



UPINION

Syrian voices from Türkiye: Reflections on return, legal barriers, and the future

May 2025

Key findings

Return movements

- **90%** (n=227) of Upinion's community reported still being in Türkiye. **5%** returned to Syria permanently, **4%** were in Syria but only for a temporary visit.
- **95%** (n=201) of respondents that were still in Türkiye indicated that they had not travelled to Syria since the fall of the Assad regime either. Among them, **58%** said they had no plans to visit, while **37%** indicated they were planning a future visit. Only **2%** reported having visited Syria since the regime change.

Future plans

- Future plans among Syrians in Türkiye are varied: **20%** (n=211) plan to stay, **20%** plan to return to Syria, **21%** aim for UN-led resettlement to a third country, and **23%** remain uncertain.
- The two main barriers to return include limited capacity to rebuild homes (**52%**, n=201) and lack of jobs (**49%**), alongside poor services, weak infrastructure, and fear of being unable to re-enter Türkiye.
- Many Syrian individuals anticipate a potential increase in return movements after the school year ends or when weather conditions improve, though uncertainty remains high.

Legal residency in Türkiye

- **18%** (n=211) of respondents lack legal documentation, facing greater fear of deportation, checkpoints, and arrest, as well as limited access to services compared to those with legal status.
- Limited freedom of movement remains the most frequently reported challenge for both individuals with legal documentation (**69%**, n=162) and those without it (**55%**, n=38).
- Many, regardless of legal status, reported issues such as ineligibility for government support, issues returning to Syria, legal documentation issues, and discrimination by public authorities.

Return support

- **60%** (n=209) said return support would influence their decision, **24%** disagreed, and **7%** were considering return without support. However, this should be viewed with caution, as support alone does not necessarily ensure a safe, voluntary, or informed return.
- A large majority (**74%**, n=140) said they would require a financial stipend to cover costs after arrival, such as food supplies or partial reconstruction. Additionally, **41%** indicated they would need financial support for the return journey itself.
- Many respondents indicate they would need support for housing, reconstruction, legal issues, basic needs, as well as for starting or finding economic opportunities.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Methodology	4
Demographic information	4
Representativeness	5
Data findings	5
Return movements and experiences	5
Return and temporary visits	5
Purpose of temporary visits	6
Actors present at the border	6
Knowledge about 'go-and-see' visits regulations	6
Obstacles re-entering Türkiye	6
Successful visit?	7
Future plans	8
Plans for the next 12 months	8
Reasons Syrians do not want to return to Syria yet	8
Return at the end of the school year	9
Return when the weather improves	10
Legal residency in Türkiye	10
Legal documentation	10
Main challenges	10
Return support	12
Return support's influence on return	12
Type of support needed	12
Usage of return support	13
Conclusion	14

Introduction



This brief presents key findings from a recent conversation with Syrian individuals residing in Türkiye, focusing on their views, experiences, and plans regarding return to Syria. The discussion explored cross-border movements, including the purpose and impact of "go-and-see" visits, as well as the main barriers to return such as legal constraints, insecurity, and lack of services in Syria. Participants also shared their current legal and social situations in Türkiye, future intentions, and perceptions of what kind of support would be needed to enable a safe and dignified return. The insights gathered provide a snapshot of shifting dynamics and priorities that can inform future programming and dialogue on return.

Methodology



The study's methodology consisted of a conversation held through Upinion's Digital Engagement Platform (DEP), as part of a broader series of monitoring conversations conducted with Syrian individuals in Türkiye over the past four years. Upinion has developed this online platform that allows it to securely connect and stay in touch with marginalised or hard-to-reach communities, including people in crisis and displacement-affected countries. The in-house developed platform enables Upinion to engage real-time with people in the same way they connect with their friends and families, using messaging apps like Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp, which are also widely used by Syrian refugees in Türkiye.

Important to mention is that the DEP enables Upinion to send tailored, neutral information to respondents about relevant services or initiatives in their area, thereby turning the conversation into an information exchange. This sets the study's methodology apart from traditional surveys, as participants become active agents engaged in and influenced by knowledge exchange, rather than being simply providers of data.¹

Demographic information

It is essential to interpret the results while considering the sample characteristics unique to this conversation.

The sample consists of **228** Syrian nationals who started the conversation, and **201** respondents who completed it. The data collection took place from the **27th of March till the 1st of May 2025**.

¹ For more information on the recruitment of participants and Upinion's DEP, please contact info@upinion.com.

Of those who provided their demographic information, **69%** (n=228) identified as male and **31%** identified as female, resulting in a male-to-female ratio of 1 : 0.44.

The largest group of respondents (**42%**, n=227) were aged between 36 and 45. Smaller proportions fell within the age ranges of 26–35 (**21%**), 46–55 (**20%**), and 56–65 (**11%**). Only 7 individuals were aged 18–25, and 6 were older than 65.

Regarding respondents' areas of residency, individuals in this sample were living in the Southeastern Anatolia Region (**33%**, n=229), the Marmara Region (**30%**), the Mediterranean Region (**27%**), and the Central Anatolia Region (**7%**).

Representativeness

Upinion does not aim to establish statistical representativeness through its findings, as the conversations conducted for research purposes constitute qualitative or quantitative inquiries that do not simulate a reflection of the actual population. When comparing our distribution to actual country distributions, readers are invited to see for themselves how our samples can be reflective of a larger tendency.

Data findings

Return movements and experiences

Key findings

The majority of displaced Syrians in Türkiye remain hesitant to return, even temporarily. The small number who undertake visits mainly do so to check on property or see family and friends, though these visits are not always reported as fully successful. While few major obstacles were noted, uncertainties and concerns persist around re-entering Türkiye, particularly regarding access to aid, legal documentation, housing, and the risk of forced deportation upon return.

Return and temporary visits

90% (n=227) of Upinion's community reported still being in Türkiye. **5%** returned to Syria permanently, **4%** were in Syria but only for a temporary visit.

95% (n=201) of respondents that were still in Türkiye indicated that they had not travelled to Syria since the fall of the Assad regime either. Among them, **58%** said they had no plans to visit, while

37% indicated they were planning a future visit. Only **2%** reported having visited Syria since the regime change.

Upinion will remain connected with all individuals, including those planning future moves, to monitor their experiences and needs, and provide relevant information as their situations evolve.

Purpose of temporary visits

Amongst those reporting they were currently, or had visited Syria before, the main reasons were checking or reclaiming property (**7** out of **12**), seeing family and/or friends (**7**), or feeling the atmosphere in Syria (**5**).

Actors present at the border

Those indicating they were or had been visiting Syria were questioned about the actors present at the border to provide information or support.

3 respondents noted the presence of the Turkish Red Crescent, while **1** mentioned UNHCR. Additionally, **6** out of **12** participants referred to other actors, including the Turkish government, the White Helmets organization, and the Syrian transitional government.²

Knowledge about 'go-and-see' visits regulations

8 out of **12** respondents mentioned they had knowledge about the rules around temporary/'go-and-see' visits. **3** were not sure, and **1** indicated to not know the rules.

Obstacles re-entering Türkiye

Out of those indicating to have made a visit in the past, **3** out of **4** individuals did not experience any obstacles when re-entering Türkiye. **1** respondent faced issues related to their child's legal documentation³:

"They stopped the Kimlik (temporary protection ID) of one of my children at the border. They said he did not enter Turkey with us and that the entry cameras did not capture him three years ago. I followed up with the Göç (migration) administration and submitted a petition for reconsideration, but they did not respond to me." - Syrian respondent

² A trusted civil society partner of Upinion, active in both Türkiye and Syria, confirmed the presence of the Turkish Red Crescent and Turkish government authorities at the border.

³ Upinion's civil society partner working in Türkiye and Syria explained that, under current procedures, Syrians with Temporary Protection who travel to Syria do not have their status cancelled or deleted from the system; rather, their records are temporarily frozen until they return. However, some Syrians may misunderstand this as removal from the system, as well as, in practice, certain officers have reportedly kept names frozen beyond the intended period, creating challenges despite this not being stipulated by law.

Amongst those visiting Syria at time of the conversation, **5** out of **8** mentioned they foresee issues in re-entering Türkiye:

"I expect that me visiting Syria will be considered as me choosing voluntary return, and I might be deported forcibly – I say *might*, I'm not certain..." - Syrian respondent

"Aid can be suspended because of the vacation in Syria." - Syrian respondent

"I expect that the landlord wants the house back, and I can't go to another place because other areas are restricted and registration there is not possible." - Syrian respondent

"I expect suspension of the Kimlik, registration, and aid" - Syrian respondent

2 participants did not think they would face any issues, and **1** person preferred not to answer the question.

Successful visit?

6 out of **12** respondents reported that they were unable to achieve what they had planned to do in Syria. **4** indicated partial success, while only **1** respondent stated they had fully achieved their goals.

When asked to elaborate on why their visit was only somewhat or not at all successful, respondents highlighted the destruction of houses and infrastructure, the lack of basic and social services, and the overall instability, among other factors⁴:

"I saw my house bombed by aircraft and missiles as well as the parts left were taken by someone else." - Syrian respondent

"Syria is a country that has suffered from a war for 14 years. It is a completely exhausted country. There are no basic services, such as electricity, water, internet, or work. If you do not have money, you cannot live because our homes are completely destroyed in the Qaboun neighborhood in Damascus." - Syrian respondent

"I wanted stability, but I don't have a home for me and my children to live in, and I don't have the capital to open a project to live off. Our homes were destroyed because of the war, so I decided to return to Türkiye." - Syrian respondent

⁴Upinion's civil society partner working in Türkiye and Syria confirmed that these concerns highly exist under Syrians who have made visits: "After the fall of the Assad regime, Syrians felt very optimistic and happy to return to their country, but the vast majority, upon visiting, collided with the rock of reality and the fact that Syria is unable to provide the services necessary for them for daily life, which made some cancel the decision to permanently return, to avoid competing for the limited resources available with the members of their community."

"I was a classroom teacher and served for 36 years. The defunct regime imprisoned me, and after I was released, they expelled me from my job. I received no salary, no compensation, and no retirement benefits. When I followed up with the relevant directorate in Aleppo, they responded, 'There is no decision, and there are tens of thousands like you.' So how can I return to Syria now, when I am nearly seventy years old—without a pension or any money to live with?" - Syrian respondent

Future plans

Key findings

Future plans among Syrians in Türkiye are divided between staying, returning to Syria, or seeking resettlement elsewhere. For those not wanting to return (yet), structural barriers such as lack of housing, jobs, and essential services in Syria continue to deter return. Many anticipate a potential increase in return movements after the school year ends or when weather conditions improve, though uncertainty remains high.

Plans for the next 12 months

Among those who have not returned to Syria permanently, future plans for the next 12 months varied widely. **20%** (n=211) reported planning to stay in Türkiye, while another **20%** planned to resettle in Syria. Additionally, **21%** indicated plans to leave for a third country through UN-led resettlement, and **23%** were uncertain about their future plans.

This figure is similar to the one reported when Upinion asked about respondents' future plans in February 2025, just one month earlier. However, it contrasts sharply with responses from before the fall of the regime, when most participants expressed a desire to leave for a third country, followed by those planning to remain in Türkiye.

Reasons Syrians do not want to return to Syria yet

When asked about the main factors currently discouraging Syrians from returning to Syria, the largest share of participants (**52%**, n=201) cited the lack of capacity to rebuild homes. Nearly half (**49%**) also identified the lack of job opportunities as a key concern.

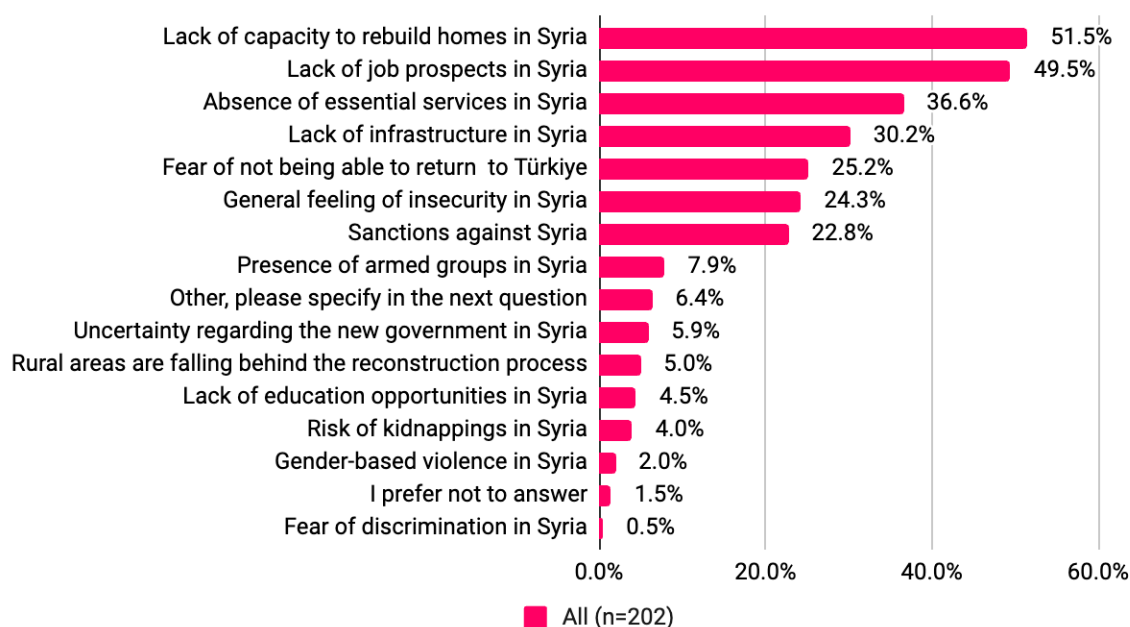
These key challenges align with insights from Upinion community members inside Syria as of January 2025, among whom a considerable **42%** (n=386) reported not living in their former homes after returning—mainly due to destruction. The largest groups of respondents also cited economic instability and lack of job opportunities as primary reasons for wanting to leave Syria again, not being able to afford basic needs, all of which contribute to their sense of insecurity.⁵

⁵For access to the report on community insights inside Syria from January 2025, please contact Upinion at info@upinion.com.

Other frequently mentioned barriers for return for Syrian individuals in Türkiye included the absence of essential services (**36%**), poor infrastructure such as roads and public services (**30%**), fear of not being able to return to Türkiye after visiting Syria (**25%**), and international sanctions on Syria (**23%**)

Concerns such as fear of discrimination, gender-based violence, the presence of armed groups, risks of kidnapping, rural areas falling behind in reconstruction, and uncertainty about the new government in Syria were mentioned less frequently.

Figure 1. "What would you say are the main factors right now making Syrians not want to return to Syria?" - multiple answers - all respondents (n=202)



It is important to note that the lack of job prospects and the inability to rebuild homes in Syria were mentioned more frequently by males (**55%** and **56%**, respectively, n=136) than by females (**37%** and **47%**, respectively, n=60). In contrast, a considerably higher proportion of females (**35%**) cited a general feeling of insecurity in Syria as a key factor preventing return, compared to **20%** of males.

Return at the end of the school year

90% (n=201) of respondents indicated that it is somehow likely (**52%**) or very likely (**38%**) that a large number of Syrians will return after the end of the school year in June 2025. **9%** thought it was unlikely.

Return when the weather improves

87% (n=201) of respondents indicated that it is somehow likely (**52%**) or very likely (**35%**) that a large number of Syrians will return when the weather improves in summer and houses no longer need heating. **12%** thought this was unlikely.

Legal residency in Türkiye

Key findings

While most Syrians in Türkiye have temporary protection, a considerable group remains without legal residency, facing greater fear of deportation, checkpoints, and arrest, as well as limited access to services. However, for both documented and undocumented individuals, limited legal rights continue to restrict mobility and access to support. Key challenges include restricted freedom of movement, ineligibility for government aid, and ongoing—though recently reduced—fear of deportation.

Legal documentation

Among those still living in Türkiye, **77%** (n=211) reported having obtained legal residency, while **18%** did not have legal residency. Additionally, **5%** preferred not to answer the question.

"I had a temporary protection card, but it stopped four years ago. I filed a case with the administrative court, but to no avail." - Syrian respondents

Amongst those obtaining legal residency, the majority obtained a Temporary Protection Identification Card (Kimlik) (**91%**, n=162). Few respondents indicated to have Turkish citizenship (**4%**), a work permit (**2%**), or an International Protection Identification Card (**1%**).

Main challenges

When asked to indicate the main challenges faced, both those with legal documentation (**69%**, n=162) and those without (**55%**, n=38) reported limited mobility or freedom of movement to be their main challenge.

When elaborating on their answers, respondents with legal documentation mostly referred to restrictions on movement between regions, as they are unable to travel without a permit, which often gets delayed or denied. For those without any legal documentation, these challenges were compounded by fear of checkpoints and police patrols. Many described feeling unsafe even when moving within their own neighborhoods, due to the constant risk of arrest and forced deportation.

"I cannot travel to another governorate without a travel permit, and most of the time it is denied—even when there is a strong reason to travel. For example, my sister in Gaziantep is going to have heart surgery in the hospital. My niece is in Istanbul, and I cannot visit her because they won't grant me permission to travel." - Syrian respondent with Temporary Protection

"I go out shopping and I refrain from moving too much around the neighbourhood out of fear." - Syrian respondent without legal documentation

Individuals without legal documentation reported considerably higher levels of certain challenges. These included threats of forced return or deportation to Syria (**45%** amongst those without legal documentation vs. **27%** with documentation), fear of checkpoints (**34%** vs. **23%**), denial of access to healthcare (**26%** vs. **6%**), restricted access to justice (**18%** vs. **8%**), risk of detention or arrest (**21%** vs. **5%**), and the inability to enroll children in school or participate in official events (**13%** vs. **2%**).

"After our Kimlik was stopped, we could no longer access treatment in government hospitals. When we traveled to another province to see a doctor who specializes in treating my child's rare disease, we were arrested, imprisoned, and threatened with deportation." - Syrian respondent without legal documentation

"I was not yet directly threatened. But my children and I are in constant fear of deportation or arrest. Sometimes we do not leave the house for days, for fear of that." - Syrian respondent without legal documentation

However, other notable challenges were reported at roughly similar levels by both those with and without legal documentation in Türkiye. These included ineligibility for certain government support (**26%** among those without documentation vs. **29%** with documentation), inability to return to Syria (**23%** vs. **24%**), issues with renewing or losing legal status (**26%** vs. **23%**), and experiences of discrimination when interacting with public authorities (**18%** vs. **22%**).

"I have an overactive gland with nodules that requires surgery, and I've already had more than three surgeries, including rods and screws in my legs. Yet, I'm not eligible for disability or permanent illness assistance." - Syrian respondent with legal documentation

These challenges generally align with previous monitoring results (in August and September 2024).

Return support

Key findings

Return support plays a significant role in Syrians' decisions to return to Syria, with the majority indicating that financial assistance for both the return journey and post-arrival costs is essential. Most respondents would need support for food and (partial) reconstruction, with a focus on family-oriented assistance.

However, this topic should be approached with caution: while it is essential to listen to these needs, return support should not become the sole driver of return, as it alone does not guarantee a safe, voluntary, or informed return.

Return support's influence on return

When asked whether receiving return support would influence their decision to go back to Syria, **60%** (n=209) responded 'Yes,' while **24%** said 'No.' An additional **7%** stated they were already considering returning, regardless of any support.

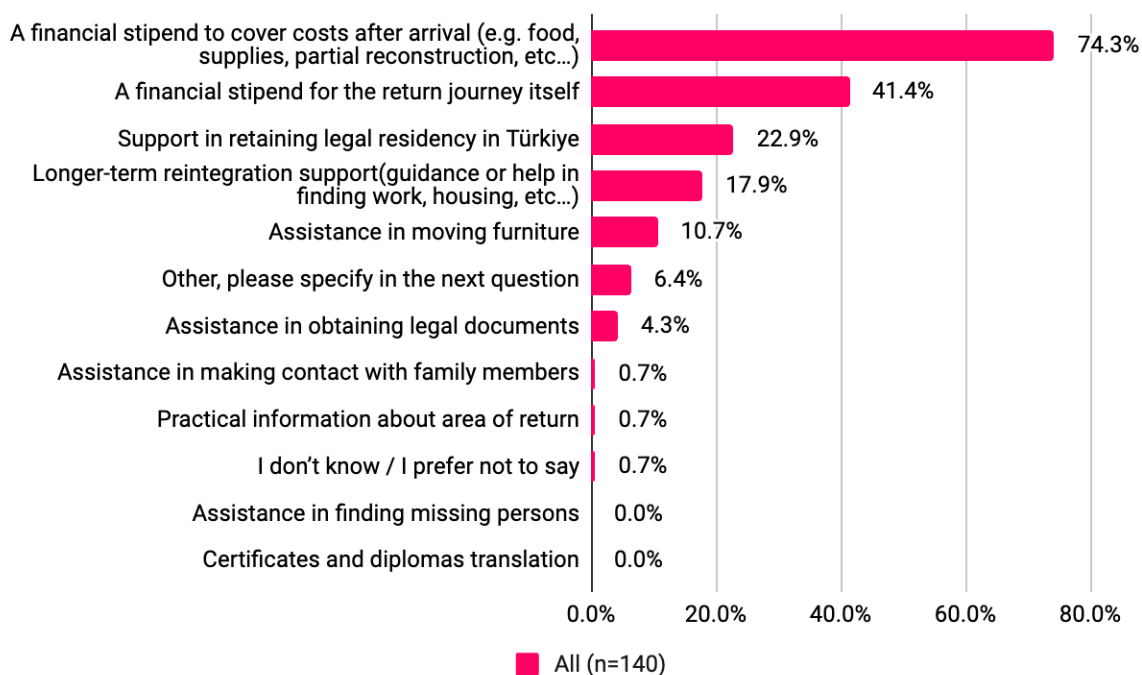
Type of support needed

Among those considering return, respondents were asked what kind of support they would most need—or what they felt they could not manage without. A large majority (**74%**, n=140) said they would require a financial stipend to cover costs after arrival, such as food supplies or partial reconstruction. Additionally, **41%** indicated they would need financial support for the return journey itself.

Other needs included support to retain legal residency in Türkiye (**23%**), and longer-term reintegration assistance (**18%**), such as help finding work, housing, or general guidance.

Notably, almost no respondents mentioned needing support in contacting family members, locating missing persons, obtaining legal documents in Syria, or accessing practical information about their area of return.

Figure 2. "What type of return support would you mostly need or can you not go without?" - multiple answers - all respondents (n=140)



It is important to note that, in a follow-up question, most participants (**66%**, n=135) mentioned that their return would ideally involve bringing 3 to 6 family members, indicating that any return support should be designed with families in mind.

Usage of return support

Additionally, when asked in an open-ended format to elaborate on which practical steps they would need return support for, respondents mentioned for housing and reconstruction, legal issues and administration, to obtain basic needs and infrastructure as well as for starting or finding economic opportunities, i.e. through opening a business.

"Firstly, transportation, which is very expensive. Secondly, housing. My area is 80 percent destroyed. I can try to live in a place other than my area, of course, if housing and work are secured." - Syrian respondent

"First, we need the costs of returning, then, we don't have a house in Syria that is destroyed, and we don't have any services. We need reconstruction assistance with food and drink supplies." - Syrian respondent

"We hope in the next steps that the infrastructure will be reconstructed as soon as possible and that support for the rest of the health and educational services and facilities." - Syrian respondent

"Legal steps: Placing children in schools, getting their certificates. I have two births that are not registered in the family book. My house is destroyed in Syria and needs reconstruction, so I will wait until I get support to build my house and rehabilitate schools and hospitals for my children." - Syrian respondent

"I want a financial grant so that I can renovate my house and a grant to open a small business from which I and my family can live." - Syrian respondent

Conclusion

This report's findings reveal the complexity of decisions regarding return among Syrians in Türkiye. A large majority of the displaced Syrian population remains hesitant to return to Syria, also for temporary visits. While some individuals undertake short-term visits, primarily motivated by the desire to reconnect with family and friends or to assess the condition of their properties, these experiences often fall short of initial hopes. Factors contributing to these unmet expectations include widespread destruction of homes and infrastructure, the severe lack of basic services such as electricity, water, and internet, and the prevailing atmosphere of instability and insecurity within Syria.

Looking ahead, Syrians in Türkiye have diverse plans, with some intending to stay, others aiming to return, and some seeking resettlement elsewhere. Key factors influencing these decisions include the ongoing economic instability, lack of housing, and limited job opportunities in Syria, which remain significant deterrents to return. Meanwhile, legal barriers, such as restricted mobility, fear around deportation, and limited access to aid, housing, and public services, continue to impede the ability of Syrians to fully integrate into Turkish society.

While return support, especially financial assistance for travel, housing, and reconstruction, is vital, it should not be a driving force for repatriation. A more comprehensive approach is needed: one that not only addresses the financial needs of returnees but also ensures safety, legal security, access to basic services, and long-term stability. Only through this holistic approach can return be made both sustainable and safe for displaced Syrians who wish to return.

Contact

Noor Lekkerkerker
CEO
noor@upinion.com

Noëlle van Glabbeek
Researcher
noelle@upinion.com