

UNHCR Legal Assistance in Syria

Jan – September 2023

157,939

individuals* reached through legal awareness-raising.

48,530

individuals* benefited from courts and administrative interventions.

96,739

individuals* received legal counselling.

IMPACT OF LEGAL INTERVENTIONS



23,396 individuals assisted to obtain national identity cards.



4,514 marriages documented.

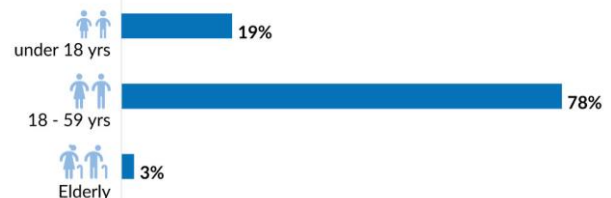


4,416 individuals assisted to obtain family booklets.



2,220 children assisted in registration and obtained official birth certificates.

303,208 total number of beneficiaries of legal assistance

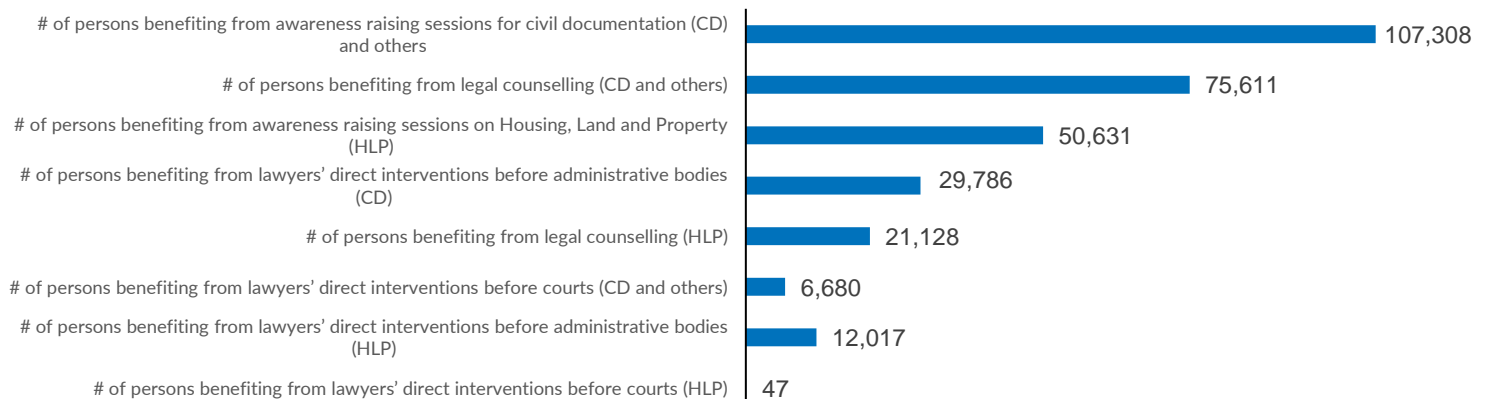


Legal Interventions

14 Governorates

271 Lawyers

154 Volunteers



* These figures reflect IDP returnees' beneficiaries as well as host communities benefited from legal assistance. For activities provided to refugees and asylum-seekers, please see section 'Legal assistance for refugees and asylum-seekers' on page 3.

Legal Assistance for IDPs, returnees, and host communities

UNHCR provides legal services through its partner NGOs for internally displaced people (IDPs), returnees, host communities, in addition to asylum-seekers and refugees.

The objective of the legal assistance is to provide support for the most vulnerable individuals on the following four legal/protection thematic areas when needed and feasible:

- **Documenting vital events** such as births, marriages, divorces, and deaths;
- **Obtaining personal civil status documents** including but not limited to identity cards, family booklets, and civil status records;
- **Protection risks encountered by women and children** including custody, alimony, inheritance, and domestic violence cases;
- **Housing, land, and property (HLP) rights** including obtaining lost or damaged deeds and proof of ownership, as well as authenticating transactions.

The legal services are offered in different forms, including **legal interventions and representation** before courts and other governmental bodies, individual **legal advice**, and **legal awareness-raising** sessions. Interventions before courts or other governmental bodies support vulnerable individuals who have protection concerns, limited capacity to follow the legal procedures and requirements, difficulties reaching the administrative and legal bodies, or who encounter financial constraints.

The legal assistance is provided in all **14** governorates, primarily through mobile teams and legal offices, as well as through UNHCR-supported community centres.

The legal mobile teams consist of **271** experienced lawyers who work closely with **154** legal outreach volunteers (ORVs). The legal ORVs include law students, trainee lawyers and senior lawyers. Some of the legal ORVs are selected from the IDP and returnee communities, and they contribute, on a voluntary basis, to the legal assistance programmes through dissemination of information, identification of individuals in need, and referrals. Also, legal ORVs are trained on a regular basis to provide people with basic legal information and conduct awareness-raising activities on general legal matters.

UNHCR, in coordination with its partners have established six legal offices, located in Damascus, Al-Hassakeh, Deir-ez-Zor and Hama.

Protection Mission to Aleppo

Between 2 and 5 October, a protection mission to Aleppo led by the Assistant Representative for Protection was conducted. The mission members met with the Head of Civil Affairs, the Director of the Provincial Cadastral Department, the Head of the Immigration Department, and the Head of Department of Social Affairs and Labor. The mission visited the Civil Registries rehabilitated by UNHCR in Khal Al Hariri, Sabaa Bahrat, Aleppo,



Protection Mission to SO Aleppo meeting SARC legal team. ©UNHCR.

and Maskanah. Community-led initiatives in the Civil Registry in Deir Hafir were visited as well as the community-led project in Sheikh Maqsoud.

The mission was a great opportunity for the Damascus Legal Unit to acquire information on legal practices and needs that could be used for purposes of programming and for advocacy with authorities.

Legal assistance for refugees and asylum-seekers

UNHCR provides legal services for refugees and asylum-seekers related to any significant protection issues, including **obtaining and renewing residency permits, birth registration** and other civil legal documentation, **non-refoulement, detention and exit visas** as well as other legal/protection-related matters such as **women and child protection**.

Until end of September 2023, UNHCR provided legal assistance to **5,435** refugees and asylum-seekers on various legal matters.

The legal services are provided either directly by UNHCR legal teams and contracted lawyers or by its partners in the legal and community centres located in different Governorates.

Restoring capacities of national institutions

Identity documents, birth certificates and documents related to vital events are essential for the enjoyment of basic rights such as freedom of movement and access to schools, hospitals, livelihoods. Documentation is also essential to receive subsidized rations and items through smart cards. To enhance the protection of these rights, UNHCR provides support to civil registries, citizens service centres and immigration authorities. UNHCR has also started to provide similar support to cadastral offices in order to enhance HLP legal responses.

Until end of September 2023, UNHCR completed the repair of **six** civil registries in As-Sweida and Ar-Raqqa Governorates. Additionally, UNHCR provided solar kits to **43** administrative bodies (**38** civil registries¹, **two** immigration offices², **two** border points³, and **one** citizen service centre⁴) in order to ensure the continuity of services as well as access of people with whom UNHCR works for in civil documentation. Additionally, and upon verifying and prioritizing the remaining/new needs in the aftermath of the earthquakes that hit Türkiye and northern Syria on 6 February 2024, UNHCR is working on restoring the capacity of an additional 37 civil registries, cadastral offices and citizen service centres. This is done either through minor renovation or provision of solar kits. UNHCR also provided information and communication equipment to the Directorate of Immigration and Passports and the Directorate of Civil Affairs, given their pivotal role in the protection of refugees, IDPs and returnees in Syria.

¹ In Damascus, Rural Damascus, Qunietera, Homs, Hassake, Raqqa, Aleppo, Deir-ez-Zor, Sweida and Lattakia,

² In Damascus

³ In Homs and Lattakia

⁴ Raqqa

According to the records of the Directorate of Civil Affairs and the General Directorate of Cadastral Affairs, **1,487,996** civil documents were successfully obtained by Syrian citizens across the country by the end of Sep 2023, including birth certificates, identity cards and family booklets.

Assistance to students

During National Exams, UNHCR provided legal support through partners for the **9th and 12th** grade students, who are from Lebanon and non-government-controlled areas. They were supported in obtaining IDs and facilitating their participation to sit the national exams. In coordination with the Ministry of Education, and the Directorate of Civil Affairs, **4,942** students were assisted to apply for and obtain their IDs.



Legal support for issuing civil documentation/IDs for the students coming from neighbouring countries to sit for national exams. ©SARC.

Legal advocacy

Following UNHCR's advocacy and consultations with the Directorate of Civil Affairs and the Directorate of Immigration and Passports, two circulars were issued waiving the fines imposed on delayed registration of vital events as well as delayed renewal of residency for refugees and asylum-seekers for a certain grace period (elapsed on 21 September 2023 for people abroad). The waiver was for a period of nine months.

As a result, **673,545** people registered their delayed events free of charge by end of the grace period. Additionally, **279** refugees and asylum-seekers were assisted to renew their residency without paying fines.

Furthermore, following the earthquakes in February, a legislative decree was issued that exempts all earthquake-affected people from regular taxes, some fees and fines mainly related to Housing, Land and Properties matters such as rehabilitation and restoration of affected buildings, as well as fines related to civil documentation and registration of vital events.