

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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LEBANON / SYRIA



● Risk level | High

The deepening socioeconomic crisis in Lebanon leads Syrian refugees to opt for unsafe return to Syria, increasing humanitarian needs

RATIONALE

The Lebanese economic crisis – which started in 2017 – has caused many Syrian refugees to lose their jobs. Since October 2019, the Lebanese lira (LBP) has lost over 80% of its value and inflation has exceeded 100%, impacting food prices and other basic goods. The situation has deteriorated further with the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the explosion in Beirut, which destroyed or partially destroyed residential and business areas and Lebanon's key commercial port (ESCWA 19/08/2020; Business Insider 15/07/2020; WFP 06/2020; Reuters 26/08/2020; SNHR 09/09/2020). In Lebanon it is difficult for Syrians to obtain residence permits, limiting their access to services, jobs, and housing. In July 2020, the Ministry of Social Affairs outlined possible plans to organise the return of Syrian refugees (Al Jazeera 24/08/2020; Arab News 18/07/2020; FDD 04/08/2020).

These developments are forcing some Syrian refugees to view returning to Syria as a viable option. It is expected that at least 5%¹ of Syrian refugees will return in the next six months. Syria still faces protracted conflict and large-scale internal displacement, and has weak or non-existent infrastructure and social services; over 50% of social infrastructure is not operational. A lack of security as a result of the conflict remains widespread across the country (SACD 12/07/2020; USAID 02/07/2020; UNHCR 16/06/2020; SNHR 09/09/2020; IPA 29/09/2020).

Syria has been facing an economic crisis since October 2019 – partly impacted by the Lebanese crisis, which is causing lower remittance flows into Syria. Many Syrians have kept their savings in Lebanese banks, where their value has eroded drastically as a result of the depreciation of the LBP. The economy in Syria also deteriorated with the intensification of sanctions (WFP 07/2020; WFP 08/2020; AP 12/06/2020; Asharq Al-Awsat 10/01/2020; MEI 28/08/2020).

IMPACT

As more Syrians return – both forcibly and voluntarily – the severity of humanitarian needs will significantly increase, including food security, access to essential services, housing, and protection.

Syrians must cross the borders with a valid passport – which costs between US\$300–800 per person – and must exchange US\$100 to Syrian pounds at the official rate in order to enter the country; both are unaffordable to most of the impoverished Syrians in Lebanon. Syrian refugees will likely be refused entry at the border if unable to fulfil these requirements, and will resort to taking dangerous smuggling routes or being stranded at the borders with increased protection, housing, and NFI needs (The New Arab 10/07/2020; SNHR 09/07/2020; The New Arab 18/09/2019; VOA 16/06/2020).

PROBABILITY



IMPACT



Returnees are at risk of arrest, extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances and conscription, kidnappings, and gender-based violence. Since the beginning of 2020, at least 62 Syrians returning from Lebanon have been arrested or forcibly disappeared. The active conflict puts returnees in danger and may force them to flee their homes, becoming new IDPs in Syria (SNHR 09/09/2020; The Washington Post 02/06/2019).

Many Syrians do not have or have lost their civil documentation, limiting their access to essential services, legal rights, and housing, land, and property. With land and property often taken away by the government, many returnees will have no home to return to (EASO 04/2020; InfoMigrants 17/02/2020; HRW 23/09/2020; SNHR 15/08/2019).

Returnees – already the most economically vulnerable – will face another economic crisis in Syria. Scarce economic opportunities will force more households to adopt negative coping mechanisms. Severe fuel and bread shortages will continue to impact the displaced population and host communities (UN 29/06/2020; SAWA 02/2019).

1. This figure is derived from a survey of 3,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon – conducted by Stanford's Immigration Policy Lab between August and October 2019 – which found that 5% of respondents intended to return to Syria within one year. Given that the survey was conducted at the start of the economic downturn in Lebanon and before the economic repercussions of COVID-19 and the Beirut port explosion, it is expected that at least 5% of the total Syrian refugee population in Lebanon (1,500,000 people) would opt to return. The estimate takes into account the new approved plan by the Ministry of Social Affairs in Lebanon, which would push more Syrians to return.



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Chain of plausability:

