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Lebanon

Access to Lebanon for Syrians Entitled to Courtesy Residence in Lebanon

**Report based on a Fact Finding Mission to
Beirut, Lebanon, in January and February
2020**



Ministry of Immigration
and Integration

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Immigration Service

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Disclaimer

This brief report is written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology.¹ The report consists of minutes from meetings with the Lebanon's General Directorate of General Security (GDGS).

This report is not and does not purport to be a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed in the report and should be weighed against other available country of origin information on access to Lebanon for rejected Syrian asylum seekers from third countries that are entitled to courtesy residence in Lebanon.

The report at hand does not include any policy recommendations or analysis. The information in the report does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service (DIS).

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

¹ European Union: European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *EASO Country of Origin Information report methodology*, June 2019, [url](#)

Introduction and methodology

This brief report focuses on Syrian asylum seekers, who are rejected from third countries, and who are entitled to courtesy residence in Lebanon. The report specifically addresses the possibility to gain access to Lebanon for this group of rejected Syrian asylum seekers.

The report at hand contains information on the possibility to access Lebanon for rejected Syrian asylum seekers from third countries that are in possession of a Syrian passport and those who are not.

The report is the product of two meetings with the General Directorate of General Security (GDGS) during fact finding missions conducted by the Country of Origin Information (COI) Division of the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) to Beirut, Lebanon. The meetings with the GDGS took place on 9 January and 24 February 2020. The delegation had to meet with the GDGS twice as the information obtained during the first meeting turned out to be incomplete with regard to answering the questions of the terms of reference (ToR).

The purpose of the meetings with the GDGS was to collect updated information on recurring issues identified in cases pertaining to rejected Syrian asylum seekers who are entitled to courtesy residence in Lebanon. Taking this into account, the ToR was written by DIS in consultation with the Secretariat of the Refugee Appeals Board. An advisory group on COI ('Referencegruppen') was also informed about the mission and the ToR before the first departure in January 2020.² The ToR is included in Appendix 1 at the end of the report.

The only source of information in this report is the GDGS, which is an intelligence agency under the Ministry of Interior. Prior to the mission, the GDGS was identified as the main source for the researched topic on the basis of the ToR and the GDGS' role as the authority responsible for, among other things, issuing visas, entry permits and residence permits.

During the mission in January 2020, the delegation consulted one additional interlocutor in connection with the topic addressed in this report. This was an international organisation working with Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Since the international organisation did not have much accurate information on the topic addressed in this report, the information from the source was used as background information and no minutes from the meeting with this source are included in the report. In addition, the delegation asked two diplomatic sources consulted during the same mission whether they had information on courtesy residence and the possibility to enter Lebanon for Syrian asylum seekers rejected by a third country. None of these diplomatic sources had any information on the topic and they both referred to the GDGS as the sole authority who may have accurate information on the topic.

As regards written sources, the delegation did not find open source information on the topic of courtesy residence in Lebanon other than the limited information on the GDGS' website about the requirements for obtaining such residence permit.

² The group consists of the Danish Refugee Council, Amnesty International in Denmark, the Danish Institute for Human Rights, Dignity, representatives of two Christian organisations ("Europa Missionen" and "Åbne Døre"), the National Commissioner of Police and the Danish Bar and Law Society (representing asylum lawyers).

Against this background, the report at hand is exclusively based on the information provided by the GDGS in the meetings with DIS. Since the minutes from the meetings with the GDGS are a summary of the GDGS' statements, the report is solely a complete version of the minutes from the meetings with the source.

When meeting with the GDGS, the source was briefed about the purpose of the mission and informed that its statements would be included in a publicly available report in accordance with their preferred referencing. Moreover, the GDGS was offered the opportunity to review and approve its statements. However, the source did not find it necessary to do so.

The Danish Embassy in Beirut provided valuable assistance in the planning and execution phases of the mission.

The research and editing of this report was finalised on 23 April 2020.

The report can be accessed from the website of DIS at nyidanmark.dk and is thus available to all stakeholders in the refugee status determination process as well as to the general public.

Executive summary

Syrians entitled to a courtesy residence in Lebanon can only apply for a courtesy residence permit if they are present in Lebanon.

The Lebanese authorities will not facilitate travelling of rejected Syrian asylum seekers to Lebanon from third countries even if they are entitled to a courtesy residence.

Syrians with a valid Syrian passport, who are entitled to residence permit in Lebanon, can apply for an entry-Visa to Lebanon at a Lebanese embassy abroad.

Syrians, who have previously stayed in Lebanon, can be issued a ban to reenter Lebanon if they have applied for asylum in another country, overstayed on their visa in Lebanon or have previously entered or exited Lebanon illegally. However, re-entry bans are always issued on a case-by-case basis by Lebanese authorities.

Minutes from meetings with the GDGS, Beirut, 9 January and 24 February 2020

In Lebanon, courtesy residence is a temporary residence permit that is granted to Arab and foreign immigrants for free.³ On its website, the GDGS list seven categories of beneficiaries entitled to courtesy residence in Lebanon. Among those categories relevant for this report are: Arab immigrant that has a Lebanese mother and does not work; the husband of a Lebanese woman if their marriage is dated to more than one year; the wife of Lebanese man that does not work.⁴

1. Access to Lebanon for rejected Syrian asylum seekers from third countries entitled to courtesy residence

1.1. *Access for Syrians without a Syrian passport*

For Syrians without legal residence in a European country who are not in possession of a passport, the following applies:

Syrians entitled to a courtesy residence in Lebanon can only apply for a courtesy residence permit if they are present in Lebanon. In order to enter Lebanon, a Syrian must obtain an entry visa. The entry visa is only issued on a valid passport. This is also the case for Syrians entitled to a courtesy residence in Lebanon. Syrians, who are entitled to a courtesy residence in Lebanon, are thus not able to enter Lebanon if they do not have a valid passport.

In order to obtain a passport, Syrians who reside in a third country must apply at a Syrian embassy or consulate.

The Lebanese authorities will under no circumstances facilitate travelling of rejected Syrian asylum seekers to Lebanon from third countries, even if they are entitled to a courtesy residence. This also applies to Syrians, who cannot obtain a new passport because they cannot (or will not) visit a Syrian embassy or consulate out of fear of being subjected to questioning or punishment by the Syrian authorities,

1.2. *Access for Syrians with a Syrian passport*

Regarding Syrians without a legal residence in a European country, who are in possession of a Syrian passport, the following applies:

All Syrians, who have a valid passport, can apply for an entry visa and travel to Lebanon, regardless of whether they have legal residency in a European country, as long as they meet the conditions for residency in Lebanon, e.g. courtesy residence

A Syrian, entitled to a courtesy residence, must have a document that proves that his/her mother, his/her spouse is Lebanese.⁵ This document can be a valid family book, a wedding certificate or a civil registration extract (which can be issued in Lebanon).

³ General Directorate of General Security, *Courtesy Residence*, accessed 23 April 2020, [url](#)

⁴ General Directorate of General Security, *Courtesy Residence*, accessed 23 April 2020, [url](#)

⁵ For more information on the required documents in order to obtain courtesy residence, see: General Directorate of General Security, *Courtesy Residence*, accessed 23 April 2020, [url](#)

By presenting these documents, the Syrian is eligible to apply for a visa at a Lebanese embassy which would allow him/her to travel to Lebanon and apply for a courtesy residence. The visa issued will be valid for one month. Once in Lebanon, the Syrian can apply for an additional six month visa, which will provide a sufficient time frame for the Syrian to apply for courtesy residence.

1.3. Access for Syrians with a laissez-passer

When asked if Lebanon would issue a laissez-passer to a Syrian national, entitled to a courtesy residence, in order for the individual to travel to Lebanon, the GDGS said that Lebanon would not issue a laissez-passer to a Syrian entitled to a courtesy residence.

Even if a third country (e.g. Denmark) has issued a laissez-passer to a Syrian entitled to courtesy residence, and who has documentation that his mother or spouse is Lebanese, the Lebanese authorities will reject his entry visa application and prevent the individual from entering Lebanon. However, such applications are handled on a case-by-case basis by the GDGS.

1.4. Impact of previous residency in Lebanon

Previous residence in Lebanon does not have an impact on whether a rejected Syrian asylum seeker from a European country, who is entitled to a courtesy residence, will be granted a courtesy residence in Lebanon.

2. Re-entry ban

Re-entry travel bans issued by the Lebanese authorities can also be issued to Syrians entitled to a courtesy residence. The ban can be issued for a number of reasons, such as:

- If an individual has overstayed on his visa.
- If the individual has applied for asylum in a foreign country.
- If the individual has previously entered or exited Lebanon illegally.

A re-entry can be valid for one year, three years or be issued as a life time ban. A Syrian, who has overstayed his visa, can be issued a re-entry ban for one year. The ban will be absolved after one year and once all the fines for the violation of overstaying the visa has been payed. A Syrian, who does not pay the fines, will receive a life time ban regardless of whether he has overstayed one, two, five or 10 years.

However, re-entry bans are always issued on a case-by-case basis. Decisions in all exceptional cases are taken by the General Director of the GDGS.

Appendix 1: Terms of Reference

Access to Lebanon for rejected Syrian asylum seekers from third countries who are entitled to obtain a courtesy residence permit in Lebanon

- 1.1. Possibility to obtain visa at Beirut International Airport
- 1.2. Possibility to apply for and obtain a residence permit within the period the visa applies
- 1.3. Impact of previous residency in Lebanon