

NORTHWEST SYRIA IDP INTENTION SURVEY

Key findings

Background:

As of January 2025, north-west Syria (NWS) was hosting more than 3.4 million IDPs, including almost 1.95 million living in more than 1,500 IDP sites across Idleb and northern Aleppo. After thirteen years of conflict marked by repeated displacements, economic stagnation and inadequate basic services, recent events that led to the fall of the government offer opportunities for potential returns of IDPs to their areas of origin.

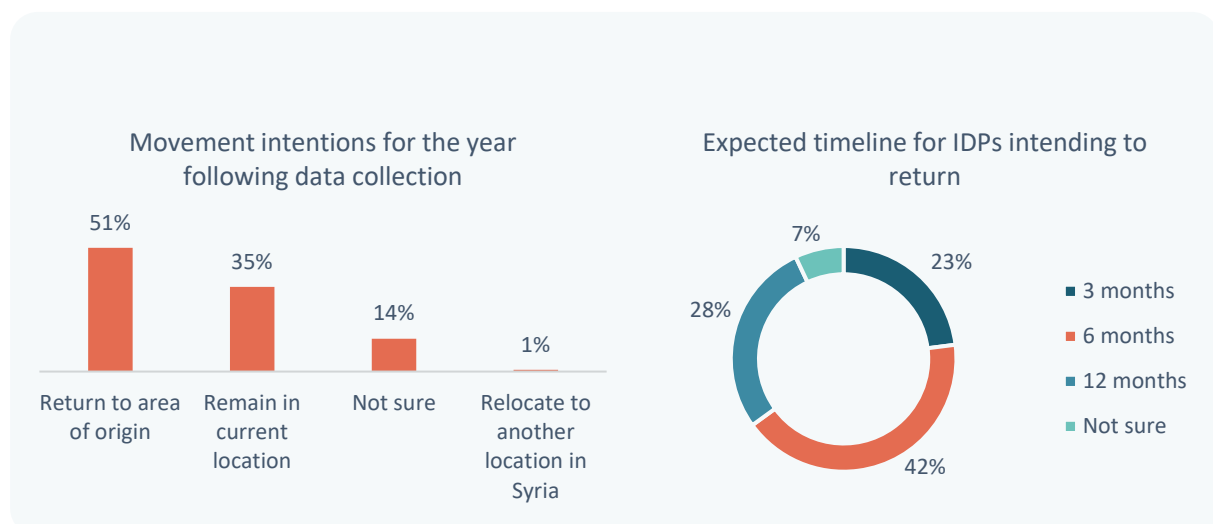
In response, the CCCM Cluster, UNHCR, and REACH have coordinated a large-scale assessment on movement intentions within IDP sites in NWS. The objective of this assessment was to provide humanitarian actors with robust data on IDPs’ return movement intentions, timeline, and factors that would enable or hinder such movements. This assessment was conducted in collaboration with 12 CCCM Cluster partner organizations that collected data from over **4,800 households across 519 sites** between 26 January and 23 February, using a stratified cluster sampling approach. Findings are representative at district-level, meaning they can be extrapolated to the IDP population across all sites within each district.

In parallel, REACH and the north-east Syria Sites and Settlements Working Group (SSWG) are coordinating similar assessments for IDPs in informal sites and emergency collective centers in north-east Syria. Findings from these exercises will be integrated into subsequent reports to offer a comprehensive overview of displacement dynamics across the region.

Key findings:

The assessment revealed that **half of IDP households in camps and sites across NWS plan to return to their areas of origin within one year**, potentially translating into **nearly one million returnees between 2025 and early 2026**. Almost two-thirds of these returns are expected to take place within three to six months, suggesting that **more than 600,000 individuals could return to their areas of origin before the end of the summer in 2025**.

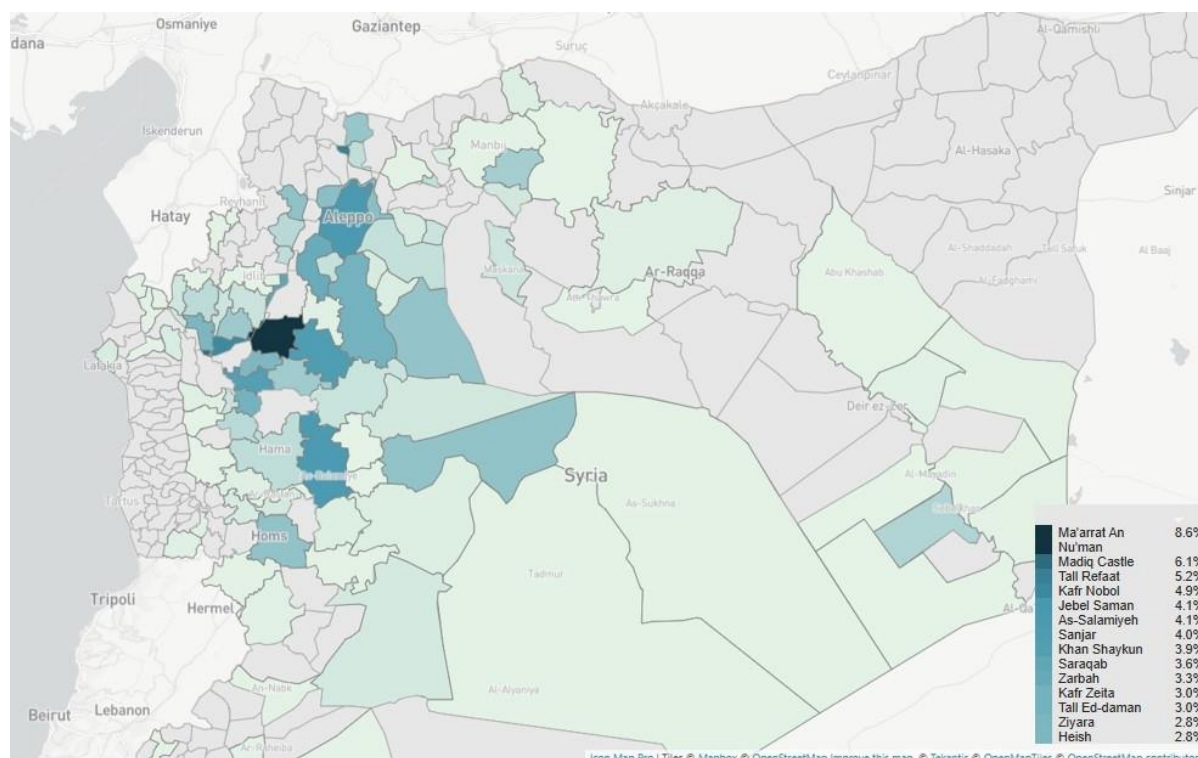
IDP movement intentions and return timeline



Intentions to return are particularly strong among IDPs in Idleb district, where approximately two out of three households expressed an intention to return to their area of origin. Similarly, in Harim district — home to more than half of the IDPs in NWS — over half are planning to leave sites to return to their areas of origin.

Almost all returns (95%) are projected to take place within NWS or surrounding areas, with high numbers expected in former frontline areas, such as Al Ma'ra and Jebel Samaan districts (see map below). These expected movements could have significant demographic consequences, with the population in Ma'arat An Nu'man and Kafr Nobol (Idleb) sub-districts expected to rise from 3,000 to 130,000 individuals — a more than a 40-fold increase — within a year. Overall, 23 sub-districts could see their populations at least double. In a region severely affected by years of conflict, this would place additional strain on basic services, housing, and markets.

Areas of intended returns (sub-district level)



Findings also highlighted notable gender differences: while more than half of male-headed households plan to return, 55% of female-headed households were undecided or preferred to stay in displacement sites, most of whom highlighting the availability of affordable housing as the main reason for their decision to stay.

In terms of the main factors influencing return decisions, the vast majority of IDPs (84%) cited a strong emotional desire to return, while slightly more than a third reported better access to livelihoods and housing in their areas of origin. Although nearly all IDPs planning to return intend to move back to their former homes, **80% reported that their homes are severely damaged or destroyed** — a figure that rises to 95% among the 350,000 IDPs planning to return to the former frontline districts of Al Ma'ra (Idleb) and Suqaylabiyah (Hama).

Around one-third of IDP households living in sites intend to remain in their current location for the next 12 months. Intention to remain was the highest in A'zaz, Jarablus, and Ariha districts, where more than half of the IDP population in sites plans to stay. The primary barrier to return was the lack of adequate housing and services in areas of origin. Shelter rehabilitation and improved access to services were the most reported conditions necessary for safe and dignified returns. Although IDPs planning to stay in sites largely viewed their living conditions as average or poor, they pointed to the access to basic services, affordable housing and humanitarian assistance as the main reasons to stay.

Data collection conducted by CCCM Partners:



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