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300,000 Syrian Refugees Have Returned Home Since 2016 — Russian Defense Ministry

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TASS

An estimated 300,000 Syrians have returned to their homeland since Russia intervened in the country's civil war on the side of the Syrian regime, the Russian Defense Ministry has said.

Russia has conducted airstrikes in support of Syrian government forces since September 2015 and deployed military police to the country in 2017. Some 5.6 million people have been driven from Syria since the conflict began and 6.6 million have been displaced in a war that has killed an estimated half a million people.

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Russian Defense Ministry spokesperson Mikhail Mizintsev said 300,000 people have returned

to Syria from abroad in the past 2.5 years, the RBC news website reported Wednesday.

Another 1.2 million internally displaced Syrians have returned to their homes, he was cited as saying in a statement.

Days after a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump in Helsinki in July, Mizintsev said that the ministry had sent a proposal to Washington to jointly organize the return of Syrian refugees based on an agreement made between the two leaders.

The ministry estimated that 1.7 million Syrian refugees would be able to return to the country under the plan, mostly from Lebanon, Turkey and countries in the European Union.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Tuesday that conditions were in place for the return of Syrian refugees. His spokeswoman later said that camps had been set up in 100 towns and cities least affected by the war to accommodate half a million returnees.

The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, says it is not yet safe for refugees to return to Syria but it helps those who choose to go back with their documentation.

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