

UNHCR Legal Assistance in Syria

January – March 2023

47,452
participants in
awareness-raising

8,030
persons represented before
courts and administrative
bodies

20,968
individuals received legal
counselling

LEGAL DOCUMENTATION



4,540 individuals obtained national identity cards



559 marriages documented

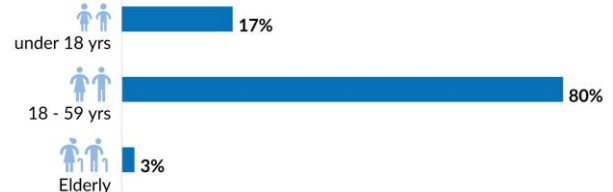


1,528 individuals obtained family booklets



354 children registered and obtained birth certificates

76,450 beneficiaries of legal assistance

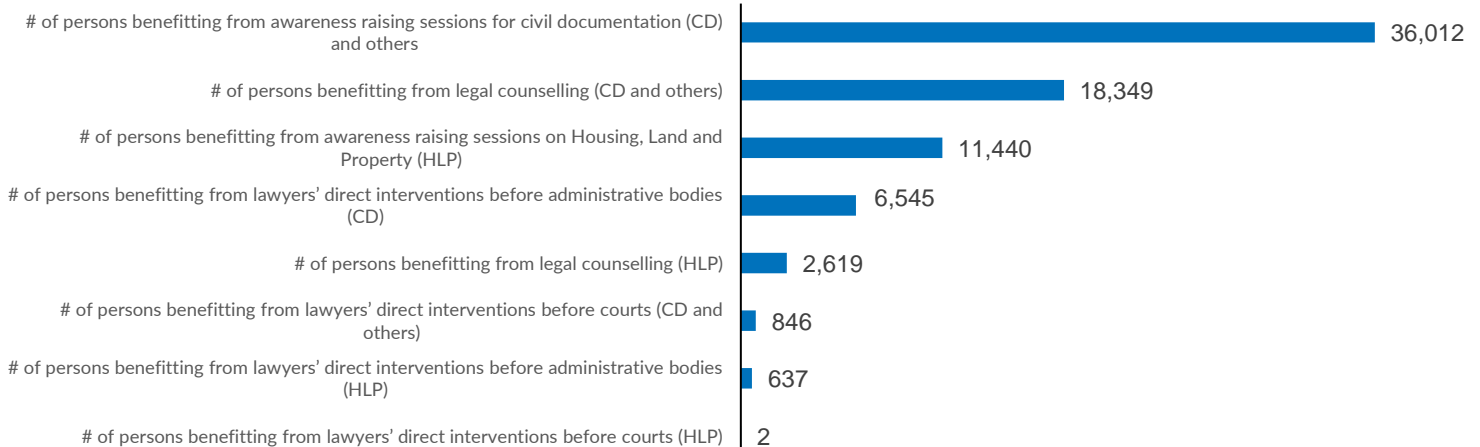


Legal Interventions

14 Governorates

248 Lawyers

142 Volunteers



UNHCR Legal Assistance for IDPs, Returnees and Host Communities

UNHCR provides legal services through its partner NGOs, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the Syria Trust for Development, to internally displaced people (IDPs), returnees, host communities, asylum-seekers and refugees.

The objective of the legal assistance is to provide support on the following four legal/protection thematic areas:

- **Documenting vital events** such as births, marriages, divorces and deaths.
- **Obtaining personal civil status documents** including, but not limited to, identity cards, family booklets and civil extracts.
- **Protection risks encountered by women and children** including custody, alimony, inheritance and domestic violence cases.
- **Housing, Land and Property (HLP) rights** including obtaining lost or damaged deeds and proof of ownership as well as authenticating transactions.

The legal services are offered in different forms, including **legal representation** before courts and other governmental bodies, individual **legal advice** and **legal awareness-raising** sessions.

Interventions before courts or other governmental bodies support vulnerable individuals who have protection concerns, limited capacity to follow the legal procedures and requirements, difficulties to reach the administrative and legal bodies, or encounter financial constraints.



Supporting the student from hard to reach area to issue and ID card. ©UNHCR/H. Maarouf

The legal assistance is provided in all **14** governorates, primarily through mobile teams, legal centres as well as UNHCR-supported community centres.

The legal mobile teams consist of **248** experienced lawyers who are working closely with **142** legal outreach volunteers (ORVs). The legal ORVs include law students, trainee lawyers and senior lawyers. Some of the legal ORVs are selected from the IDP and returnee communities, and they contribute, on a voluntary basis, to the legal assistance programmes through dissemination of information on the legal programmes, identification of individuals in need, and referrals. Also, legal ORVs are capacitated on a regular basis to provide people with basic legal information and conduct awareness-raising activities on general legal matters.

UNHCR, in coordination with its partners implementing its legal aid programme have established six legal centres (one by Syria Trust and five by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent) located in Damascus, Al-Hassakeh, Deir-ez-Zor and Hama.

Legal assistance for refugees and asylum-seekers

UNHCR provides legal services for refugees and asylum-seekers related to any significant protection issues, including **obtaining and renewing residency permits, birth registration** and other legal documentation, **non-refoulement, detention and exit visas** as well as other legal/protection-related matters such as **women and child protection**.

The legal services are provided either directly by UNHCR legal teams and contracted lawyers or by its partners in the legal and community centres located in different Governorates.

Restoring capacities of national institutions

Identity documents, birth certificates and documents relating to vital events are essential for the enjoyment of basic rights such as freedom of movement and access to schools, hospitals, livelihoods and to the smart cards required to receive subsidized rations and items. To enhance protection of these rights, UNHCR provides support to civil registries, citizens service centres and immigration authorities. UNHCR has also started to provide similar support to cadastral offices in order to enhance HLP legal responses.

In the first quarter of 2023, the total number of governmental entities benefited from UNHCR support is 20; 18 civil registries and 2 Immigration offices (rehabilitation of **two** civil registries¹, and providing solar kits to 16 civil registries² and two Immigration Offices)³. Currently, and considering the remaining needs of other civil affairs and cadastral offices affected by the earthquake, UNHCR teams in the field are verifying the new needs in order to prioritize the most critical ones that would have an impact on Civil Documentation issues. Furthermore, Also, as a result of the identified needs in 2022 and the shortage in the capacity of the Directorate of Immigration and Passports and the Directorate of Civil Affairs, UNHCR provided Information and communication technologies equipment to both directorates given their pivotal role in the protection of refugees, IDPs and returnees in Syria.

As a result of the rehabilitation and technical support projects that were implemented during the last few years, and according to civil affairs records, **541,652 identity documents were**

¹ In Swieda Governorate

² In Hassake Aleppo, Raqqa and Damascus

³ In Damascus

successfully obtained by Syrian citizens across the country during the first quarter of 2023 including identity cards, family booklets and birth certificates.

Legal advocacy

With reference to the [Legislative Decree 24/2022](#) issued on 21 December 2022 granting a general amnesty for some crimes, committed prior to its date of issuance, including some military service crimes, misdemeanours and offences, some crimes and certain penalties of financial nature were still excluded. UNHCR successfully advocated with the Directorate of Civil Affairs and the Directorate of Immigration and Passports to include relevant fines imposed for offences related to the Civil Affairs Law as well as the Law that regulates Entry and Exit of Non-Syrians and Arabs to Syria. As a result, two circulars were issued waiving the fines imposed on delayed registration of vital events as well as fines imposed on delayed renewal of residency for refugees and asylum-seekers within the scope of the amnesty. The mentioned has led to successful registration of civil events and issuance of civil documents for Syrian citizens, for **207,491** individuals whose events and documents were registered/issued during the grace period (elapsed on 21 March 2023) without paying the fines articulated by law. Additionally, concerning the waiver that was applied on residency fines, about 279 Refugees and Asylum-Seekers benefited from the amnesty and succeeded to renew their residency without paying the articulated fines.

Furthermore, following the earthquakes in February, a high-level meeting was conducted between UNHCR's Deputy High Commissioner and the Syrian Minister of Interior which was followed by various meetings at the technical level from both sides. The aim of these meetings was to advocate on the needs for a fourth waiver for fines imposed on delayed registration of civil events to enable people affected by the earthquake to get a replacement for their lost document. As a result, on **12 March**, the Syrian President issued Legislative Decree No. **3** of 2023 that exempts all earthquake affected people from regular taxes, some fees and fines mainly related to HLP matters such as reconstruction work, restoration of affected buildings and included fines related to civil documentation and registration of vital events. The Legislative Decree also gave access to affected people to loans up to 200 million Syrian pounds required for the reconstruction and restoration works needed to respond to the earthquake damages.