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Syrian ‘Military Evaders’ Face Unlawful Seizure of Property, Assets

Floundering Government Finds New Ways to Confiscate Wealth of Syrian Citizens

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A Syrian flag flies in the city of Maarat al-Numan, near Idlib, Syria, February 12, 2020. [Click to expand Image](#) A Syrian flag flies in the city of Maarat al-Numan, near Idlib, Syria, February 12, 2020. © 2020 Dmitriy Vinogradov/Sputnik via AP

On February 2, Syria’s Ministry for Media and Information posted a video in which Colonel Elias al-Bitar, head of the army’s Exemptions and Reserves Branch, informed the country of an amendment that allows authorities to seize the property of “military evaders” who fail to pay egregious fines. The message caused a public uproar.

Al-Bitar’s statement brought to light a little-known amendment that alters article 97 of Syria’s Military Conscription Law to allow for the immediate seizure of assets for men who did not serve in the military and failed to pay the requisite \$8,000 USD exemption fee for not serving within a period of three months from the day they turned 43, when they age out of conscription

The law previously required a conditional assets seizure for those who failed to pay the exemption fee, pending court judgment. But the amendment now empowers the Ministry of Finance to immediately confiscate and sell an individual’s property without providing notice or giving the individual an opportunity to challenge the decision. While military conscription applies to men only, the law also enables the government to seize the assets of wives, children, and other immediate relatives of the individual in question until the source of those funds is verified.

The law not only fails to meet basic due process guarantees, but also creates additional obstacles for Syrians considering returning home. Many men have fled Syria to avoid military conscription, which not

only involves risk of death but also promised involvement in egregious human rights abuses that have stained the Syrian Armed Forces' actions since the start of the conflict.

Many refugees do not have the means to pay fines for evading conscription. Syrian refugees, most of whom are in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, are enduring unprecedented harsh economic circumstances, brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on economies that already largely marginalized refugees.

But as its new video shows, the Syrian government is out to get money however it can, even if that means seizing the assets of individuals who fail to pay because they can't.

This is only the latest in a series of laws and policies designed to punish perceived political dissidents and Syrians who fled, but which also serve to enrich a flailing government with money from the pockets of disillusioned Syrians already facing a barrage of crises.