



On The Latest Developments In Syria and Voluntary Return

WHAT DO SYRIANS THINK - 1

“SYRIAN WOMEN ”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the developments in Syria on 08.12.2024, the report series titled “*What Do Syrians Think?*” was designed to understand and convey the perspectives of Syrians regarding the current situation in Syria and voluntary return, identify their needs and potential problems, and inform and mobilize the relevant stakeholders, particularly civil society organizations and public institutions. The first report in this series, *What Do Syrians Think -1: Syrian Women*, is now presented to the public. This report provides an analysis of recent developments in Syria and voluntary return, with a particular focus on Sultanbeyli. It brings together insights from discussions with Syrian women and the results of surveys conducted with voluntary participants, supplemented by recommendations.

Although Syrian women emotionally described the developments in Syria on 08.12.2024 as “promising”, their views on the voluntary return are shaped by uncertainty, anxiety, and various social dynamics. When assessing the possibility of return -whether to Syria or remaining in Türkiye- Syrian women prioritize factors such as security conditions, economic stability, living standards, and their children’s education. While 67% of participants stated that they do not currently favor voluntary return, 63% also expressed the belief that they would eventually return. This suggests that return decisions are influenced by both individual and societal pressures, and highlights that although many women are not entirely willing to return, they largely anticipate doing so in the future.

Participants reported facing severe challenges in Türkiye due to economic hardships, rising rental costs, and social pressures. Misinformation and inconsistencies regarding the developments in Syria and inconsistencies in the implementation of procedures in Türkiye exacerbate security concerns. Additionally, discrimination in schools, hospitals, and broader social environments negatively impacts the psychological well-being of both adults and children. While many fear returning to Syria due to its unstable conditions and the prospect of having to rebuild their lives from scratch, the lack of security and stability in Türkiye leaves them feeling trapped and vulnerable. Following the recent developments in Syria, there is a growing perception among Turkish society that Syrians will rapidly return, which in turn exerts additional pressure on them. Many Syrians fear that these societal expectations will escalate, further intensifying their sense of insecurity. Key concerns include children’s education and future prospects, legal status, social cohesion, and the risk of forced return. Many individuals struggle with the feeling of being caught between two countries and uncertainty about their future. Moreover, some Syrian women express a sense of belonging to both Türkiye and Syria, unwilling to sever their ties with either.

These findings underscore the need for a multidimensional approach to understanding and addressing Syrian women’s decisions regarding return.

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing war in Syria, which began in 2011, has forced a significant portion of the Syrian population to migrate to various countries. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of 2024, more than 6.8 million Syrians are refugees worldwide. A substantial number of them reside in neighboring countries, particularly Türkiye, which has hosted the world's largest refugee population. While Türkiye previously accommodated approximately 3.5 million Syrian refugees, the current number stands at 2.8 million. This long-discussed issue has once again gained prominence following the developments in Syria on 08.12.2024.

On this date, significant political and military changes unfolded in Syria, marking a stark departure from the 14-year-long conflict. The collapse of the Ba'ath regime and the subsequent efforts to establish a new government have profoundly impacted all those affected by the conflict, particularly internally and externally displaced Syrians. This shift has sparked expectations for Syria's stabilization and has reignited debates on *voluntary return*, given the large number of Syrians living outside the country. Since 08.12.2024, national and international actors have issued numerous statements regarding the voluntary return of Syrians and the evolving conditions in Syria.

UNHCR continues to provide regional updates on mobility trends both within Syria and in host countries. According to the latest data, as of 15.01.2025, more than 195.000 Syrians have returned to Syria, with the majority of returns reportedly from Türkiye¹. Views on voluntary return vary widely among Syrians. Official statements have also been made by both the Turkish government and the newly formed Syrian administration. According to Türkiye's Ministry of Interior, as of 12.01.2025, 52.622 Syrians have voluntarily returned from Türkiye to Syria². Additionally, in a report covering the period from 09.12.2024 to 23.12.2024, it was noted that the number of adult men returning voluntarily was higher than that of adult women³.

Across all national and international discussions, the importance of ensuring that Syrian returns are *voluntary, safe, dignified, and orderly* is frequently emphasized. This highlights the necessity of understanding the perspectives and sentiments of Syrians in different host countries and incorporating their views into policy-making processes.

In response to these developments, the report series titled *What Do Syrians Think?* is launched to examine Syrians' perspectives on the situation in Syria and voluntary return, identify their needs and potential challenges, and inform and mobilize relevant stakeholders, particularly civil society organizations and public institutions. The first report in this series *What Do Syrians Think -I: Syrian Women* is now publicly available. This report provides an analysis of recent developments in Syria and voluntary return with a specific focus on Sultanbeyli. It synthesizes insights from

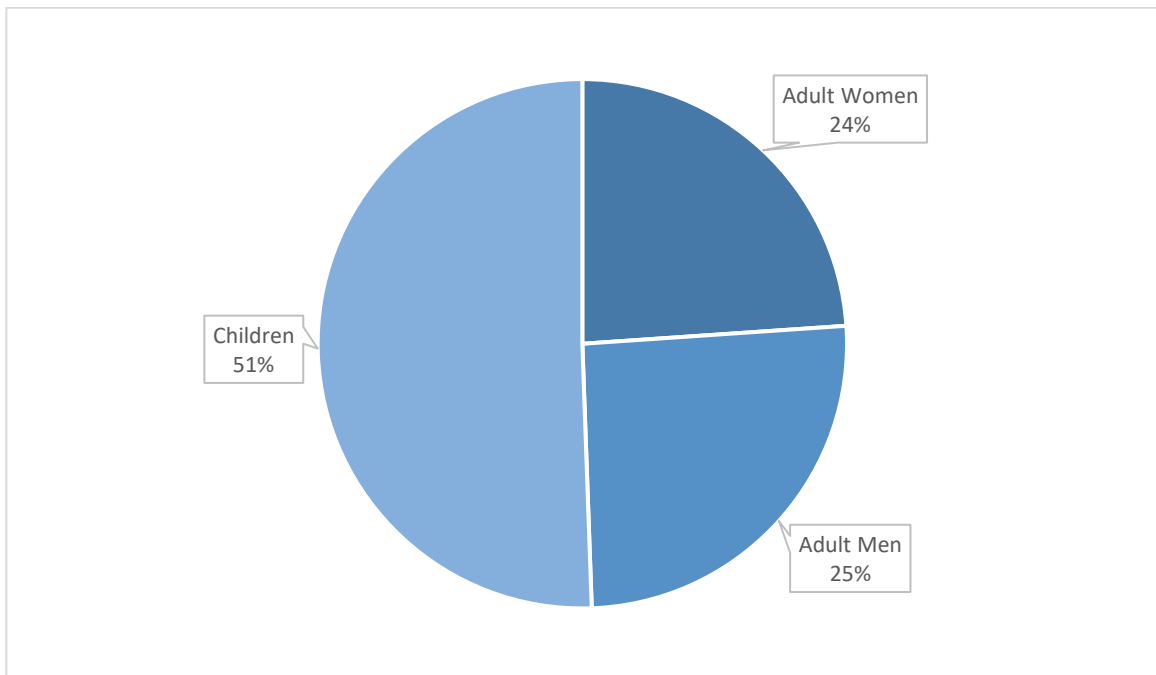
¹ <https://reporting.unhcr.org/syria-situation-crisis-regional-flash-update-10>

² <https://goc.gov.tr/icisleri-bakani-ali-yerlikaya-bir-ayda-52-bin-622-suriyeli-gonullu-guvenli-onurlu-ve-duzenli-geri-donus-yapti>

³ <https://www.goc.gov.tr/icisleri-bakani-ali-yerlikaya-gonullu-geri-donus-islemlerinde-randevu-sistemi-devreye-alindi-sinir-kapilarinda-724-calisma-esasina-gecildi>

discussions with Syrian women and the findings of surveys conducted with voluntary participants, offering recommendations.

According to the latest data from Türkiye's Directorate of Migration Management, women constitute 48% of the 2.8 million Syrians currently in the country. Of this female population, 49% are adults, meaning Syrian adult women comprise 24% of the total Syrian population in Türkiye. Understanding Syrian women's perspectives on developments in Syria and voluntary return is crucial for planning future processes and shaping policies that address their specific concerns and needs.



Graphic 1: Syrian Population in Türkiye

A. OBJECTIVE AND METHOD

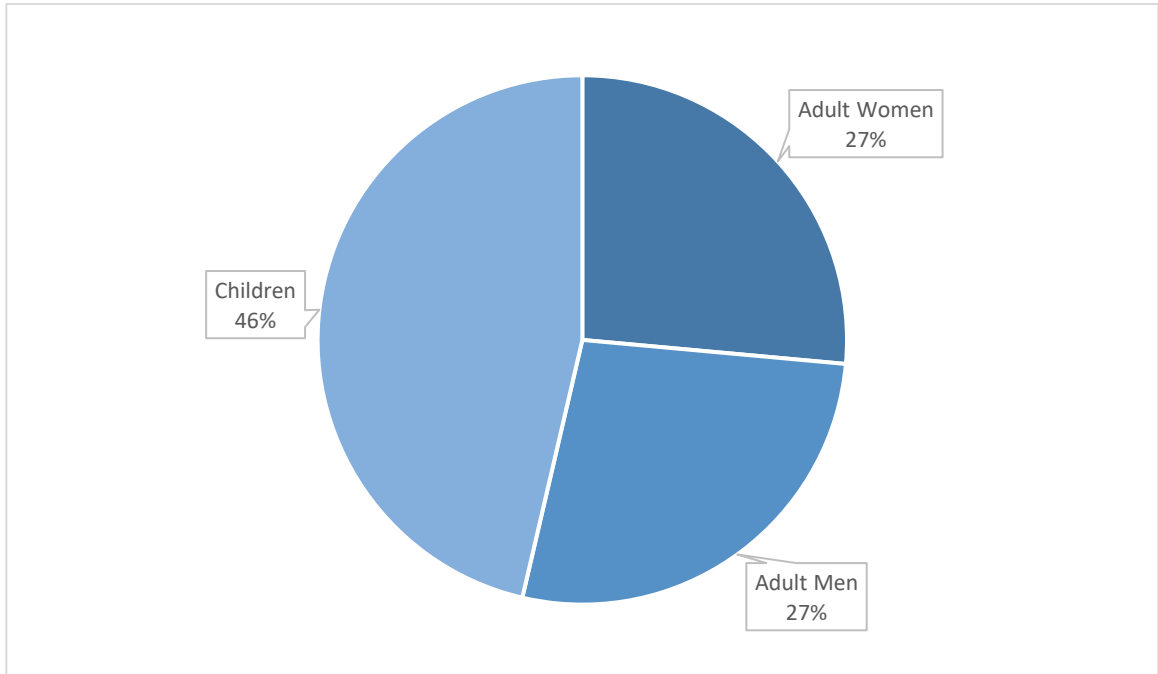
The *What Do Syrians Think?* report series was launched to understand and communicate Syrians' perspectives on the evolving situation in Syria and the debate surrounding voluntary return following the developments on 08.12.2024. The series aims to identify needs and potential challenges while informing and mobilizing relevant stakeholders, particularly civil society organizations and public institutions.

The developments of 08.12.2024 created a widespread perception that Syria has become a safer and more livable place, bringing the issue of Syrians' return to the forefront of public discourse. Media coverage frequently highlights news and statistics on return, shaping public perceptions. Meanwhile, national and international institutions continue to emphasize that any return process must be *safe, voluntary, and dignified*. Given these dynamics, it is crucial to amplify the voices of Syrians who are the primary actors in this process to ensure that public perception aligns with reality, prevent potential harm to social cohesion, and establish the necessary conditions for a responsible return framework.

Understanding, exploring, and making visible the feelings and thoughts of Syrians is essential for the development of sustainable policies. Recognizing this importance, this study was conducted to document Syrians' perspectives in the wake of recent developments in Syria and to contribute to a *safe, voluntary, and dignified* return process through informed recommendations.

Istanbul hosts the largest Syrian population in Türkiye, with 503.423 registered individuals. Sultanbeyli, located on Istanbul's Anatolian side, is the district with the highest concentration of Syrians. In such a densely populated area, assessing Syrians' views on the current situation in Syria and the possibility of return provides valuable insights into broader public sentiment. According to SUKOM⁴ records, Sultanbeyli is home to 4.643 Syrian families, totaling 21.774 individuals of whom adult women constitute 27%.

⁴ SUKOM is the online database of Refugees Association. Every beneficiary who applies and/or receives services from Refugees Association is registered in this database.



Graphic 2: Syrian Population in Sultanbeyli

This report aims to present the views and concerns of Syrian women in Sultanbeyli regarding the recent developments in Syria and the issue of voluntary return. The findings are accompanied by recommendations intended to contribute to policy-making processes at both local and international levels.

Given the sensitivity of this issue, the Refugees Association deliberately avoided structured activities focused solely on return, as conducting direct research on voluntary return could have unintended negative effects on participants. Instead, opinions on the situation in Syria and voluntary return were recorded and analyzed *with participants' consent* during ongoing activities. If participants expressed their views on these issues during group discussions, their responses were documented. Additionally, to collect quantitative data, a short online survey was designed using the Mentimeter program and shared with volunteers.

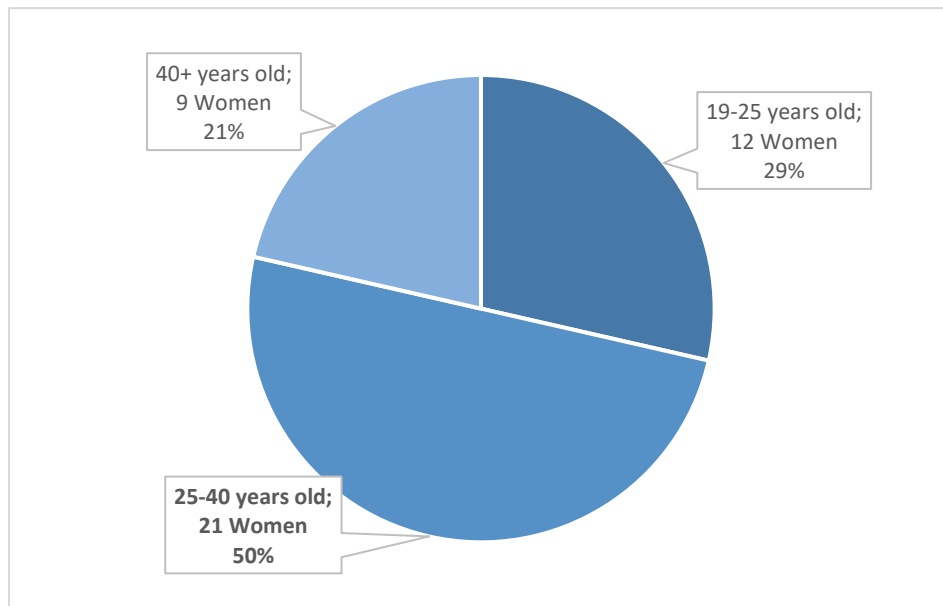
This report is based on the findings from the *Mother-Baby Health Project Satisfaction Assessment Meeting*, which is regularly organized by the Refugees Association. Since 2018, the *Mother-Baby Health Project* has been providing early childhood services, including educational visits to households during pregnancy, focusing on maternal mental health and baby care. On 10.01.2025, during a satisfaction assessment meeting held at the Sultanbeyli Community Center with participants in this project, women also shared their thoughts on life in Türkiye voluntary return in light of recent developments in Syria. These insights were documented in meeting notes. Additionally, an online survey was conducted, with the link shared among women who volunteered to participate. Thus, the findings presented in this report were gathered through two mechanisms:

	Mechanism	Date	Place	Number of Participants
1	Meeting with Syrian women	10.01.2025	Sultanbeyli Community Center	42 women
2	Online survey with Syrian women	10.01.2025 – 12.01.2025	Mentimeter	27 women

The meeting notes and survey results were synthesized to draw conclusions, and the report was supplemented with recommendations based on these findings.

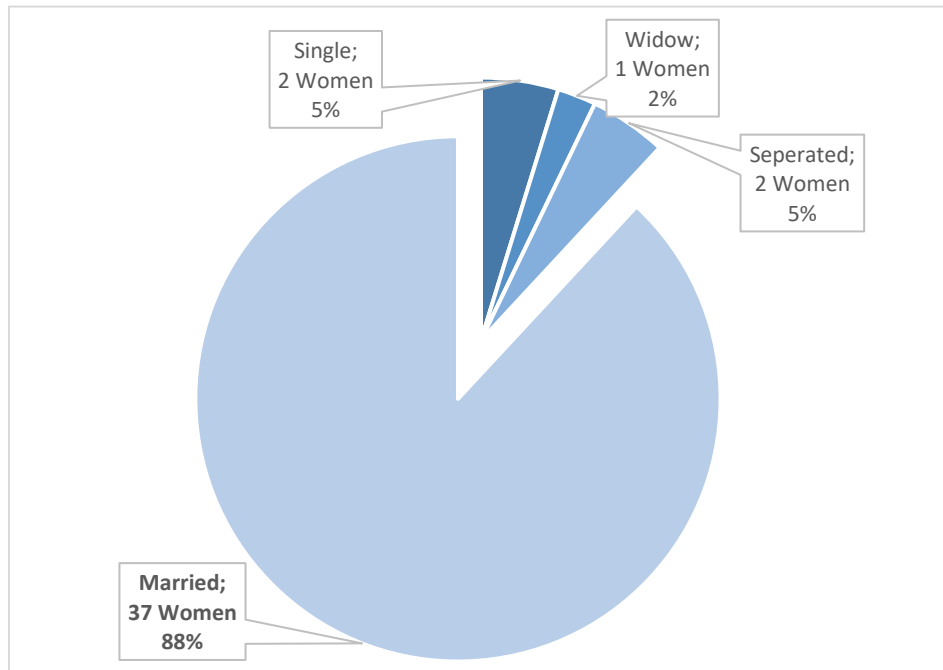
B. PARTICIPANT PROFILE

The meeting was attended by 42 Syrian women between the ages of 19 and 57, all residing in Sultanbeyli. Half of the participants were between the ages of 25 and 40.



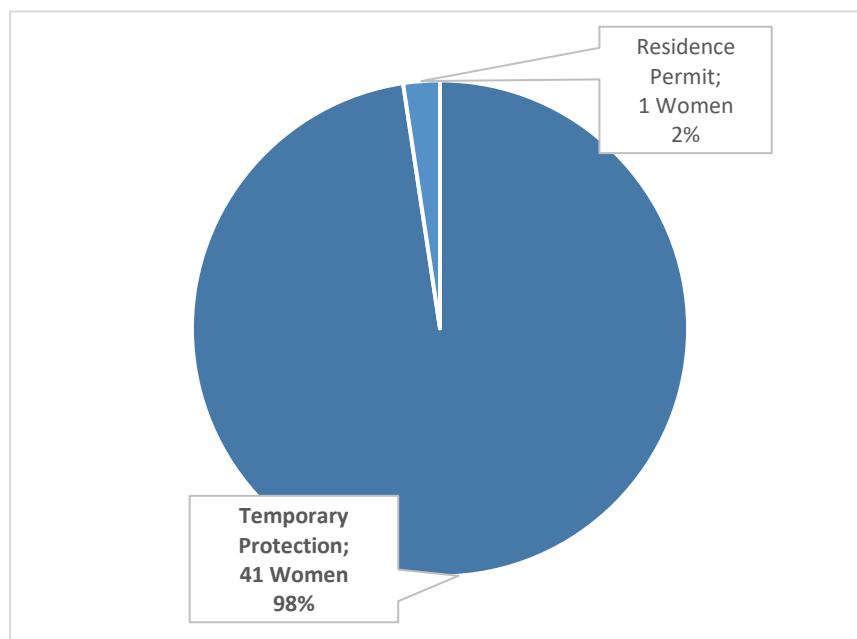
Graphic 3: Participants' Age Distribution

The participants in this study were predominantly married women, though there were also single, widowed, and separated individuals.



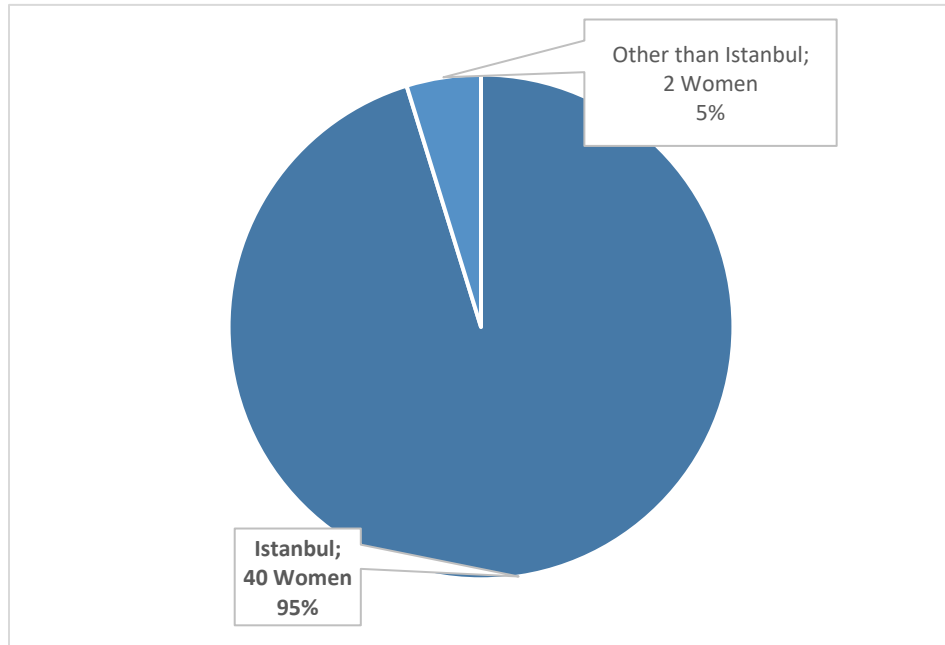
Graphic 4: Participants' Marital Status

All participants have a legal right to stay in Türkiye. The vast majority **hold temporary protection identity cards**, with only one participant having a *residence permit*.



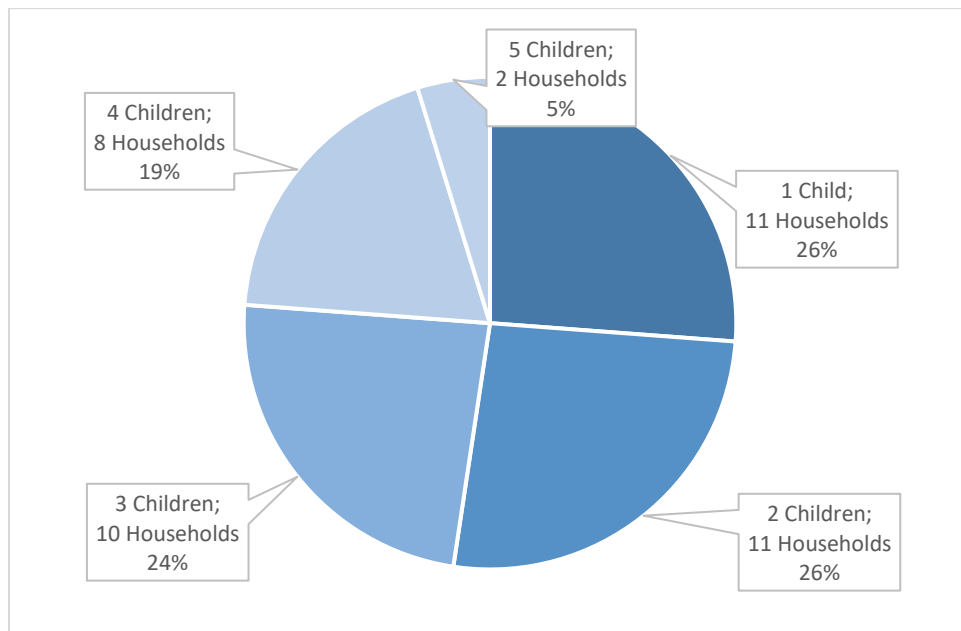
Graphic 5: Participants' Legal Status

Most are **registered in Istanbul**, while two participants are officially registered in other cities but currently reside in Istanbul.



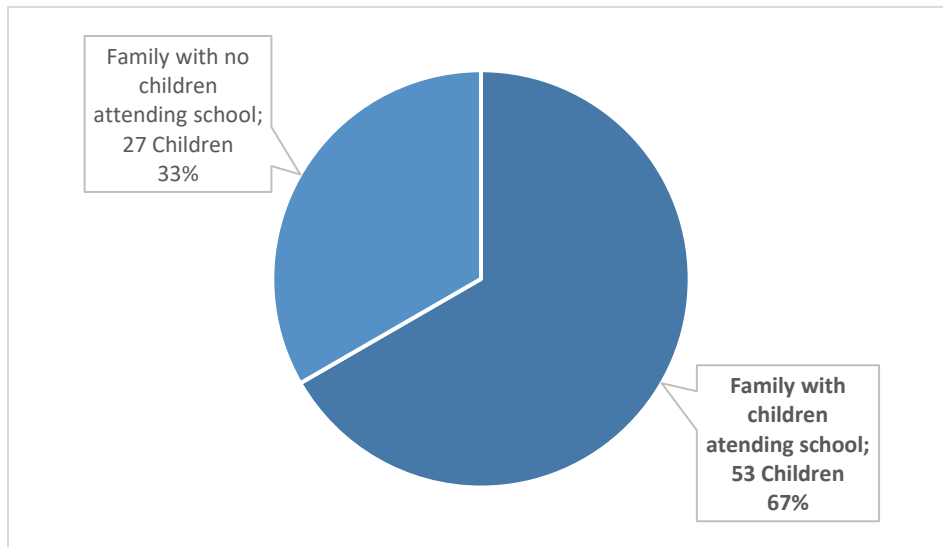
Graphic 6: Participants' Registration City

While not all participants are mothers, each has **at least one child** in their household.

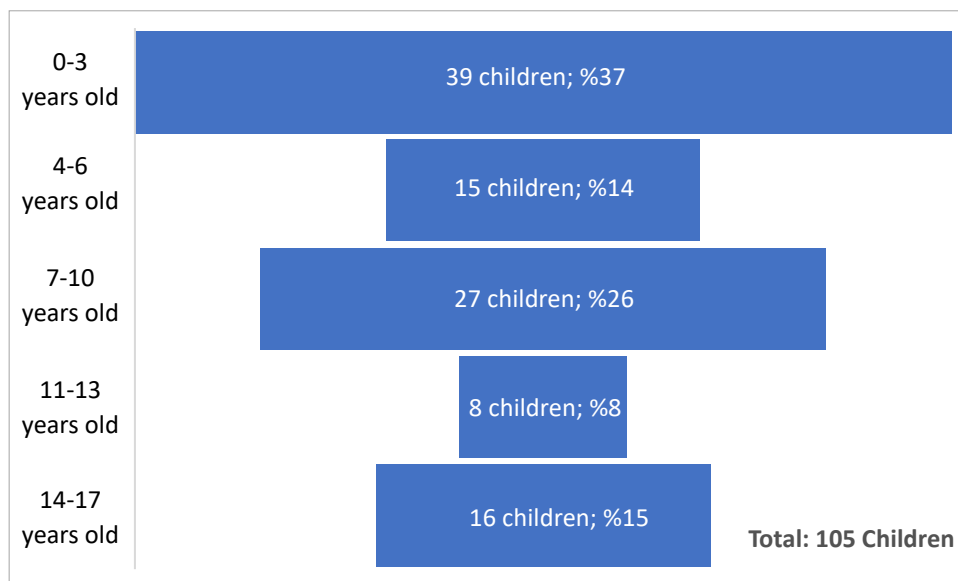


Graphic 7: Number of children in households

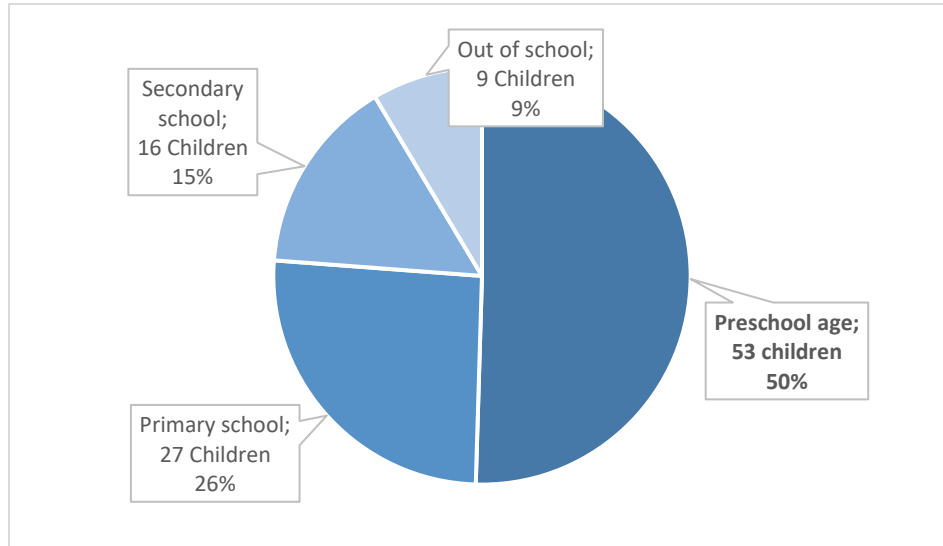
In total, there are 105 children in the participants' households. Half of these children are of **preschool age**, while 41% are enrolled in primary or secondary school. Additionally, 67% of families have at least one **child currently attending school**.



Graphic 8: Family with Children Attending School



Graphic 9: Children's Age Distribution



Graphic 10: Children's Education Status

C. FINDINGS

The meeting notes, reflecting the views of Syrian women living in Sultanbeyli on recent developments in Syria and the prospect of returning, along with the findings from the survey conducted with volunteer participants, are presented below.

I. Meeting Notes

The meeting notes, reflecting the views of Syrian women living in Sultanbeyli on recent developments in Syria and the prospect of returning, along with the findings from the survey conducted with volunteer participants, are presented below. Discussions revealed that Syrian women's perspectives on the situation in Syria primarily revolve around *anxiety and confusion*, *social pressures*, and *future plans and expectations*. Concerns about the continuity of their legal status in Türkiye, their children's education, and the social and economic pressures they face emerged as key issues. Notably, there is no single, unified stance among Syrian women regarding voluntary return. Instead, their attitudes are largely shaped by a preference to *maintain their current situation* or adopt a *wait-and-see approach*.

a. Anxiety and Confusion

One of the primary factors contributing to uncertainty and anxiety among participants is **misinformation and inconsistencies**. Misinformation and contradictory reports circulating through various channels make it difficult for individuals to access reliable information. As a result, many struggle to make informed decisions about their future.

“We hear different things every day, stuff like ‘you’ll be sent back’ or ‘you have six months left.’ We just want to know the truth. I’ve been in Türkiye for about 11 years, we have a home, we pay rent, we’re happy here. We just want real news. There’s so much talk everywhere, and we don’t know who to believe.”

“They’re saying that once schools close for vacation, no more children will be registered. What are we supposed to do?”

“We’ve heard that there will be an amnesty for Syrians in prison and that they’ll be sent back to Syria. Is that true?”

“People are saying that those who go to Syria with travel permission will be forced to stay there after six months.”

“We’ve heard that if someone visits Syria three times, they won’t be allowed back in Türkiye.”

Misinformation also creates opportunities for malicious actors to exploit people’s confusion and uncertainty for financial gain.

“There are people saying, ‘I can help you go back to Syria’ and asking for money. But we’re supposed to go through the official link provided by the state, right?”

Beyond misinformation, the gap between official statements and what happens in practice, along with **the lack of clear and standardized procedures**, further fuels insecurity and anxiety.

“When I applied at the Directorate of Migration Management to go to Syria, they told me, ‘If you leave, you can’t come back.’ When we showed them the news reports, they didn’t accept it. They kept insisting that after three visits, we wouldn’t be allowed back into Türkiye.”

“My husband wants to travel back and forth. Should I be worried? Should I tell him it’s safe to go?”

“Can you guarantee anything? I’ve been here for 13 years. Do I even still have a home there?”

“I’m just asking, I don’t want to go.”

Participants are deeply concerned about Türkiye’s policies toward Syrians following recent developments in Syria, particularly the future of their temporary protection status. Their main fear is not being able to sustain their current lives and facing yet another forced change.

“When will temporary protection be removed?”

“Is there a possibility of being sent back?”

“I don't feel safe even now, in case temporary protection is removed.”

“I don't know what we'll do if they take away temporary protection.”

The fact that participants have children and the possibility of their children not being able to continue their education increases their sensitivity to return and loss of legal status. The lack of foresight in **ensuring the sustainability of children's education** caused confusion and anxiety among participants.

“They say children will stop enrolling after school closes for the holidays. What are we going to do?”

“Children are studying here, both young children and university students. If we go to Syria, they won't be able to continue their education. We don't want to leave, but they say we won't be allowed to stay after three years. I have two kids in university.”

“My children are in school. I don't want to go back to Syria.”

Another significant concern regarding children is the **disconnect between their future aspirations and those of their families**. Many children and their parents have differing perspectives on voluntary return and life in Syria. This misalignment is expected to cause family conflicts in the future, and participants already expressed concern about this issue.

“The children don't want to return. This is a big problem.”

“When my youngest son heard that Damascus had fallen, he started crying, saying he didn't want to go. My daughter tells me, ‘If you want to go, go. I don't want to.’”

Beyond concerns about children, participants also raised questions about the **situation of individuals and groups living under different conditions in society**.

“Will people in prison be sent back?”

The living conditions in Syria, the uncertainty of whether individuals or their families still have property there, and the prospect of having to start over from scratch under these circumstances all contribute to heightened anxiety.

“If we go back now, we'll have to start from scratch. We'll be tenants in our own country, just like we are here. In some parts of Syria, there isn't even electricity or water, and we might not be able to find work. There aren't even houses for rent, we don't have our own home anymore.”

b. Social Pressures

Participants strongly emphasized the social and economic pressures they face in their daily lives. **Economic pressures** were the primary concern, particularly the irregular and steep increases in rent. Many described rent hikes as a significant source of stress. Additionally, participants noted that developments in the labor market also contribute to these pressures.

“The biggest problem for Syrians in Türkiye is the rent.”

“We have recently started facing pressure regarding rent, it increases every year. We used to pay 1,800 TL, now we’re paying 10,000.”

“We might not pay much attention to people’s attitudes at school, in hospitals, or on the street, but landlords constantly raise the rent and pressure us. I wish there was a set percentage for increases, but there isn’t. They use this as a way to push us out.”

“Employers tell job seekers, ‘Syria has been liberated, go work there,’ and they refuse to hire them.”

Beyond economic pressures, Syrian women shared instances of **social exclusion and discrimination in public spaces** such as transportation, healthcare facilities, and government institutions, particularly following the developments of 08.12.2024.

“Every time I go to the hospital, people complain. I was in hospital before coming here, and even there, they asked me, ‘When are you leaving?’ It’s not the hospital staff, it’s the citizens.”

“When I got on the bus, a woman realized I was Syrian and kept talking to me about it until I finally said, ‘I’ll be leaving in a month.’ Even then, she replied, ‘Why not now?’ I switched seats to avoid the conversation, but she followed me. I felt awful. I don’t have a home there; I can’t leave right now anyway.”

Participants reported experiencing not only social pressure from citizens but also **institutional pressure from civil servants**. The way procedures are implemented, and the communication style of government employees were cited as particularly difficult to endure.

“Public institutions will wear us down. Even if people on the street don’t, the institutions will.”

“We try to ignore the comments from outsiders, but in public institutions, especially the Directorate of Migration Management, civil servants constantly yell at us, throw insults, and make us feel unwanted.”

Syrian women also highlighted the pressure their children face in **schools**, where misinformation about return is spread by students, parents, and even teachers. This pressure is not limited to schools, children also face similar treatment in streets and parks.

“This happens even in schools. Students keep saying these things. My daughter was beaten twice. Even when I went to complain, the teachers behaved badly toward me.”

“Teachers told my children they wouldn’t be allowed to enroll in school next year. These are primary school children. They are under constant pressure at school, and they’re scared. They don’t even want to go outside. Even we, as adults, are afraid.”

“Even in parks, children pressure each other, saying, ‘When are you going to Syria? Assad is gone, and so are you.’”

Syrian women also demonstrated awareness of misinformation and hate speech targeting them on **social media**.

“We know they’re fighting with us on social media.”

c. Future Plans and Expectations

Syrian women’s future plans are closely tied to conditions in both Türkiye and Syria. Their expectations center on their legal status in Türkiye and the potential improvement of living conditions in Syria.

Participants expressed varying perspectives on returning to Syria, with **social and economic stability** being key determinants in shaping their decisions.

“We would return to Syria for stability; our fate here is uncertain.”

“I will return if the situation in Syria improves.”

“We plan to return if Syria becomes Dubai.”

However, improved living conditions in Syria alone do not necessarily increase the willingness to return for all participants. **Social ties** and personal circumstances also play a significant role.

“We will not leave unless they force us out.”

“I will not return even if things get better; we have relatives here and there..”

Property ownership in Syria emerged as an important factor influencing voluntary return decisions. Women highlighted that those who own homes in Syria may be more inclined to return. Additionally, concerns about whether **support** would be available to meet their needs **during the return process** remain an important issue.

“I don’t think about returning to Syria because there’s no real difference between here and there—I pay rent here, and we don’t own a home there.”

“People who have a house in Syria may want to return.”

“Is there any support for returning to Syria?”

Beyond voluntary return, Syrian women seek information about Türkiye’s **broader migration policies**. The education of their children, in particular, raises concerns about the feasibility of returning and strengthens expectations for long-term stability and integration in Türkiye.

“Children make it difficult for me to return.”

“Most of my acquaintances are considering returning after the school year ends.”

“Can’t at least the children studying here be granted citizenship?”

For many women, the decision is not solely about returning to Syria or remaining in Türkiye. Some feel a deep connection to both countries, viewing Türkiye as a **second homeland** and seeking to maintain their ties regardless of their location. This underscores the enduring bond between Syrian and Turkish communities despite the challenges.

“Whether we go to Syria or not, we have two homelands: Türkiye and Syria. Even if I return to Syria, I’d love to have a residence permit here and be able to visit.”

II. Survey Results

During the meeting, a brief questionnaire was shared with participants to gather their views on the current situation in Syria and the prospect of return. An average of **27 participants** voluntarily responded to the questionnaire. Since not all questions required mandatory answers, the number of respondents varied between 26 and 28.

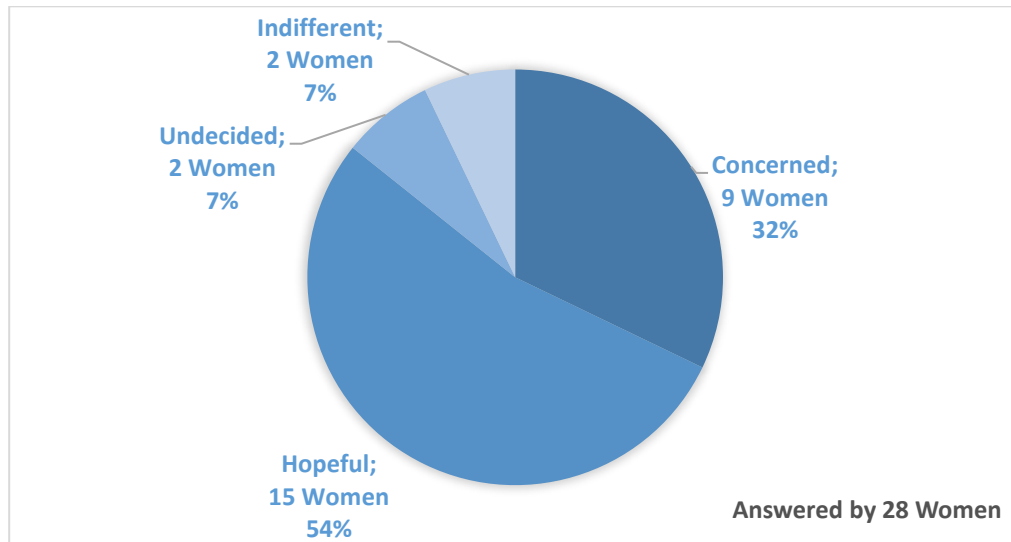
To explore how Syrian women felt in response to recent developments in Syria, a word cloud study was conducted. Participants were asked, *can you describe your feelings about the recent developments in Syria in one word or a short sentence?* The responses revealed a mix of emotions. While many expressed enthusiasm and gratitude, their statements also reflected lingering concerns, anxiety, and ongoing needs. The word cloud generated from this study is presented below.



Can you describe your feelings about the recent developments in Syria in one word or a short sentence?

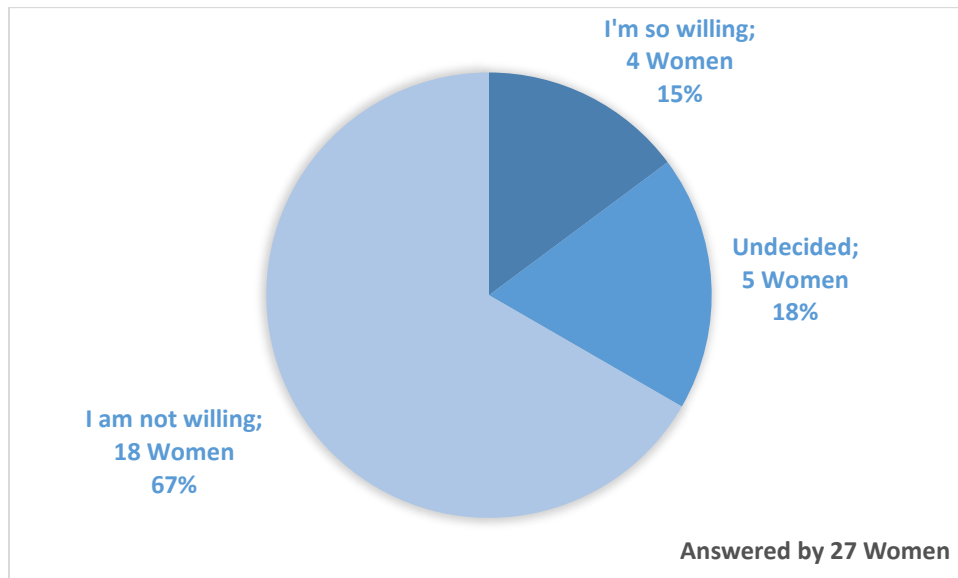
a. Opinions on Developments in Syria and Voluntary Return

In addition to the word cloud study mentioned above, participants were asked, *how do you feel about the current developments in Syria?* The findings indicate that more than half (54%) expressed **hope**, followed by **concern** and **indecision**.



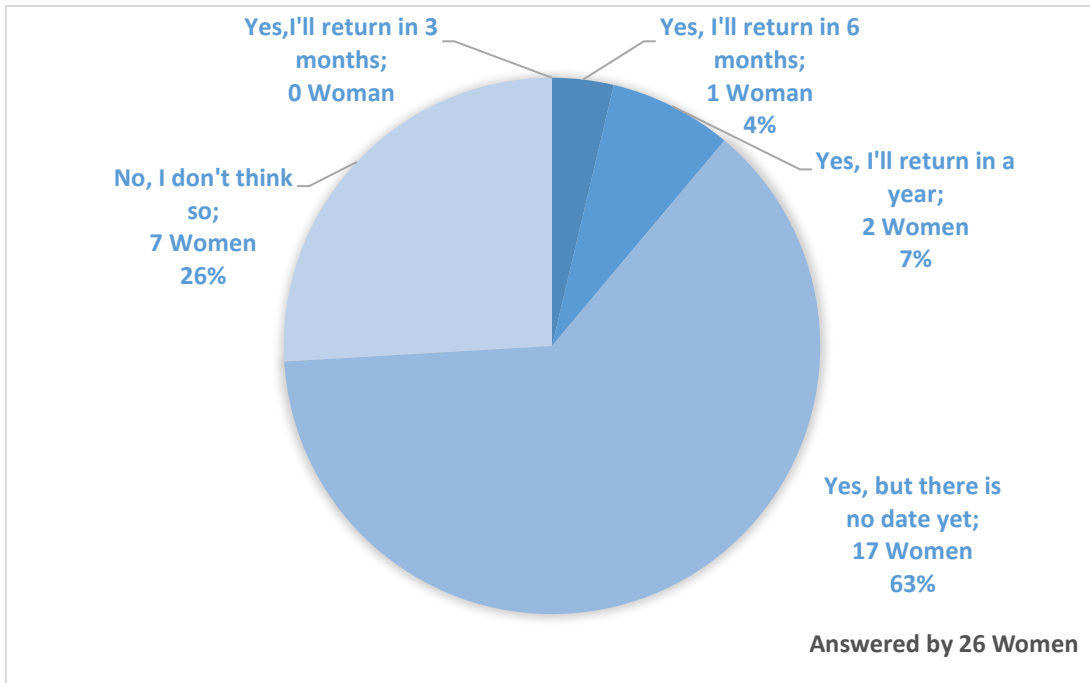
Graphic 11: How do you feel about the current developments in Syria?

Regarding voluntary return, the majority of participants (67%) stated that they were not willing to return to Syria. The remaining participants were nearly evenly split between uncertainty and strong willingness to return. This suggests that a significant proportion of participants **do not have a positive outlook on return**.



Graphic 12: What do you think about returning to Syria?

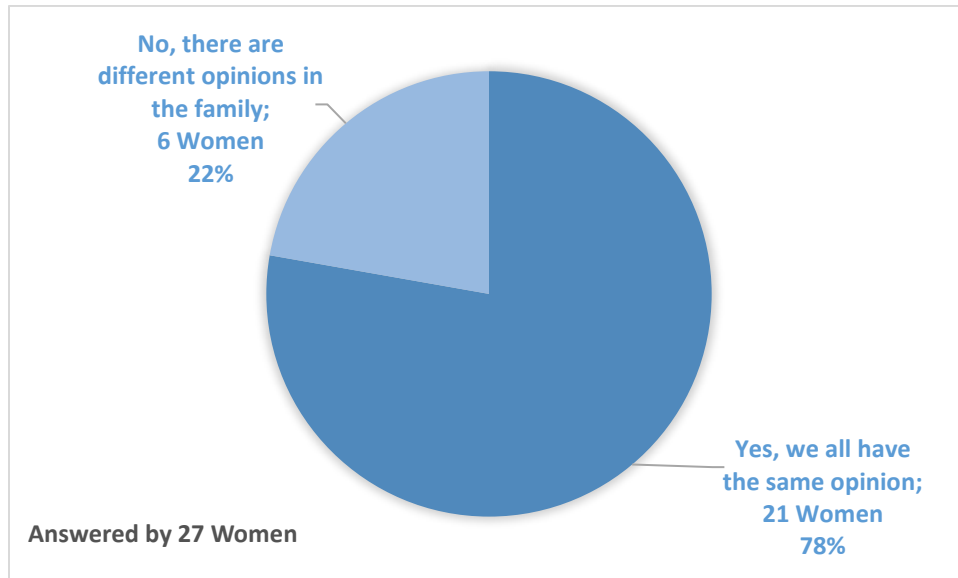
After assessing participants' willingness for voluntary return, the study also explored their plans for return. It was found that while 63% of participants stated they would eventually return, their **plans remained unclear**, and no specific timeframe was determined. Among those who could estimate a timeframe, a return was projected within six months to one year, but none indicated plans for an immediate return. Additionally, 26% of participants stated that they did not intend to return at all.



Graphic 13: Do you plan to go back to Syria?

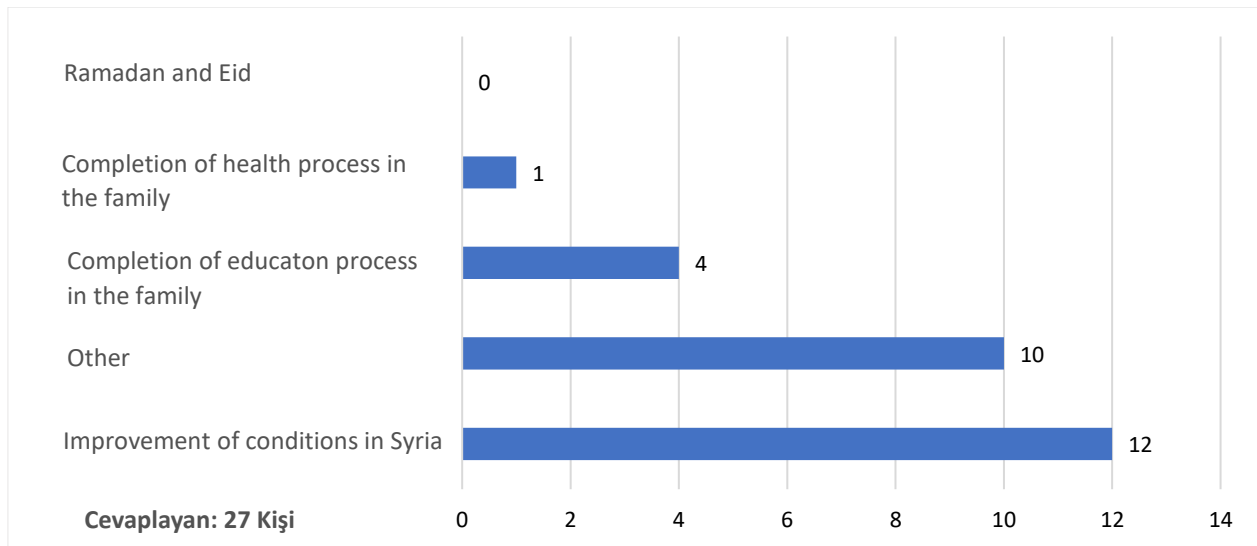
The contrast between 67% of participants stating they were unwilling to return and 63% stating they would eventually return but without a set timeframe suggests that many Syrian women perceive return as a long-term possibility, even if they are reluctant in the present.

When examining the family perspective on return, the study found that the vast majority (78%) of participants reported that their **entire family shared the same opinion** regarding returning to Syria. Given that all participants belonged to households with at least one child, the question aimed to explore potential differences of opinion between children and adults. However, only 22% of participants reported divergent views within their families. It is possible that some respondents answered this question without considering children's perspectives, as indicated by earlier discussions highlighting generational differences in this issue.



Graphic 14: Do you and your family share the same opinion about returning to Syria?

Among the key factors influencing voluntary return, the most cited reason (44%) was the **improvement of conditions in Syria**. Unlike findings from other studies, religious and cultural milestones such as Ramadan and Eid did not emerge as influencing factors in participants' decisions about return.



Graphic 15: What are the factors that will influence your return to Syria?

At the end of the survey, participants were allowed to freely share additional thoughts on voluntary return. Their statements largely emphasized a desire to remain in Türkiye, and expectations for support on the voluntary return.

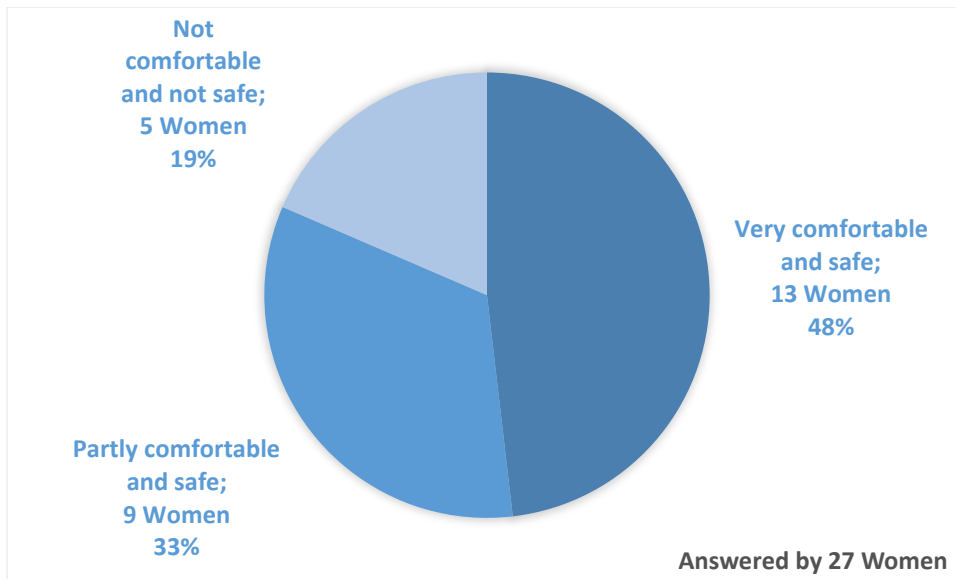
“I do not want to go back to Syria.”

“I hope to stay in Türkiye longer to secure the future of my children. Thank you.”

“I hope to provide financial and transportation support for families returning to Syria so they can start a new life.”

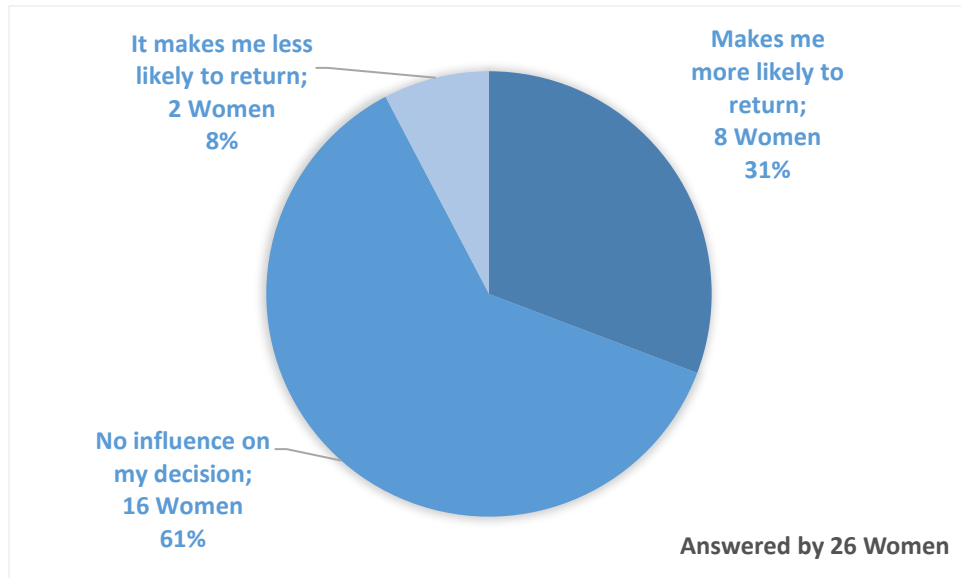
b. Opinions about Türkiye

An analysis of how Syrian women perceive their situation in Türkiye following recent developments in Syria revealed that 19% do not feel comfortable or safe in Türkiye at all, while 81% feel comfortable and safe to varying degrees.



Graphic 16: How safe and comfortable do you feel in Türkiye after the developments in Syria?

The majority of Syrian women (62%) stated that living conditions in Türkiye had no influence on their decision to return to Syria. This was followed by those who believed that conditions in Türkiye increased the likelihood of returning to Syria (31%). A small minority (8%) stated that conditions in Türkiye decreased their likelihood of returning.



Graphic 17: How do the living conditions in Türkiye affect your decision to return to Syria?

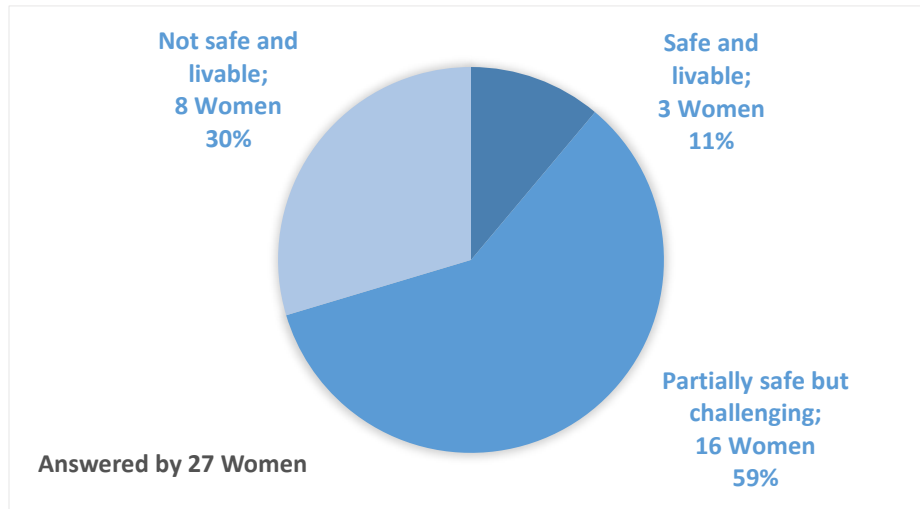
Although most respondents (81%) reported feeling comfortable and safe in Türkiye, a significant portion (61%) also stated that their views on returning to Syria were independent of their experiences in Türkiye. This suggests that conditions in Syria play a more decisive role in shaping voluntary return decisions.

At the end of the survey, participants were allowed to freely share additional thoughts about Türkiye. Their responses reflected a sense of gratitude.

“Thanks to the wonderful people of Türkiye.”

c. Opinions about Syria

More than half of Syrian women (59%) described the current situation in Syria as “partially safe but challenging”. This was followed by those who viewed the situation negatively as “not safe or livable,” while very few considered it “safe and livable”.



Graphic 18: How do you assess the current situation in Syria?

At the end of the survey, participants were allowed to freely share additional thoughts about Syria. Their responses reflected a desire for support in improving conditions in Syria.

“Please support Syria’s development.”

D. CONCLUSION

An assessment was conducted to evaluate the emotions and perspectives of Syrian women who participated in activities organized by the Refugees Association in response to recent developments in Syria on December 8, 2024. This assessment focused on three key themes: “The Situation in Syria after December 8,” “Life in Türkiye after December 8,” and “Voluntary Return.” The key findings are as follows.

1. While recent developments in Syria have sparked **enthusiasm and hope** among Syrians, they have also led to **concerns, anxieties, and uncertainties**. These concerns pertain to both Syria and Türkiye. In Türkiye, Syrian individuals are particularly uncertain about how these developments will affect their legal status, the future of temporary protection, and their **ability to sustain their current rights and livelihoods**. Additionally, there are concerns about Syria’s livability, as it is not yet in a condition suitable for socio-economic reintegration.
2. **Syrian women do not intend to return voluntarily in the immediate future**. Instead, they foresee a **gradual and long-term process extending beyond six months** before considering a return.

3. Although Syrian women expressed reluctance toward voluntary return, many still stated that they would eventually return. The primary factor influencing this contradiction is their **concern for their children’s well-being** and future.
4. The most significant factor influencing voluntary return is the **availability of stable and livable conditions in Syria**. While Syrian women acknowledge security improvements, they emphasize that **critical infrastructure and essential services, including education and healthcare, must be further developed** before return becomes viable. A stable Syria appears more attractive, particularly for individuals who own homes there, as they are perceived to be at an advantage for reintegration.
5. Syrian women expressed a need for **clear and transparent policies that provide long-term sustainability**.
6. **Misinformation and inconsistencies in the dissemination of information** significantly impact the voluntary return process. These arise from both **unverified social media reports** and **discrepancies between the announced policies and implementation on the ground**. The lack of standardized procedures creates an environment where **exploitative individuals** can take advantage of misinformation for personal gain.
7. **Socio-economic difficulties in Türkiye** were particularly emphasized. Rising **rental costs** have placed significant financial strain on Syrians. Additionally, after December 8, **social pressure related to voluntary return**, particularly targeting women and children in **schools, public spaces, and daily interactions**, has made life in Türkiye increasingly challenging. Some participants also expressed concerns about experiencing **institutional pressure and intimidation**.
8. While **social pressure to return** was a recurrent theme, the findings suggest a **dual impact on social cohesion**. On the one hand, economic difficulties and social exclusion were widely discussed. On the other hand, participants frequently expressed **gratitude toward Türkiye and its people**, with many describing Türkiye as their “**second homeland**”.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the developments in Syria on 8.12.2024, the recommendations for Türkiye and Syria regarding the voluntary return process are outlined below. These recommendations are based on the findings obtained from discussions with Syrian women during activities conducted by the Refugees Association.

1. Türkiye’s voluntary return **policies should be standardized** across institutions operating in the field. Clear and precise explanations should be provided to address variations in implementation across provinces, districts, and institutions, and efforts should be made to minimize these discrepancies. The application of standardized procedures should be systematically monitored and regulated.

2. **Policies and procedures regarding the future of temporary protection status in Türkiye** should be clearly defined and publicly communicated. This would help alleviate concerns, reduce uncertainty and confusion, and enable individuals to make informed decisions about their future.
3. To prevent misinformation and distrust, **the dissemination of accurate and reliable information** should be prioritized. Official announcements should be made in both Turkish and Arabic through all available communication channels. Additionally, measures should be taken to identify and counter the spread of misinformation. **Public awareness campaigns** should be conducted to inform both Syrian and Turkish communities about the risks associated with misinformation.
4. **International cooperation** should be strengthened, and support from international organizations should be sought to ensure the rapid provision of essential services in Syria, such as infrastructure, healthcare, and education. **Effective coordination** among relevant stakeholders is crucial for this process.
5. A collective effort is required for Syria's reconstruction and development to create favorable living conditions. All relevant national and international stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental, should assume responsibility in this regard. Additionally, voluntary return is not expected to occur on a large scale in the short term, and many Syrians will continue to reside in host countries for an extended period. Therefore, **national and international institutions should sustain their support for Syrians and social cohesion efforts in host communities**. Otherwise, there is a risk that Syrian individuals may lose their existing rights and livelihoods, leading to social tensions and instability, which could hinder development or even result in regression.
6. In response to developments in Syria, **social cohesion projects** that foster dialogue between Syrians and Turkish communities should be developed and/or expanded. This would help mitigate pressures for voluntary return and prevent discriminatory attitudes toward Syrians. Failure to manage this process effectively could result in Syrians leaving Türkiye under pressure, accompanied by negative emotions and experiences. In addition to straining future relations between the two neighboring countries, the marginalization and negative experiences of Syrians could pose security risks in the long run. While stabilization efforts continue in Syria and Türkiye, the presence of armed groups and security threats remains a concern. Therefore, it is essential to prevent grievances that could push individuals toward activities that undermine regional security.
7. Measures should be implemented to ensure that personnel in key institutions, particularly in schools and the Directorate of Migration Management, interact with Syrian individuals in a sensitive and non-discriminatory manner. **Feedback and complaint mechanisms** should be established and widely promoted. Reports of inappropriate conduct should be thoroughly investigated, and any actions that could harm social cohesion should be promptly addressed.
8. Given that the war and instability in Syria have persisted for 14 years, an entire generation of Syrian children has been born and raised in displacement. Many have never been to Syria

and may not even speak Arabic fluently. Psychosocial support programs are necessary to help these children and adults process their experiences and manage their anxieties regarding return. The availability and accessibility of **psychosocial support services** should be maintained and strengthened, with a particular focus on women and children.

9. To facilitate voluntary return for those who wish to return **in-kind and financial assistance** such as travel, and relocation support should be provided. Public institutions, local authorities, and civil society organizations should offer guidance and information to ensure that individuals can access these support mechanisms effectively.
10. To ensure the continuity of Syrian students' education during the voluntary return process, **joint educational programs between Türkiye and Syria** should be developed. These programs should support students' transition between education systems in both countries and minimize disruptions to their learning.



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