



📍 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT · BRUSSELS

— SYRIAN RETURN · CHATHAM HOUSE RULE

After Assad's fall — what does *return* actually mean?

A morning roundtable at the European Parliament on the humanitarian reality behind Syrian return — co-hosted by Tineke Strik MEP (Greens/EFA) and Umutcan Yüksel (EUI / DKH), under Chatham House Rule.

ONE YEAR AFTER THE TRANSITION

A transition under compounding crises.

More than three million refugees and IDPs have returned home — a sign of cautious hope. The humanitarian reality on the ground tells a more sobering story.

16.5M

SYRIANS NEED HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT
 ≈ 70% of the population · 2026 Syria HRP

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GLOBAL HUNGER HOTSPOTS FOR 2026
 FAO-WFP outlook

5.5M

STILL INTERNALLY DISPLACED
 Plus 1.8M IDP returnees · UNHCR

138K

DISPLACED FROM ALEPPO
 January 2026 offensive · Sheikh Maqsoud & Ashrafiyah

CANNOT AFFORD THE NEW ELECTRICITY TARIFFS

83%

Grid heavily rationed · 15.4M people at risk from explosive ordnance · reconstruction estimated at \$216B.

Sources: 2026 Syria Humanitarian Response Plan · FAO-WFP · UNHCR · Yüksel & Strik, Migration Policy Centre (EUI), 20 March 2026.

A GROWING ASYMMETRY

Pushed out — *pulled back?*

90%+

LEBANON'S SYRIAN
REFUGEES IN EXTREME
POVERTY

2.8M

SYRIANS UNDER
"TEMPORARY PROTECTION"
IN TÜRKİYE

76%

DO NOT INTEND TO RETURN
WITHIN 12 MONTHS
UNHCR Enhanced Regional Survey,
Sep 2025

LEBANON

Crisis-deepened deprivation

Over 90% of Syrian refugees live in extreme poverty amid economic collapse; 76% lived below the minimum expenditure basket in 2023. Lebanese Armed Forces summarily deported thousands throughout 2024.

TÜRKİYE

Anti-refugee sentiment — and coerced "voluntariness"

Highest anti-refugee sentiment globally (UNHCR, 2024); 90% cannot cover basic monthly expenses. HRW documents coercion into "voluntary return" — over 85,000 estimated deported in 2024 alone.

EUROPEAN UNION

From asylum suspensions to return architecture

Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Austria suspended Syrian asylum within days of Assad's fall. Status revocations begun across multiple Member States; pressure mounts to list Syria as a "safe country of origin".

INSIDE SYRIA

Pull factors remain weak

Housing, security, economic challenges and basic services cited as primary concerns (UNHCR ERS, Sep 2025). January 2026 Aleppo clashes, winter storms affecting 158,000 displaced people, and the ongoing ISIL threat undercut the "new Syria" narrative.

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN BRUSSELS

An environment of *constructive refoulement*.

Feasibility is not the same as safety. Return becomes feasible when a political obstacle disappears — it becomes safe only when security, legal protections, housing, services, and genuine freedom of choice are actually in place.

€2.5B

EU PLEDGE FOR SYRIA 2025–2026

€620M

ADDITIONAL PACKAGE COMMITTED

European Commission

\$216B

ESTIMATED COST OF RECONSTRUCTION

01

Status review and revocation.

Multiple Member States have initiated reviews; some have begun revocation proceedings. ECRE cautions the situation in Syria is far from meeting the requirements — changes must be fundamental, durable, and stable.

02

Safe-country-of-origin listing.

The EU agreed an EU-wide list in December 2025. Syria is not yet listed — but political pressure from several Member States to include it is mounting.

03

Common European System for Returns.

The Commission's March 2025 proposal creates institutional momentum that may not distinguish safe from unsafe contexts.

04

Frontex back on Syrian returns.

Operational support for Syrian return operations resumed — formally framed as voluntary, but stacking with revocations and reduced reception conditions.

Sources: ECRE · European Commission · [Yüksel & Strik, MPC/EUI, 20 March 2026.](#)



Returns must be voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable — not a slogan, but the legal and ethical floor against which every EU policy instrument should be measured.

— Key message, Brussels Roundtable, 24 March 2026

Read the full analysis: **“Why Syrian refugee return is driven by push, not pull”** — Migration Policy Centre, European University Institute.

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migrationpolicycentre.eu

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