and indirect intervention, particularly in health, through partnerships with rehabilitation centers and hospitals. HI also works closely with local and international partners across health, preparedness, inclusive

education, IHA, and HMA programming. In parallel, HI leads evidence-based advocacy efforts on disability inclusion, victim assistance, protection of civilians, inclusive humanitarian action, and the humanitarian impact of explosive ordnance and explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA), while actively contributing to humanitarian coordination mechanisms and policy dialogue at national and international levels.

HI in Jordan

HI has been responding to the Syrian crisis in Jordan since 2012. The programme started by supporting refugees with the provision of rehabilitation services, including assistive technology, prosthetics and orthotics. In 2014, the programme shifted to system strengthening, building the capacities of local actors and collaborating with the Ministry of Health on the development and implementation of the National Rehabilitation Strategy.

Today, HI programmes take a rights-based approach to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in Jordan, working across health (rehabilitation and early childhood development), economic inclusion, inclusive education and social protection. HI focuses on system strengthening at national and local levels, engaging with the Jordanian civil society and building the capacities of grassroots organisations, while engaging with the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and key ministries at policy level. HI has continued promoting equitable access to services for refugees and vulnerable Jordanians, especially persons with disabilities, through awareness-raising, identification and referrals, technical and targeted support, in collaboration with key stakeholders from public services and the civil society.

HI in Lebanon

Since 1992, Humanity & Inclusion (HI) has been working in Lebanon to promote the inclusion and protection of vulnerable populations, particularly persons with disabilities. Operating across Beirut, Mount Lebanon, North Lebanon, Bekaa, and South Lebanon, HI focuses on Physical and Functional Rehabilitation, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), Inclusive Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), Inclusive Humanitarian Action, Humanitarian Mine Action, and Disability Inclusion.

HI works closely with national authorities, including the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), local organizations, and communities to strengthen systems and improve access to inclusive services. The organization has played a key role in responding to major emergencies in Lebanon, including the war 2006, Syrian refugee crisis, the Beirut Port explosion, and recent conflict-related displacement.

Since March 2026, HI has been implementing its emergency response strategy to provide timely and inclusive support to crisis-affected populations, including rehabilitation, MHPSS, SRH services, and explosive ordnance risk education (EORE). Today, HI Lebanon employs approximately 51 staff members and collaborates with four local partners to deliver humanitarian and development interventions across the country.

For further information, kindly contact:

Mara BERNASCONI, Regional Advocacy & Policy Manager m.bernasconi@hi.org