



المركز السوري للإعلام وحرية التعبير

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Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression

SCM Stancepaper on the Escalating Humanitarian Crisis in Lebanon and the Impact on Syrian Refugees



Image: Reuters

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SCM seeks to build a society that guarantees freedom of expression and belief, human rights, and justice. Since its inception in 2004, SCM has been dedicated to safeguarding human rights defenders, advocating for human rights and fundamental freedoms, empowering civil society and victims' associations, and fostering the growth of an independent and professional media sector.

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Introduction

SCM is deeply alarmed by the escalating humanitarian disaster in Lebanon, which is inflicting immense suffering on vulnerable populations, particularly Syrian refugees. For over a decade, these refugees have faced displacement, persecution, and severe economic challenges. The intensification of the Israeli army's hostilities in Lebanon has dramatically worsened their plight, leading to civilian casualties, disrupted aid, and the displacement of tens of thousands.

There are 6 official border crossings between Lebanon and Syria, three of which were affected by Israeli attacks, the **Matraba**¹ crossing, the **Masnaa** crossing and the Jousieh crossing². In recent weeks, more than 528,000 persons (71% Syrians and 29% Lebanese)³ have fled into Syria, many on foot after Israeli airstrikes made the Masnaa crossing inaccessible to vehicles⁴. One of SCM's resources stated that **when he got home after the beginning of the attacks, his wife and children were in a state of indescribable terror and that a nearby house had been destroyed by the bombing. He also described his journey when he and his family attempted to flee the area as they saw the fires caused by the bombing, and that they had to stop occasionally when there was a nearby bombing**⁵.

As of October 2024, Lebanon is hosting around 1.5 million Syrian refugees, the highest number of refugees per capita in the world. Conditions have worsened as 1.2 million people, including Lebanese citizens, have been displaced internally due to airstrikes. The lack of legal residency status for most Syrians severely limits their ability to move freely or access basic services⁶.

Discrimination Against Syrians in the Right to Shelter

Syrian refugees in Lebanon face systemic discrimination in their right to access shelter, adding to their already desperate circumstances⁷. Reports indicate that Syrians are frequently denied entry to communal shelters, which are primarily reserved for Lebanese citizens. This discriminatory practice leaves many Syrian families sleeping on the streets, in parks, or in overcrowded, unsafe spaces⁸. **One of SCM's resources stated that Syrians are only received and provided shelter by their relatives in Lebanon residing in refugee camps and by Syrian associations, knowing that they are facing discrimination in shelter and food**⁹.

Moreover, Syrian refugees live in deeper poverty than the local population, and shelter remains one of the most significant challenges. Many Syrians rely on makeshift housing or informal settlements

1 [Israeli attack targeting border crossing between Syria and Lebanon](#)

2 BBC article: [What are the most prominent crossings between Syria and Lebanon, and how did they become a target during the war?](#)

3 [UNHCR Syria Short Brief posted on the 3rd November](#)

4 [Israeli strike hits key road used to flee Lebanon](#)

5 SCM private resource R.M

6 ["I Can't Go Home, Stay Here, or Leave": Pushbacks and Pullbacks of Syrian Refugees from Cyprus and Lebanon | HRW](#)

7 SCM private resource A.Q

8 [لا مكان للسوريين في مراكز الإيواء! - مناطق نت](#)

9 SCM private resource M.D

in the Bekaa Valley or other rural areas, where they face substandard living conditions. An estimated 90% of Syrian refugee households live in extreme poverty, lacking access to basic necessities such as shelter, food, and sanitation¹⁰. According to one of SCM's resources, the Syrians have been suffering from discrimination when searching for housing as house owners generally refuse to rent them their houses, while others request higher monthly fees than the ordinary¹¹.

Lebanese authorities have given priority to sheltering Lebanese citizens affected by the conflict, leaving Syrian refugees without adequate access to safe housing. While local NGOs attempt to provide emergency housing, their capacity is minimal. Many Syrians are forced to remain in dangerous areas, fearing arrest or being unable to return to Lebanon if they leave¹².

Documented Casualties and Human Rights Violations In Lebanon and Syria and the fear of return to unsafe zones:

The SCM documented a total of 145 Syrian civilians killed by Israeli attacks in Lebanon and Syria between the 1st of August and the 31st of October, among which 96 were Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The conflict's deadly reach extends beyond Lebanon. Inside Syria, 49 Syrian civilians have been killed in Israeli airstrikes, primarily in the provinces of Homs, Damascus, Rural Damascus, and Hama, further demonstrating the extensive harm caused by the violence. Among the identified victims in Lebanon are 46 adult males, 25 adult females, 12 female children, and 13 male children. Additionally, other cases are under investigation as SCM continues to gather further details on the casualties. **According to one of SCM's resources, one of her relatives residing in Majdal Salm has been killed due to the Israeli Army's attacks along with 4 members of his family while others have been injured**¹³. The total number of casualties, without indications of their nationalities, according to official resources since the beginning of the Israeli aggressions in Lebanon, is 3481 persons while the wounded are 14786¹⁴.

Since the escalation of the military operations by Israel in Lebanese territories on the 23rd of September, the SCM documented /17/ violations committed against the persons who returned to Syria as follows: /11/ arbitrary arrests - /5/ enforced disappearances - /1/ unlawful killing. The actual number and scale of violations are believed to be higher due to challenges in reaching out to witnesses, victims, and their families, as well as the systematic repression practiced by actors to the conflict in Syria, primarily the Syrian government forces. It is important to refer to previous violations committed against Syrians who were forcibly returned to Syria from Lebanon, as SCM documented during the years 2023 and 2024, a total of /27/ violations of forced return from Lebanon to Syria, /8/ of them were subjected to other various violations after their return to Syria, such as arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, torture, forced conscription, and unlawful killing.

Israel's army has launched strikes inside Lebanon despite the terms of the ceasefire on November 27, 2024, and is restricting people from returning to their homes in parts of the south. These

10 [Why Syrian refugees in Lebanon are a crisis within a crisis](#)

11 SCM private resource M.M

12 [لا مكان للسوريين في مراكز الإيواء! - مناطق نت](#)

13 SCM private resource S.K

14 Ministry of Public Health, [articles published on the 17th of November](#)

incidents contribute to an increasingly fragile and unsafe environment for residents in Lebanon.¹⁵

On the Syrian side, the recent escalation in Northern Syria has severely jeopardized the safety and security of civilians and humanitarian workers, while also compromising the integrity of essential civilian infrastructure. These escalations have intensified the challenges and heightened the dangers, making Syria an even more precarious place for refugees to return¹⁶.

Recommendations to the International Community:

Protection of Civilians and Refugees:

- * Ensure the protection of civilians ,including Syrian refugees ,during armed conflict
- * Halt arbitrary detention ,disappearance ,forced conscription ,unlawful killing and exploitation
- * All civilians must be given safe passage and resettlement opportunities.

Accountability for Crimes Against Returnees:

- * The international community must ensure that crimes and violations committed against forcibly returned Syrians and returnees are halted immediately.
- * Independent investigations should be conducted into all reported violations, including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and unlawful killings.
- * Perpetrators must be held accountable under international law, ensuring justice and redress for victims and their families.

Adherence to International Law:

- * All parties must respect the Third Common Article of the Geneva Conventions, which mandates the protection of civilians and non-combatants.

15 [Analysis: Can the Hezbollah-Israeli ceasefire hold? | Israel attacks Lebanon News | Al Jazeera](#)

16 [WOS Flash update #1 - Recent escalation in Northern Syria - Syrian Arab Republic | ReliefWeb](#)

- * Violations ,including the targeting of civilians ,must be investigated and prosecuted under international law.

International Investigation and Accountability:

- * Support a UN investigation into hostilities between Lebanon and Israel.
- * Investigate war crimes and ensure accountability for violations of international law, especially disproportionate use of force.

Lebanon's Commitment to the ICC:

- * Lebanon should officially accept the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate crimes committed on its territory from 7 October 2023, regardless of the suspects' nationality.

Non-Refoulement Principle:

- * Lebanon must uphold its legal obligation under international law not to forcibly return Syrian refugees to areas where they may face persecution or harm, regardless of the wartime context.

Recommendations to International Actors and Donors:

Humanitarian Access:

- * Ensure unrestricted delivery of humanitarian aid and establish independent monitoring mechanisms to prevent misuse of aid.

Resettlement and Evacuation:

- * Urgently implement resettlement and evacuation programs for vulnerable populations ,prioritizing women ,children ,and those with medical needs.

Involvement of Returnees:

- * Engage returnees in the planning and monitoring of aid programs ,ensuring aid meets their needs and is not diverted to benefit repressive state institutions.

