

Timeline of major policies influencing the livelihoods of Syrian refugees in Lebanon

Introduction

Since the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2011, the Government of Lebanon (GoL) has introduced various policies, regulations, and instructions that directly impact the participation of Syrian refugees in the country's labor market. Ten years into the crisis, the majority of refugees in Lebanon continue to work informally. For example, at least 95% of Syrian refugees participating in a survey in April-June 2020 reported working without a valid work permit.

Persisting challenges:

1. Impact of the compounded crisis in Lebanon, including the COVID-19 and economic crisis, with 60% of Syrian refugee respondents participating in a survey conducted in April-June 2020 reporting being laid off permanently during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 31% reporting being laid off temporarily.
2. Difficulty to obtain legal residency permit, whereby 70% of registered refugees, particularly those above the age of 15, are still without a legal residency permit, which hinders their access to livelihoods opportunities and limits their freedom of movement.
3. Discriminatory labor laws, including limitations on the sectors in which Syrian refugees can participate and the sponsorship system, the latter putting them at risk for exploitation.
4. Crackdowns by the Ministry of Labor, and new requirements to obtain a work permit even within allowed sectors where this was not previously necessary in practice.
5. Labor restrictions also affect refugee women, who face additional challenges related to cultural and societal norms, and lack of childcare support.
6. Refugees working informally are outside of any social protection scheme, are paid low wages, and face poor working conditions and exploitation.

Sources

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- World Food Programme. (2020). *Nine out of ten Syrian refugee families in Lebanon are now living in extreme poverty, UN study says*.

2012

At the onset of the Syrian Refugee Crisis, the GoL allows an informal open-door policy, and adopts the word "displaced" not "refugees" to refer to refugees from Syria entering Lebanon.

2013

FEB GoL limits access of Syrians (not registered with the UNHCR) to the formal labor market, except in the fields of agriculture, construction and "environment" or cleaning, and furthermore states that UNHCR-registered refugees are ineligible to work in Lebanon as they are receiving humanitarian assistance. In addition, the GoL issues decrees that require employers to (1) submit proof that they first tried to find Lebanese workers for the same jobs and (2) maintain a less than 10:1 ratio of Lebanese workers to foreign workers, and enforces the sponsorship system, whereby Syrians seeking work must have a Lebanese sponsor who has signed a "pledge of responsibility".

AUG GoL imposes restrictions on the entry of Palestinian refugees from Syria and introduces a valid pre-approved visa which requires an application made by a guarantor in Lebanon for entry.

2014

AUG At least 45 municipalities across Lebanon impose curfew measures on Syrians, restricting their freedom of movement in response to the lacking national policy for the management of Syrian refugee influx into the country.

OCT The Council of Ministers adopts a new policy on Syrian displacement, and

- I. Develops the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), a collective effort of 95 partners, including various United Nations' agencies and national and international organizations.
- II. Imposes regulations on admission and residency renewal for Syrian refugees aiming to reduce influx of refugees into Lebanese territory and encouraging them to return to Syria.

2015

JAN GoL and supporting agencies implement the October 2014 regulations, which include:

- I. Requesting that the UNHCR no longer register any new refugees, with the exception of certain humanitarian cases upon approval from relevant ministries.
- II. Restricting admission of Syrians to those who can produce valid identity documents and provide proof that they fit into one of several approved entry categories.
- III. Introducing a requirement for residency renewal every six months for a 200 USD fee.
- IV. Categorizing Syrian refugees into those registered with UNHCR and who are required to sign a pledge not to work, and those not registered with UNHCR and who are required to present a pledge of responsibility or sponsorship along with other documents.

APRIL Ministry of Social Affairs requests that the UNHCR de-register Syrian refugees who had arrived in Lebanon after 5 January 2015.

MAY Lebanese authorities instruct UNHCR to temporarily suspend registration of Syrian refugees (including individuals in the country and new arrivals), except for humanitarian cases approved by the relevant ministries.

2016

FEB GoL and European Union adopt a compact agreement at the high-level London conference which addresses fostering growth and job opportunities, through for example boosting Lebanon's productivity and competitiveness in the agribusiness and wood sectors. Interventions are expected to create at least 300,000 jobs, of which 60% could be for Syrians. Commitments include providing an appropriate and safe environment for Syrian refugees, facilitating their residency status, as well as improving access to education for Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese populations, providing work permits as appropriate, and facilitating the documents required for employment in certain sectors.

APRIL The Ministry of Social Affairs requests once again that the UNHCR deregister all Syrian refugees who arrived in Lebanon after January 5, 2015.

JULY GoL replaces the "pledge to not work" with the "pledge to abide by the Lebanese laws" to simplify the document requirements for obtaining a residency permit, though no official statement on the issue is released.

2017

FEB GoL introduces a waiver of legal residency renewal and overstay fees for displaced Syrians registered with UNHCR before January 1, 2015, and who had not renewed their residency previously based on tourism, sponsorship, property ownership or tenancy in 2015 or 2016. Various organizations report issues with application of residency policies by the General Security.

2019

JUNE Ministry of Labor launches a plan with measures to combat unauthorized labor, giving workers and their employers a one-month grace period to apply for work permits.

JULY Ministry of Labor inspectors start giving violation notices to businesses employing individuals without work permits.

2020

JAN To date, a total of 328 municipalities impose some type of curfew affecting Syrian refugees, more than 40% of which are strictly enforced.