



# SITUATION REPORT ON VOLUNTARY RETURN TO SYRIA



[ibc.org.tr](http://ibc.org.tr)



# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Scope and Purpose:

As of December 8, 2024, with the collapse of Baas regime in Syria, an urgent and comprehensive approach is needed to address the return process of millions of Syrian refugees. This process requires tackling multifaceted challenges such as security, basic needs, housing, documentation, and financial support. IBC has closely monitored activities at border crossings and engaged with all stakeholders. Based on the findings and feedback gathered, a situation report has been prepared to facilitate a smooth voluntary return process.

## 2. GENERAL SITUATION

On December 8, 2024, following the confirmation of news that Bashar al-Assad had fled the country, celebrations began among Syrian refugees. Celebrations were observed across many provinces in Turkey. While the social tension remained low during these events, in provinces such as Kayseri and Ankara (Altındağ) that had previously experienced social unrest, celebrations were held under police supervision. Celebrations in the refugee container camps in the earthquake-affected areas were also observed.<sup>1</sup> In border and nearby provinces—Hatay, Adana, Gaziantep, Adiyaman, Şanlıurfa—celebrations continued.



[1] Kaynak: [https://www.ntv.com.tr/galeri/turkiye/turkiyedeki-suriyelilerden-kutlama-artik-ozguruz-herkes-vataninadonsun,piO4UwNFpEaqS7B33LzJZg/jDK95sHh\\_E6lOryS6HFiyA](https://www.ntv.com.tr/galeri/turkiye/turkiyedeki-suriyelilerden-kutlama-artik-ozguruz-herkes-vataninadonsun,piO4UwNFpEaqS7B33LzJZg/jDK95sHh_E6lOryS6HFiyA)





## Türkiye's Stance on Migration Policies

Although the Directorate General of Migration Management under the Ministry of Interior has not issued an official statement regarding the future status of Syrian refugees, statements made by government officials indicate that Turkey supports the voluntary return of Syrian refugees:

Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan: "Turkey will continue to fulfill its responsibilities to ensure Syria's territorial integrity, political unity, prosperity, security, and stability. We will maintain our efforts to facilitate the safe and voluntary return of Syrians and contribute to the country's reconstruction."

## IBC's Field Work



[2] Kaynak: <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/gundem/disisleri-bakani-hakan-fidandan-suriye-aciklamasi-guvenli-geri-donus-icin-calisacagiz-7254221>

[3] Kaynak: [https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/ankaradan-suriye-aciklamalari,IODmG7z-MkKdsEhUpQ\\_bMQ](https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/ankaradan-suriye-aciklamalari,IODmG7z-MkKdsEhUpQ_bMQ)



Interviews were conducted with approximately 200 community leaders, local administrators, and refugees. Initial insights from focus group discussions revealed the following:

- Community leaders advised restraint during celebrations to avoid provoking local communities.
- Refugees under temporary protection displayed a high motivation to return, with initial crowds at border crossings predominantly comprising individuals from Aleppo. Refugees from Homs and surrounding areas sought information about their houses, lands, and assets.
- Most camp residents plan to spend the winter in current conditions and decide based on the feedback from the first returnees.
- Syrian refugees with Turkish citizenship showed lower motivation for voluntary return compared to those under temporary protection. Many of these citizens do not plan to return to Syria in the near future.
- Widespread concerns exist about sudden deportations. A majority seek gradual and secure return measures.
- Young people and children are more apprehensive about returning, and finding life in Turkey is more appealing.
- Women expressed significant concerns about gender-based security risks during migration.
- Infrastructure deficiencies and uncertainties regarding the establishment of a new governance system in Syria persist but are not seen as major obstacles to return.
- Communities were warned about potential fraud during the return process.
- Some communities voiced concerns over increasing pressure from local communities regarding return expectations.





Refugees who seek voluntary return began their journeys to border crossings, with notable crowds observed at Kilis Öncüpinar, Gaziantep Karkamış, and Hatay Cilvegözü crossings. Daily crossings are expected to rise, and approximately 80% of those queuing at the border are young men.

### Demographics of family members seeking voluntary return include:

- 60% women and children,
- 20% elderly and disabled,
- 20% young men.
- Among children, malnutrition is a prevalent concern, while women report incidents of violence.<sup>4</sup>



[4] Kaynak:[Bu verilere kanaat önderleri ve sınır kapılarında gönüllü geri dönüş için bekleyen mültecilerle yapılan görüşmeler sonucu ulaşılmıştır.



# SECURITY SITUATION

## Humanitarian Risks:

Prolonged waiting times during border crossings severely restrict access to basic needs. Gendarmerie forces established a checkpoint 5 km from the border crossing to manage congestion, directing refugees deemed eligible for crossing to the border crossing. Each crossing sees over 1,000 individuals daily, with numbers expected to increase.

## Health Risks:

Overcrowded conditions increase the risk of infectious diseases.

## Violence and Exploitation:

Women and children are particularly vulnerable during border crossings, facing heightened risks of abuse and violence. These groups face severe challenges and threats, with an increased likelihood of human rights violations, including exploitation and mistreatment.





# 3. NEEDS ANALYSIS

## Basic Needs:

It was observed that those who want to return to Syria have basic needs support such as transportation, shelter, food, water, health, etc. while waiting at the border crossings in Türkiye.

## Transportation:

It is anticipated that the necessity for transportation assistance for Syrians residing in regions situated at a considerable distance from the border will intensify in the forthcoming days. The provision of assistance in this area is expected to facilitate the process of voluntary return.

## Shelter:

The preliminary contact with refugees situated at the border crossing has indicated that the number of individuals arriving from external locations is relatively considerable. In the course of interviews with the Provincial Directorates of Migration, it became evident that preliminary arrangements have been made for Syrians arriving from outside the city to utilize school facilities for accommodation purposes. Since this information has not yet reached the people waiting at the border crossing, the Syrians we interviewed intend to remain in open areas close to the gates. Especially during the winter months and adverse weather conditions, the shortage of shelter may become even more acute.

## Food:

Those waiting in queues for voluntary return have difficulty accessing basic food, as they are reluctant to move for fear of losing their place in the queue. As border crossings are often located far from water sources, there are serious problems in the supply of drinking water. Due to the high demand for water, prices at kiosks close to border gates have been observed to be up to 5-6 times higher than normal. This situation makes it even more difficult for refugees experiencing economic difficulties to access water. Although some individuals and aid organizations are already providing partial support, the amount of water available is far from meeting the growing population density.

## Health Services:

Preliminary interviews with Provincial Directorates of Migration have identified a potential risk of increased health problems, particularly among vulnerable groups such as women, children and the elderly, due to food safety and hygiene issues. The current level of healthcare provision at border crossings is inadequate to meet the high demand in the region. The number of health personnel available to provide basic health interventions is limited. Particularly vulnerable groups, such as pregnant women, children and the elderly, are at risk of experiencing more difficulties in accessing medical attention. These groups may face health risks due to gaps in health services.



# 4. COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

## Short-Term Strategies:

Currently, an average congestion level of 900-1200 people is observed at the border crossings. The distant location of the area and the lack of access to basic needs such as food, shelter, and potable water have created an urgent need for the provision of sandwiches, drinking water, and blankets, especially given the harsh winter conditions. Potable water can be supplied from nearby cities using high-capacity tankers. A high-capacity food truck operated by IBC could be mobilized for this purpose. Ensuring safe and accessible hygiene facilities is critical, particularly for women, children, and the elderly, who are more vulnerable to these conditions. In terms of health measures, medicine, and emergency response teams should be allocated.

## Medium- and Long-Term Strategies:

Developing preventive mechanisms to address potential congestion and chaos in the long term is critical to mitigating challenges in the process. Beyond immediate food aid, enhancing water and food logistics at locations near border crossings is essential. Increasing water and food logistics at border crossing locations after emergency food support will address the problem of selling products above the market price at points observed in the border crossing region, thus facilitating access to basic needs. Health support is identified as a significant long-term requirement due to the potential for deprivation, particularly in preventing outbreaks of infectious diseases and providing care for individuals with chronic illnesses. Health screenings for returning populations should be conducted, and vaccination campaigns should be prioritized, especially for children and the elderly. Given the anticipated increase in needs in the coming days, maintaining flexible operational capacity and regularly replenishing stocks is extremely important.

Humanitarian organizations should work closely with local and international actors. Leveraging the capacity of local actors and communities will accelerate the return process.

