

# UNHCR Legal Assistance in Syria

January– December 2023

**214,971**

individuals reached through legal awareness-raising

**128,773**

individuals received legal counselling

**64,228**

individuals benefited from interventions before courts and administrative bodies

## IMPACT OF LEGAL INTERVENTIONS



**31,118** individuals assisted to obtain national identity cards



**7,089** marriages documented

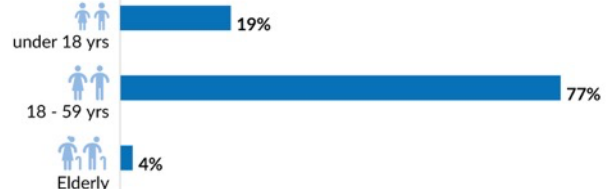


**5,449** individuals assisted to obtain family booklets




**3,340** children assisted in registration and obtained official birth certificates


**407,972** individuals benefited from legal assistance

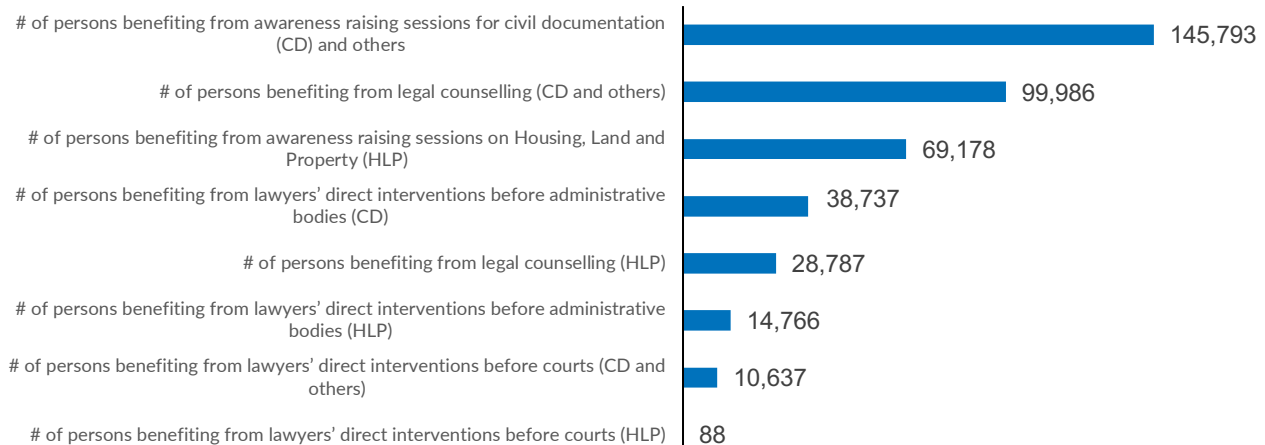


## Legal Interventions

 14 Governorates

 245 Lawyers

 134 Volunteers



## UNHCR legal assistance for IDPs, returnees, and host communities

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

The objective of the legal assistance is to provide support to 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 gender-based 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 UNHCR-supported community centres, through mobile teams as well as through partners' legal offices.

The legal mobile teams consist of **245** experienced lawyers who work closely with **134** 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. The legal ORVs are also trained on a regular basis to provide people with basic legal information and to conduct awareness-raising activities on general legal matters.



*Protection mission by UNHCR country office team to Aleppo to visit the Civil Registries rehabilitated by UNHCR in Khal Al Harir, Sabaa Bahrat, and Maskanah. Community-led initiatives in the Civil Registry in Deir Hafir were visited as well as the community-led Project in Sheikh Maqsoud. SARC legal team. ©UNHCR.*

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

## Legal assistance for refugees and asylum-seekers

UNHCR provides legal services to 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 the end of December 2023, UNHCR provided legal assistance to **7,807** 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 December 2023, UNHCR supported in restoring capacities of **65** public institutions (56 civil registries<sup>1</sup>, three cadastral offices<sup>2</sup>, four immigration offices and border points<sup>3</sup> as well as two citizen service centres<sup>4</sup>) through minor rehabilitation and/or provision of solar kits in order to ensure the continuity of services as well as access of people with and for whom UNHCR works to civil documentation. 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. According to the records of the Directorate of Civil Affairs and the General Directorate of Cadastral Affairs, **1,932,877** civil **documents were successfully obtained by Syrian citizens** across the country by the end of December 2023, including birth certificates, identity cards and family booklets.

## Assistance to students

During national exams in Syria, UNHCR provided legal support through partners to the **9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>** grade students, who are coming from Lebanon and hard-to-reach areas. They were supported in obtaining IDs and their participation to sit the national exams was facilitated.

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.

<sup>1</sup> In Damascus, Rural Damascus, Homs, Aleppo, Deir-ez-Zor, Al-Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa, As-Sweida, Dar'a, Quneitra, Latakia.

<sup>2</sup> Aleppo, Latakia, and Deir-ez-Zor.

<sup>3</sup> Damascus, Latakia, and Homs.

<sup>4</sup> As-Sweida and Ar-Raqqa.

## Capacity building

UNHCR enhanced the capacity of its partners/legal service providers through protection trainings for 104 lawyers and legal outreach volunteers. The trainings covered topics on international legal framework/standards for the protection of IDPs, refugees and returnees, UNHCR mandate and the objectives of UNHCR legal aid programme as well as the basic principles on GBV and child protection. The covered topics contributed to enhancing partners' response to the protection needs of people whom UNHCR serves.



*Training on enhancing the capacity of UNHCR partners/legal service providers ©UNHCR.*

## 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 three months for events occurred inside Syria and nine months for events occurred outside Syria.

As a result of advocacy, by end of the grace period, **673,545** people succeeded to get their events registered by civil affairs offices without paying fines. Additionally, **279** refugees and asylum-seekers were assisted to renew their residency without paying fines.

Furthermore, following the 2023 February earthquakes, a legislative decree was issued that exempts all earthquake-affected people from regular taxes, as well as some fees and fines mainly related to housing, land and properties matters such as rehabilitation and restoration of affected buildings. Fines related to civil documentation and registration of vital events have also been included within the scope of the amnesty as a result of UNHCR advocacy.