

Refugees and Asylum-seekers in Syria

January – September 2023

12,919
Refugees

5,589
Asylum-seekers

477 new individuals registered and **115** individuals recognized as refugees.

Population Demographics



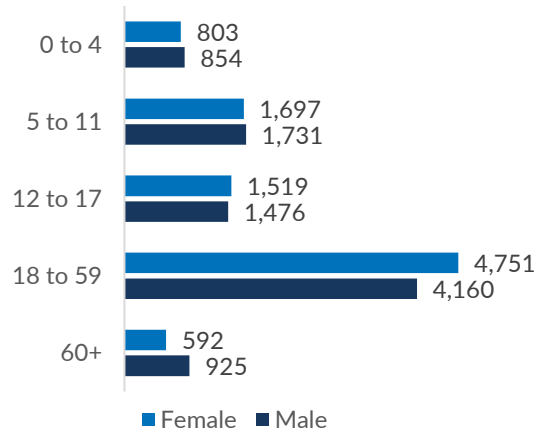
8% of refugees are elderly

44% of refugees are children

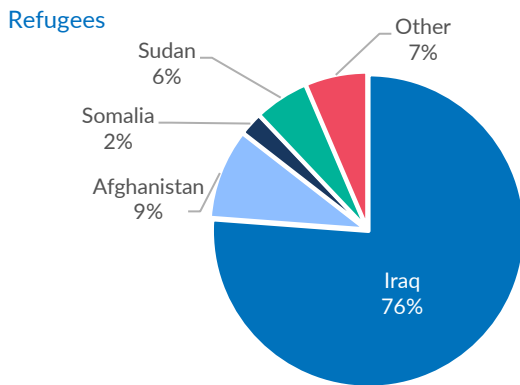
18,508
Total population

52% of refugees have special needs

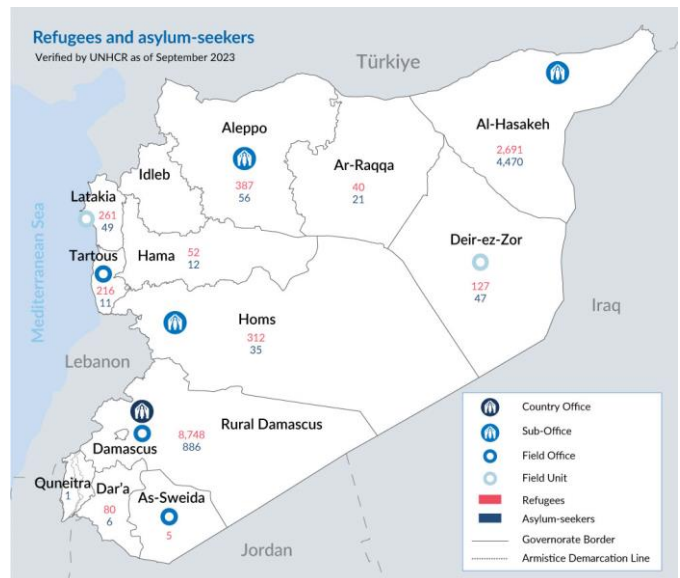
Age Distribution



Country of Origin



Asylum-seekers



 **Registration and Identity Management**

Registration of people seeking international protection is critical, as it enables the **early identification of individuals with specific needs** and their **referral to available protection responses**. Additionally, registration provides comprehensive population data needed for programme planning including shelter, food, health, water and sanitation, cash-based interventions and other forms of assistance.

UNHCR identification cards provided to refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR constitute proof of legal identity, can prevent arbitrary arrest and *refoulement*, and **facilitate greater freedom of movement**. The cards also enable refugees and asylum-seekers to apply for **legal residency, register vital events** (particularly birth registration), and access basic assistance in Syria.

Between January and September 2023, UNHCR registered **477 individuals** (new registrations), mainly comprising Iraqi and Sudanese nationals. Additionally, **11,864 identification cards, including renewals were issued**, representing an 11% decrease compared to 13,405 cards issued between Jan-Sep 2022. **The decrease is mainly related to the bulk inactivation exercise that was carried out by year-end**. The registration helpline received **6,244** calls during the reporting period.

 **Refugee Status Determination**

Refugee Status Determination (RSD) is the legal administrative process by which governments or UNHCR determine whether a person seeking international protection is considered a refugee under international, regional, or national laws. RSD is often a **vital process in helping refugees realize their rights under international law**. In agreement with the Government of Syria, UNHCR conducts RSD for asylum-seekers in the country.

By the end of September 2023, interviews were conducted for **109 cases (214 individuals)**, 124 cases (**253 individuals**) were submitted for review, and **119 cases (237 individuals)** were reviewed. Decisions were taken for **107 cases (208 individuals)**, out of which **61 cases (115 individuals)** were recognized as refugees, and **46 cases (93 individuals)** were rejected.

An **RSD helpline** is fully operational, providing counselling on both the RSD process and the status of asylum-seekers and refugees' individual cases. By the end of September 2023, the RSD helpline had received **295** calls relating primarily to the status of individual cases and requests for cash assistance. The RSD unit is also participating in monthly community sensitization sessions to ensure asylum-seekers are informed and understand the RSD process in Syria.

 **Resettlement**

UNHCR Syria identifies and submits resettlement cases in third countries for highly vulnerable refugees. By the end of September 2023, **135** individuals were interviewed to determine their resettlement eligibility and **28** cases were submitted to resettlement countries. In addition, UNHCR facilitated the departure of **31** individuals under resettlement and complementary pathways.

Resettlement remains one of the most sought-after services by refugees. However, Resettlement countries offer limited quotas, meaning that most refugees cannot be considered for resettlement to another country even if UNHCR believes it would be necessary for their protection or to reunite them with family members.

A 'resettlement helpline' offers regular counselling to refugees, providing accurate information on the status of individual cases and managing expectations. By the end of September 2023, a total of **781 individuals** were offered counselling. In addition, community awareness sessions on general resettlement procedures and prospects in Syria take place every month. This ensures refugees and asylum-seekers are informed of the process and are protected from misinformation and potential exploitation.

Community-based protection

By end of September 2023, there were **115** UNHCR-supported **community centres**, out of which one is located in north-east Syria, where many refugees and asylum-seekers reside. UNHCR-supported community centres are designed as a "one-stop shop" which is critical for people in need, particularly in remote areas where availability of services is scarce. Moreover, community centres cooperate with other facilities and service providers to ensure complementarity in service provision. Refugees and asylum-seekers have access to all UNHCR-supported community centres and can benefit from a wide variety of protection interventions.

UNHCR also engages **106 refugee outreach volunteers** (RORVs) of different nationalities in Al-Hasakeh, Aleppo, Damascus, Rural Damascus, Homs, Latakia, and Tartous Governorates. The RORVs promote community engagement and assist in mobilizing youth to design and lead community-led initiatives. Additionally, through follow-ups and home visits, the volunteers identify and respond to the needs of vulnerable households either directly or through referrals to community centres, and other service providers including charities, local organizations, and government entities.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

During the reporting period, **202** refugees and asylum-seekers received mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS), including individual and group counselling, with **11** refugees referred to specialized mental health services such as psychiatrists and psychotherapists.

During the reporting period, UNHCR through its partners continued to provide MHPSS services, targeting **472** refugees with specific needs (older persons and persons with disabilities) with general and medical in-kind assistance. This assistance is provided to increase a sense of dignity, help prevent harmful coping mechanisms, and reduce the financial burden on families and caregivers. In addition, **111** refugees with specific needs received adult diapers.

UNHCR and partners conducted **725** social/recreational activities and awareness-raising sessions for **500** individuals.

Child Protection

During the reporting period, UNHCR and partners conducted awareness-raising sessions in Damascus as well as in Al-Hol camp and Tel Hamees in Al-Hasakeh Governorate, targeting **2,233 children and 490 caregivers (2,723 in total)**. The awareness sessions covered topics on various child protection risks. As a result of the awareness-raising sessions, a positive impact was observed by the child-friendly space facilitators including improvement of children's capacities and skillsets especially in areas where there is a lack of schools.

By end of September 2023, a total of **121** refugee and asylum-seeker children received tailored case management services. The main identified risks in north-east Syria were child labour, child neglect, and child maltreatment. In Damascus, the top risks were school drop-out and lack of documentation. Consequently, as a result of the provided services, positive improvements were observed by child protection case managers in the children's daily lives, including in relationships at home and school, and in their psychosocial well-being.

During the first three quarters of 2023, **eight** refugee and asylum-seeker children clubs and child welfare committees were established in Damascus, as well as in Al-Hol camp and Tal Hamees in Al-Hasakeh Governorate where the majority of refugee communities are located. The members of the child welfare committees and children's clubs received several trainings, including on their role in the communities as well as on child protection basics and referral mechanisms.



Gender-based violence

By September 2023, UNHCR and partners identified and supported 89 refugee and asylum-seeker survivors of **gender-based violence (GBV)** with psychosocial services, livelihood opportunities, legal aid, and material assistance. Outreach volunteers helped to link the survivors with support networks within their communities.

Additionally, UNHCR conducted **57** GBV awareness sessions on psychological violence, deprivation of resources, opportunities and services, child marriage, sexual harassment, and physical violence, targeting **836** adolescent and adult women in Rural Damascus, as well as in Al-Hol camp and Tal Hamees in Al-Hasakeh Governorate. As a result of the awareness-raising sessions on behavioural change, higher levels of awareness and implementation of prevention measures designed by the communities were observed during the assessments conducted by GBV team members.

During the reporting period of 2023, **three** refugee **women's committees** continued their community involvement in north-east Syria to enhance the role of women in decision-making and designing activities inside refugee camps, including for the prevention of GBV.



Cash assistance

Cash assistance continues to be the most efficient and dignified way to allow the people under UNHCR's mandate to meet their basic needs, especially in the prevailing economic situation. As of 1 March 2023, the multi-purpose cash grant – which refugees were already receiving – was extended to asylum-seekers when UNHCR had the resources to do so. Refugees and asylum-seekers currently have equal access to cash assistance, subject to their specific needs and vulnerability assessments. The legal status is no longer used as a criterion to determine eligibility for cash assistance.

Additionally, exceptional financial assistance (for urgent and unforeseen protection needs) continued during the reporting period. Multi-purpose cash grants (MPCGs) and winterization grants targeted both asylum-seeker and refugee families who were prioritized based on demographics and specific needs. The assistance was provided through a cash-over-the-counter modality.

By end of September 2023, **monthly multi-purpose cash grants** were provided to **5,599** households (**16,159 individuals**) for four cycles. In addition, a total of **8,561** households (**116,720 individuals**) including both refugees and asylum-seekers received the second tranche of winterization cash assistance.

Legal Assistance

Lack of identity and travel documents, irregular status, and limited knowledge on national legislation and procedures are the main legal challenges encountered by refugees and asylum-seekers in Syria, affecting their ability to secure residency and register vital events, as well as limiting their freedom of movement and access to basic rights and services.

In response to some of these challenges, UNHCR provides **legal assistance** on a range of issues such as *refoulement*, residency, civil documentation, registration of vital events (particularly birth registration), detention, exit visas, prevention and response to GBV, and child protection issues.

The legal assistance includes counselling and support for legal interventions before courts and administrative bodies as well as awareness-raising activities conducted either through direct sessions or printed materials to disseminate information and raise the awareness of refugees and asylum-seekers on the applicable laws and procedures.

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

Legal Advocacy

Following UNHCR's advocacy and consultation 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 fines imposed on delayed renewal of residency for refugees and asylum-seekers for a certain grace period (elapsed on 21 March 2023). As a result, **279** refugees and asylum-seekers succeeded in renewing their residency without paying the stipulated fines.

As a result of UNHCR's advocacy, Law No. 4 of 2023 was issued on 2 April, amending Law No. 2 of 2014 regularizing the entry, exit, residency of Arabs and foreigners in Syria. The new law has included individuals holding refugee cards in Syria who do not hold passports or whose national passports expired. These can be exempted by the Minister of Interior from the requirement of holding a valid passport. Also, the new law **permanently** waived residency fees for refugees and their family members. These amendments are considered as a positive step by the Government of Syria and will enhance the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers without documents.

A leaflet was developed on the amended law for refugees and asylum-seekers and widely circulated by Field Offices.

Capacity-building

In coordination with the Diplomatic Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), UNHCR Syria conducted a two-day workshop on the International Protection for Refugees on 24-25 January 2023. The workshop was attended by 44 participants, mainly targeting diplomats assigned to multilateral settings and to countries hosting refugees. The workshop

was also attended by participants from both the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice.