

**Advocating for the rights and protection of Syrian refugees**

Refugee Protection Watch (RPW) conducts research and advocacy on protection issues facing Syrian refugees in Lebanon, as well as on the conditions for safe, voluntary, informed and dignified return to Syria.

**Respondents**

119 refugee returnee respondents who live across Rural Damascus, Douma, Homs Governorate and Damascus city were individually interviewed in March 2021.

Respondents were:



Average age **42 years**

For more details and background information, go to [www.refugeeprotectionwatch.org](http://www.refugeeprotectionwatch.org) for the most recent reports from RPW.

**The Partners**



**Safe Return**

**FEAR OF BEING FORCIBLY CONSCRIPTED**

The **biggest fear** for men between the ages of 18-40 is being detained, **forcibly conscripted or re-enlisted in the military.**

**70%** of respondents are concerned that either themselves, or friends and/or relatives, will be forcibly conscripted.

**43%** of respondents know of people that have already done their military service and are now at risk of being re-enlisted.

*They recently took one of my relatives for an unknown reason; they called him from the military detachment for a follow-up, he went but never returned.*  
- Male, 37, Douma

**CHECKPOINTS**


Interviewees report **intensive checks, the need to pay money for transporting goods, bribes, threats and bad treatment** as challenges they experience at checkpoints. These are most frequently reported in Douma and Rural Damascus.

*Young men usually get scrutinized at checkpoints for reserve service or because of their security status. As for women, they sometimes check their names.*  
- Male, 37, Douma

**PERCEPTION OF (RELATIVE) SAFETY**

*We feel relatively safe at home but we are scared of the security forces and the detentions of those who had left Syria and then returned.*  
- Female, 31, Homs

*I have not known the taste of safety for ten years. There is no safety as long as people are in this state of poverty, injustice and displacement.*  
- Female, 36, Damascus City

 When directly asked, 1 out of 4 people reports not feeling safe. They fear forced military conscription, remnants of wars and the security forces. Those that report feeling safe in their current place of residence cite that living among family and friends is the main reason for this.

**WOMEN'S SAFETY**

**60%** of all female respondents never, or very rarely, move at night, as they do not feel safe in the dark.

*I am concerned about sexual violence or abuse, especially in the dark. So I never go out after sunset.*  
- Female, 31, Homs

**Voluntary & Informed Return**

**PUSH FACTORS FROM LEBANON**

72% of respondents cited the following push factors from Lebanon as the main reason for return:

- > High costs of living
- > Racism and harassment
- > No access to the job market
- > General deterioration of the situation in Lebanon

*[Our reasons for return were] the difficult situation in Lebanon and most importantly the bad treatment; they consider that because I'm a Syrian refugee I'm a beggar and I'm eating at their own expense or that I'm taking their jobs; of course the majority thinks that, not everyone.*  
- Male, 33, Douma



One in every four people reported **not having had access to enough information** about conditions inside Syria, as they had to return in a rush or the situation turned out to be different on the ground.

*I returned to Ghouta as soon as the road was opened and the siege was lifted and found the situation to be different from how my relatives and friends had described it to me. When I met them and asked them about the reason, they told me they were scared to talk over the phone and tell me how bad the situation was.*  
- Male, 39, Rural Damascus

**Summary**



Conditions are currently **not in place for a safe, voluntary, informed and dignified return.**

Interviewees cite forced military conscription, economic insecurity and harassment by security forces as main concerns.

Push factors in Lebanon, such as deteriorating living conditions, are the main reason for return, preventing a truly voluntary return decision.

Livelihood opportunities and the overall economic situation inside Syria deteriorated drastically in the past year.

*My relatives have no intention of returning to Syria at the moment. We returned before them and didn't encourage them to come back.*  
- Male, 27, Rural Damascus

**Dignified Return**

Most respondents report a clear lack of livelihoods, missing access to good services and income and a deteriorating situation. Only **29%** are able to cover their basic household necessities.

*From what we're hearing, the area will be expropriated and compensation will be given to the owners of the houses, but it is still unclear when that will happen.*  
- Male, 50, Damascus City

*Things didn't go as we had planned for them before our return, and the living, educational and social situations are very bad and not up to the standard.*  
- Female 60, Rural Damascus



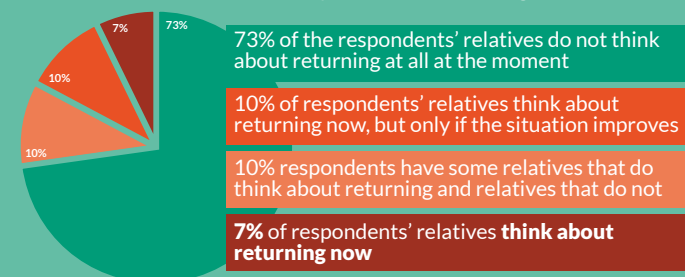
**Prospects & Re-returns**

*We have no other place that we can go to, that's why we will stay in Syria.*  
- Female, 41, Homs

**56%** of the respondents know others that returned to Syria but then left again.

**CONSIDERING TO RETURN**

The vast majority of the respondents' relatives who live abroad do not currently consider returning:



**Recommendations**

Maintain position that Syria is not safe for return and respect the principle of non-refoulement

Moratorium on forced deportations in Lebanon

Long term funding across the "triple nexus"

International mechanism to monitor returns