

The Reopening of René Mouawad's Airport: Preliminary Estimate of its Economic Impact



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1. Introduction

The Lebanese government announced officially on 6 June 2026, in a ceremony attended by Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, the reopening and redevelopment of René Mouawad Airport in Qlayaat as a secondary civil and commercial airport. Sky Lounge Services company won the contract on 19 May 2026 to rehabilitate the site and build a new terminal, which has a timeline target of 90 days, and to run airport maintenance. The airport is planned to handle 114,000 passengers in its first year, with initial flight routes that include Mersin, Istanbul and Dubai, and with plans to expand the airport's capacity to handle 600,000 passengers by its fourth year, and expand the routes to include Saudi Arabia, Cairo and Athens. The airport will also be used for cargo.

Qlayaat airport was in the custody of the Lebanese army until the late 1980's, when Middle East Airlines used the airport to operate domestic flights between Beirut and Qlayaat when roads were closed due to the Civil War (1975-1990). But today the reopening of René Mouawad's Airport has more ambitious plans, as it is expected to support the country's economy, and open the door to the development of north Lebanon, especially Akkar, the most under-served region in the country. We will try in this report to briefly review all this; and, more important, to estimate the expected economic benefits and the anticipated contribution of Qlayaat airport to the Lebanese economy.

2. General Overview

The reopening of René Mouawad's Airport in Qlayaat will stimulate job creation and employment, specifically in the north region. This includes direct jobs in the airport, such as airline personnel and airport management, and indirect jobs in supply chains, maintenance and services. Also, opportunities will expand to the surroundings, especially in hospitality and retail sectors, which in turn will help in attracting investments to the most under-served region in Lebanon and stimulate balanced development in the process. Other benefits include easing pressure on Rafic Hariri International

Airport, the only current airport in Lebanon. In addition to stimulating, in general, trade, tourism and transit in the region.

However, it's not going to merely be a 'priceless' economic heaven. Alongside benefits, the re-development of René Mouawad Airport poses challenges and burdens. Perhaps the most prominent of them is the fact that Sky Lounges Services, as per the contract, is responsible for developing only terminal-related infrastructure, which implies they are not responsible for developing the surrounding infrastructure. Hence, it is the Lebanese government responsibility to develop the broad regional infrastructure such as roads, utilities, and other essentials. This, accordingly, will add to the financial burden on a state that has not yet recovered from its financial crisis, and still threatened with war and its associated financial losses and urgent expenses. In addition, note also the designated area in the north currently suffers from poor infrastructure which will limit the airport's ability to operate efficiently at full scale

3. Estimates of Expected Economic Impact

A. Arrivals

Based on regular monthly reports regarding activity at Rafic Hariri International Airport, we can note that between 800,000 and 1.2 million members of the Lebanese diaspora visit Lebanon each year on average. If we reasonably consider that people from the North will most likely be the ones using René Mouawad's Airport; and if we assume, based on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' data for registered overseas voters that voters originally from the North consistently make up roughly 10% to 15% of the active expatriate electorate. Then we can estimate that the airport will, roughly and initially, will attract 80,000 to 180,000 per year. Worth mentioning that this estimation is a minimum since it does not include foreign tourists, travelers using the airport as a regional hub, and Lebanese not from the north who could still prefer to use the airport.

B. Employment

In an attempt to estimate the extent of the airport impact on employment rates in Lebanon, we looked at Rafic Hariri International Airport, and according to data published by InfoPro research firm, the airport and its direct and indirect and induced aviation operations and supply chain roles, support nearly 19,700 jobs nationally. And taking into consideration that the capacity of Rafic Hariri International Airport is roughly 10 times that of René Mouawad's Airport (Based on the fact that Beirut airport handles on average 6 million passengers annually, while Qlayaat airport is expected to handle 600,000 by its fourth year), we can estimate on capacity basis that the airport will be able to support at minimum of nearly 1,970 jobs nationally. This number, of course, includes direct, indirect and induced jobs¹. But it does not include the catalytic jobs that will be supported by the induced

¹ Direct jobs include airline personnel, ground handlers, airport management, customs/security, and air traffic control. Indirect jobs include aviation supply chains, maintenance, and airport services. Induced jobs are the ones created when both direct and indirect employees spend their wages within the local economy

broader hospitality sectors and the regional development in the surrounding areas. So the additional jobs numbers could be effectively larger on a broader national scale.

C. GDP

According to data published by InfoPro, Beirut's Rafik Hariri International Airport and the broader aviation sector directly contribute 2.0% to Lebanon's GDP. However, when including indirect and induced and catalytic benefits the total economic contribution rises to 17% of GDP. So based on airports capacities previously mentioned, we can simply and in an initial sense, estimate that René Mouawad's Airport could contribute around 1.7% to Lebanon's GDP.

Summary Findings:

	Rafic Hariri International Airport	René Mouawad Airport
Annual Number of Lebanese Diaspora Attracted	800,000 to 1.2 million	80,000 to 180,000*
Contribution to Employment	Support nearly 19,700 jobs	Support nearly 1,970 jobs*
Total Economic Contribution	17% of GDP	1.7% of GDP*

* Author's Estimate

4. Conclusion

In the end, it is important to note that Beirut's Rafik Hariri International Airport is also a primary commercial hub that handles roughly 41% of Lebanese exports by value. Hence, the real economic gains to Lebanon from Qlayaat airport are not just to relieve pressure on Beirut airport or to act as just a substitute or associate, but also the gains from supporting especially the industrial/commercial sectors in the North region, in order to enhance Lebanese exports and fully exploit the new established hub in an efficient way. The same applies to the tourism sector and the need to utilize Qlayaat airport to increase airport traffic in Lebanon as a whole. Of course, this will necessitate proper marketing and collaboration between the Lebanese government and Sky Lounge Services to transform the airport into a regional vital touristic and commercial hub, which in turn will help facilitate the potential economic benefits along with additional government revenue. However, this will remain subject to enhancing the government's capability and to secure the needed funds, something that is primarily based on accelerating the implementation of anticipated reforms, restoring full sovereignty and security in the country, and putting a real end to the war.

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