

Project Proposal:

Creating conditions for sustainable return and reintegration in Syria

Project type:	Durable Solutions (DS)
Secondary project type:	Return and Reintegration Assistance for Migrants and Governments (RR)
Geographical Coverage:	Syrian Arab Republic
Executing agency:	International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Beneficiaries:	20,000 (internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, host community members) ¹
Partner(s):	Local communities, Ministry of Social and Affairs and Labour (MOSAL), Ministry of Local Administration and Environment (MOLAE), Solutions Working Group members (UN Agencies and NGOs); Civil Society Organizations
Management site:	Damascus, CO, SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
Duration:	12 months
Budget:	EUR 1,000,000.00

Summary

This project aims to support early recovery and strengthen conditions for sustainable return and reintegration in areas of high return in Aleppo and Idleb governorates in Syria. Since late 2024, large-scale spontaneous returns, estimated at over 2 million IDPs and 1.28 million refugees, have placed increasing pressure on communities already affected by prolonged conflict, damaged infrastructure and limited access to essential services. Key destinations, including Aleppo and Idleb, remain only partially conducive to return due to degraded living conditions, insufficient basic services and persistent housing, land and property (HLP) challenges. These constraints continue to undermine reintegration prospects and increase the risk of renewed displacement and community tensions.

¹ Please note total beneficiaries is subject to change based on locations ultimately selected.

To address these challenges, IOM will implement a one-year, area-based intervention focused on rehabilitating critical public and community infrastructure in selected high-return locations. Through participatory and conflict-sensitive approaches, the project will identify priority needs through community consultations and technical assessments to ensure interventions respond directly to the needs of returnees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities. Rehabilitation works will focus on light to medium-scale infrastructure, including water systems, community facilities, markets and other essential services, to restore functionality and improve access. By strengthening local service delivery, improving living conditions and supporting inclusive access to shared infrastructure, the project will contribute to stabilising communities, reducing pressures that contribute to displacement, and supporting sustainable reintegration outcomes in areas of high return.

Complementing field-level interventions, the project will strengthen the capacity of Belgian reintegration stakeholders to support informed, safe and voluntary returns in line with the return and reintegration due diligence policy. Through targeted webinars and knowledge-sharing products, the project will provide up-to-date, evidence-based information on conditions in areas of return, enabling more accurate counselling and decision-making for Syrians considering return. A final dissemination event in Brussels will further support policy dialogue and alignment between migration, humanitarian and development priorities.

1. Rationale

The fall of the Assad regime, on 8 December 2024, triggered the first significant wave of spontaneous returns among displaced Syrians in more than a decade. Since the conflict began in 2011, an estimated 14 million Syrians have been forcibly displaced in search of safety. Today, more than 5.96 million Syrians remain internally displaced, while approximately 3.7 million refugees reside in neighbouring countries, including Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt¹. In addition, sizeable Syrian refugee populations live in Europe – including an estimated 30,000 in Belgium.

Return movements have accelerated since late 2024. According to [IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix \(DTM\) Baseline Assessment Round 15](#), as of April 2026, approximately 2.08 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and over 1.34 million Syrians from abroad have returned to the Syrian Arab Republic (hereafter referred to as Syria), together accounting for nearly 12 per cent of Syria's total population (27.9 million as of April 2026). The governorates of Aleppo and Idlib remain the primary destinations for these returns; receiving the largest share of returnees, alongside Rural Damascus. IOM's 2026 [survey of Syrians in Belgium](#) reflects similar patterns: among the Syrian returnees who departed from Belgium since January 2025, approximately 45% appear to be directed toward the governorates of Aleppo and Idlib.

While most returns occur spontaneously, a smaller number take place through formal Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) mechanisms. According to [IOM Syria's Population Mobility and Baseline Assessment \(April 2026\)](#), key pull factors influencing return include an improved security environment (39% of those assessed), the need to reoccupy property and recover assets (17%), and better access to livelihoods (12%). However, despite these pull factors, conditions in key return areas remain highly fragile. Extensive destruction of public infrastructure, weak governance capacity and deep social fractures continue to [undermine](#) prospects for sustainable reintegration.

Most recently, following a significant escalation in hostilities across the Middle East region beginning on 28 February 2026, cross-border movements into Syria have increased, particularly from neighbouring Lebanon. More than 130,000 people have crossed from Lebanon into Syria, according

to the latest data from IOM DTM. Reported needs among new arrivals included food, cash assistance, and shelter, with most individuals relying on temporary accommodation arrangements, often staying free of charge with relatives or friends. As of 18 May, [DTM also recorded 82,060 individuals arriving across 892 locations in all 14 governorates in Syria](#). These growing number of crossings heighten pressure on an already fragile system. Syria's infrastructure and public services remain weakened after more than a decade of crisis, and key destinations, including Aleppo and Idlib are under growing pressure to adapt rapidly to this changing context.

[IOM's Communities of Return Index \(CORI\) \(Round 4\)](#) assesses both Aleppo and Idlib as only "partially conducive to returns", with major barriers including degraded living conditions, limited humanitarian or development assistance, and poor access to essential services. 51 per cent of locations in Aleppo and 52 per cent in Idlib lack access to drinking water, 36 and 43 per cent lack access to primary schooling, 75 and 72 per cent lack access to secondary school, and 75 and 73 per cent lack access to emergency health care. These constraints place additional pressure on local institutions, heighten the risk of renewed displacement and inter-communal tensions, and weaken the overall sustainability of returns.

Across assessed governorates, the lack of public electricity and waste disposal services also remained the most consistently reported challenges. KIs indicated that 40 per cent of communities had no access to public electricity, while 28 per cent lacked any waste management services, although some improvements in access have been observed since the previous round.

At the same time, return movements often coexist with ongoing displacement and secondary mobility, demonstrating that return does not signal the end of humanitarian or protection needs. Sustainable reintegration is closely tied to improvements in security, housing, essential services and livelihood opportunities, all of which CORI data illustrate remain currently insufficient in key areas of return.

In other locations in the country, namely rural Damascus, KIs have emphasised the importance of social initiatives in the recovery of key infrastructure. KIs referenced campaigns in Al-Kiswah, including the drilling of a second strategic well in the Al-Jabal area of Al-Kiswah, implemented through a community-based and participatory process. These activities form part of ongoing efforts in the governorate to enhance water security and improve access to reliable water supplies for residents and provide a promising model that can be replicated in other locations across the country.

To complement government efforts, priority rehabilitation needs in Aleppo and Idlib will focus on restoring and expanding water supply networks, repairing or replacing damaged electricity infrastructure, improving waste disposal systems, and rehabilitating economic, health and education facilities in high-return areas. Ensuring access to such basic services is fundamental to improving living standards, supporting sustainable return and reintegration, particularly for families who have remained displaced due to inadequate conditions in their areas of origin. As part of the No Tents and Camps vision, the governorates of Idlib, Aleppo and Hama have been identified as priority areas as they are simultaneously locations of displacement and locations of preferred return for internally displaced persons as well. Results of intentions surveys indicate that shelter, access to basic services, livelihoods, mine action and rubble removal are key to conduciveness of areas of return. In Belgium, IOM has implemented the national AVRR programme since its inception, working in close synergy with Fedasil to deliver dignified return and reintegration assistance. Joint efforts include community-based reintegration approaches, country-specific interventions, and post-return monitoring to assess sustainability and satisfaction with the return process. At the end of 2025, IOM also conducted a Syrian Return Intentions Survey to better understand the evolving aspirations, concerns, and decision-making factors among Syrians living in Belgium in light of the shifting context in Syria. Most respondents are cautious about return: only 7 per cent intend to return to Syria within the coming year, while 38 per cent envision returning in the medium to long term, contingent on improved

conditions in Syria. While safety and security concerns emerged as one of the most decisive factors, the reconstruction of housing and land issues, and the restoration of essential services, such as health care, were also identified as key preconditions for sustainable reintegration. The findings of this survey provide an additional evidence base to inform counselling, programme design and policy dialogue. Experience from AVRR operations consistently shows that reintegration outcomes depend heavily on whether conditions in countries of origin are conducive to return, underscoring the importance of linking return assistance with broader efforts to strengthen local recovery and resilience.

With increasing political momentum in Belgium to strengthen the link between international cooperation and migration objectives, there is a timely opportunity to operationalize such alignment in Syria. Given the scale of recent return movements, including from Belgium, and the urgent need to stabilise high-return locations, IOM proposes an area-based early recovery initiative. This project would focus on strengthening municipal systems, inclusive local development planning, and the rehabilitation of public and community infrastructure in high-return areas of Aleppo and Idlib.

The proposal offers a concrete, practical contribution to creating conditions conducive to safe, dignified and sustainable reintegration, benefiting returnees from Belgium and other countries, as well as internally displaced Syrians and host communities. It also provides a structured and non-conditional way for Belgium to align development and migration priorities in a context where early investment is critical to prevent renewed instability and displacement.

2. Project Description

Objective: Using an area-based approach, support the early recovery and sustainable reintegration of communities of return in Syria.

IOM will focus its one-year project on interventions in two communities in high return governorates of Aleppo and Idlib. IOM will select specific communities and needs at the project start utilising IOM's CoRI data, triangulating with information on location needs by the Syrian Government.

To address the complex and interconnected challenges that continue to hinder sustainable returns and reintegration, IOM proposes a comprehensive and conflict sensitive area-based approach that delivers coordinated, multisectoral support within clearly defined locations of high return. IOM's area-based approach focuses on a specific geographic area, such as a neighbourhood or a cluster of nearby communities, and works directly with the people living there to understand their priorities, the services they rely on, and the systemic barriers affecting daily life. By analysing how the area functions as a whole, rather than addressing needs in isolation, the approach makes it possible to design tailored packages of assistance that strengthen essential services, reinforce local community networks, and promote social cohesion among returnees, IDPs and host communities.

IOM aims to rehabilitate communal spaces or shared infrastructure in a way that addresses impediments to social cohesion and creates opportunities to build social cohesion. IOM will prioritize locations, communities and infrastructure projects that have a direct and strategic impact on social cohesion and/or community tensions; and will adopt processes that will intentionally build social cohesion.

Prioritized activities will be designed in direct consultation with different groups including returnees, IDPs, host communities, women, youth, and persons with disabilities. Following years of conflict and fractured communities it is essential that an area-based approach is adopted to facilitate inclusive decision-making and to avoid exacerbating tensions. By implementing activities at the community,

rather than individual level, this project will support peace/social cohesion outcomes by facilitating dialogue among diverse community members (horizontal relationships) and strengthening local authorities service delivery capacities. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with local leaders, community members, local civil society and grassroots organisations and local authorities will inform IOM's area-based selection of appropriate interventions based on local priorities. IOM will also map all available resources, services, and facilities to determine the appropriate scale, viability, and sustainability of the proposed intervention. Government authorities will be involved to promote alignment of the interventions with local development plans and available resources.

At the national level, IOM will coordinate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates (MOFAE) as well as relevant line ministries, including the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment (MOLAE) and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL) to ensure alignment with the priorities of the National Recovery Plan and the 'No Tents and Camps' vision.

Through this project, IOM will revitalise public infrastructure that expands access to education, health care, water, livelihoods and other essential services. The project will also upgrade shared community spaces that contribute to stability and daily well-being. By grounding interventions in community identified needs and the realities of the local service environment, the project aims to improve living conditions, resilience, reduce pressures that contribute to secondary displacement and strengthen the foundation for sustainable, long-term reintegration.

Outcome 1: Communities of return benefit from improved access to rehabilitated public infrastructure, sustainable reintegration, service continuity, and community stabilisation.

Through this outcome, IOM will support early recovery and sustainable reintegration for Syrian returnees from Belgium and other European countries, as well as IDPs, by rehabilitating essential public infrastructure in areas of return. Interventions will prioritise community level facilities with high social impact, rather than individual housing units, to ensure that both returning populations and host communities have equitable access to basic services. By restoring key public infrastructure, the project will address one of the main barriers to return identified by displaced populations, while reducing pressure on host communities, mitigating return-related tensions, and strengthening social cohesion. This approach will ensure relevance, conflict sensitivity, sustainability, and contribute to rebuilding trust in local systems and institutions, which is critical for sustainable reintegration.

Interventions will focus on areas with high return potential in Aleppo and Idlib where a significant proportion of returnees originate.

Output 1.1: Public infrastructure in areas of return is rehabilitated to support early recovery and sustainable reintegration.

In Aleppo and Idlib, CoRI Round 4 data highlight several critical infrastructure gaps that directly undermine living standards and the sustainability of returns. As outlined in the rationale, in both Aleppo and Idlib governorates, access to safe drinking water remains a major concern, with other significant gaps in access to telecommunications, primary schools, and health care services. Closely linked with access to critical infrastructure is livelihoods. In Aleppo 73 per cent and in Idlib 83 per cent of the primary livelihoods sector remains partially functional with the high cost of living cited as significant challenge nationally. CoRI data underscores the importance of investment in infrastructure restoration and its link to short-medium- and longer-term employment opportunities.

Given these conditions, priority rehabilitation needs in both governorates will focus on restoring and expanding water supply networks, repairing or replacing damaged electricity infrastructure, improving

waste disposal systems, and rehabilitating economic, health and education facilities in high-return areas. Ensuring access to such basic services is fundamental to improving living standards, supporting sustainable return and reintegration, particularly for families who have remained displaced due to inadequate conditions in their areas of origin.

Activities

Activity 1.1.1: Conduct area-based and facility-level assessments to identify target return locations.

The selection process for communities will be based primarily on a combination of trends in numbers of returnees and relocating IDPs or returnees from abroad, and will consider population demographics, vulnerability of locations vis-a-vis the DTM CoRI and Baseline data, government priority lists under the 'No Tents and Camps' vision, as well as other available data on community-level conditions conducive to the achievement of reintegration.

Community Selection will consider locations which have already received significant returns and those which have potential to receive more returns based on return intention surveys.

Communities affected by recent returns or relocation. These are communities that have either experienced or are expecting a proportionally higher number of returns or relocation of Syrians returning from abroad or returning or relocating IDPs and that are accepting the arrivals. In some cases, these also include communities that hosted many IDPs and witnessed significant waves of returns in the past year or are expected to receive a higher number of returnees from abroad.

The assessments will also consider communities still experiencing limited or no returns. This category includes communities that have been impacted by displacement but have seen limited returns compared to the overall displaced population.

The assessment and identification of these communities will occur at the initial stages of the program, informed by IOM's ongoing monitoring of the overall displacement situation in the country, priority locations shared by the government based on data collected under the 'No Tents and Camps' vision including the intentions of IDPs and Syrians abroad. Community selection will be driven by evidence-based approaches, utilizing data analysis and complemented by a thorough consultative process with the communities, authorities, and local organisations. This ensures that areas and projects most in need of intervention are identified and prioritized.

Once the prioritised community is identified, IOM will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the community assets and resources using IOM's flagship [community-based planning process](#) in close coordination with the local authorities and communities through relevant IOM technical teams. These consultations will ensure that the selection of interventions is guided first and foremost by the needs and priorities of the communities themselves.

Activity 1.1.2: Rehabilitate priority public facilities (education, economic, health, community, religious, and water infrastructure), engaging communities and local authorities in planning, implementation, and oversight of rehabilitation works.

Based on a combination of participatory needs assessments and existing DTM data focused on conditions in areas of return, IOM will rehabilitate priority public facilities that are essential for community functioning and early recovery. These may include schools, health centres, public markets, religious establishments, community centres, parks and playgrounds, and small-scale water treatment plants, water supply networks, electricity networks, road re-surfacing, solarisation, and drainage

systems. Rehabilitation works will be light to medium in scale and designed to rapidly restore functionality, safety, and accessibility.

To enhance the sustainability of the recovery and reintegration process at community level, IOM interventions are based off a community-based planning process involving community members and local authorities in a process aimed at defining key priorities of intervention. Members of the targeted community of different socioeconomic backgrounds, displacement status, gender and ages will be involved in identifying, as well as in planning and developing preferred solutions. Community consultation processes will encompass various steps of data collection and discussions with different stakeholders - community members, community leaders and local authorities with the aim of collecting information required to properly plan interventions based on the community's preferences and needs, as well as to identify activities that can be led and implemented by community members themselves. These steps include stakeholder and service mapping, transect walks with key informants (which reveal the location and distribution of resources and social dynamics), workshops with a larger group of community representatives and meetings with relevant local authority representatives. All information collected is compiled in a community report. In some locations, certain steps of community consultations are conducted by female IOM staff with female community members only to adequately understand the needs and perspectives of females in the community. IOM also works to identify specific needs of persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. From the information collected and subsequent validation visits, engineers develop a longlist of proposed infrastructure projects. Once all IOM interventions in a specific location are determined, IOM will conduct community feedback sessions to inform community members how the information they provided was used and what IOM interventions will take place in their communities.

IOM will implement the rehabilitation activities directly, using a community-led model including extensive community consultation in the selection of interventions (Activity 1.1.1) and engages local human resources during the construction itself. This approach is essential to promote ownership and ensure sustainability of the interventions, as well as support social cohesion and inclusive participation in the target communities.

Technical assessments will be conducted by IOM engineers alongside members of the community and local authorities. IOM contractors will monitor rehabilitation work carried out to enhance access to basic services, adopt Quality Assurance and Quality Control (QAQC) procedures and report progress, issue instructions and material approvals, defect reporting and rectifications, enter project details and beneficiary information, and record project location. Local human resources will be utilized and engaged throughout project implementation and measures will be put in place to support ongoing operations and maintenance (O&M).

Interventions will be sequenced and coordinated with other sectoral actors to maximize impact and avoid duplication. On the coordination front, activities are coordinated through the Solutions Working Group (co-led by IOM), as well as the health, WASH and education sectors. On the ground, IOM actively coordinates with other actors to ensure complementarity of efforts.

Community engagement will be embedded throughout the process, from facility selection to monitoring, to strengthen local ownership, social cohesion and accountability, functioning with an active Complaints and Feedback Mechanism allowing all community members to voice their concerns.

Outcome 2: Belgian reintegration actors and diaspora networks are better informed and better equipped to support safe, voluntary, and sustainable return to Syria.

Output 2.1: Thematic webinars delivered to strengthen Belgian counsellor's knowledge on conditions in Syrian areas of return.

As part of the project's efforts to reinforce the capacity of Belgian first-line counsellors involved in return-related information provision, IOM will organize three thematic webinars based on findings from the CoRI. These sessions will give counsellors an evidence-based overview of conditions in key Syrian areas of return, supporting more informed, consistent, and context-sensitive guidance during interactions with Syrians considering return. In addition, an online tool (e.g. a SharePoint platform) will be developed and made available to first-line counsellors, providing regular updated, accessible information on the situation in Syria to complement the webinar content and support continuous learning.

Recent evidence on Syrians returning from abroad, including from Europe, shows that while many returns are formally voluntary, they are often shaped by constrained choices, including limited opportunities, legal uncertainty and social pressures in host countries. Returnees frequently report gaps between expectations and reality, partly due to incomplete or overly optimistic information prior to departure. Once in Syria, the main challenges relate to economic reintegration, with widespread unemployment, unstable livelihoods and food insecurity consistently identified as major obstacles to sustainable return, compounded by structural constraints such as damaged housing, limited access to basic services and unresolved housing, land and property issues. While family and community ties can support social integration, protection risks remain significant, including safety concerns, legal insecurity and, in some cases, gender-specific risks such as domestic violence, abandonment and difficulties reintegrating into more traditional communities after time spent in Europe, particularly for women and children.

Against this backdrop, the webinars will present area-level insights on service availability, infrastructure, safety, and socio-economic conditions, drawing on CoRI data and complemented by inputs from IOM Syria and, where feasible, local partners.

Through this output, Belgian counsellors, from Fedasil, NGOs of the IOM Partner Network and other AVRRC actors, will gain up-to-date, impartial and comprehensive information on return conditions. Ensuring that this information is shared transparently and in a balanced manner is essential to support informed decision-making, reduce the risk of unsustainable returns, and mitigate potential negative consequences such as weakened social cohesion, secondary movements, and reduced trust in return processes.

Activities:

Activity 2.1.1: Organize and deliver three interactive webinars targeting first-line counsellors.

To achieve this output, IOM will first analyse and synthesize relevant data and complementary sources to develop tailored webinar content, including presentations and briefing materials covering service availability, infrastructure, safety and socio-economic conditions in key Syrian areas of return, ensuring that the information is evidence-based and adapted to the needs of Belgian counsellors. In parallel, IOM will coordinate with – where feasible – local partners to integrate field-level insights and contextual updates, enriching the content with operational perspectives.

In addition, IOM will develop and maintain an online tool accessible to first-line counsellors, providing regularly updated information on the situation in Syria and serving as a repository for webinar materials and other relevant resources to support continuous access to up-to-date information. Building on this, IOM will organize and deliver three interactive webinars targeting first-line counsellors from Fedasil, NGO's and other AVRR actors, facilitating knowledge sharing through presentations, discussions and Q&A sessions, and strengthening their capacity to provide balanced, up-to-date and context-sensitive return information.

Output 2.2: A closing event is organized in Brussels to disseminate project results and strengthen the policy dialogue.

As part of the project's final phase, a high-level closing event will be organised in Brussels to present the project's key achievements, operational lessons, and evidence generated on conditions influencing sustainable return and reintegration in Syria. The event will bring together representatives from relevant Belgian authorities, international organisations, Syrian diaspora networks, civil society organisations, and other relevant stakeholders.

The event will highlight early recovery progress in the targeted areas of Aleppo and Idlib, demonstrating how the project supported improved access to essential services, strengthened municipal capacities, and contributed to more conducive conditions for reintegration. Discussions will also focus on the remaining structural gaps in local service delivery and priority needs for continued recovery support.

This conference aims to reinforce Belgium's national policy dialogue on voluntary, safe, and dignified return by enhancing the evidence base available to Belgian decision-makers and frontline actors. It will support greater coherence between Belgium's migration management, humanitarian engagement, and development cooperation efforts related to Syria. The event will facilitate exchanges between Belgian institutions, international actors, and field-level partners, showcasing how Belgian-funded initiatives align with broader efforts while remaining tailored to national priorities.

In addition, the event will provide a platform for Syrian diaspora representatives living in Belgium, as well as Syrian local partners, to share first-hand perspectives on evolving conditions in areas of return. Their contributions will help ensure that future Belgian programming on reintegration, resilience, and potential human capital initiatives reflects both local realities and diaspora insights.

Activities:

Activity 2.2.1: Organise and deliver the closing event in Brussels.

To achieve this output, IOM will first design the closing event by developing a concept note and detailed agenda in close coordination with the donor, identifying key thematic priorities, target audiences and expected outcomes, and preparing presentation materials showcasing project achievements, operational lessons learned and evidence on return and reintegration conditions.

Building on this, IOM will coordinate with Belgian authorities, international partners, civil society organisations, and Syrian diaspora representatives to ensure broad and balanced participation, including the identification and confirmation of speakers from both policy and operational levels. Finally, IOM will organise and deliver the closing event in Brussels, ensuring effective logistics and

facilitation of presentations, panel discussions and interactive exchanges, and will subsequently consolidate and disseminate key messages, conclusions and recommendations to participants and relevant stakeholders to support continued policy dialogue and uptake of findings.

Crosscutting Priorities

Conflict Sensitivity and human rights-based approach: Is a key component of IOM's work in addressing migration-related crises, particularly in conflict-affected and fragile contexts. IOM is committed to integrating conflict sensitivity throughout its crisis response, to ensure that interventions respond to needs and vulnerabilities while mitigating risks. This approach contributes towards a risk-sensitive, rights-based, and inclusive strategy that integrates gender and youth considerations. Conflict sensitivity also complements and reinforces other frameworks, including the Principles of Humanitarian Action. By embedding conflict sensitivity into its operations, IOM strengthens its commitment to inclusive, transparent, and responsive interventions that align with these standards, ultimately enhancing the impact and sustainability of its programs.

Social Cohesion: IOM recognizes that in post conflict settings, communities are fractured and would be in the process of nation building. Any/all interventions have the potential to exacerbate or ameliorate social cohesion. Following the InterGroup Contact Theory, four main criteria are adopted in programming: equal status, shared goals/interests, cooperation, not competition and support of local authorities and social norms. Interventions, from consultations for activity selection to handover and maintenance, will be participatory and sequenced to facilitate social mixing, as appropriate. Building on the 'Power of Contact' research IOM's programming is informed by a purposeful understand of the political economy of each location and in addition to identifying community priorities which will bring the greatest peace outcomes, will also explore activities which can act as economic incentives.

Protection Mainstreaming: IOM ensures that protection principles—such as safety, dignity, non-discrimination, and meaningful access—are integrated into all phases of humanitarian and development programming. This approach helps mitigate risks, prevent harm, and address vulnerabilities among migrants, displaced persons, and affected communities. IOM prioritizes inclusive participation, accountability mechanisms, and tailored interventions that recognize the specific needs of at-risk populations, including women, children, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups. By embedding protection considerations across sectors like shelter, health, livelihoods, and disaster response, IOM strengthens resilience and upholds human rights in migration management.

Gender: As a broader framework, IOM Syria follows IOM's *Gender Equality Guidelines*, the IOM *Institutional Framework for addressing Gender-Based Violence in Crises* (GBViC Framework) and Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) commitments to ensure that gender-specific needs are addressed throughout all IOM programming.

IOM works to promote safe programming across all interventions in full respect of principles of gender equality and protection mainstreaming. Projects' activities and staff focus on prioritizing safety and dignity of the people IOM and its partners serve and avoid causing harm, promote meaningful access and accountability to affected populations and uphold empowerment and participation. IOM projects teams are trained on different topics related to protection mainstreaming, including Protection against Sexual and Exploitation Abuse (PSEA) and technical support is provided on the tools and process throughout the projects' cycle. IOM is also committed to promoting protection mainstreaming to partners including national stakeholders and civil society organizations (CSOs). IOM projects are expected to benefit people of all genders and age groups and duly considers the specific needs and

implications for women, men, boys and girls throughout the project cycle, from the initial needs assessment, implementation to reporting. All data collection efforts will prioritize gender disaggregation wherever feasible, enabling more targeted and effective interventions that address the specific needs of women, men, girls, and boys. IOM also mainstreams gender considerations in its capacity-building activities with government authorities and CSOs and advocates for gender sensitivity with counterparts if needs arise.¹

Accountability to Affected Populations: Accountability to Affected Population (AAP) is a key principle integrated in all IOM interventions with systems to include beneficiary participation in all stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation of IOM Projects which has been fully integrated in all stages of this proposal. This is demonstrated with the participation and engagement with people that feeds into the participatory design process for both Outcomes 1 and 2, especially with the feedback loops built into the design for the activities for Output 1 and Output 2.1. This design participation builds on the ongoing engagement that starts even before this, with the engagement with communities as part of the Communities of Return (CoRI) research participation to find out what people want and need as part of a resettlement and return process. During implementation IOM delivers on communities' right to access information with a baseline of information to be shared with people, both through in person activities as outlined above and with media and materials explaining what assistance is being offered, how they can engage, the information aims to inform people of their rights and to manage the expectations of what is possible. Feedback is gathered individually through the Interagency SafeLine CFM for Syria and processed on IOM's CFM Connect platform that can securely process multichannel feedback and complaints to IOMs IASC compliant procedures, including sensitive complaints about fraud, aid diversion, violence, and Sexual Exploration and Abuse (SEA). Larger scale area-based feedback is gathered through IOMs Area Based Feedback Monitoring (ABFM) system that listens to community level perceptions and their feedback of the ongoing work so, if needed, changes can be made during implementation for better quality of delivery and communities informed. This results in a community-driven interventions that respond to community needs and priorities, builds ownership and maximizes IOM accountability.

Localization: IOM's approach to localization focuses on participation, partnership & funding, capacity strengthening & mentorship, coordination, visibility and advocacy. In Syria, humanitarian activities are implemented through local partners, while recovery activities are mostly implemented directly, grant mechanisms are in place to facilitate more flexibility for smaller, grassroots organisations to build capacities and leverage local ownership. Moreover, extensive community consultations ground each activity, ensuring activities are truly locally owned and community driven, thereby ensuring sustainability beyond project duration.

Data Protection: IOM maintains a robust data protection framework grounded in its globally endorsed Data Protection Principles (adopted in 2009) and the comprehensive 2010 IOM Data Protection Manual. These foundational documents commit IOM to collecting personal data only through lawful and fair means, and for clearly specified, legitimate purposes. IOM enforces core principles of purpose limitation, data minimization, data quality, confidentiality, and secure handling across all stages of the data lifecycle, including storage, access, transfer, and secure disposal, to prevent unauthorized disclosure or misuse. The Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) serves as the institutional focal point for data protection, providing oversight, guidance, and ensuring internal compliance with these standards. By integrating these safeguards, alongside restricted sharing of personal data and strict access controls, IOM guarantees that beneficiary information is managed with the utmost respect for privacy, dignity, safety, and non-discrimination.

3. Partnerships and Coordination

IOM will ensure that this project complements interventions by other UN agencies, including UNHCR, and I/NGOs through coordination platforms such as the Solutions Working Group (SWG). Established in March 2025 under the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, the SWG, co-led by IOM, UNDP, and UNHCR, consolidates previous working groups into a unified forum promoting safe, dignified, and comprehensive solutions for displaced populations. Its mandate includes fostering sustainable return and reintegration of IDPs and refugees, enhancing inter-agency coordination, and aligning efforts with the Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). The SWG also engages with the Syrian government and international partners to advance area-based, multisectoral approaches to durable solutions. IOM will ensure that activities implemented under this project are aligned with and contribute to the strategic priorities of the DSWG. Strategic and operational level coordination with the DSWG and the WASH, Health and Education Sectors will also ensure complementarity of efforts through an area-based approach.

IOM will closely coordinate with national, governorate, and local authorities. At the national level, IOM will work with both MOFAE as well as relevant line ministries, depending on the infrastructure prioritised, including MOSAL and MOLAE. At the governorate and local level, IOM will work closely with local authorities and the communities throughout project design, planning and implementation.

This project will further complement interventions funded by Sweden, which focus on investments in areas of return in Aleppo governorate through social cohesion, legal assistance, shelter, and MHPSS. In addition, it will also advance the stated priorities of the Syrian government, namely via alignment to the National Recovery Plan (NRP) and 'No Tents and Camps vision.

4. Monitoring

IOM's MEAL team will closely monitor the project. The MEAL team consists of a M&E Officer, a senior M&E associate, and an M&E associate, based in the field. The team will conduct process and outcome monitoring of the project. Process monitoring will involve regular visits to the project locations to ensure implementation is on track. The MEAL team will also periodically monitor the infrastructure projects based on the BOQs to ensure quality assurance and track project progress. Outcome monitoring will be conducted via surveys to provide feedback to the program team and measure progress as well as satisfaction. Surveys conducted will provide quantitative information on the level of community participation and consultation and satisfaction with rehabilitation of priority public facilities that are essential for community functioning and early recovery. Further to this Key Informant Interviews with community leaders and representatives who were involved in decision-making will be a rich source of qualitative information providing an overview of the context, benefits and purported long-term effects of the project. Community participation will be encouraged for the monitoring of this project through Community Feedback Mechanisms (CFMs) and periodic focus group discussions (FGD) and field visits, to increase accountability to all stakeholders, and thorough evidence-based decision making. The above-mentioned actions will be guided by the project Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Plan which will be integrated within the existing IOM Syria M&E Plan as an integral part of the project cycle. The tools within the MEAL Plan will be employed to systematically guide processes of data collection, compilation, analysis, information dissemination, reporting and

informed decision-making to strengthen the projects day-to-day management monitoring or for learning purposes.

At the end of the project, IOM will conduct a final survey to determine final achievements and overall project results. The survey will be conducted by an individual or company external to project implementation to ensure objectivity and transparency, and will measure the achievements at the goal, outcome and output level, identify expected and unexpected effects. In addition, the survey will ensure the proper gathering of lessons learned and best practices to inform future programming.

5. Evaluation

No evaluation is planned under the project.

6. Results Matrix

	Indicators	Data Source and Collection Method	Baseline	Target	Assumptions
Objective: Using an area-based approach, support the early recovery and sustainable reintegration of communities of return in Syria	% of target populations reporting that the intervention supported early recovery and reintegration	Survey	0%	65%	
Outcome 1: Communities of return benefit from improved access to rehabilitated public infrastructure, enabling safe return, service continuity, and community stabilisation.	% of target populations reporting satisfaction with the rehabilitation of public infrastructure	Survey	0%	70%	Relevant stakeholders, including local authorities, and community leaders will provide the necessary support and cooperation for the identification process. Community members will be interested in attending the consultation sessions and actively participating in identifying infrastructure to be rehabilitated.
Output 1.1: Public infrastructure in areas of return is	# of communities assessed, selected and supported with essential public	Area-based assessments, progress reports	0	3	Relevant stakeholders remain engaged and

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rehabilitated to support early recovery and sustainable reintegration	infrastructure rehabilitation # of people participating in inclusive conflict sensitive consultations # of public infrastructure rehabilitated (disaggregated by sector and governorate) % of people reporting improved access to basic services	Attendance sheets Completion certificates Survey	0 0 0	150 7 70%	willing to receive IOM support.
Activities that lead to Output 1.1: Activity 1.1.1: Conduct area-based and facility-level assessments to identify targeted return locations and to identify concrete needs (Community Selection). Activity 1.1.2: Rehabilitate priority public facilities (economic, education, health, community, religious, and water infrastructure), engaging communities and local authorities in planning, implementation, and oversight of rehabilitation works.					Relevant stakeholders remain engaged and willing to receive IOM support.
Outcome 2: Belgian reintegration actors and diaspora networks are better informed and better equipped to support safe, voluntary, and sustainable return to Syria.	% of stakeholders reporting that they are better informed and equipped to support safe, voluntary, and sustainable return to Syria.	Feedback form	0%	75%	Participants actively attend and engage in the webinars; Topics are adapted to the real needs and gaps of the participants; Participants have opportunities to use the knowledge; Participants are willing to complete feedback forms;

Output 2.1: Thematic webinars delivered to strengthen Belgian counsellor’s knowledge on conditions in Syrian areas of return and online information tool made available	# of thematic webinars delivered to Belgian stakeholders # of online tools made available	Event report, attendance lists	0 0	3 1	Participants actively attend and engage in the webinars; Topics are adapted to the real needs and gaps of the participants;
Activities that lead to Output 2.1:					
Activity 2.1.1: Organize and deliver three interactive webinars targeting first-line counsellors and online tool created.					
Output 2.2: A closing event is organized in Brussels to disseminate project results and strengthen the policy dialogue	# of events organized to disseminate project results and strengthen policy dialogue	Event report, media coverage	0	1	Target participants are available and willing to attend; The event topics are relevant and attractive to the audience;
Activities that lead to Output 2.2:					
Activity 2.2.1: Organise and deliver the closing event in Brussels.					

7. Work Plan

Activity	Responsible Party	Time Frame											
		Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6	Month 7	Month 8	Month 9	Month 10	Month 11	Month 12
1.1.1: Conduct area-based and facility-level assessments to identify targeted return locations and to identify concrete needs (Community Selection).	IOM												
1.1.2: Community-led Intervention Priorities are identified, focusing on data collection and engagement with stakeholders for effective planning based on community preferences and needs.	IOM												
2.1.1: IOM will analyse and synthesize data and complementary sources, complemented by field-level insights from partners, to develop tailored, evidence-based webinar content on conditions in key Syrian areas of return. It will then organize and deliver three interactive webinars for Belgian first-line counsellors, strengthening their capacity to provide balanced, up-to-date and context-sensitive return information.	IOM												
2.2.1: IOM will design the closing event in coordination with the donor, preparing a tailored agenda and materials to present key project results and evidence on return and reintegration conditions. It will then engage stakeholders and deliver the event in Brussels, facilitating dialogue and disseminating key findings to support continued policy discussions and uptake of results.	IOM												

8. Budget

The budget for the action is EUR 1,000,000, full detailed budget is available in the separate budget file.

Annex 1. Risk Assessment Plan

<i>Risk Factor</i>	<i>Consequence</i>	<i>Likelihood and Timeline</i>	<i>Risk Treatment Plan</i>
Low participation and approval of other Government leadership to implement the national strategies, policies and community engagement practices in the field.	3	B: Has occurred elsewhere, or could occur within decades	IOM co-ordinates closely with all Government entities. Continuous monitoring, mentoring and assistance of local and central level through specialists
Risks that the operation can create on beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries – such as exacerbation or creation of conflict dynamics, alteration of social fabric and social norms.	4	B: Has occurred elsewhere, or could occur within decades	Strengthen conflict-sensitivity planning and targeting, use gender-sensitive approaches, implement strong community-level engagement and CFMs, continuous monitoring and oversight of the activities on conflict dynamics.
Security preparedness, adequacy of plans related to security measures, staffing, hazards, communication, protective equipment, premises, security training, BCP, medical and wellbeing, relocation and evacuation.	3	B: Has occurred elsewhere, or could occur within decades	Continuous legal, risk and conflict analyses are embedded into operations, regular communication with donors to ensure they are aware of issues arising, movements are coordinated with UNDSS, compliance with SRM measures, security protocols and plans are in place, and staff are informed with daily updates, briefings, and regular training and drills.