

Status Report/October 06/2024

Syrian Refugees in Lebanon Trapped by the Mercy of War





Introduction

Since October 8th, Southern Lebanon has been caught in a wave of military escalation after Hezbollah decided to open what later became known as the "Gaza Support Front." This triggered military operations along the border, forcing most residents of the areas south of the Litani River, especially those located near the Blue Line, to flee deeper into Lebanon

The displacement impacted around 38 towns and villages along a stretch of over 100 kilometers, from Shebaa in the east at the foothill of Al-Sheikh mountain to Nagoura on the Mediterranean coast. By early September, the number of displaced people from Southern Lebanon was estimated to be around 120 thousand, including Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian nationals Lebanese and Palestinian refugees spread across several regions, with many heading to Tyre, Sidon, the southern suburbs of Beirut, Iqlim al-Kharroub, Sawfar, Bhamdoun, and Jbeil. However, the dispersal of Syrian refugees from the south was more scattered, largely depending on the presence of relatives in areas of Central and Western Begaa, such as Marj, Saadnayel, Bar Elias, Ghazzeh, and Qab Elias. Some also settled in specific areas of Beirut, including Burj Hammoud (Nabaa) and Roueissat²

September 17 marked a turning point following the bombing of Hezbollah's communication devices³, which soon became clear as the beginning of a large-scale military operation. This became evident when Israel decided to shift the focus of its operations to the north⁴, subsequently launching wide-ranging airstrikes across various regions of Lebanon⁵. These developments culminated in the assassination of Hezbollah's Secretary-General⁶ and the initiation of a ground military operation⁷

1النازحون من جنوب لبنان.. كم عددهم وإلى أين توجهوا؟ | سكاى نيوز عربية (SKYNEWSARABIA.COM) تمت الزيارة في .3/10/2024

2مقابلات ميدانية مع لاجئين سوريين في لبنان، أيلول، 2024.

3 ما هو جهاز "بيجر"، وكيف حدثت الانفجارات؟ - BBC NEWS عربي تمت الزيارة في 3/10/2024.

4إسرائيل تستعد لبدء مرحلة جديدة من حرب لبنان - الاتحاد للأخبار (ALETIHAD.AE) تمت الزيارة في 3/10/2024.

5الجيش الإسرائيلي ينذر سكان مناطق في لبنان بـ"الإخلاء" (AA.COM.TR) تمت الزيارة في 3/10/2024.

6 حزب الله يعلن مقتل حسن نصرالله | الحرة (ALHURRA.COM)تمت الزيارة في 3/10/2024.

7رسمیا.. إسرائیل تعلن بدء عملیة عسكریة بریة فی لبنان|سكای نیوز عربیة (SKYNEWSARABIA.COM) تمت الزیارة فی .3/10/2024



The Lebanese government announced the displacement of 1.2 million people from the south, Beqaa, and the southern suburbs of Beirut, with 374,000 crossing into Syria, including 90,000 Lebanese nationals⁸

This report aims to monitor the situation of Syrian refugees amid the ongoing military operations in Lebanon and analyze how these developments have impacted internal displacement and reverse return to Syrian territories, as well as the associated challenges



The War Deepens the Suffering of Syrians in Lebanon

The number of Syrians currently in Lebanon is estimated at around 2 million $^{\circ}$, while the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates the number of Syrian refugees at about 1.5 million, of which 784,884 are registered with the UNHCR 10 . Syrian refugees are enduring difficult humanitarian conditions, with most living in dilapidated camps. Their suffering has recently worsened due to the rise in anti–Syrian refugee rhetoric in Lebanon, fueled by the country's worsening economic crisis, which has been increasingly linked to the prolonged presence of refugees. This has been exacerbated by many politicians and local leaders using the Syrian refugee issue as a political bargaining chip or scapegoat for Lebanon's deep-rooted crisis

At the same time, the prospects for their return to Syria remain blocked due to the complex political, security, and economic situations in their homeland

The new wave of displacement resulting from recent military operations has added new challenges to those already faced by the refugees due to their long-standing situation. Large numbers of Syrian refugees have been plunged into even more desperate conditions, losing their jobs and

8 حتى الخامس من تشرين الأول 2024

9 كشف عنها المدير العام للأمن العام بالإنابة اللواء الياس البيسري أن 42 % من سكان لبنان هم من السوريين والعدد يبلغ مليونين بين نازحين وقانونيين ولكن هناك مَن دخل خلسة الى البلد وغير مسجِّل لدى مفوضية اللاجئين ولا نعرف أعدادهم". متاح على الرابط 42 في المئة من سكان لبنان سوريون: الانفجار لن يرحم أحدا! - MTV LEBANON بتاريخ 5/10/2023، تمت الزيارة في 20/3/2024.

20/3/2024 تمت الزيارة في SITUATION SYRIA REGIONAL REFUGEE RESPONSE (UNHCR.ORG 10



livelihoods after being forced to leave areas where they had lived for long periods and built social networks. The Israeli escalation since September 21 has also resulted in the deaths of 171 Syrian refugees, including 33 women and 46 children. This brings the total number of Syrian casualties in Lebanon since the start of Israel's war on Gaza to 202, including 36 women and 50 children, with 21 others injured¹¹

Despite the Lebanese government preparing an emergency plan ¹². However, it is based on a scenario similar to the 2006 war, envisioning the displacement of one million Lebanese for a period of 45 days. The plan addresses the needs of three groups: Lebanese displaced in shelters, Lebanese displaced in private homes and apartments, and the Lebanese host community. However, refugees, including Syrians, were only briefly mentioned alongside other population groups, with a focus on cooperation with international organizations responsible for supporting these groups. Specifically, Palestinian refugees are coordinated with UNRWA, Syrian refugees with UNHCR, and foreign workers with the International Organization for Migration -IOM¹³

As a result, many shelters refused to accommodate Syrian refugees and foreign workers, forcing them to sleep on the streets, especially in the early days of the escalation and after the Israeli army issued evacuation warnings¹⁴ Later, some organizations working with refugees opened shelters, and the shelters gradually changed their policies to accept all nationalities, particularly after many displaced Lebanese rented houses in safer areas or fled toward Syrian territory¹⁵

Most Syrian refugees moved to safer areas, especially to Tripoli, some parts of Beirut, and Begaa, such as Marj, Saadnayel, and Arsal. This new wave of displacement caused a significant spike in rent prices. It became increasingly difficult to find housing in Begaa for less than \$400 a month and many landlords

11 في 12 يوما.. استشهاد 171 لاجئا سوريا بينهم 33 سيدة و46 طفل بضربات إسرائيلية على لبنان|المرصد السوري لحقوق الإنسان (SYRIAHR.COM) تمت الزيارة في 4/10/2024.

¹² حصار وتهجير قسرى.. تفاصيل خطة لبنانية لمواجهة عدوان إسرائيلي محتمل|سياسة|الجزيرة نت (ALJAZEERA.NET) تمت الزيارة في 3/10/2024.

¹³ خطة الطوارئ الوطنية (PSEAU.ORG) تمت الزيارة في 3/10/2024.

¹⁴ مقابلات مع لاجئين سوريين، تشرين أول، 2024.

¹⁵ مقابلات مع نشطاء مدنيين في لبنان، تشرين أول، 2024.



refused to rent for less than six months as advance payments. Meanwhile, monthly rental prices skyrocketed in some areas of Beirut and Mount Lebanon, reaching unprecedented levels between \$1,500 and \$2,000 per month¹⁶

As for living conditions, markets have witnessed a noticeable rise in food prices, particularly vegetables, which used to come from the south and Begaa, in addition to some staple goods. There are growing concerns about potential shortages in the markets as the military operations continue, especially after the main road to Damascus was cut off by an Israeli airstrike on the Masnaa crossing on October 4



Options for Returning to Syria

Despite some facilitation efforts by the Syrian government for Syrians in Lebanon, these measures do not apply to most Syrian refugees, particularly those who lost their homes, are being pursued for political reasons, or have arrest warrants issued against them. The majority of those returning to Syria belong to specific segments of society, which include women, children, the elderly, as well as workers and students. This group also consists of individuals required for military service and those who do not face any security-related charges for political reasons. Notably, some men have made a different decision: they have chosen to send their families—wives and children—back to Syria to live with relatives or acquaintances, while they themselves prefer to remain in Lebanon¹⁷

Border - Province	Total Arrivals	Syrians	Lebanese
Homs Crossings	104,554	60,216	44,338
Jdeidet Yabous - Rif Dimashq	194759	153973	40786
Al-Arida - Tartus	20038	13740	6298

16 مقابلات مع نشطاء ولاجئين في لبنان، تشرين أول، 2024. 17 مقابلات مع لاجئين سوريين في لبنان، تشرين أول، 2024.



Many Syrians fled to their original regions, arriving in a state of extreme hardship and being forced to stay with relatives or friends due to the loss of their homes from the conflict in Syria. Many of them sold their possessions to cover the costs of travel in search of a safer life, while some lost their properties and remained stuck in Lebanon. Meanwhile, many Syrian refugees headed to areas in northeastern and northwestern Syria. The Autonomous Administration received around 12,000 displaced Syrians, including Lebanese citizens, through the Tabqa crossing in the countryside of Raqqa and the Abu Kahf-Taiha crossing in Manbij, in the countryside of Aleppo . Additionally, 1,500 families entered northwestern Syria through the Aoun al-Dadat crossing¹⁹

Returns were made either through official crossings or through smuggling routes, where individuals paid between \$100 and \$200 per person to enter government-controlled areas. For Syrians heading north, they entered via two methods: official crossings like Tabqa and Aoun al-Dadat, or through smuggling networks for those wanted by the Syrian authorities. These networks facilitate routes between Lebanon and northeastern and northwestern Syria, involving actors from the regime, the opposition, and the Autonomous Administration. Fees for smuggling range from \$600 or more, depending on the security situation of those being transported²⁰



Facilitations Provided by the Syrian Government

The Syrian government has introduced several measures to ease the entry of Syrians from Lebanon into Syria, in response to the exceptional circumstances Lebanon is currently facing:

18 من لبنان إلى شمال شرقي سوريا... عبور 12 ألف نازح الحدود (AAWSAT.COM) تمت الزيارة في 5/10/2024. 19 مقابلات مع نشطاء في مناطق شمال غرب سورية، تشرين أول، 2024. 20 مقابلات مع لاجئين سوريين عبروا إلى مناطق في الشمال السوري، تشرين أول،



- Temporary Suspension of the \$100 Exchange Requirement: Syrian citizens entering the Syrian Arab Republic from border crossings with Lebanon are no longer required to exchange \$100 upon entry, as was previously mandated²¹
- Suspension of Reconciliation Procedures: The government has suspended the formal reconciliation procedures that were previously required for Syrians who had left Syria illegally and wished to return legally through border crossings. These procedures were formerly conducted at special windows at Syrian immigration offices, but have now been replaced by verbal instructions
- New Measures for Military Service Defaulters: Syrians who have evaded mandatory or reserve military service are now being granted a "review paper" to report to the recruitment branch. The validity of this paper has been extended to two or even three months, whereas it was previously valid for only 15 days. This extension is linked to the amnesty issued by the Syrian president, which covered internal and external desertion crimes as defined by the Military Penal Code. The amnesty provides a grace period of three months for those who deserted within Syria and four months for those who fled abroad²²
- Opening of Shelters: Shelters have been opened and equipped with necessary supplies, including water, food, and accommodation essentials, in each province responsible for hosting incoming Lebanese citizens or returning Syrians from Lebanon²³
- Provision of Transportation: The General Company for Internal Transport in
 Damascus and its countryside has arranged for daily buses, conducting
 around 20 trips, to transport arrivals from the Jdeidet Yabous border crossing
 to the center of Damascus²⁴

21 كانت المدة أسبوع من تاريخ 29/9 ثم تم تمديدها لاحقاً لمدة 10 أيام مجلس الوزراء: استمرار إيقاف تصريف 100 دولار أمريكي أو ما يعادله من السوريين ومن في حكمهم عند الدخول من لبنان لمدة 10 أيام – S A N A تمت الزيارة في 5/10/2024.

22 الرئيس الأسد يصدر مرسوماً تشريعياً بعفو عام عن جرائم الفرار والجنح والمخالفات المرتكبة قبل تاريخ الـ 22 من أيلول S A N A – 2024 تمت المشاهدة في 5/10/2024

23 تقديم المساندة للمهجرين جراء العدوان الإسرائيلي على لبنان.. محور اجتماع الجلالي مع عدد من الوزراء المعنيين – S A N A تمت الزيارة في 4/10/2024

24 الشركة العامة للنقل الداخلي بدمشق: 20 رحلة يومياً لنقل النازحين من معبر جديدة يابوس الحدودي | B2B-SY تمت الزيارة في 5/10/2024.





Syrian Refugees Left Out of the Regime's Plans

This approach is evident in the absence of any response plan to support the return of Syrian refugees from Lebanon and in the Syrian regime's political stance

- The Syrian president did not mention the situation of Syrian refugees in his recent address to the new government, despite referring to Lebanon's current circumstances ²⁵. This seems to reflect the regime's policy of linking the refugee issue to reconstruction and the lifting of sanctions, as the president emphasized in his statement recently²⁶, which was reiterated by the Syrian foreign minister during the Arab Foreign Ministers' meeting in Jeddah last May²⁷
- . Continuing the Security Approach: Nine individuals, mostly from the Rif Dimashq Governorate, have been documented as being arrested in connection with mandatory and reserve military conscription. These arrests took place at both official and unofficial border crossings between Lebanon and Syria, with most of the detainees being taken to security and military detention centers in Homs and Damascus²⁸. Additionally, the arrest of 35 individuals from areas under the control of the Autonomous Administration in northeastern Syria has been recorded. These individuals were arrested on the Salamiyah-Tabqa road after fleeing Israeli bombardments and crossing the Lebanese-Syrian border²⁹
- The regime's checkpoints have continued to tighten their grip and financially exploit returning Syrians from Lebanon. Buses carrying returnees are required to pay fees of up to 200,000 Syrian pounds per bus, and the same amount for each person wanted for military service. Those who refuse to pay face the risk of arrest³⁰

25 أبرز ما تضمنته الكلمة التوجيهية للرئيس الأسد خلال ترؤسه اجتماع الوزارة الجديدة - YOUTUBE تمت الزيارة في 4/10/2024.

26 مقابلة حصرية مع الرئيس السوري بشار الأسد علي سكاي نيوز عربية (YOUTUBE.COM) تمت الزيارة في 4/10/2024. 27 مساعد وزير خارجية النظام يشترط: "إعادة الإعمار مقابل عودة اللاجئين" (YOUTUBE.COM) تمت الزيارة في 4/10/2024. 28 تسجيل ما لا يقل عن 206 حالة احتجاز تعسفي في أيلول/ 2024 | الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان (SNHR.ORG) تمت الزيارة في 4/10/2024.

29 قوات النظام تفرض إتاوات مالية على العائدين من لبنان وتعتقل 35 آخرين|المرصد السوري لحقوق الإنسان (-SYRI) AHR.COM) تمت الزيارة في 4/10/2024.

30 قوات النظام تفرض إتاوات مالية على العائدين من لبنان وتعتقل 35 آخرين|المرصد السوري لحقوق الإنسان (-SYRI) AHR.COM) تمت الزيارة في 4/10/2024.



. While many initiatives have been launched to assist incoming Lebanese - citizens, there has been a noticeable lack of initiatives to support the return of Syrian refugees³¹



Difficult Humanitarian Conditions Inside Syria

Government-controlled areas in Syria are experiencing severe economic difficulties, with a lack of job opportunities, low wages, and continuously rising prices. All regions are also suffering from a critical shortage of services such as electricity, water, and transportation. The recent displacement has led to a sharp increase in rental prices. For example, in Homs, the rent for a house without basic utilities such as water and electricity is estimated at around 400,000 Syrian pounds, while an equipped house can cost up to 800,000 pounds. In areas around Rif Dimashq, such as Sahnaya and Jaramana, the average rent has risen from 500,000 to as much as 1.5 million Syrian pounds In northwestern Syria, there was a notable lack of a preemptive response plan, as the arrival of displaced persons was unexpected to the region that is already overcrowded, and continues to face complex humanitarian challenges



The Syrian Regime's Approach to the Syrian Refugee Issue

Some Arab countries, led by Saudi Arabia, had previously launched a new pathway starting with Syria's reinstatement into the Arab League, followed by the resumption of diplomatic relations and the reopening of the Syrian embassy in Riyadh ³² and its counterpart in Damascus³³. The Arab League called for practical and effective steps towards resolving the crisis based on the principle of "step-for-step," in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254. This approach was also aligned with the Amman Agreement on

31 مبادرات سورية لمساعدة آلاف الفارّين من الحرب في لبنان|سياسة|الجزيرة نت (ALJAZEERA.NET) تمت الزيارة في 4/10/2024

> 32 بعد سنوات من إغلاقها.. إعادة افتتاح السفارة السورية في السعودية | الحرة (ALHURRA.COM) 33 السعودية تعلن رسمياً افتتاح سفارتها في دمشق (AAWSAT.COM)



resolving the syrian crisis, which emphasized the need for continuing the political process, including the meetings of the Constitutional Committee, and prioritized the safe and voluntary return of Syrian refugees³⁴

A ministerial contact committee was formed, comprising Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, and the Secretary-General of the Arab League, to follow up on the implementation of the Amman Agreement and maintain direct dialogue with Damascus to achieve a comprehensive solution to the crisis³⁵. However, the Arab initiative faltered, as seen by the freezing of the committee's activities and the exclusion of the Syrian president from delivering a speech at the Bahrain summit ³⁶, due to the lack of progress on key issues such as the drugs control, refugee returns, and the convening of the Constitutional Committee files

Although the committee held a meeting on September 10th, on the sidelines of the Arab Ministerial meeting discussing the war in Gaza, and agreed to form an expert team to study the topics it is following with Syria, as well as to hold its next meeting in Baghdad at a later date³⁷ However, significant progress is unlikely to happen. The Syrian regime continues to undermine the process by focusing on bilateral relations with Arab countries while refusing to make any real concessions on the political solution. It insists on linking the return of refugees to the reconstruction process and the lifting of economic sanctions

Meanwhile, many issues are expected to remain stagnant, awaiting the resolution of the broader conflict in the region, which is now facing the possibility of a full-scale war. Syrian refugees, especially those still in Lebanon, remain trapped at the mercy of the ongoing conflict

34 اجتماع عمان: إنهاء أزمة سوريا عبر حل سياسي "أولوية" | سكاي نيوز عربية (SKYNEWSARABIA.COM) 35 بعد 12 سنة.. سوريا تعود رسمياً إلى الجامعة العربية (ALARABIYA.NET) تمت الزيارة في 5/10/2024 36 لماذا لم يلق الأسد كلمة في قمة المنامة؟.. "سانا" توضح - RT ARABIC 37 انطلاق الاجتماع الوزاري العربي لبحث وقف الحرب على غزة | أخبار | الجزيرة نت (ALJAZEERA.NET) تمت الزيارة في 6/10/2024