

Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

September 29, 2017

The Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon is one of the many crises facing the country as a result of the flow of Syrian refugees into Lebanon. The Syrian refugees in Lebanon suffer because they have not been granted refugee status and therefore have no access to their fundamental rights.

This report summarizes the current situation of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. It also discusses the limited options a refugee has, particularly following the renewal of calls in Lebanon for Syrians to be repatriated.

1. Geographical Distribution of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

- Lebanon witnessed waves of Syrian refugees during the period of popular protests against the Syrian regime. Lebanon was the main destination for refugees fleeing from areas adjacent to the Syrian-Lebanese border; from the city of Homs as well as from the Damascus countryside. This was in addition to the flow of other Syrian refugees from other parts of Syria who ended up in Lebanon.
- The Syrian refugees in Lebanon are concentrated next to border areas with Syria; in the city of Tripoli and its villages, as well as the Beqaa valley. These areas contain the largest concentration of Syrian camps, which vary in size and number of inhabitants according to a variety of factors including the area of the leased land, tent prices, security factors (in terms of raids), work permits and freedom of movement.
- By the end of 2015, the Lebanese army and General Security have begun issuing laws to relocate or remove some camps. They also issued a decree prohibiting setting up tents without written permissions.

2. The Legal Status of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

- Over 50% of Syrian refugees have entered Lebanon without any identity documents, due to their sudden flight after the bombing and burning of their homes. However, Lebanon has accused them of illegal entry and refused to resolve their situation, despite the fact that international law upholds the right of refugees to cross borders to preserve their lives and the lives of their families. Furthermore, there are many refugees who lost their identity documents during the fires that took place in some camps. There is also no civil registration mechanism for registering births, deaths and marriages. The reason is that many Syrian refugees fear going to the Syrian embassy or do not have the capacity to afford the costs.
- Laws regarding procedures to obtain residence permit in Lebanon are constantly changing. In 2015, the procedures for obtaining residency changed, with the cost of

obtaining residency rising to 300,000 Lebanese Pounds per person (equivalent to US \$200), while previously it was free. Later, children under 12 years of age were exempted from fees, and this was followed by several changes in procedure wherein Syrians registered by UNHCR were exempted from fees, and then Palestinian refugees were allowed to obtain legal residency under the same conditions as the registered Syrians. After this, a decision was issued stating that registration for anyone who does not carry an identity document issued by UNHCR must obtain a lease contract or have a sponsor with a pledge not to work.

These procedures have resulted in the exploitation of many Syrian refugees, with house rental contracts denied to Syrian refugees unless they pay municipal taxes that have not been paid for years. In other cases, amounts up to \$1,000 are required to register a lease. The amount taken by sponsors ranges between \$300 - \$7,000. In the end, the residence application may be rejected without clarification of the justification, even if all the documents required by the applicable law have been completed.

- Many refugee's names have allegedly been deleted from UNHCR lists annually under pressure from the Lebanese government.

3. Economic conditions

- In 2015, the Lebanese government issued a resolution prohibiting Syrian refugees from working. The only categories of work that were exempted included self-employment in the industries of construction, cleaning and agriculture.
- A labor contract costs between \$1,000 and \$1,800. Receipt of one is not guaranteed even in cases where all papers have been completed.
- Most of the Syrian refugees find themselves working in the black market, where they are being exploited. Examples include the following:
 - Many Syrian refugees are forced into slave labor or to work for a small fraction of the necessary money by the owner of the land in which their tents have been set up.
 - Many women have become the only breadwinner of their families, and are obliged to do hard labor.
 - Refugees are forced to work with their wives and children without pay.
 - Children work in agricultural lands under harsh conditions and without any protection. They are charged with carrying weights not compatible with their age and for long hours. The same thing happens in other trades, such as carpentry and furniture manufacturing plants.

- There are always cases where employers do not comply with the terms of agreements signed with refugees to do certain jobs, wherein the employer does not pay the amounts due which are stipulated in the contract. It occurs that the employer expels the worker immediately after the completion of the work assigned to him, or they may change the value of the amount without prior agreement with the worker. Due to the fact that most refugees in such cases are working illegally, they are obliged to renounce their rights under the threat of being reported to the municipality or the police station.
- Syrian refugees receive daily wages of between 5,000 and 15,000 Lebanese Pounds. In contrast, Lebanese workers receive 30,000 Lebanese Pounds in return for doing the same tasks.

4. Educational situation

The educational situation of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon is extremely bad. Thousands of children have been deprived of basic education. A plan to educate Syrian children has been developed only in the last two years, and it is inadequate for the following reasons:

- a) Many children do not have identity documents or official residence permits in Lebanon.
- b) School expenses are very expensive considering the poor financial conditions of the Syrian refugees.
- c) Some Syrian children were enrolled into schools in the regular morning shift, without taking into consideration the differences between the curricula of Syria and Lebanon. For example, the Lebanese curriculum adopts English and French in teaching, while in the Syrian curriculum teaching is in Arabic and English and French are two distinct courses. Another group of Syrian children were enrolled in evening shifts not exceeding a duration of two hours, from 2:30pm - 3:30pm, which is not sufficient to cover the required curriculum. Up to the present, Lebanese schools have been unable to develop a comprehensive plan to address the educational needs of all the Syrian children.
- d) Many schools did not comply with this plan, as some governmental schools refused to register Syrian children.
- e) Racial discrimination by some teachers and educational staff in some schools is practiced against Syrian children.

- f) Legitimacy has not been granted to the many educational initiatives that have been launched by many parties to meet the educational needs of Syria students. In addition, these students are not allowed to attend the preparatory and secondary examinations.

5. Lebanon renews calls to send back Syrian refugees

The Syrian refugees in Lebanon are the victims of political and military deals, and they face many difficulties as a result. Statements made by Lebanese officials indicate Lebanon's intention to send back Syrian refugees to Syria. Two incidents have already been recorded during 2017:

- Two refugee groups of 88 Syrian families were deported to Syria. This was facilitated by the Lebanese army, with considerable discretion on the details of the transfer. The deportations were carried out through local intermediaries inside the camps, who adopted a carrot-and-stick approach to convince refugees to return to their country.
- The most prominent deal deporting Syrian refugees from Lebanon to Syria is the deal between Hezbollah and the Syrian regime with al-Nusra Front and ISIS, which gave rise to reservations on the part of the Syrian refugees, Lebanese key actors and internationals alike, for these reasons:
 - Fears that refugees were being returned to unsafe areas.
 - Concerns that there would be a breach of the agreement guaranteeing that young Syrian men will not be recruited for military service or forced to be recruited by any armed faction in the areas to which they will be transferred.
 - The Lebanese government in particular rejects any deals with ISIS and al-Nusra Front. It considers Hezbollah to be acting above the state and the law. They considered Hezbollah's actions related to this case to be outside the framework of state law.

The deportation of Syrian refugees from Lebanon to Syria is surrounded by many sensitive issues that must be dealt with in depth. Any voluntary return of Syrian refugees will inevitably be the result of pressure from the circumstances and measures taken to constrain them. In addition to the above, we find:

- Fire rages in Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon resulting in many casualties, but the Lebanese government has taken no action to prevent such incidents.

- Raids and arbitrary arrests are among the biggest concerns of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.
- Failure to hold accountable those responsible for repeated attacks, hate speech and incitement against refugees.
- Poor living conditions for Syrian refugees due to irregular access to aid.
- High rental costs of homes. In addition, the Syrian refugees pay an amount that ranges between 50,000 - 450,000 Lebanese Pounds to rent a tent.

Given this study of the situation of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon as well as consultations with a cross-section of refugees held by the Syrian Civic Platform (SCP), the current situation and recommendations can be summarized as follows:

- Most Syrian refugees do not wish to remain in Lebanon, as they regard the living conditions to be very harsh and there is no future there for them and for their children. Repeated attacks, hate speech and incitement against Syrian refugees are the main concerns for them. For this reason, most Syrian refugees who believe that the war will last for many years prefer to leave Lebanon and go to Europe. Those who hope that the war will end soon prefer to return to Syria. However, the current initiatives to repatriate Syrian refugees to Syria resulted from pressures exerted by the Lebanese government to constrain them in terms of work, mobility and increased racism.

Since there are no guarantees for the protection of refugees returning to their country, the idea of returning to Syria ignites innumerable concerns including fear of bombing, arrest, kidnapping, forced disappearances and fear of forced recruitment of young Syrian men by the conflicting parties. In addition, the homes of the vast majority of refugees are completely destroyed, and there are no sufficiently equipped shelters. Therefore, in the case they are forced to return, the refugees call for international guarantees to protect them and their children, and to be provided with all basic services to ensure a safe, voluntary and dignified return.

- A second scenario involves the Syrian refugees remaining in Lebanon, which is a temporary solution until the end of the war. However, this option is very difficult because of the increasing violations against refugees in addition to the restrictions that have been imposed on them, especially with regard to obtaining residence and work permits and freedom of movement. Moreover, the lack of humanitarian aid makes life for refugees more difficult. The Lebanese government does not



provide basic services. It is necessary to emphasize the need to ensure the safety of Syrian refugees, and their situations must be settled. Furthermore, efforts must be directed to facilitate their access to residency, and to allow them to work and hold accountable those who violate their rights and dignity.

- Some refugees travel through asylum applications to UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Others travel in illegal ways. But the number of these cases is very small comparing to the overall number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.