

**ipl** Immigration Policy Lab

POLICY BRIEF

## Returning Home? Why Pushing Syrian Refugees To Return Is Unlikely To Be Effective

**LOCATION**  
Lebanon

**RESEARCH QUESTION**  
What factors shape refugees' decision to return home?

**RESEARCH DESIGN**  
Panel survey

**TEAM**  
Aislinn Atkinson | Immigration Policy Lab, ETH Zurich  
Daniel Mesteron | Immigration Policy Lab and University of California, Santa Barbara  
Melina Casella | Immigration Policy Lab, ETH Zurich  
Dominik Hangartner | Immigration Policy Lab, ETH Zurich  
Jeremy Weinstein | Immigration Policy Lab, Stanford University

Twelve years after Syria's civil war began, 5.5 million Syrians live in neighboring countries, many of whom have been displaced for a decade or more. Much of Syria remains devastated, and many refugees considering returning fear violence, persecution, and government retribution in the postwar period. In February 2023, the country's ongoing humanitarian crisis was compounded by the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that hit southern Turkey and northwestern Syria, leaving even more people without basic shelter and public services. This has rekindled important questions over the fate of displaced Syrians and their prospects for returning home. Some governments have taken active steps to push refugees to return to Syria, yet many in the international community believe that conditions in the country remain unsuitable.

Absent in these discussions is the voice of Syrian refugees. Do they want to go back to Syria? If so, when and under what conditions? What factors predict the return of refugees? Researchers at the Immigration Policy Lab (IPL) conducted a representative survey of 3,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon in 2019 to learn about their return intentions.

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