



Northeast Syria Internally Displaced Persons Movement Intentions - Key findings

February 2025 | Northeast Syria

KEY MESSAGES

- **Major differences in movement intentions** exist between **internally displaced persons (IDPs) that recently arrived to emergency collective centers (E-CCs)** and **IDPs that have been living in camps and sites for years**. While **two thirds of IDPs in E-CCs plan to return to their areas of origin (AoO) within a year**, this figure is down to **12% for IDP living in camps and informal sites**.
 - In **emergency collective centers**, which mainly host IDPs that arrived following the November 2024 military escalation in Northwest Syria, the **vast majority of returns are expected to be to Afrin district**.
 - In **informal sites and camps**, these returns would largely concern **areas along the Euphrates river**, mainly to Deir-Ez-Zor governorate, which would likely host 13,000 new returnees by early 2026.
- While **return decisions for IDPs in camps and sites** are largely determined by factors **related to livelihoods and access to services**, IDPs in **emergency collective centers** largely stressed **security and stability-related factors**.
 - In the context of the transition process in Syria, specific **efforts to promote stability, improve basic services and support markets will be essential to enable safe and dignified returns**.

Context & Rationale

As of December 2024, Northeast Syria (NES) hosted over 331,000 IDPs in last-resort sites, many of whom had been displaced for years. Recent events that led to the fall of the former government caused further displacements from Northwest Syria (NWS), and as of January 2025 approximately 26,000 IDPs remain across 183 emergency collective centers in NES.¹

After thirteen years of conflict marked by repeated displacements, economic stagnation and inadequate basic services, the changing political situation offers potential opportunities for IDPs to return to their areas of origin, but also raises critical questions around service availability and infrastructure readiness in these areas. Following a series of agreements between the interim government and key actors, efforts to enable displaced families to return are underway, even as concerns remain about service availability and infrastructure readiness in areas of origin.²

In this context, humanitarian actors require robust, representative data to guide programming and coordinate response efforts. The current brief outlines **key findings from three rounds of data collection** conducted by REACH in Northeast Syria to capture intentions of IDPs living in last-resort sites and key factors influencing their decisions, building on a similar exercise conducted by REACH in partnership with UNHCR and CCCM Cluster in Northwest Syria.

The three rounds of data collection in NES focused on:

1. **Six planned and unplanned camps** (Abu Khashab, Areesha, Mahmoudli, Newroz, Tel Samen, and Twahina) from 21 to 28 January 2025;
2. **Informal settlements and collective centers** in February 2025,
3. **Emergency collective centers** opened following the escalation in November 2024, with data collected by the Sites and Settlements Working Group (SSWG) data collection partners (Acted and Care International) in February and March 2025.

40,000 IDPs are anticipated to leave their locations of displacement in NES and return to their areas of origin within a year, including:

- **20,000** returns expected before the end of the summer 2025

All three rounds employed a consistent methodology, with a similar data collection tool and a sampling approach designed to collect representative data at district level for emergency collective centers and informal sites (which were also stratified by site type), and at camp level for the exercise in camps. Samples were designed to achieve a 95% confidence level (90% in camps) and 10% margin of error.

This output presents a overview of key findings and main takeaways from the three rounds of data collection, with a view to inform humanitarian programming. More detailed findings for camps can be found in the dedicated [factsheet](#),

and other assessments are accessible in the [dashboard on IDP intentions in Northern Syria](#). The terms of reference (ToR) for this assessment can be found [here](#).

Limitations:

The surveys captured intended movements at a specific point in time, and these intentions may evolve, potentially leading to slight over- or under-estimations of actual movements. Secondly, while the methodology is rigorous, it may differ from approaches used in other partner-led assessments, so comparisons should be made with caution.

IDPs in Camps and Informal Sites

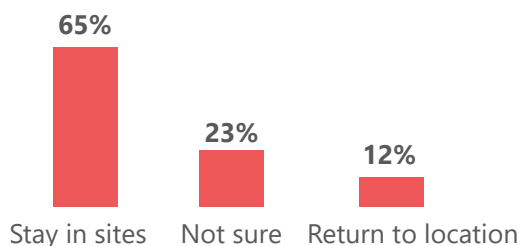
Return intentions in camps and informal sites remain low

An estimated 214,000 IDPs (40,000 HHs) live in informal sites (165,000) and in the 6 assessed camps (49,000 IDPs). Most of these IDPs have experienced prolonged displacement since the onset of the conflict, with an average of 9 years of displacement and three relocations.

Most IDPs in assessed locations are originally from areas within or neighbouring Northeast Syria, with 41% of households from Deir-Ez-Zor governorate. More than a third are originally from Hama (19%) and Homs (18%) governorates. Their distribution varies, with the vast majority of IDPs from Hasakeh and Deir Ez Zor being displaced within their governorate of origin, and almost all IDPs from Hama and Homs displaced in sites and camps in Raqqa.

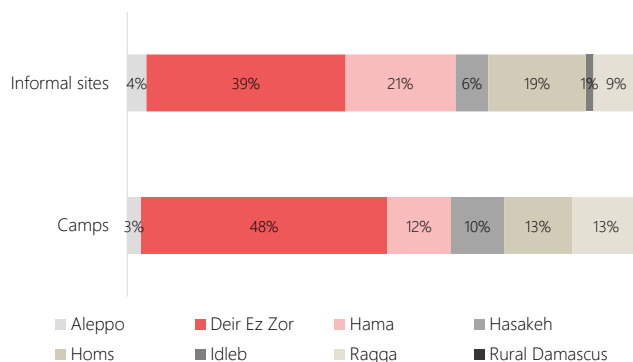
Overall, roughly two-third of IDPs in camps and sites planned to remain in their current locations in the 12 months following data collection, with only 12% intending to return. Return intentions are particularly low in collective centers —where only 3% plan to return. In camps, IDPs’ intentions range from 0% in Tel Samen camp (Raqqa governorate) to 25% in Areesha camp (Hasakeh). In informal sites they range from 1% in Hasakeh governorate to 22% in Deir-Ez-Zor.

IDP movement intentions in camps and sites



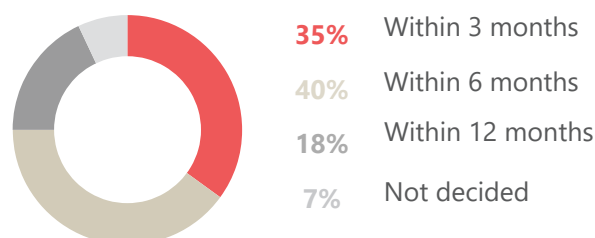
In total, just under 25,000 of the 214,000 IDPs living in informal sites and assessed camps are expected to leave and return to their areas of origin within a year, with over 75% planning to return within three to six months—meaning that nearly 19,000 individuals could return before the end of summer 2025.

IDPs in camps and sites: areas of origin (governorates)



These prospective returns are mainly concentrated in areas along the Euphrates river in Deir-Ez-Zor and Raqqa, which for years marked the boundary between Northeast Syria and areas controlled by the former government of Syria. Notably, half of IDPs in camps intending to return are originally from Al-Mayadin, while two third intended returnees from informal sites are expected to return to the Deir-Ez-Zor (25%), Tabni (20%), and Maadan (17%) sub-districts. For informal sites, most movements are expected to concern IDPs displaced in Deir-Ez-Zor and returning to their areas of origin within that same governorate.

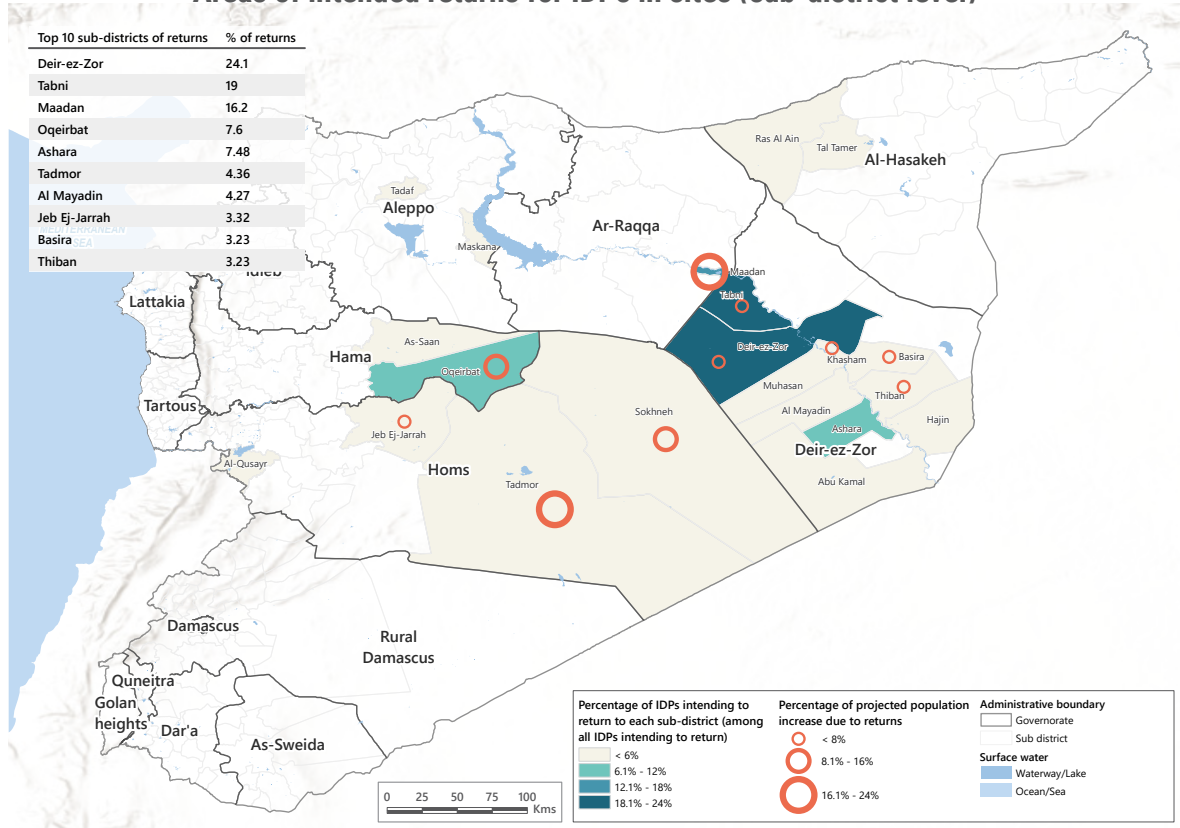
Expected timeline of returns



In contrast to the large-scale returns anticipated in low-population areas for IDPs in Northwest Syria, **most returns in NES are expected in relatively populated regions**, with the most substantial increase in population projected at 23% in Maadan sub-district.

More than half of intended returns in NES camps and sites are expected to be to **Deir-Ez-Zor governorate**

Areas of intended returns for IDPs in sites (sub-district level)



Economic factors and access to services shape return decisions

Among IDPs planning to return, the emotional desire was largely cited as the main decisive factor for their decision. Other factors differed between camps and sites, with in-camp IDPs largely reporting the perspective of improved employment and access to livelihood opportunities (65%), against only over a third for IDPs in informal sites.

With regards to shelter conditions, all IDPs intending to return to Abu Kamal sub-district reported access to housing and shelters there as a key motivation to return, while this was cited by over half of in-camp IDPs intending to return, and less than 20% for IDPs in sites.

Conversely, the **lack of employment and livelihood opportunities in displacement sites were the most commonly reported reasons for IDPs wanting to leave the displacement sites and return to their areas of origin.** This was notably reported by over 85% of IDPs in Areesha and Abu Khashab camps, as well as by more than 80% of IDPs living in sites in Al-Mayadin and Raqqa districts. Most IDPs also reported the lack of basic services in their current locations, though this factor being more reported in informal sites (62%) than in camps (48%).

Nearly all households across sites and camps planning to return are intending to go back to their former homes; however, over half of them indicated that their **houses are severely damaged or uninhabitable**, which reaches over two thirds of IDPs returning to Deir-Ez-Zor sub-district.

While **almost all IDPs intending to return reported having enough information to make the decision**, not all were able to get first-hand information on their areas of origin. Although more than 80% reported having been able to recently visit their area of origin, this figure dropped to less than two thirds for IDPs in the Areesha camp, where most IDPs intend to return to Al-Mayadin sub-district, and reported also getting information from social media and phone calls.

For IDPs remaining in displacement settings, **living conditions in areas of origin constituted essential factors for this decision**, with aspects related to livelihoods and basic services being largely reported as **both barriers to short-term returns and essential conditions** to enable safe and dignified returns.

80% of IDPs intending to return from **Abu Khashab camp and informal settlement in Al-Thawrah** reported the **lack of healthcare services in their current locations** as push factors.

The rehabilitation and reconstruction of homes and shelters in areas of origin, was cited by over half of IDPs in NES, which included more than 75% originally from Oqeirbat and who do not intend to return in the upcoming year.

Although security-related concerns were not cited as the most common barriers to return, some areas stood out. The **presence of explosive hazards** was notably reported as a barrier by more than half of IDPs originally from Tabni and Oqeirbat sub-districts, and over 90% of IDPs from Ehsem reported waiting for a political solution before returning. Among IDPs who reported intending to stay in camps and sites, over two third reported **safety and**

stability in displacement sites as a key factor influencing their decision. In camps, 90% of IDPs highlighted the access to humanitarian assistance, against only 41% in informal sites. With the vast majority of IDPs rating their living conditions as average or poor, continuous support for these vulnerable populations remains essential.

IDPs originally from the **Ras al Ain and Tal Abiad** area (RATA) cited very different challenges: more than 90% of IDPs from Ras al Ain reported a **lack of safety and security** in their AoO, and more than 40% of whom reported the fear of retaliation and arrest, while roughly three out of four from RATA stressed the **importance of a political solution** as key enabler for their returns

IDPs in Emergency Collective Centers (E-CCs)

The vast majority of households in E-CCs intend to return, but timelines remain unclear

Emergency collective centers (E-CCs) in NES were opened in late November and early December 2024 by local authorities with support from the Sites and Settlements Working Group, mainly to host new IDPs coming from NWS, who largely [transited through Tabqa border crossing](#).

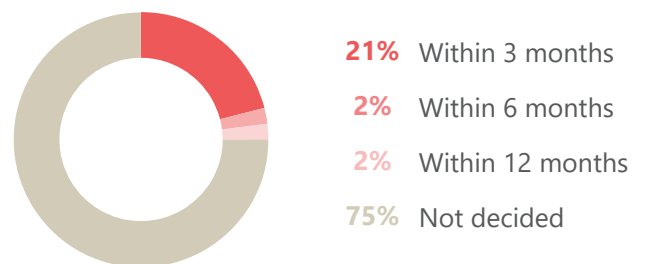
As of January 2025, **most of the 26,000 IDPs living in E-CCs were in the Raqqa (50%) and Hasakeh (39%) governorates**, with roughly a third in the Al-Thawra sub-district. Almost all these recently settled IDPs are originally from the Aleppo governorate, with 39% coming from Afrin sub-district.

The assessment pointed to **distinct movement intentions among IDPs in E-CCs, compared to those living in camps and sites**. In assessed locations, **68% of households plan to return to their areas of origin**—potentially translating into around 16,000 individual returns.

Return intentions were particularly high in Hasakeh district (95%), while only about half of respondents in Al-Thawrah intend to return.

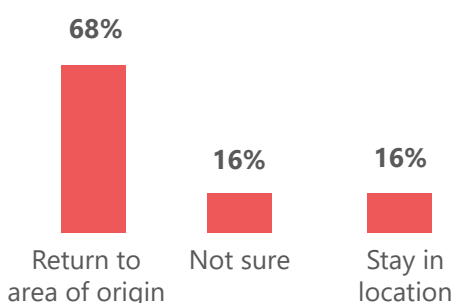
The **timeline of these returns remains uncertain**, as three out of four HHs intending to return are unsure about when they might return, including almost 90% for E-CCs in Raqqa governorate. Due to this uncertainty, only one in four intended returns is expected to take place before the end of the summer.

Expected timeline of returns



These prospective returns are predominantly concentrated in northern areas of the Aleppo governorate, almost half of which to the Afrin sub-district, where up to 8,000 returns can be expected.

IDP movement intentions in E-CCs



94% of IDPs intending to return are originally from the Afrin district, including almost 11,000 from Afrin sub-district, 2,800 from Jandairis, 2,750 from Bulbul, and 2,650 from Raju.

Safety and stability concerns shape return decisions

Return decisions in E-CCs are largely influenced by perceptions of improvements in safety and security conditions in AoO and better living conditions compared to displacement sites. More than half of respondents cited an emotional desire to return (60%) alongside expectations of **better security and stability (58%), which was notably reported by all IDPs living in E-CCs in the Raqqa district**, most of whom intending to return to the Afrin sub-district.

in E-CCs viewed insecurity in their areas of origin (79%) or during the transit (61%) as the main barriers preventing their returns, and almost half feared arrest or retaliation upon return.

To **enable safe and dignified returns, almost all (91%) stressed the need for improved safety and stability**, with 73% emphasizing political stability in their areas of origin. For IDPs intending to return to Afrin sub-district, 90% highlighted the importance of political stability, and more than half also cited the **need to have more information on their area of origin** before making their decision.

Most common pull factors for IDPs in E-CCs intending to return to their areas of origin



Insecurity was particularly concerning for IDPs from Afrin sub-district, with 86% considering that the lack of security was a major challenge in their AoO, and 40% mentioning the potential presence of unexploded ordnances.

Although **86% of IDPs intending to stay in E-CCs reported their living conditions as average or poor**, they mainly justified their decision by the perception of better safety and stability (93%), access to humanitarian assistance (53%), and availability of basic services (39%), compared to their AoO.

These findings clearly illustrate that **return intentions in E-CCs are heavily dependent on the security and political situation in areas of origin**. In the context of the ongoing political transition process, findings indicate that **efforts towards enhanced safety and stability in areas of origin could play a crucial role in enabling these newly-displaced IDPs to return**.

82% of IDPs intending to **return to Raju sub-district reported access to basic services** as a key driver for their decision to return.

Conversely, **the lack of employment (66%) and insufficient basic services (65%) were reported as the decisive factors for IDPs' intentions to leave current displacement sites**. The lack of employment and livelihood opportunities was notably reported by more than 80% in Al-Malikeyyeh (98% of IDPs intending to return) and Qamishli (83%) districts.

Although nearly all households intend to return to their former homes, only 53% have sufficient information about their areas of origin, and only 3% reported having had visited their area of origin, highlighting challenges in accessing accurate information, with IDPs largely relying on social media and phone calls.

Despite the high number of IDPs intending to return and reporting an improvement in the security situation in their AoO, many IDPs considered that conditions were not met for their returns. The vast majority of IDPs intending to stay

ABOUT REACH

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).

Endnotes

- 1 UNICEF. (2024, December 29). Syrian Arab Republic. [Humanitarian Situation Report No. 3.](#)
- 2 Syria Protection Sector. (March 2025). [Protection Landscape in Syria: A Snapshot.](#) Global Protection Cluster.