

Introduction

It is time to close the detention camps in Northeast Syria. We are requesting the international community to redirect funding from sustaining the camps toward an investment to empty the camps. GCERF estimates that not only will the investment make the world safer, but it will save billions of dollars in humanitarian and military aid support for the years ahead. Despite significant global efforts, including those supported by GCERF, emptying the detention camps in Northeast Syria (NES) remains immensely challenging, and urgent. The camps have more than 35,000 residents (mainly women and children). Recent events (i.e. the end of Assad regime and the pause and cancellation of USAID's programming) underline the importance of expediting emptying the camps holding Syrian, Iraqi and third country nationals (TCNs) to avert the resurgence of ISIS and other security risks.

A central element of GCERF's new 4-year strategy is to establish a **Global Rehabilitation and Reintegration Mechanism (GRRM)** to support global and local security and stabilisation efforts by reducing the number of people in NES camps to the irreducible minimum. This will be achieved by building on our positioning across the return cycle, expanding our already significant scope in Iraq and Syria (including extending pre-departure support from Roj to Al-Hol detention camp), and scaling and mobilising the support of our unique multi-stakeholder partnership to close the camps. The Global Mechanism is a ringfenced investment fund with a three-pillared approach to emptying the camps, **ensuring comprehensive support (Iraqis, Syrians, and TCNs) with holistic R&R and case management services.**

Establishing a Virtuous Circle

With this proposal GCERF aims to create a 'virtuous circle': commencing with pre-departure training in the camps through sustainable rehabilitation and reintegration; and by communicating back to the camps successes, encouraging others to return.

In turn, sharing effective practice across the entire cycle is intended to encourage more countries to return their nationals.



Pillar I – Iraqi Returnees

GCERF partners have supported Mental Health and Psycho-social Support (MHPSS) and referrals to **1,732 Iraqi returnees since May 2024** under a grant funded in part by USAID. Based on a recent in-person assessment, the MHPSS support across **9 case management centres** for case intake and services (in Anbar, Ninewa, and Salahaddin governorates) is vital as many of the returnees, after leaving Al-Jadaa reception centre, remain radicalised. However, referral to livelihood, legal, and housing support is challenging because several partners such as IOM, TdH, IRC, and UNDP, which are dependent on USAID funding have halted service delivery. In addition, according to GCERF's initial assessment, referral services were less available in rural areas than urban areas. But even in urban areas, the referral system was often unable to meet the service demand of returnee populations, especially as the number of returnees from Al-Hol has increased in the last three months (4,800 people). **The objective of the Government of Iraq is to return all Iraqi remaining citizens (12,200) by the end of 2025.**

After 10 months of implementation, GCERF has learned that an integrated programme, which includes mental health, legal, livelihood and shelter support, is required and far more effective, efficient and impactful than referral services alone. The case management software, which has been developed, is currently run by GCERF's civil society partners. IOM has also developed a case management system used for returnees in Mosul. The objective is that **all existing case management systems are synchronised and are handed over to government of Iraq for sustainability purposes.** GCERF is currently investing in the **training of 200 personnel of Ministry of Migration and Displacement.**

GCERF partners produced over 20 stories encompassing the testimonies of Iraqi returnees about their successful reintegration from the Al-Hol camp. The Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve – the coalition forces, provide support for repatriation, and led by Brigadier General Celo, are streamlining these very stories to encourage people to leave the camps and come forward for voluntary repatriation.



Intended results

9,000 Iraqi returnees from Northeast Syrian camps are provided with holistic case management including comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration support in Anbar, Ninewa and Salahaddin between 2025–2028.

Additional co-investment is made together with the Government of Iraq to support the legal documentation and get the ID cards for children and youth that will enable them to attend school and access various government services such as healthcare.

Pillar II – Third Country Nationals in the NES camps

Through the engagement of a Syrian civil society partner, GCERF has been working with TCNs from partner countries whose governments (Albania, Indonesia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, the Philippines, in discussion with the Central Asian countries) have authorised GCERF to engage them in the Roj Camp. Through a safe space centre, so far **300 foreign children and women have been provided with pro-social skills, sports, anger management, non-violent communication skills, and vocational skills in baking, hairdressing, tailoring, etc., as well as recreational activities.**

GCERF's pre-departure programme aims to manage potential returnees' expectations, counter rumours, reduce vulnerability, and prepare women and children for return to their country of origin or nationality. Engagement is through a Syrian civil society partner which has built trust with camp authorities and with the camp residents. The first group of participants will be repatriated to their country of origin soon, providing proof of concept about the necessity and effectiveness of the pre-departure support.

Under the GRRM, GCERF aims to expand its support to other TCNs residing in Al-Hol camp. **It will make an initial investment of USD 500,000 through a local Syrian civil society partner to create a similar pre-departure support centre building on existing facilities and services in Al-Hol by June 2025.** GCERF will work closely with international partners such as Blumont, Save the Children and others present in the camp.

Success stories of reintegration of TCNs returning to countries in the Western Balkans and Central Asia will be communicated to encourage governments to take their citizens back. Similarly, these stories will be aired to potential returnees still in the NES camps to encourage them to come forward for voluntary return.



Intended results

2000 TCNs from Northeast Syrian camps are provided with support to enable them to return, rehabilitate, and reintegrate in their country of origin.

GCERF will also proactively engage with other governments of TCNs to support and advocate for the repatriation of their nationals.

Pillar III – Syrian nationals in Syria

GCERF’s proposed entry point for Syria is to build on our existing programme providing pre-departure support to third country nationals. Engaging with families perceived to be affiliated with Daesh (e.g. former members or families of Daesh fighters) is an important issue to the transition authorities as it concerns direct security and perceptions.

According to the latest figures, 15,600 Syrians are still held in Al-Hol camp. According to the official statement on 23 January 2025 by the Social Affairs and Labor Authority in the Autonomous Administration of Northeast Syria, the opening of the way for Syrian citizens residing in the Al-Hol camp to voluntarily return to their residential areas was announced.

The authorities called upon immediate and specific support to them. These individuals have specific needs and are among the most vulnerable to recruitment by terrorist groups. Providing them with social and economic support will strengthen the prevention of radicalisation and recruitment and strengthen community security, which is key for reconstruction and stabilisation efforts.

GCERF would also engage with the communities into which people from the camp are returning to support creating an enabling environment. This work may take place in coordination with local and transition authorities. The usual approach of becoming a GCERF partner country will be followed.

Intended results

9,000 internally displaced Syrian returnees from Northeast Syrian camps will be provided with pre-departure, rehabilitation and reintegration support in Deir al-Zor, Raqqa, Aleppo and any other relevant locations between 2025 and 2028.

Objectives

- 1. Facilitate closure of the camps in NES by supporting repatriation and R&R support for residents and demonstrating success to the global community.
- 2. Ensure that case management is owned by the national government authorities.

Results

- a. 18,000 Iraqis and Syrians and 2,000 TCNs receive R&R services through a case management, community-based approach from 2025–2028.
- b. Government authorities own the case management system.

Budget

Pillar	Cost in USD
Pillar 1 (Iraqis)	4,000,000
Pillar 2 (TCNs)	2,000,000
Pillar 3 (Syrians)	6,000,000