



NOTE

This is an excerpt from IDMC's 2019 Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID).

SPOTLIGHT

SYRIA

Reconstruction and challenges around housing, land and property

Eight years of civil war have left around a third of the Syria's urban housing stock in ruins.⁴³¹ As the government retakes control of towns and cities across the country, reconstruction is beginning, but evidence suggests that segregation and displacement are being used as part of the process to consolidate the state's authority and reward its supporters. New HLP laws have also been passed that raise questions about how IDPs and other groups will be included in the reconstruction process.⁴³²

The government adopted a law in April 2018 that speeds up expropriation procedures to support the reconstruction effort and "redesign unauthorised or illegal housing areas". Known as Law No. 10, it is an extension of Decree 66, a measure first implemented in the Damascus area. The new law initially established a deadline of just 30 days for people to prove ownership over property subject to expropriation, but this was extended to a year in November under international pressure.⁴³³

Once the deadline has passed, people will not be compensated and property rights will revert to the state or local authorities.⁴³⁴ This has the potential to disproportionately affect Syria's 6.1 million IDPs and more than 5.7 million refugees, many of whom are likely to find it hard to prove ownership, whether because they have lost documentation, are unaware of the new legislation or are unable to travel to deal with the formalities required.⁴³⁵ Many land registries have also been destroyed during the war.⁴³⁶

Nor does Law No. 10 provide for enough compensation and assistance, making it difficult for former residents to re-establish themselves in their areas of origin.⁴³⁷ This has the potential both to prevent IDPs returning and cause new displacement.

The law applies to informal and unplanned settlements where residents lack building permits or property titles. Even before the conflict, between 30 and 50 per cent of

the population lived in such areas, meaning that it has the potential to significantly change the demographic and spatial composition of Syrian cities.⁴³⁸

There are concerns that Law No. 10 and other HLP regulations will be used to consolidate the government's authority to the detriment of its opponents, as highlighted by the case of Basateen al-Razi neighbourhood in Damascus. An informal settlement associated with the opposition, its working and lower middle-class residents were evicted to make way for Marota City, an upmarket real estate project.⁴³⁹ Other legislation imposes strict security clearances for property transactions, ostensibly an anti-terrorism measure, and provides for the confiscation of property owned by people who failed to do military service.⁴⁴⁰

Given that around half of Syria's pre-war population has been displaced during the conflict, resolving HLP issues will have to be a first and central step toward nationwide peace-building and stability. In its current form, however, Law No. 10 appears to benefit only a small fraction of the population, raising serious questions about its role in the post-conflict recovery process.



High levels of damage and destruction in Eastern Ghouta, Syria. Photo: Karl Schembri/NRC

| Notes

431. The World Bank, "The Toll of War: The Economic and Social Consequences of the Conflict in Syria", July 10, 2017.
432. Daher, "Decree 66 and the Impact of its National Expansion", March 7, 2018; Daher, "Reconstructing Syria: How the al-Assad regime is capitalizing on destruction", December 2018.
433. Human Rights Watch, "Q&A: Syria's New Property Law", May 29, 2018.
434. *Ibid.*
435. UNHCR, "Situation Syria Regional Refugee Response", March 11, 2019, available at, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>.
436. Prettitore, "Will forcibly displaced Syrians get their land back?", July 21, 2016.
437. PAX for Peace, "Legal Obstacles to Housing, Land and Property Rights in Syria", March 6, 2019.
438. Daher, "Reconstructing Syria: How the al-Assad regime is capitalizing on destruction", December 2018; Chatham House, "Property Law no.10 and its implications on Syrian cities", June 2018.
439. IRIN, "Decree 66: The blueprint for al-Assad's reconstruction of Syria?" April 20, 2017.
440. PAX for Peace, "Legal Obstacles to Housing, Land and Property Rights in Syria", March 6, 2019.