

July 2018

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



Deplorable situations of Syrian Families Await to Complete "Settlements" and Others Return With No Guarantees

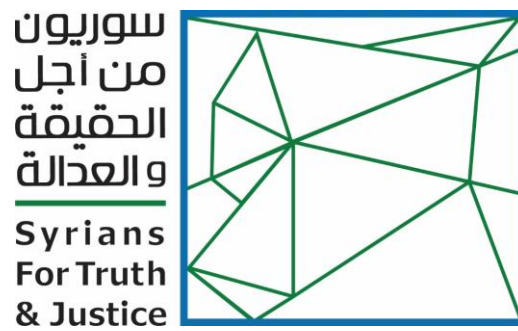
A Joint Report Between the Voice of the Capital News Network and Syrians for Truth and Justice



About Syrians for Truth and Justice

[Syrians for Truth and Justice \(STJ\)](#) is an independent, non-governmental and non-profit organization whose members include Syrian human rights defenders, advocates and academics of different backgrounds and nationalities. It also includes members of other nationalities.

The initiative strives for SYRIA, where all Syrian citizens (males and females) have dignity, equality, justice and equal human rights.



About the Voice of the Capital

[A news network](#) dedicated to report the security, livelihood, and economic conditions in the capital Damascus and its outskirts within regime-controlled cities and neighborhoods.





Deplorable situations of Syrian Families Await to Complete "Settlements" and Others Return With No Guarantees

*A Joint Report Between the Voice of the Capital News Network and
Syrians for Truth and Justice*



Up to 100 refugee families from [al-Zabadani](#), Damascus countryside, are still stuck in Lebanon- until the time of writing this report July 20, 2018-after promises from the Syrian government to secure their return and settle their status since June 15, 2018. On the other hand, dozens of similar families returned from Lebanon to their areas in Syria, including [Muadamiyat al-Sham](#) in Damascus countryside, according to testimonies collected by Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) and the Voice of the Capital news network.

About ten months ago, the Syrian government, through dignitaries and mediators from al-Zabadani, announced its readiness to regularize the status of the refugees in Lebanon by registering their names on the lists of those wishing for "reconciliation" so that those who obtained the "security approval" from Lebanon would be transferred to Syria and pay the fine for breaching the conditions of "legal residency" in Lebanon of \$200 per year, which the United Nations is supposed to pay. Under "Reconciliation", the returnee is granted six months to join the Syrian compulsory military service, and the mediators had set the return date in June 2018, but the date has been postponed several times and a fixed date has yet to be set for the return, according to several testimonies collected by STJ from refugees from al-Zabadani city who reside in Lebanon.

On July 15, 2018, in an interview with STJ, Abu Khalid¹, a resident from al-Zabadani, said he had registered his name along with his wife's and his 2-years-old kid's in order to return to the city, and actually he was informed that he gained the "security approval" and consequently was supposed to go back on the second day of Eid al-Fitr on June 15, 2018. He added,

"We await a fixed date from the responsible committee. Every week we receive a new promise but in vain. I have sold a part of my furniture and sent the other to al-Zabadani. In addition, I have left the house that I was renting and my work as well (...) When the return date was canceled, some of my friends received me at their house for several days. And now, after waiting more than a month, I sleep with my family in the garden or in the mosque. I can't rent a new house, and I have almost ran out of my savings plus I have no furniture."

Abu Khalid illustrated that he was wanted for the military service and that he was obliged to wait for his return in the convoy because he has not got the money to pay for his fine to the Lebanese government for breaching terms of legal residency (he had overstayed the residence period and had not renewed his residency), adding:

"the situation of many people are like mine. We want to go back to our houses in al-Zabadani and end this miserable living conditions here in Lebanon, but we have no money to cross the border, which the UNHCR is supposed to pay in case the return is to be conducted by mediation."

¹ An alias to preserve the safety of the witness.



For his part, another refugee from al-Zabadani identified as Abu Mohammed², who has resided in Lebanon since 2014, said that he had registered the name of him and his family about ten months ago to return, but the response to his application was "non-consent". He added,

"the repatriation was supposed to be with the United Nations (UN) guarantee but the regime did not agree on that. There are no guarantees for non-arrest, therefore, I changed my mind and I no longer want to go back to al-Zabadani since I have not got "the security approval". I trust no the party in power of the Syrian territory."

In Muadamiyat al-Sham located in Damascus countryside, the Voice of the Capital news network quoted from local sources on July 12, 2018, that only 65 persons from the city, who were refugees in Lebanon, returned under "settlement of status and reconciliation" conducted at the Syrian/Lebanese border. Buses that carried the returnees were accompanied by vehicles belonged to the UN that in turn handled the critical health conditions.

According to local sources that reported to the Voice of the Capital news network, the first batch of the returnees included a person who had fled the compulsory military service, another person who was required for the reserve military service and a person who was a defector from the Syrian regular forces. all of them conducted "reconciliation" to join the military service immediately. The sources indicated that the government provide temptations for those youths who had fled the compulsory military service that they will spend the period of their military service in positions surrounding the city.

According to local sources, a second batch of those wishing to return to the city are being registered in Lebanon and are expected to return next August. There is also a third batch expected to return early next year, and the city's reconciliation officer, Akram Jamil, supervise the file, under the supervision of Brigadier General Ghassan Bilal, commander of the Security Office for the 4th Brigade,.

On April 18, 2018, 470 Syrian refugees, who were residing in Shebaa, the border town with Lebanon, returned to Beit Jinn area and its farms in the Western Ghouta in Damascus, under the agreement concluded between the regime and the opposition in the region at the end of last year. According to the agreement, a settlement of status will be conducted to those

² An alias to preserve the safety of the witness.



required for compulsory and reserve military service among the returnees, provided that they stay for six months in the town before they are sent to the military service, as reported by the Lebanon's National News Agency, which stated that the majority of those arrived in Beit Jinn were children, women and the elderly, noting that the repatriation of Syrian families from Shebaa was supposed to take place a month ago, but was postponed for logistical and security reasons related to the regime.

The Lebanese authorities organized the departure of the convoy, and 15 buses crossed the Lebanese/Syrian borders at al-Masnaa point and drove the returnees from Shebaa on the road Shebaa- Ain Aata- Rashaya- al-Masnaa, then the Syrian territory. This came after Lebanese state announced that [UNHCR agreed with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Jebran Bassil's suggestion](#) to divide the refugees in Lebanon into categories to organize their return and that it will not stand in the face of those who want to return "voluntarily" to Syrian territory.

The minister Bassil had had accused the UNHCR of hindering the repatriation of Syrian refugees by intimidating them of the fate that they would face, and directed authorities to [freeze the residence applications for UNHCR staff in Lebanon](#) following a statement by the Lebanese president Michel Aoun that [the refugees should start returning to Syria before even a political situation is found](#).