

The Future of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon

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Jul 5, 2018

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Jiwan Soz is a Kurdish journalist based in France and a member of the French Press Syndicate. His articles focus on Turkish affairs and minorities in the Middle East, as well as human rights and media freedom issues.



Brief Analysis

On the streets of Beirut, the impact of the Syrian Civil War is more than palpable. According to recent reports, Syrian refugees make up approximately a fourth of Lebanon's total population. Seeking to address rising acrimony and hostility between refugees and Lebanese, the country's authorities have been searching for solutions that will end the suffering on both ends. The refugees, however, are struggling to live in Lebanon and, in some cases, Lebanese attitudes towards them has made life significantly harder.

Lebanese citizens believe that they are in a difficult position—some even go so far as to represent themselves as a minority surpassed by the number of Syrian refugees flooding the country. The tension between the two groups is growing increasingly explicit. For example, a [song \(https://www.annahar.com/article/796323-%D8%A3%D8%BA%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A1%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84-%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%82-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B9-%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88%D9%89-%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88\)](https://www.annahar.com/article/796323-%D8%A3%D8%BA%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A1%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84-%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%82-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B9-%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88%D9%89-%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88) aired during a comedy show on the Lebanese channel *al-Jadid* represented Syrians as Lebanon's majority, drawing on stereotypes such as Syrians' poor living conditions and having many children to cast them in negative light, while portraying Lebanese citizens as strangers in their own country. Many Syrians found the song's implications deeply offensive and, in response, the Dubai-based Syrian news channel *Orient News* produced a musical number describing the employees of *al-Jadid* as "Nazis."

This incident highlights the tensions that exist between some Lebanese and Syrians, and can exacerbate the challenges and exploitation that many refugees face. In terms of labor, Lebanese employers in places like cafes, restaurants, hotels, and gas stations have very limited legal obligations towards the Syrians working for them and can get away with paying their Syrian employees a pitiful amount for their services due to the legal restrictions

placed on the employment of refugees.

And poor labor conditions are just of one of the many problems refugees have to deal with. Although Syrians in Lebanon are far from the watch of the Assad regime, they are still afraid; Syrians can never be certain of others' political orientations and critics of Assad do not dare express their opinions as the Syrian regime still has supporters in Lebanon. Furthermore, fearing retribution, Syrian Alawites do not disclose their identities due to Lebanon's Alawite affiliations and even pro-regime Syrians practice self-censorship.

Syrians in Lebanon also suffer from threats to their safety and are at risk of forceful eviction. A recent **report** (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/20/lebanon-mass-evictions-syrian-refugees>) by Human Rights Watch indicates that at least thirteen municipalities in Lebanon have forcibly expelled 3,364 Syrian refugees from their homes and that 42,000 more are currently at risk of suffering the same fate. Some of the refugees have claimed that authorities used violence to expel them and did not allow them to challenge evictions or grant them other protective measures in accordance with international legal standards. According to Human Rights Watch, these eviction methods cost the displaced refugees their property, sources of income, and educational opportunities.

The difficulties plaguing the lives of Syrians in Lebanon are magnified when it comes to child refugees, who lack access to social and health benefits. In order to survive, Syrian children must often beg for money in the streets or sell boxes of tissues beside traffic lights in Beirut. Unfortunately, data on the lives of child refugees is lacking since Syrian births in Lebanon are not officially recorded, so the true impact is poorly understood.

While the situation in Syria is rapidly changing, the instability generated by the Syrian Civil War will persist for years and may even lead to new influxes of Syrian refugees. In response, it seems that the Lebanese government and Hezbollah have begun coordinating to establish a joint mechanism to resettle Syrian refugees. The two are working in tandem to deport a large number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. In late May, Lebanese President Michel Aoun **urged** (<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/246820>) the United States to “help Lebanon facilitate the return of Syrian refugees to safe areas in Syria.”

Hezbollah has opened a number of offices monitoring the situation of Syrian refugees from the Bekaa to the south. Most recently, in a televised interview on the *al-Manar* satellite channel, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah announced that he “will work together [with the Syrian government] so that as many Syrian refugees as possible who want a voluntary and safe return can go back [to Syria.]” Nasrallah also **announced** (<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2018/06/29/Hezbollah-s-Nasrallah-interferes-in-the-Syrian-refugees-return-from-Lebanon.html>) that he will establish popular committees to be placed in Syrian refugee-populated areas so as to secure their return to Syria. Under this plan, many of the refugees would be forced to return to regions controlled by Assad's sectarian militias without providing them with sufficient guarantees of safety, which some international human rights organizations have considered a stringent violation of United Nations human rights conventions and the relevant Geneva Conventions.

Nevertheless, the movement of refugees back to Syria has already begun, with hundreds returning in several convoys coordinated between the Lebanese General Security and the Assad regime.

If Lebanon does not develop a more coherent solution to this issue, its short term strategies will exacerbate the refugee situation in the country. Thus, the new Lebanese government must figure out how to better deal with the issue of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and define a clear path toward resettlement. In this manner, Beirut could justify its recurring requests for additional international financial assistance, such as the World Bank's recent \$4 billion loan **pledge** (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-economy-france-worldbank/world-bank-pledges-4-billion-in-loans-to-lebanon-minister-idUSKCN1HD1M7>). Seeing that the EU has imposed pressure on Lebanon and neighboring countries to limit the migration of refugees to Europe, the international community and the European Union must also lend a helping hand by continuing to work side by side with the Lebanese government

to confront this crisis. ❖

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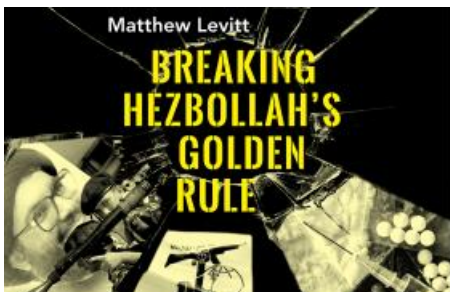
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