

## Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: New measures threaten livelihoods

October 18, 2018

In September 2018, the UN World Food Program (WFP) cut food aid for more than 8,000 registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon, depriving program beneficiaries of the nutrition cards and the cash they received. This will have tragic consequences for the beneficiaries of the program as Syrian refugees in Lebanon suffer harsh living conditions and discriminatory laws that deprive them of their right to legally work, forcing them to work in the black market where they are exploited.

Food aid provided by the WFP is about \$27 per person, and 260,000 Lebanese Pounds (\$170) for some families.

"Nizar" is a 39 year-old father of two children. He has been a resident of Lebanon for four years and received a message on September 17 from UNHCR informing him that his food and financial assistance would be cut in early October. This is his only source of livelihood in Lebanon, as he has been unable to find proper work that suits his health condition.

The WFP did not mention any reasons or criteria for the decision to cut the aid of 8,000 Syrian beneficiaries. It is noteworthy that these discarded beneficiaries include families in desperate need and families who lost their breadwinner or had a physical disability. The situation has been exacerbated by the restrictive practices of the Lebanese government on Syrian refugees. The campaign to close Syrian commercial shops in Lebanon was initiated the Lebanese Ministry of Labor to target people who lack licenses and work permits.

The Syrians consider this decision as an additional effort to tighten the restrictions on them and make them despair and leave the country. The closure of Syrian-run shops has been accompanied by high fines according to witnesses. Licenses and documents have been confiscated by the general security agency or have been requested for review. Many Syrians face the threat of arbitrary arrests, repeated violations, and fear of being pressured to return to Syria or receive an expulsion card from Lebanon.

M.N, a tenant of a shop in Tripoli explains, "The Lebanese general security agency came to the shop while I was away and my son was there. They wrote a fine for the seizure of 3 million Lebanese Pounds and closed the shop. All the goods I have are worth 2 million Lebanese Pounds, and the rent of the shop is 300 thousand Lebanese Pounds. I cannot pay this fine."

Syrian refugees consider the cut in aid by the World Food Program a form of pressure to force them to return to Syria, which is accompanied by a large campaign sponsored by the Lebanese government, some Lebanese politicians, and some within Lebanese media.

The Syrian Civic Platform therefore finds that the pressures on Syrian refugees for access to basic services and decent work are a major factor for pushing refugees to return to Syria before there are safe and sustainable conditions for their return.

We urge the UNHCR to reconsider the measures and decisions related to food aid and to intensify their efforts to protect refugees from all forms of pressure, especially economic and legal.

We also urge the Lebanese government to regulate the labor law to allow Syrian refugees to secure their needs and to preserve their human dignity.