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WORLD NEWS JULY 18, 2018 / 4:55 PM / A MONTH AGO

Russian and Syrian authorities set up center for refugees returning to Syria

Reuters Staff

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MOSCOW/BEIRUT (Reuters) - Russia's Defence Ministry said on Wednesday that Russian and Syrian authorities had set up a refugee center in Syria to help refugees return home from abroad.

The ministry said in a statement that the Centre for the Reception, Allocation and Accommodation of Refugees will "monitor the return of all temporarily-displaced people and Syrian refugees from foreign countries to their places of permanent residence".

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Syria's war has killed an estimated half a million people, driven some 5.6 million people out of the country and displaced around 6.6 million within it.

As the Syrian army, backed by Iran and Russia, has recovered territory, the map of the conflict has been decisively redrawn in President Bashar al-Assad's favor and violence has died down in some areas.

These developments have led countries such as neighboring Lebanon, where around a quarter of people are refugees, increasingly to talk about refugees returning to Syria.



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The U.N. refugee agency, UNHCR, says it is not yet safe for refugees to return but it helps those who do choose to go back with their documentation.

Russia's defense ministry said in a separate statement that 336,500 places around the country have been prepared to receive returning refugees.

These areas include 39,000 places in the city of Douma, near the capital Damascus. Douma came back under government control in April after years of siege and a devastating campaign of bombardment.

The ministry also said local committees have been set up around Syria to assess infrastructure and the needs of returnees, and buses have been allocated within local private transport companies to transport refugees.

On Wednesday, 335 civilians had returned from abroad, the ministry said. Of them, 293 crossed from Lebanon and 42 from Jordan.

Reporting by Lisa Barrington in Beirut and Andrey Ostroukh in Moscow; Editing by Catherine Evans

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