

The logo for the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), consisting of the letters 'NRC' in white on an orange square background.

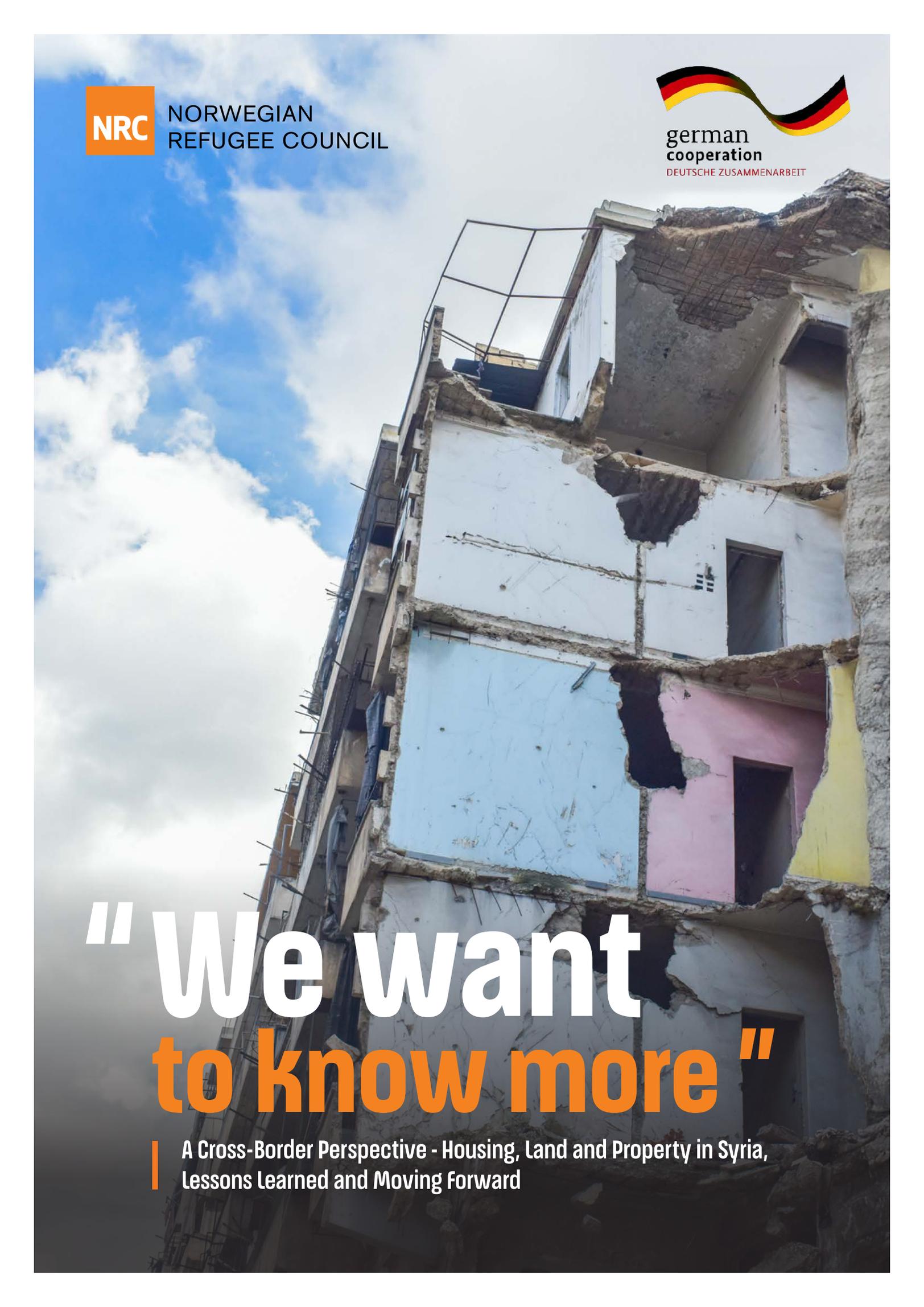
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DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

A photograph of a multi-story building that has been severely damaged, likely by conflict. The building's facade is crumbling, with large sections of white, blue, pink, and yellow paint missing, revealing the underlying concrete and rebar. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

"We want to know more"

A Cross-Border Perspective - Housing, Land and Property in Syria,
Lessons Learned and Moving forward

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AUTHOR

Juliette Syn

TECHNICAL REVIEW

Shereen Al Abdallah and Shezane Kirubi

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The Norwegian Refugee Council (www.nrc.no) is an independent humanitarian organisation helping people forced to flee. We work in crises across 40 countries, providing life-saving and long-term assistance to millions of people every year. NRC extends gratitude to all the refugees and members of host communities who generously shared their personal stories, insights, and expertise. Without their contribution, this research and analysis would not have been impossible.



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INTRODUCTION

Thirteen years since the start of the Syria crisis, long-term solutions for Syrian refugees remain extremely limited.¹ As of 30 June 2024, UNHCR reports that there are 5,007,733 registered Syrian refugees, with 779,645 in Lebanon, 628,135 in Jordan, and 284,861 in Iraq.² Socio-economic conditions in the host countries themselves have deteriorated after Covid, new conflicts and natural disasters, adding further stress to both host and refugee communities. The 2024 Regional Strategic Overview (RSO) cites results from UNHCR's 2023 Intentions Survey, that said 56 per cent of Syrians wished to return, but only 1.1 per cent planned on doing so in the next 12 months.³ UNHCR's latest return intention survey conducted in early 2024 indicated that while 57 per cent of Syrians still have hopes of returning, only 1.7 per cent planned on doing so in the next 12 months, 36.8 per cent hoped to return in the next five years, and 30.2 per cent hoped to return "one day."⁴

The Syrian conflict has caused widespread destruction with severe damage to housing, infrastructure, and land governance systems. Property rights have been severely impacted, with widespread Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) violations (such as forced evictions) and other complications due to a breakdown in institutional processes and services, which can lead to complex ownership disputes.⁵

- 1 Regional Strategic Overview (2024): "3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan".
- 2 UNHCR Operational Data Portal, available at <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>.
- 3 Regional Strategic Overview (2024): "3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan".
- 4 UNHCR (2024): "Ninth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon," available at <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/109624>.
- 5 International Legal Aid Consortium (2020): "Resolving the Property Issue in Syria: Technically Possible, Politically Challenging and Central to Accountability"; Impunity Watch & Pax (2020): "Violations of Housing, Land and Property Rights: An Obstacle to Peace in Syria. What can International Policymakers do?"; Jon D. Unruh (2016): "Weaponization of the Land and Property Rights system in the Syrian civil war: facilitating restitution?" Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding.

Many displaced individuals lack proper documentation to assert their HLP rights, especially women who face significant legal and societal barriers because of their gender. Customary norms often prevent women from securing property rights, exposing them to violence and exploitation within their families. The conflict has entrenched these discriminatory practices, making it challenging for women to protect and claim their rights.

The possibility of safe return remains unlikely in the near future, but this does not prevent humanitarian, development, and peace-building actors from assisting them in the interim.⁶ The protection of refugees' HLP rights in Syria remains one of the most critical aspects of helping them build self-reliance as they ready themselves for whatever they will face next, and preserving these rights during protracted displacement is essential, particularly as refugees' HLP rights in Syria may become weaker as time progresses unless timely steps are taken.

Recognizing this reality, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has been implementing a cross-border HLP project across Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, which focuses on safeguarding refugees' HLP and legal identity rights in Syria. This model is distinct from other projects which focus on HLP needs in the country of displacement rather than those in the country of origin, and instead provides information and legal assistance to safeguard property rights in Syria – e.g., obtaining replacement HLP documents, discussing legal options for destroyed or severely damaged property, issues of inheritance, etc. This modality allows NRC to reach Syrian refugees throughout the region and provides them with consistent advice about HLP issues in Syria, regardless of their location during displacement. Specific training is also provided to women so they can understand their HLP rights and the possibilities to claim them.

In partnership with GIZ, the project began in December 2020 and ran in two phases until June 2024. There were subsequently two six-month extensions: one from March to December 2023 and a second from January to June 2024. The activities have included providing information and counselling services to build capacity and help refugees make decisions about their HLP issues (including any legal and civil documentation related to HLP), as well as a smaller component on legal assistance to help refugees obtain a Power of Attorney (POA) for someone inside Syria act on their behalf regarding HLP matters.⁷ The current goals for the project in 2024 are intended to focus solely on HLP issues by building on and learning from the progress that has been achieved thus far.

This report is intended to review and identify the challenges, good practices and lessons learned over the past two and a half years, assess how to build on this experience, and help determine whether and how program activities should be modified moving forward to better support refugees, given the reality that return may be unlikely for an unknown period of time.

- 6 Durable Solutions Platform (2023): "Durable Solutions & Early Recovery Policy Brief".
- 7 At the start of the project, legal assistance was limited to facilitating POAs to extract replacement HLP documents as this was a relatively straightforward process. Over time, the ICLA programs began accepting more complex cases due to the growing needs and requests for such assistance.

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years passed since
the start of the Syria
crisis



Syrian Man - Iraq

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The information for this report was gathered through an extensive review of existing NRC reports and interviews for previous activities, studies and reports; interviews with NRC staff of multiple levels, including management and implementing personnel; and direct interviews with Syrian refugees themselves in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. These included a combination of focus group discussions (FGD) and household interviews (HH) in program countries: 14 HH in Jordan, 11 FGDs and 7 HHs in Lebanon, and 7 FGDs and 7 HHs in Iraq/KRI.

Limitations included the inability to contact and access several beneficiaries over the past years or speak with Syrians who have returned to Syria. Everything is based on the perspectives of interviewees, and all names have been changed to protect privacy.

CROSS-BORDER HOUSING, LAND AND PROPERTY (HLP) ASSISTANCE

A WHY A CROSS BORDER FOCUS?

As noted by the 2024 Regional Strategic Overview (RSO), "[V]oluntary repatriation and local integration remain elusive [for Syrian refugees]. Often, resettlement or complementary pathways are the only viable solutions, but the demand far exceeds the available opportunities."⁸

UNHCR's Return Perception and Intention Survey conducted in early 2024 indicated that while 57 per cent of surveyed Syrians still have hopes of returning, only 1.7 per cent planned on doing so in the next 12 months, 36.8 per cent hoped to return in the next five years,⁹ and 30.2 per cent hoped to return "one day."¹⁰

⁸ Regional Strategic Overview (2024): "3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan".

⁹ This number is up 10 per cent from reported intentions in 2023.

¹⁰ UNHCR (2024): "Ninth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon," available at <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/109624>.

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UNHCR reports that there are more than

5M

registered Syrian refugees

Hanna, Syrian woman with her daughter - Lebanon - Bekaa



Although 87 per cent said they did not have enough money to meet basic needs while displaced, this was not a primary factor in deciding whether or not to return to Syria.¹¹ This suggests that refugees currently in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq will stay in these hosting countries despite the increasingly harsh conditions they face.

Due to the complexity and specificity of the Syrian regional displacement crisis, a cross-border approach is essential. This strategy goes beyond the traditional separation of in-country operations, leveraging NRC's strong operational presence in both countries of origin and asylum to create a more effective and comprehensive response.

NRC's cross-border project aims to address the reality of protracted displacement by providing Syrian refugees with relevant information and legal support about HLP in Syria.

Under the present initiative, "cross-border" is understood as synonymous with "regional," and refers to the delivery of specific legal aid services that require close cooperation and coordination among NRC ICLA teams and a network of lawyers based in the hosting countries of Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon.

These local lawyers work in collaboration with a legal expert/ legal help desk in Syria, ensuring that all advice and actions align with Syrian legal frameworks. This strategic approach not only facilitates legal processes for refugees but also strengthens their ability to reclaim and protect their HLP rights under Syrian law.

Supporting refugees to take steps that arrange for others in Syria to help protect their HLP interests for example is key, as many new regulations require either the presence of the HLP right holder(s) or their authorized agent(s) to prevent violations and/or extinguishments of HLP rights – of growing importance as the refugees' time outside of the countries increases.

Additionally, the provision of knowledge of HLP laws and procedures in Syria is especially salient now: approximately one-third of the overall legislation and regulations that relate to HLP were adopted during the conflict,¹² and one of the primary strengths of the cross-border project has been the ability to monitor changes in Syrian law that affect the HLP rights of displaced Syrians, and share that information with the cross-border teams and refugees themselves.

While there are many projects that address HLP needs for Syrian refugees in their hosting countries, this one is unique in that it primarily focuses on safeguarding HLP, and related legal identity needs in Syria.

The project facilitates direct coordination between, and pulls together programming, knowledge and institutional learning across, multiple countries, reaching Syrian refugees throughout the region and providing them with consistent legal support on HLP and related Legal Identity Documentation (LID), regardless of where they are.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² NRC (2019): "Uncertain Futures: Civil Documentation, Housing, Land and Property and Barriers to Return for Syrian Refugees in Jordan;" NRC (2021): "Legal Identity and HLP Rights of Syrian Refugees from a Durable Solutions Perspective".



5 Pillars OF THE CROSS-BORDER MODEL

Below is a summary of the five pillars of the cross-border model



CONTENT CREATION

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Case scenarios and related legal pathways accessible to all ICLA teams, which are consolidated in a digital tool referred to as the Common Scenario Matrix (CSM).

Online legal aid platforms (KOBUI and JESR) that incorporate a dedicated "HLP in Syria" page. Two HLP videos as well as links to information on legal identity documentation, which is often intrinsically tied to the ability to exercise HLP rights are made available.



CAPACITY STRENGTHENING AND COORDINATION

Several training and guidance tools have been developed on topics such as such as: displaced women HLP rights; safeguarding HLP rights while in displacement; a regional compendium on civil documentation, and; leaflets on key HLP documents.

Coordination on HLP rights in Syria with a regional perspective: Coordination between an (internal) legal help desk and country ICLA teams ensures that high quality legal services are provided, and that implementation of key procedures are better understood, particularly where discrepancies between law and practice are signaled by refugees.



LEGAL INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING

ICLA teams provide legal information and counselling services to Syrian refugees and content on the CSM and KOBUI is regularly updated.



LEGAL RESEARCH

Legal research is conducted to ensure information is up-to-date and to address key knowledge gaps.



LEGAL ASSISTANCE

ICLA teams across Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq provide Syrian refugees with legal assistance services for two categories of HLP-related needs in Syria: 1) direct HLP rights cases (e.g., the replacement of lost HLP documents), and 2) legal identity documentation cases connected to HLP rights in Syria (e.g., proving family relations to establish inheritance rights).

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The tools mentioned here are explained in greater detail in Part III below.

B

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND CHANGES IN SYRIAN LAW AFFECTING HLP RIGHTS FOR DISPLACED SYRIANS

Syria's Housing, Land and Property legislative framework is historically complex and has evolved based on different geopolitical dynamics, incorporating Islamic, Ottoman, French Mandate and Ba'athist influences. The legal framework related to HLP rights in Syria is composed of a broad variety of acts, legislative decrees and regulatory acts. Some of the most relevant laws regarding HLP rights of all Syrians – whether displaced or not – include **Law No.84 of 1949: Syrian Civil Code; Land registry law resolution 188 of 1926; Land registry law resolution 189 of 1926; and Law 19 of 2023 consular fees and services.**¹⁴

Legally recognized ownership rights over real property can only be obtained and/or transferred through registration with the Syrian land registry.¹⁵ As such, buyers will not be considered to be the legal owners of real property until it is registered in their name(s). In practice however, land registration has been limited in Syria, and ownership and other rights over real property are often passed through inheritance, court adjudication and the use of an irrevocable power of attorney. Box 1 below lists the most common ways of proving ownership of real property.

BOX 1

HLP RIGHTS AND PROOF OF OWNERSHIP: RELEVANT DEFINITIONS AND DOCUMENTS

Tabou ["Title deed" (*Sanad Tamleek*)]: The tabou is an official title deed issued by the Directorate of Cadastral Affairs in the Governorate where the property is located. It proves the rights of each right holder to a specific piece of property.

Court Decision: A final court decision that recognizes the owner(s) of a specific property is strong evidence of ownership, as it includes detailed information about: the name and personal information of the owner/s, his/her/their shares in the ownership if it is joint/common ownership; details about the ownership (i.e. separated, common, inherited ownership); and details about the land type, location, registration number and cadastral zone number. If there is a building in the property, details about the building (number of floors, type of the building, etc.) are included in the court decision.

Irrevocable Power of Attorney: The irrevocable POA is a legal authorization from the seller to the buyer to transfer ownership, certified by a competent notary public, by registering a specified property in the buyer's name in the competent land registry, without the seller's presence. It is common for people in Syria to use this as a proof of ownership to avoid expensive fees and taxes.

Land Registry Statement: This is an official document that can be used to prove ownership and is issued by General Directorate of Cadastral Affairs in the Syrian governorate where the property is located, upon request of one of the concerned persons.

Sale of Property Contract: The sale of property contract is an agreement between two or more parties, whereby one or more buyer(s) agrees to pay a certain amount of money to one or more owner(s) in order to transfer ownership of a land/property. A sale of property contract which has been ratified by the public notary includes three numbers that enable parties to identify the contract: general number, specific number, and the record number.

Determination of heirs: This document is a court decision issued by a Sharia court, which outlines the division of inheritance shares between inheritors based on Islamic provisions.¹⁶

¹⁴ Greater discussion is available in the NRC Operational Guidance Notes.
¹⁵ Syrian Civil Code, Legislative Decree No. 84 (1949), art. 825.
¹⁶ NRC Operational Guidance Modules.

Since the conflict began in 2011, significant new legislation has been introduced that affects HLP rights for Syrian refugees, with approximately one-third of the country's overall HLP legislation and regulations adopted during the conflict.¹⁷ A summary of some of the most important legal developments is included below.

Legislative Decree No. 19/2023, Fees for Consular services inside and outside of Syria. Decree 19 unified existing legislation on consular fees and services, and specified the new, increased fees for the certification of various documents. The table below includes some of the new fees in accordance with Decree 19.¹⁸

57%
of Syrians still have hopes of returning.

Table 1: New Consular Fees

DOCUMENT	PREVIOUS FEE	NEW FEE
Certification of documents that are not of a commercial nature (e.g., birth certificate, marriage certificate) in the Consular administration in the Syrian Ministry of foreign affairs	115 SYP	2000 SYP
Certification of General Power of Attorney in the Consular administration in the Syrian Ministry of foreign affairs	335 SYP	6000 SYP
Certification of Specific Power of Attorney in the Consular administration in the Syrian Ministry of foreign affairs	335 SYP	3000 SYP
Certification of civil status records (e.g., birth, marriage, divorce and death certificates) at Syrian consulates/embassies in other countries	25 USD	50 USD
Issuing new POA (general or specific) at Syrian diplomatic missions outside the country	100 USD	200 USD
Certification of a POA ¹⁹ (general or specific) at Syrian Embassy outside the country	50 USD	100 USD

While the new law included a provision that an applicant who is poor and of Syrian nationality could be exempted from the payment of fees, ICLA's current work, past research and interviews conducted for this report do not indicate that this exemption has been widely applied (if at all).

Circular No. 19/2023; Power of Attorney for the sale of real property. Circular No. 19, issued by the Ministry of Justice on 12 November 2023, stated that when organizing a Power of Attorney to transfer ownership of real property, security approval must be obtained when at the notary public (rather than at the financial directorates, which is the procedure if the sale is registered directly at the land registry).

¹⁷ NRC (2019): "Uncertain Futures: Civil Documentation, Housing, Land and Property and Barriers to Return for Syrian Refugees in Jordan;" NRC (2021): "Legal Identity and HLP Rights of Syrian Refugees from a Durable Solutions Perspective".
¹⁸ Note that the Table 1 includes references only fees for official actions/processes. Other incidental costs may include transport, gathering documentation, notary publics, etc., making the actual cost significantly higher than what is stated in the law.
¹⁹ Certification is done by the Syrian Embassy after the POA is issued, regardless of whether it was issued at the Embassy or by a notary public in the host country.



I like being able to read and write, because my parents are not able to do so. Syrian Boy, Lebanon

A CROSS-BORDER ACTIVITIES

1. INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING

a. Information and Counselling

In all three countries in this review - Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq/KRI - information and counselling activities have been carried out since the start of the project. Information sessions were conducted by ICLA staff and counselling was provided by lawyers working for or with ICLA. For the information sessions, ICLA uses standardized scripts designed by Syrian lawyers regarding specific HLP and legal identity topics from Syrian law, including: 1) the importance of preserving HLP documents, 2) the title deed ("tabou"); 3) sales contracts; 4) court decisions; 5) irrevocable POAs; 6) supportive HLP documents; and 7) determination of heirs. This ensures that all ICLA teams share consistent and up-to-date information with refugees in all countries. After attending an information session, those seeking personalized assistance or who have specific questions can then approach ICLA lawyers for individual counselling. Others who have heard of this service can also contact NRC directly. This information can be especially valuable for women who may not have been afforded the opportunity to learn about and engage in HLP rights.

IMPACT OF CROSS-BORDER ACTIVITIES

"Because I attended many sessions, HLP in Syria became more interesting and important to think about. Especially the part of the importance of extracting lost or damaged documents... I would like to know more about the POA procedures."

- woman in Lebanon²⁰

"The information is useful; we learn about the importance of documents in proving our rights in housing, land, and property because we need this information..."

We want to know more information about the legal protection of our properties, the procedures, and how to reclaim them in case of property transfer through forgery."

- woman in KRI²¹

Refugees in KRI told the research team that the most interesting topics for them related to obtaining replacement HLP documents that had been damaged or lost, the process of empowering someone in Syria to handle their HLP assets there, and how to prove and claim inheritance rights.²²

In Lebanon, refugees wanted to know about property registration in Syria, general POAs, inheritance procedures, obtaining and replacing HLP documents and what to do regarding rehabilitation of damaged properties.²³ Similarly, refugees in Jordan wanted more information about POAs and HLP documents.

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Field Visit, Syrian Refugee, Jordan



"I have a house back at my home town but I lost all the ownership documents and I want to extract the tabou so I can protect my land and house."

- Man in Jordan²⁴

b. Online Legal Aid Platforms: Increasing Access and Sustainability

There have been recent efforts to complement in-person information sessions through the development of digital legal aid platforms with the aim of reaching a larger audience and providing a method of accessing information that does not require travel or physical presence. The digital sites are sustainable methods to make this information widely available; Lebanon and Iraq are piloting an online site called KOBLI, and Jordan has a site called JESR. While the number of refugee returns to Syria are still low (UNHCR verified 38,257 returns in 2023),²⁵ the online resource ensures that Syrians have access to reliable information about laws and procedures as they navigate the challenges of returning home.

Both platforms have the same "HLP in Syria" page, which includes information on topics such as documents that can prove ownership rights of assets in Syria, civil/legal identity documents that can protect HLP rights, advice on how to protect these documents, and guidance on obtaining a determination of heirs for inheritance cases (as inheritance is one of the most common issues that Syrians have questions about).

²¹ IQ FGD1.

²² IQ FGD1, 2.

²³ LB FGD4, 7-9.

²⁴ JO HH3.

²⁵ Regional Strategic Overview (2024): "3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan".

ICLA staff at an awareness raising session on documentation for Syrian in Mafraq-Jordan



Two videos on obtaining a POA and determination of heirs are also included, as well as links to information on civil documentation, which is often intrinsically tied to the ability to exercise HLP rights²⁶ – e.g., birth, marriage and death certificates are required to prove inheritance rights, Syrian IDs or family books are required for many HLP related claims, etc.

ICLA is trying to make Syrians aware of and familiar with these sites now so that in the future, if they are unable to reach NRC directly, they will still have access to important HLP information. Additionally, there is a link for site users to send questions to ICLA, as well as a link to a WhatsApp chatbot for more general questions, so they can still seek and receive advice on HLP matters from wherever they may be.

KOBLI:²⁷ Teams in Lebanon and Iraq are implementing the digital legal aid platform KOBLI, which provides specific information on HLP in Syria for those with access to internet and mobile phones.²⁸ The HLP in Syria page went live in Lebanon in November 2023 and in Iraq in June 2024.²⁹ KOBLI aims at making legal assistance more accessible and safer for refugees. The site is available through a web-browser or a mobile app, where legal experts publish information for displaced Syrians. Anyone can access KOBLI from a phone or computer at any time. The HLP in Syria page includes links to answers for common questions:

- What can I do to protect my HLP rights in Syria?
- What are the most important documents that can prove ownership in Syria?
- What should I do if I don't have HLP documents?
- Are there other types of documents I can use to exercise my HLP rights?
- How can I obtain a determination of heirs?
- Why is civil documentation key to exercising HLP rights?
- How can Syrians register vital events that occurred outside Syria?
- How do I protect my documents?

There are also future plans to add a feature to the KOBLI website that will allow Syrians to upload their HLP documents to the server. Once uploaded, they will be the only user who can view/access these documents. Neither NRC nor KOBLI administrators will be able to view these documents, with the idea of creating a safe space where Syrians can keep copies of their documents that will be accessible from any location.

JESR:³⁰ JESR is a digital platform used in Jordan that provides information on how to access their basic rights and gain a deeper understanding of their legal rights in Jordan. The site includes information about the refugee registration process, legal stay in Jordan, civil and legal documentation, and HLP and labor rights in Jordan. JESR includes the same page on HLP in Syria that is available on the KOBLI site, as described above.³¹

²⁶ <https://lebanon.kobli.no/en/page/HouseLandPropertySyr>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Future plans for the platform involve letting Syrians upload their HLP and legal identity documents to a cloud server, which can only be accessed by the document owner.

²⁹ As the HLP in Syria page in Iraq was only launched very recently, there was no data on its usage and rollout as of the time of this writing.

³⁰ <https://jesr.info/en/page/HLP-In-Syria>.

³¹ Ibid.

2. LEGAL ASSISTANCE

a. Helping Syrians obtain POAs in hosting countries

BOX 2

POWER OF ATTORNEY (POA)

A Power of Attorney is a formal contract between two parties, where one person (the principal) grants authority to another person (the agent) to act on his/her behalf) in legal matters and to represent them before relevant authorities. Powers of attorney are utilized for various reasons, including when the principals are unable to handle their legal or administrative affairs personally in Syria, due to reasons like residing abroad or lacking knowledge about legal procedures,

Legal assistance activities began in Lebanon in 2021, focusing on legal identity and HLP cases. Legal assistance started in Jordan in 2023 and in KRI in 2024, with a primary focus on facilitating access to Powers of Attorney (POA) for Syrian refugees to help them manage affairs related to their HLP assets and issues in Syria, including getting replacement HLP documents. Under this activity, ICLA attorneys explain the process of obtaining the POA to refugees, and for those who wish to proceed, also provide assistance with the necessary paperwork and procedures. Obtaining a POA would be extremely helpful for Syrians, and some of the most common reasons listed for wanting a POA relate to inheritance and proving ownership, as in Zara's case below:

BOX 3

ZARA'S STORY ³²

87%
of Syrians said they did not have enough money to meet basic needs while displaced

Zara currently lives in Irbid with her son. She used to live with her mother and niece, but her mother said she had to leave because Zara's son was too old to stay in the same house as her niece. She is currently renting another apartment but fears being evicted because she is a single mother trying to care for her 16-year-old son. In Syria, she and her husband lived in a house they rented in Dara'a, but she also had a piece of land her father had given her.

Zara says her husband asked her to transfer the land to his name so he could apply for a loan. When they later divorced, she said that her husband forced her to waive any rights she might have before he would agree to the divorce, but that he also said he would give her back the land. She attended NRC's information session in Jordan because she was interested in learning more about land and HLP documentation and wanted to know how to get her land back from her husband. She was especially interested to learn about POAs because she had one before but did not know how to use it. Zara has asked NRC for legal assistance, but the case highlights the challenges in providing this service; her case has been ongoing for over a year because her husband has refused to act, so she has not been able to obtain a POA.

Counseling session on HLP in Syria - Lebanon - Bekaa

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Syrian farmer - Lebanon



Another common request is for help to get a POA to obtain a new or replacement tabou.³³ Other reasons for wanting a POA were to sell or lease property in Syria, or to entrust someone to stop other family members from taking/selling their property or their shares in property.

"I want to send a Power of Attorney to a lawyer to investigate the lawsuit filed by my brother claiming that I sold him the property through a verbal contract. Additionally, I need legal support to obtain the lease contract for someone interested in using the land."

- man in Jordan³⁴

b. Challenges in Obtaining POAs

Unfortunately, practical, legal and other challenges have often stymied attempts to help refugees obtain POAs that can be granted to persons in Syria to handle HLP matters, and this activity has yielded mixed results. Situational challenges, such as the lack of a trusted person to act as an agent in Syria, make obtaining a POA difficult and of questionable use. Additionally, many Syrians may lack legal identity documents such as Syrian IDs or birth/marriage/death certificates needed to prove relationships, which are necessary to facilitate HLP transactions.

BOX 4

LEGAL IDENTITY AND HLP

While the connection between legal identity and HLP issues may not always be clear, documents such as the family book, marriage, death and birth certificates are often crucial to proving familial links to ensure that family members can inherit HLP and other assets. Women need marriage certificates to prove their link to their husbands, and birth and death certificates are needed to address inheritance issues. Death registration is of critical importance, as it directly affects matters of guardianship, parentage, and nationality of children.

According to the Syrian Civil Status Law, all vital events, such as births, marriages, divorces and deaths that take place abroad must be registered within nine months, either at the diplomatic mission in the place of residence or the place where the event occurred, or directly at any Civil Registry Centre in Syria. For vital events that occurred abroad to be considered valid for registration in Syria, they must first be registered in accordance with the laws of the country in which they occurred, which must not conflict with Syrian laws.³⁵

Previous research highlights that despite the efforts that the Syrian and host governments have made since the start of the conflict to improve and increase access to civil documentation, many Syrian refugees remain unable to obtain, replace, or update documentation.³⁶ In some cases, refugees are adopting inherently risky coping mechanisms in an attempt to address their documentation needs, including by obtaining fraudulent documents. Moreover, if the challenges related to accessing civil documentation and HLP rights are not addressed for Syrian refugees, durable solutions will be harder to achieve in the longer term and future recovery efforts will be negatively affected.

³³ This is the title deed in Syria.

³⁴ JO HH6.

³⁵ NRC (2021): "Legal Identity and HLP Rights of Syrian Refugees from a Durable Solutions Perspective".

³⁶ Ibid.

While some details might vary, the primary process includes obtaining certifications from the host country judicial department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Syrian Embassy. POAs involving the sale, purchase or transfer of HLP rights require security clearance for both the principal and the agent from security branches of the Syrian government. This means that the POA must be sent to the preferred agent in Syria, who must then go to the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to have the document certified before the security clearance is given and the POA is authorized (here the sender, recipient and purpose of the POA are investigated before being certified by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs). However, each country presents unique legal and practical obstacles in completing this process, such as lack of legal residency or limited access to a Syrian Embassy.

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1.7%
plan on returning in the next 12 months



NRC staff providing legal counseling and services to the residents of the remote Haswa village in the Anbar governorate.

In Jordan, a person requesting a POA from a public notary must present a valid Syrian passport, which is very difficult for most people to obtain. However, they only need a Syrian ID when requesting a POA from the Syrian Embassy, and ICLA facilitates the process of obtaining POAs from the Embassy as most Syrians have IDs and legal residency. Requesting a POA regarding land requires presentation of the original land registry statement for the land from the Syrian land registry. In essence, this requires that the original document be obtained by someone in Syria and then transported to the applicant in Jordan – a process that can be both very expensive and difficult to complete.

In Lebanon, in most parts of the country, it is required that Syrians seeking the POA have legal residency in the country, which has been very difficult to obtain for a substantial number of refugees who are there – either because they arrived after the Lebanese government stopped issuing residency permits, they crossed illegally, and/or they were unable to find a Lebanese sponsor who would vouch for them. Additionally, a 2023 regulation stated that the Embassy would not certify POAs for anyone other than the principal, so those seeking a POA must physically present themselves at the Embassy, which many refugees are afraid to do – especially if they lack legal residency.

In Iraq, the only Syrian Embassy is located in Baghdad, and most Syrians in KRI are unable to travel to Baghdad due to travel and security restrictions. Initially, these logistical challenges made it very difficult for people to obtain POAs, but ICLA has worked around this by having the refugee request two POAs from a notary public: one to a lawyer working with NRC to go to the Syrian Embassy in Baghdad on their behalf, and a second one to the person in Syria. This has allowed ICLA to help more people obtain POAs in KRI.

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Isra and Hajar, orphans from al-Qa'em, struggle to obtain their identification documents



Even if the described procedural obstacles can be overcome, key ICLA staff and refugees interviewed for the study listed the same reasons stopping people from trying to obtain a POA, in particular the lack of a trusted person in Syria to whom POA could be granted. Several people interviewed for this report said that they did not trust their family members who were still in Syria, reporting that their relatives were often the ones violating their HLP rights, such as brothers, sisters or uncles trying to claim the shares in HLP assets belonging to the refugees. In addition, many refugees lack the ability to cover the costs of processes that would take place in Syria.

The largest impediment to greater success regarding this activity is the inability to act or provide further support inside Syria. NRC and other organizations are unable to provide legal aid services in Syria due to the legal aid ban that was passed by the GOS in 2018, restricting the provision of legal counselling inside the country, which Syrians often need to navigate HLP laws and bureaucratic processes.³⁷ This ban affects Syrians in both host countries and those who have returned, as in Sara's case below:

BOX 5

SARA'S STORY³⁸

Sara is a Syrian woman who is married with five children – three sons and two daughters. She was born in Dara'a and lived in the village of Nawa until 2012, when the conflict forced her family to flee to Jordan, where they lived in Al Azrak camp for over three years. Life in the camp was challenging, but Sara felt that refugees were more welcome there than in Zaatari Camp. She also believed that they had better prospects to work in Al Azrak; one member of the family was able to work with an international NGO and earn some salary.

In 2018, Sara and her family returned to Nawa after the situation in Dara'a stabilized. She also needed to support her family, because two of her brothers were killed during the fighting in Dara'a. Her husband does construction work when it is available, and she is working as a cleaner with a Jordanian organization in Dara'a. Sara's five children were registered with Nofous in Syria before they fled to Jordan, and they had been able to take classes in Al Azrak camp with the Jordanian educational curriculum. However, when the family left Al Azrak, the camp authorities would not allow them to take all their belongings, including important documents. It was only after they returned to Syria that Sara realized that they had left the title deed to their house in Dara'a and the educational certificates for the children in Jordan.

Sara's husband has rights to his family house in Dara'a, where they now live with his four brothers and their families. The property is registered in the name of Sara's father-in-law, but he died while the family was in the camp. Sara says she cannot afford the costs involved in obtaining a determination of heirs and extracting a new title deed affirming her husband's rights to the house.

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Other support tools for implementing teams include:

LEGAL HELP DESK:

The legal help desk was established to provide support to country office teams, who are able to pose questions to the Damascus legal team about new or difficult situations. This has helped develop a network of local lawyers across Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon who are able to communicate with NRC lawyers in Damascus to ensure consistent communication and information sharing.

COMMON SCENARIO MATRIX (CSM):

The CSM was developed in 2020. This tool includes a list of common legal questions that may arise and that is accessible to all NRC ICLA lawyers in the host countries. If they are unable to find a solution to their particular question, they are able to use the legal help desk referenced above.

OTHER RESEARCH:

Additionally, the project has monitored the Syrian legal and policy framework, has continued to focus on how to document HLP violations, legal pathways to protect HLP rights in displacement, and has created leaflets and other products on key HLP topics, such as tabou, sales contracts, and irrevocable POAs. There has also been a strong focus on women's HLP rights, both in law and practice, based on cultural and social conditions which often prevent women from claiming their HLP rights.



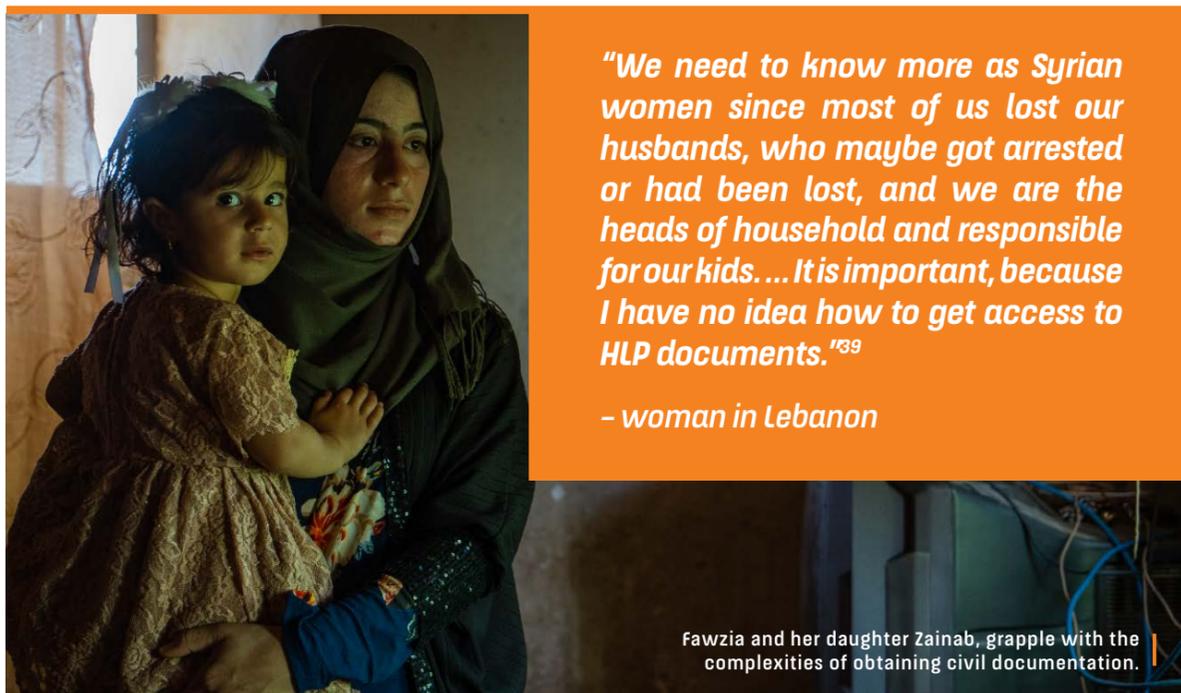
Young man, refugee from Syria, Beddawi Youth Centre, legal advice. NRC ICLA Assistant, North Lebanon

³⁷ Durable Solutions Platform (2023): "Durable Solutions & Early Recovery Policy Brief".

³⁸ Sara was interviewed by NRC after she returned to Syria. She did not receive assistance from NRC while her family was in Jordan.

3. WOMEN AND HLP

The conflict and protracted displacement has transformed the traditional roles of Syrian women, with many taking on additional roles and responsibilities within their families. The ability to control and benefit from how HLP assets are used and managed is key to providing for the family, so access to HLP information is of special value to women, who may not have been able to, or needed to, handle such matters before. As expressed by one woman in Lebanon:



"We need to know more as Syrian women since most of us lost our husbands, who maybe got arrested or had been lost, and we are the heads of household and responsible for our kids. ... It is important, because I have no idea how to get access to HLP documents."³⁹

- woman in Lebanon

Fawzia and her daughter Zainab, grapple with the complexities of obtaining civil documentation.

Having a safe space where women can inquire about such matters is especially important as social and cultural norms may punish them for seeking to claim HLP rights. Previous studies about Syrian refugees in Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan consistently found that the vast majority of HLP assets are in men's names.⁴⁰ Syrian women's access to land and housing is often through relationships with the men in their lives – whether father, brother or husband – and maintenance of these relationships is often contingent upon their decision to give up claims to HLP assets. Other NRC research has detailed these restrictive norms, but also highlights that women in displacement can feel less affected by intimidation and violence by men in their lives; the upheaval of their way of life can result in the loss of family ties and social safety nets as having less meaning, and subsequently less fear if they try to claim HLP rights.⁴¹

During NRC's research with Syrian women in Jordan, the women said that exposure to the inheritance system in Jordan and talking to Jordanian women had helped increase their knowledge of HLP rights.⁴² They expressed wanting to have properties registered in their names, whether individually or jointly, and wanted to have actual control – the ability to make decisions, manage and benefit from the property. Additionally, several women emphasised how dramatic life changes – the loss (or potential loss) of brothers, husbands and fathers and uncertainty of what the future may hold – has given them more determination to claim their rights to secure a future for themselves and their children.⁴³

³⁹ LB FGD1.

⁴⁰ NRC (2017): "Briefing Note: Reflection of Future Challenges to Housing, Land and Property Restitution for Syrian Refugees".

⁴¹ NRC (2024): "Facing an impossible choice: Refugee Women's Housing, Land and Property Rights in Syria".

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

BOX 6

RANIA'S STORY ⁴⁴

Rania is from Dara'a in Syria. During the first years of her marriage, she lived with her in-laws in Syria but wanted to have a place that she felt was truly her own. She had a job working as a cleaner in a school, and against the wishes of her in-laws and traditions that did not think women should own property, she took out a loan, made an initial payment for a flat in Dara'a and got a tabou as proof of her ownership. This caused problems with her husband's family, but she says he was happy to have their own home – though he did not contribute any financial support for the payments on the house. Eventually, she was unable to continue making the necessary payments, so she sold the flat and purchased a smaller house that was in poor condition with an irrevocable power of attorney.

After she and her family fled to Jordan in 2013, her sister moved into the smaller house to guard against others trying to claim and/or move into the house. In Jordan, Rania attended one of NRC's information sessions, and in 2023 she approached ICLA for help with registering the irrevocable POA in Syria. NRC helped her get a POA for her sister to register the irrevocable POA in Syria, who is now looking for a trustworthy lawyer in Syria to assist with the process.

Rania describes her determination and growing courage throughout her experience:

In the cultural milieu of rural Dara'a, where I originate, a prevailing norm dictates that women are systematically deprived of their inheritance rights. This custom extends not only to rural areas but also encompasses Dara'a city, forming an entrenched tradition where women are consistently denied their rightful shares and privileges. Attempting to assert these rights often leads to formidable challenges, as women may encounter threats from their families and face unwelcome repercussions, such as being excluded from family homes or even entire villages ...

However, the current landscape is witnessing a shift. Many women from the area, including those within our refugee society, have participated in enlightening sessions facilitated by organizations like the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). These sessions have focused on the significance of HLP rights. Empowered with new knowledge, these women have not only found the courage to inquire about their rights but have also begun actively claiming what is rightfully theirs. This transformation marks a notable departure from the past, signaling a positive shift towards awareness, education, and empowerment among women in the community.

⁴⁴ JO CSI.



"We want to know more"

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Rana Khawaldeh, Syrian woman
Jordan - Mafraq

Increasingly, women believe that they should be able to choose what they want to do with HLP assets that are rightfully theirs; some wanted to keep the property for themselves and their children, while others wanted financial compensation to use either during displacement or to find somewhere else to live.⁴⁵ After over a decade of displacement and gaining greater awareness of women's HLP rights, Syrian women are now asking for more than just knowledge about their rights; they want to know how to actually claim their rights, particularly in the face of cultural and social discrimination:

Among the women who expressed an intention to claim their rights, one said it:

"Among the women who expressed an intention to claim their rights, one said it."

Reflecting the breakdown of social contracts since the conflict, they added that they were prepared to do this, even if it was not custom in their family, and even if their brothers resisted:

"because those same brothers have neglected their sisters living outside of Syria."

One woman ... simply said:

"If I had just one penny, I would pursue my rights."⁴⁶

This is a gap that the cross-border project is helping to fill. Lawyers in Jordan report that women frequently approach them with questions about how to prove ownership of HLP assets so that they could be legally sold, as well as inheritance questions, as in Lila's case below.

BOX 7

LILA'S STORY⁴⁷

Lila has been living in northern Lebanon since 2013. She says they currently rent a house, but the rental costs are too high, and she has had to move out of five different houses. She has a house back in Homs that is registered under the name of her late husband, and she and her sister have rights to her late father's property in Syria; her sister is still in Syria.

Regarding her family property, she says they need to go through the process of transferring ownership to herself and her sister so they can sell the property. She would like to ask ICLA for counselling and legal assistance to organize a POA so her sister can start the process by taking inventory of the inherited property, and facilitating the transfer of ownership and sale of the property.

⁴⁵ NRC (2024): "Facing an impossible choice: Refugee Women's Housing, Land and Property Rights in Syria".

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ LB HHS.

It must be noted that every family is different, and some women report having more support from their male family members than others, which can make a significant difference in their abilities to exercise HLP rights. This was observed in NRC's recent research on Syrian women's HLP rights in Jordan⁴⁸ and is further illustrated by Aliya's story below.

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BOX 8

ALIYA'S STORY⁴⁹

Aliya is a Palestinian Refugee from Syria (PRS). She and her family had a house in Al Yarmouk Camp, but fled to Lebanon in 2013 because of the war. When they arrived in Lebanon, someone advised them to go the Baalback, where they were hosted in a shelter center affiliated with the Palestinian Endowments in Wavell Camp. The center is next to a cemetery, and they slept on the ground until rooms were constructed for them to live in. Aliya has no income to pay rent outside the shelter, but she fears the center will ask her to leave because they have been there for such a long time.

Aliya says that the house in Al Yarmouk Camp in Syria was completely destroyed, and that they never had any proof of ownership of that house. However, her father owns a small house in the Al Tadamon area, and to protect his daughters' rights and avoid complicated inheritance procedures after his death (e.g., determination of heirs and having multiple owners who need to sign on the documents), her father decided to transfer the ownership of the house to Aliya and her sisters while living.

Aliya had attended ICLA's information sessions, and in 2021, she decided to ask for legal assistance with her case. She said she was afraid in the beginning, because she did not know who to trust and feared losing the only house that they own. However, she says that after meeting the ICLA team and lawyer, she felt comfortable moving forward, and ICLA helped get a POA issued for her in Lebanon. She sent the POA to a lawyer she knew in Syria who helped complete the process. The procedures have been finalized and the necessary documents issued, but Aliya says the lawyer will not give her the documents until after she receives full payment for her services. Aliya is still saving to pay her.



ICLA staff home visit for Syrian women
in Jordan

⁴⁸ NRC (2024): "Facing an impossible choice: Refugee Women's Housing, Land and Property Rights in Syria".

⁴⁹ LB CSI.

B AREAS OF SUCCESS

Strong focus on women's HLP issues and rights. Access to HLP information is also of special value to women, who may not have been able to, or needed to, handle such matters before. They frequently raise questions about how to protect their and their children's inheritance rights, and the project activities have focused on helping raise their levels of awareness and knowledge, and can provide a safe space to discuss their HLP rights.

Women HLP training- Iraq

Developing greater expertise in Syrian HLP laws and processes to better protect HLP rights for the displaced. The project has spent years developing knowledge regarding Syrian HLP laws and processes to navigate processes, such as those to obtain new or replacement documents and registering marriages or deaths for inheritance claims. It has also followed changes that impact refugees, such as new requirements to obtain a POA from outside the country, and documented HLP claims, common scenarios and legal pathways to protect HLP rights for displaced Syrians.

Coordination among ICLA teams in different countries. The creation of the legal help desk and common scenario matrix has helped ensure that each team receives the same legal advice regarding HLP in Syria, and there have been joint meetings with representatives from each country coming together to discuss the challenges and issues they have faced. Such coordination has allowed each team to benefit from the monitoring, research and analysis of Syrian HLP laws and policies that is conducted by Syrian lawyers, and created a network of local lawyers across the three countries. To date, over 200 cases have been supported across the countries, including on issues such as inheritance and powers of attorney.

Building trust with Syrian refugees. A clear area of success has been the building of trust and networks between the refugee communities and NRC. Program beneficiaries in all three countries report telling their friends and family about the services being provided by ICLA. The programs all work with local and community leaders, often hiring refugees themselves for various activities. Interviewees often told the research team that they felt safe working with NRC and that the teams were responsive to their questions and needs, even if their problems could not be fully solved at that time.

Meeting information needs. Refugees who did receive information and counselling services also expressed great appreciation:

"We want to know more information about the legal protection of our properties, the procedures, and how to get our properties back from the people occupying it."

– woman in Gawilan⁵⁰

"I decided to attend [the information session] since the matter of my husband's house in Syria is very important, and if I don't follow up on it, no one else will."

– woman in north Lebanon⁵¹

Facilitating POAs for those who meet the required conditions. While there are many challenges in terms of facilitating POAs, for those who do meet the requirements – e.g., they do not have security concerns, have someone inside Syria they trust who can complete steps in that country – obtaining a POA can be a great victory, as in Yusuf's case below.

BOX 9

YUSUF'S STORY ⁵²

Yusuf currently lives in Gawilan Camp in KRI. He has a house in Ras-a-lyn in Syria, and a plot of land that is registered in the name of his deceased father. He has a sales contract for the house and a tabou for the land. He wants to transfer the ownership of the land to his mother's name. He decided to attend an ICLA information session to learn more about HLP rights and procedures and called NRC staff to learn how to register his father's death and proceed with the determination of heirs. He requested legal assistance from NRC and says their help was very useful because he did not know the proper procedures, could not afford the costs involved, and could not go to Baghdad himself. He was very happy that NRC was able to help him to obtain the POA so that someone inside Syria could complete the necessary steps.

Refugees throughout the region noted the importance of being able to prove ownership of their property inside Syria, either so they could protect their claims, rent out their properties, or potentially sell them in the future for higher prices.⁵³ Additionally, it has become more difficult for them to survive in the hosting countries due to factors such as increased housing costs, lack of regular job opportunities and the reduction in humanitarian aid.

Building self reliance. As has been emphasized throughout this report, the fact that Syrians are unable to act upon new advice or information immediately does not mean that they do not derive value from gaining new understanding of how to safeguard their HLP rights in Syria. HLP is a complex topic, and some Syrians have attended multiple sessions to better understand the issues and options available to them. An individual's circumstances can change quickly, and it is useful to ensure that they are equipped with the knowledge to respond to such changes if and when they occur.

C CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTATION

Convincing Syrians of the importance of addressing HLP issues inside Syria. Several ICLA teams reported that initially, many refugees were reluctant to discuss HLP inside Syria because they feared that there was a push to have them forcibly return. While it took effort, the teams also said that after explaining the project and assistance that could be provided, many refugees understood that the intent was to help address/protect refugees' assets for whatever happens in the future.

"In the beginning, people were not so interested in [HLP in Syria] because they thought it would be linked to making them return."

– NRC staff member



Bardarash Camp for Syrian Refugees, Iraq

Many Syrians lack hope. In all countries, it was reported that Syrians often felt discouraged about moving forward with any processes because they did not think that they would be able to return, or because they felt that their property had already been lost. However, this is not a permanent obstacle and may change if/when conditions begin to improve in Syria, or they are able to speak with others who can help them see other possibilities for the future.

“When people are asked whether the information [on HLP in Syria] is useful, they say no because they have no property in Syria; they have nothing left or are not planning to return.”

– NRC staff member

“People refused to answer questions about keeping HLP documents safe and accessible, because they have no desire to return to their country.”

– NRC staff member

Security concerns. Inside host countries, traveling to the Syrian Embassy can be difficult because of security concerns regarding the need to pass through checkpoints. Inside Syria, there are also security concerns regarding the need for people to present themselves to Syrian authorities to certify a POA. Males of military service age also fear contact with Syrian authorities because of worries about conscription.

“[Syrians] don’t come forward, because they don’t have legal residency.”

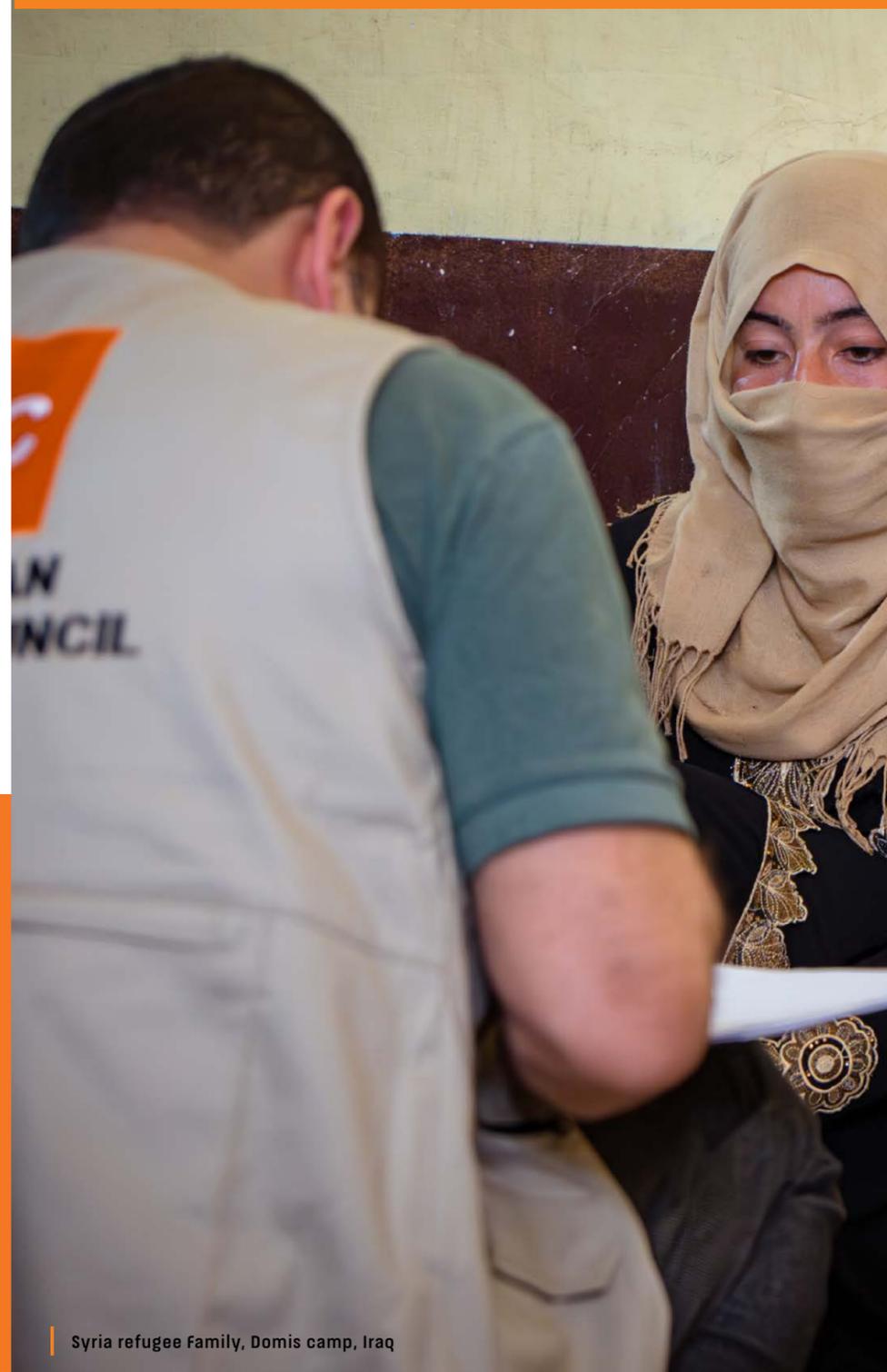
– NRC staff member

“Security approval [by the GoS] for a POA is considered a barrier.”

– NRC staff member

Mismatch between law and practice in Syria. While it is important to provide refugees with the correct and official laws and procedures regarding land management, there must be an accounting for the fact that this was not the primary way HLP assets were governed and used throughout much of the country. For example, Syrians in KRI often come from areas in Syria that are governed by de facto authorities (e.g., the “Self Administration”) that has their own rules. Similarly, other areas outside the control of Damascus may use different procedures to govern the use and management of HLP assets. Additionally, even before the conflict, the majority of land in the country was not officially registered.

People seek advice on matters beyond NRC’s control. Many refugees face situations that NRC cannot address. For instance, many refugees ask for help because their property inside Syria is occupied by the state or other non-government actors, or because their property has been destroyed.



Syria refugee family, Domis camp, Iraq

“For people who ask for assistance because their property was taken by Turkish authorities, we explain that this is outside the control of NRC.”

– NRC staff member

While in Iraq there has been some ability to help people file cases to seek compensation, these outcomes are beyond NRC’s control. However, it may be of value to help document the events, including the testimony of the refugees and those inside Syria who can confirm the events.

Inability to act inside Syria. The legal aid ban passed by the GoS in 2018 prevents NRC from carrying out legal activities inside Syria, and NRC has yet to identify a partner who is able to operate inside the country. Even where NRC is able to cover expenses for legal proceedings in host countries, refugees often state that they cannot afford lawyers to continue necessary processes inside Syria, and it was common to hear from refugees and ICCLA staff alike that there was not a trusted person inside the country to help refugees with their HLP matters:

“The challenge was to find a person who you can trust. In addition that the person who will follow the procedure in Syria will bear a heavy financial burden.”

– woman in northern Lebanon⁵⁴

“I want to obtain a replacement for the irrevocable POA in order to proceed with the sale [of the house]. However, I don’t have anyone in Syria that I can trust, and I can’t afford the costs associated with these procedures in Syria.”

– man in Jordan⁵⁵

“Counselling [on HLP in Syria] was not helpful for those who do not have financial resources or trusted relatives in Syria to assert their rights.”

– woman in KRI⁵⁶

NRC’s prior research in Jordan also noted that there is some suspicion of lawyers in Syria and an assumption that the legal system there is corrupt, expensive and ineffective.⁵⁷

54

LB HH6.

55

JO HH7.

56

IQ FGD1.

57

NRC (2024) “Facing an Impossible Choice: Women’s HLP rights in Syria”.

IV

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Generally speaking, most Syrians have acknowledged that conditions in Syria are not yet conducive for return, but they are having difficulty integrating into their host countries, whether through the inability to work, lack of legal residency, or inability to own property in their own names. That said, a substantial percentage of refugees still have hopes of returning, and NRC should continue helping Syrians to build their knowledge on HLP matters for whatever future decisions lie ahead and use the time in displacement to explain information in greater depth. As one example noted above, women who have spent the past ten years in displacement have learned a great deal about their HLP rights, and are asking more complex questions about how to exercise their rights now that they have a better understanding of what they are. Other refugees who have learned more about Syria's new HLP laws and regulations may be more inclined to ask for assistance to protect their HLP claims if they will not be able to return in the near future.

From topics ranging from inheritance to HLP documentation, to powers of attorney, Syrians interviewed for this report generally felt that such knowledge would help them protect their HLP rights, especially women who had taken over as heads of their households. The use of videos that can be distributed to other partners and/or relevant actors in this space may be a way to increase the numbers of people reached, particularly in areas where NRC may not be present; there have so far been two videos created – one on powers of attorney and another on determination of heirs that are available on the KOBUI website. The project will build on its existing work, which includes over 200 cases on matters such as inheritance and replacing lost or damaged HLP documents, track the evolving nature of refugees' questions and needs regarding their HLP rights in Syria, and continue building Syrians' knowledge base on options available to them to protect these rights.

At present time, legal assistance activities are focused on helping Syrians obtain POAs. However, NRC is in the process of examining more expansive thinking about what qualifies as “legal assistance.” There should be a greater focus on how refugees can be assisted with building resiliency and a more complex knowledge – particularly as HLP-related complications in Syria may increase the longer they are displaced. To that end, the following recommendations are offered:

Regarding Information & Counselling:

- Consider providing different levels of information presentations (e.g., level 1, level 2, etc.) such that more information is gradually provided, with later levels building on information from earlier levels.
- Gauge topics of interest for attendees of information sessions to ensure that they are receiving information that is relevant for their situations, and ensure that topics covered in information sessions are in line with the audience (e.g., women’s HLP rights for women, sales of HLP assets for property owners, etc.)
- Consider other methods to spread awareness of HLP information via phone or online resources – radio advertisements, SMS/text messages, NRC’s KOBLI/JESR sites – and monitor usage of existing digital platforms to determine patterns of usage and understand what topics are of greatest interest.
- Gather feedback from Syrians regarding their concerns and experiences regarding non-in-person methods of communication and receiving HLP information.
- Include specific discussions to explore methods that may not require POAs or other formal legal steps as an interim measure to address HLP issues.

Regarding women’s HLP rights:

- Consider how to build additional “soft” skills for women, such as negotiation, to help them navigate pathways to overcome social and cultural barriers to claiming their HLP rights.
- Facilitate discussions/platforms where women can share experiences and advice about how to claim HLP rights and navigate conversations with difficult persons (which can be both men and women) who do not support their efforts.
- Offer women-only information sessions to encourage open discussion regarding HLP challenges.
- Identify men who can help explain the importance of women’s HLP rights to their communities.

Regarding legal assistance:

- Undertake a broader search for partners inside Syria. They may not need to be “legal providers,” per se, but could be actors/organizations that can support or accompany Syrians to go through certain administrative processes, visit administrative offices, etc. (e.g., NGOs that support women’s rights, general land and property rights, etc.).
- Develop a network of lawyers in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria to facilitate legal services
- Build a network of trusted persons who can act as agents for Syrian refugees (given the levels of distrust towards family members that have been expressed to the research team)
- Support logistical fees (e.g., fees to transport necessary documents from Syria to the host country)
- Coordinate more closely with actors/partners in Syria to monitor refugees who return from hosting countries to gather information about HLP challenges upon return.
- Consider how to broaden activities that may fall under legal assistance besides facilitating a POA, and discuss other options if obtaining a POA is not possible. For example:
 - Where refugees’ property has been seized by the state or other armed actors, consider helping them document the HLP violation with relevant testimony to prepare for future actions.
 - Assist in systematically preparing claims for compensation for HLP violations or assets that have been taken or destroyed.
 - Discuss obtaining a determination of heirs if the beneficiary has a family member/another heir inside Syria, or talk through possibilities of other trusted persons who can help manage affairs while the process to obtain a POA is ongoing).

Regarding legal documentation:

- Include financial and human resources to support Syrians to obtain legal identity documents that facilitate/support the ability to exercise HLP rights (e.g., legal residency, national IDs, registration of vital events, etc.)
- Examine how to increase access to other legal documents that are needed to fully exercise HLP rights, including through advocacy and clarifying about relevant procedures and costs – e.g., legal residency, asylum registration, other host country documents, etc...

Advocacy:

- Advocate for longer-term funding for HLP activities to account for the length of time it takes to address HLP issues.
- Advocate with hosting countries to stop or pause policies that force Syrians to return – e.g., lifting restrictive policies on legal residency in Lebanon, lifting restrictions on work opportunities for Syrians in Jordan, restart issuing residency permits for Syrians in KRI, etc.
- Advocate with the Syrian government to simplify some HLP processes, such as obtaining replacement HLP documents and registering transfers of HLP rights.
- Advocate with the Syrian government to end the legal aid ban.



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