

UNHCR Legal Assistance in Syria

January – June 2023

109,468

participants* reached through awareness-raising

24,541

people* represented before courts and administrative bodies

55,185

individuals* received legal counselling

LEGAL DOCUMENTATION



12,297 individuals obtained national identity cards



2,132 marriages documented

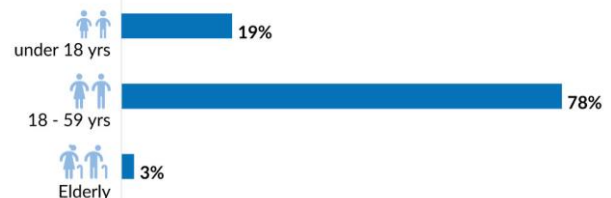


2,935 individuals obtained family booklets



1,328 children registered and obtained birth certificates

189,167 beneficiaries of legal assistance

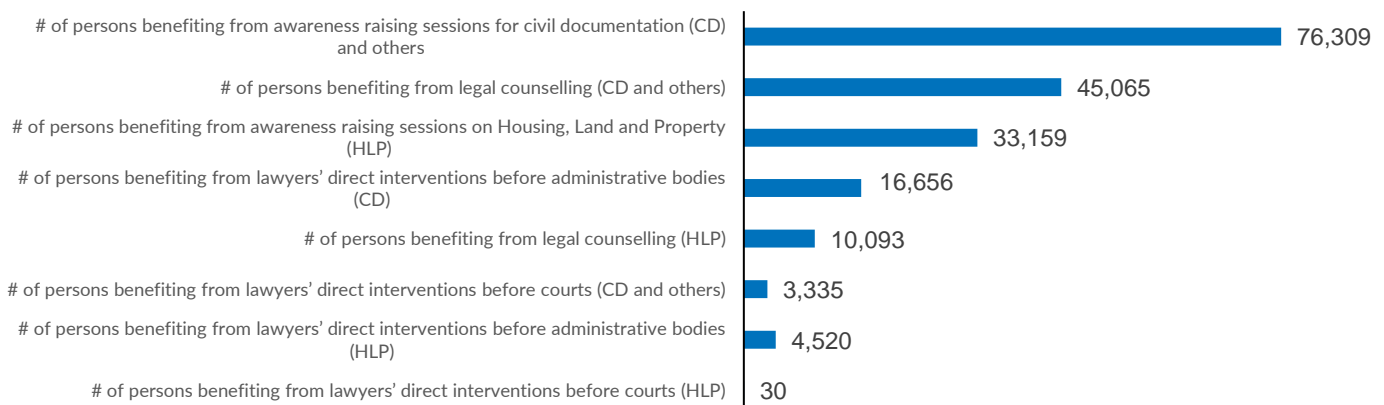


Legal Interventions

14 Governorates

267 Lawyers

154 Volunteers



* These figures are related to activities targeting IDPs, returnees, and host communities. For activities targeting refugees and asylum-seekers, please see section 'Legal assistance for refugees and asylum-seekers' on page 3.

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 for 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 status records;
- **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 interventions and 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 reaching the administrative and legal bodies, or who encounter financial constraints.



*Legal support for issuing civil documentation/IDs for the students coming from neighbouring countries to sit for national exams.
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The legal assistance is provided in all **14** governates, primarily through mobile teams and legal centres, as well as UNHCR-supported community centres.

The legal mobile teams consist of **267** experienced lawyers who work closely with **154** 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 trained 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**.

In total during the first half of 2023, UNHCR legal assistance programs have provided legal assistance to 3,344 refugees and asylum-seekers on various legal matters.

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 half of 2023, UNHCR completed the rehabilitation of two civil registries in Sweida Governorate. Additionally, UNHCR provided solar kits to **36** administrative bodies (**32** civil registries¹, **2** immigration offices² and **2** border points³) in order to ensure the continuity of services as well as access of people with whom UNHCR works to civil documentation. Additionally, and upon verifying and prioritizing the remaining/new needs in the aftermath of the earthquake, UNHCR has committed to restore the capacity of additional 30 administrative bodies either through minor renovation or provision of solar kits. 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 (ICT) equipment to both directorates given their pivotal role in the protection of refugees, IDPs and returnees in Syria. UNHCR will continue providing essential ICT equipment

¹ In Damascus, Rural Damascus, Qunietera, Homs, Hassake, Raqqa, Aleppo, and Lattakia

² In Damascus

³ In Homs and Lattakia

to the mentioned directorates as well as Directorate of Cadastre to improve their capacity to respond to the various needs of people with and for whom UNHCR works.

As a result of the rehabilitation and technical support projects that were implemented during the last few years, and according to the records of the Directorate of Civil Affairs and Directorate of Cadastre, **972,607** civil documents were successfully obtained by Syrian citizens across the country during the first half of 2023, including identity cards, family booklets, birth certificates, and HLP documents.

Assistance to students

UNHCR provided legal support through the two partners (SARC and ST) to the **9th and 12th** grade students coming from Lebanon and non-government-controlled areas to sit their national exams. As a result of the coordination between the two partners, the Ministry of Education, and the Directorate of Civil Affairs, **4,942** students were assisted to apply for and obtain their IDs which enabled them to sit for their exams and facilitated their freedom of movement.

Legal advocacy

Following UNHCR's advocacy and consultations with the Directorate of Civil Affairs and the Directorate of Immigration and Passports, 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 for a certain grace period (elapsed on 21 March 2023). As a result, **207,491** Syrian citizens were able to register civil events and obtain documents during the grace period without paying fines. Additionally, **279** refugees and asylum-seekers succeeded to renew their residency without paying fines.

Furthermore, following the earthquakes in February, a legislative decree was issued that exempts all earthquake-affected people from regular taxes, and some fees and fines mainly related to HLP matters such as rehabilitation work and restoration of affected buildings, as well as fines related to civil documentation and registration of vital events which are also included the legislative decree as a result of UNHCR's advocacy.