

The Living Reality Of Palestinians In Refugee Camps In Lebanon

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Abstract

The research aims to describe the living conditions of approximately 280,000 Palestinian refugees scattered among twelve camps and gatherings. These areas consist of concrete blocks with corrugated roofs, narrow alleys with sewage and water pipes, and a complex network of makeshift electric wires. The result shows that they faced significant challenges and violations of their human rights and targeted basic needs like healthcare costs and potable water, poor drainage, school overcrowding, students not allowed to enroll in Lebanese public schools, limited access to the labor market, and property ownership not allowed. The Lebanese government does not assure security and is limited to camp entrance checkpoints. "Death wires" due to hazardous electricity networks. A qualitative method is used to collect data through deep desk review incorporating statistical data. This led to a critical analytical approach and the researcher's accumulated experience through work in one of the oldest organizations providing services to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

Keywords: *Palestinian refugees, camps, Lebanon.*

Introduction

Overview

Lebanon's Crisis: Impacts on Palestinian Refugees' Survival Alternatives

Lebanon has been experiencing deepening economic and financial crises for the past three years, worsened by systemic governance failures and the economic impact of the war in Ukraine². This has increased poverty and a heightened need for aid among the vulnerable population³. Reports show that a significant percentage of Lebanese citizens, Syrian refugees, and Palestinian refugees are in dire need of help as food prices have risen significantly⁴.

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² <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/publication/economic-update-april-2022>.

³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/wfp-lebanon-mid-year-highlights-jan-jun-2022>.

⁴ Previous reference

Additionally, the cost of essential services has skyrocketed, and medicines have become scarce and unaffordable due to the lifting of government subsidies⁵.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is the specialized humanitarian body that provides aid and protection to registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. UNRWA offers services in education, health care, relief, social services, camp infrastructure, and emergency help⁶. According to UNRWA, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon face alarming humanitarian conditions, with chronic diseases, unprecedented levels of poverty, and unemployment⁷.

Amid the multifaceted crisis added by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lebanese government has failed to implement an adequate social protection program. Human Rights Watch (HRW), in its 2022 World Report, emphasized the social and psychological impact on marginalized communities in Lebanon, particularly among refugees. The country's population reportedly experiences increasing stress, trauma, depression, and anxiety, with the psychosocial well-being of both refugees and Lebanese people at critical risk. These conditions contribute to deteriorating physical health, an inability to focus on daily tasks, strained household relationships, a lack of proper care for family members and oneself, and a rise in self-harm and suicide reports (both successful and tried)⁸, which have increased by 65%.

Noting that Lebanon has not signed the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. According to Lebanese law, Palestinian refugees are treated as a distinct group of foreigners, denying them the same rights granted to other foreigners. Palestinians lack the right to work in the public sector and thirty-nine specified professions, including medicine, law, and engineering. They can only work within the camps and cannot own real estate.

General Statistics

According to the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) report of May 23, Lebanon's population consists of 5.9 million residents, including⁹:

- 4 million Lebanese citizens
- 1.5 million displaced Syrians (RS)
- 180,000 Palestinian refugees from Lebanon (PRL)
- 32,400 Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS)

Multiple studies and community needs assessments conducted by national researchers and international organizations have emphasized the negative impact of the crises on Palestinian refugees in the camps. A study published by ECOI Net in February 2022 highlighted the psychological distress, acute feelings of depression, and hopelessness among Palestinians, particularly the youth. The youth and adults bear a sense of worry and uncertainty about the future¹⁰.

Historically, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have lived in overcrowded camps and faced marginalization due to discriminatory policies. The lack of civil rights, economic and social safety nets, employment opportunities, proper health services, and overall protection have

⁵ Previous reference

⁶ https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/strategic_plan_2023-2028.pdf.

⁷ <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/palestine-refugees-lebanon-fall-further-abys>.

⁸ Previous reference

⁹ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/100389#:~:text=The%202023%20Lebanon%20Crisis%20Response,affected%20people%20living%20in%20Lebanon.>

¹⁰ <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2068428/In+Focus+-+Mental+health%5B3%5D%5B1%5D.pdf>.

persistently affected Palestinians¹¹. UNRWA's protection report from July 2022 revealed that 86% of refugees in camps and gatherings live in poverty¹². These conditions jeopardize community safety, leading to tensions among them.

Palestinian refugees continue to feel trapped in this ongoing crisis. They have been confined within camps with restricted movement for decades. Restrictions on international travel have blocked any possibility of improving their living conditions. However, their insistence on dignity has compelled youths, adults, families, and children to take dangerous journeys on *deathboats* for a better life. Unfortunately, these boats never reach their intended destinations, and the camps mourn the lives lost, especially among the youth, which needs urgent collective action to prevent families from perishing at sea while securing their right to live¹³.

The number of people trying to leave Lebanon by sea nearly doubled between 2020 and 2021, with Palestinians forming the majority. The figure increased by over 70% in 2022, as said by UNRWA's Commissioner General, Philippe Lazzarini, who emphasized that people take these life-threatening risks in search of dignity. Men, women, adults, children, and the elderly are all yearning for a better life. To prevent further loss of life, there is an urgent need to protect and support children where they are and expand options for refugees to live safely¹⁴.

Methodology

The method employed in this research follows a descriptive-analytical approach, which consists of two dimensions. The first dimension is based on the researcher's experiences during the seven-year tenure (2014-2020) at the National Institution for Social Care and Vocational Training (NISCVT) known as Beit Atfal Alsomoud, the oldest and largest institution operating in Palestinian camps. During this period, the researcher served as the director of the social work department, overseeing a team of 23 social workers who were Palestinian refugees. The team worked across all Palestinian camps in Lebanon. This experience entailed daily field visits and active engagement with beneficiaries and their families at various levels, including education, social welfare, economic aspects, health (including mental health), and the overall living conditions of Palestinian refugees.

The second dimension of the method involves conducting a desk review of relevant reports that shed light on the actual situation of Palestinian refugees. This desk review incorporates statistical data and leads to a critical analytical approach.

Introduction

The Middle East region, particularly Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, grapples with interconnected challenges, notably social and political instability arising from conflicts and economic and health crises. Furthermore, the Ukraine-Russia war has further strained the global economy, increasing fuel, food, and daily living expenses, in addition to the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, making the case much worse.

¹¹ <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/hitting-rock-bottom-palestine-refugees-lebanon-risk-their-lives-search>.

¹² https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_lfo_advocacy_paper_eng_final.pdf.

¹³ <https://www.unicef.org/mena/press-releases/unicef-deeply-saddened-death-toll-boat-sank-coast-syria-coming-lebanon>.

¹⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/24/lebanon-migrant-boat-sinking-syria-death-toll>.

Despite facing minimal living conditions, the resilience of Palestinian refugees is supported by local governments collaborating with international relief agencies, such as the UNRWA organization, which specializes in caring for Palestinian refugees across various aspects of life. They await a just and comprehensive resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict¹⁵.

Notably, Palestinians' right to return is significant to the Lebanese government. Resolution 194, passed by the United Nations, addresses the right of return for the Palestinian people to the State of Palestine¹⁶. However, this resolution was not implemented, as the United Nations General Assembly approved Israel's membership under the condition that it would fulfill Resolution 194. Unfortunately, Israel did not implement the decision for political reasons¹⁷.

Following this brief introduction, this section will present a descriptive and analytical overview of the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. It will highlight the significant challenges they face in their livelihood.

The main aim is to reveal the reality of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. This will be done through two approaches: the first section will outline the daily challenges faced by Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, while the second section will discuss their situations across various sectors, including education, health, and the youth sector.

Palestinians' Historical Background: A Glimpse¹⁸

The term *Nakba* refers to the uprooting, displacement, destruction, and expulsion experienced by Palestinians in 1948, resulting in the establishment of the State of Israel. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, out of the 1.4 million Palestinians who lived in the territories occupied in 1948, approximately 800,000 were displaced from their villages and cities to the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and neighboring Arab countries, and some remained in Israeli territory. Additionally, around 11.8 million people live in historic Palestine, covering an area of approximately 27,000 square kilometers. However, over 85% of the total land is occupied by Jews, constituting 51% of the population.

Statistical data reveals that Palestinian refugees account for 44.2% of Palestine's total population. In 2013, the number of refugees registered with UNRWA reached approximately 5.3 million, being 45.7% of the global Palestinian population.

Palestinian refugees are dispersed across Jordan, Syria, Lebanon (59%), the West Bank (17%), and the Gaza Strip (24%). Around 29% live in 58 camps: 10 in Jordan, 9 in Jordan and Syria, 12 in Lebanon, 19 in the West Bank, and 8 in Gaza. These figures do not include those displaced from 1949 until the eve of the war in June 1967 or those deported in 1967, meaning these estimates do not fully reflect the number of Palestinian refugees.

The population of Palestine, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip was estimated to be 4.4 million by the end of 2012, with 2.7 million in the West Bank and approximately 1.7 million in the

¹⁵ The United Nations General Assembly adopts resolution 194 (III), resolving that *refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or property damage which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.*

¹⁶ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East, resolution 194: <https://www.unrwa.org/content/resolution-194>.

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_session_of_the_United_Nations_General_Assembly.

¹⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.net>(<https://tinyurl.com/53hj8cpj>)

Gaza Strip. The number of occupied territories in the West Bank reached 482 by the end of 2012, with 537 settlers present as of 2011.

According to the Nakba's Encyclopedia of Palestine, published on the Nakba's website, Jewish ownership of Palestinian land in 1918 did not exceed 240,000 dunams, accounting for only 1.56% of the total Palestinian land. By 1948, Jewish ownership had increased to 1.8 million dunams. It's worth noting that the number of Jews in Palestine was around 5,000 in 1800 and approximately 55,000 in 1918, making up about 8% of the population. This figure rose to 650,000 Jews, being 31.7% of the population.

Based on data, UN Resolution No.181, adopted on November 29, 1947, declared the division of Palestine into two states: one Jewish state covering 54.7% of Palestinian land with 498,000 Jewish settlers and 497,000 Palestinian Arabs and one Arab state encompassing about 44.8% of the territory, home to 725,000 Palestinians alongside 10,000 Jewish settlers.

From 1948 to 1967, Jews gradually occupied all Palestinian territories, with later expansions into Syria's Golan Heights, Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, and southern Lebanon in 1982.

Palestinian Refugees Residing in Lebanon

As a definition, a Palestinian refugee is Each Palestinian displaced to the Lebanese territories since 1947 due to the uprooting operations and all the accompanying forms of forced displacement and the subsequent Israeli occupation of Palestine in 1967 and its implications, in addition to all the descendants of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon in the sense defined above¹⁹.

The first wave of refugees consisted of 110,000 Palestinians²⁰ who arrived in Lebanon in 1948, fleeing from towns and villages in occupied northern Palestine, including the Upper Galilee and coastal cities. Most existed in camps, while others lived in Lebanese towns, villages, and informal gatherings.

Statistics on the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon remain conflicting for several reasons. The lack of official statistical surveys for over 70 years has hindered the Lebanese government's effective implementation of political reforms. Consequently, different authorities' estimates have led to inaccurate and sometimes misleading beliefs about the Palestinian refugee population living in Lebanon. UNRWA officially declared on its website that are 455,000 refugees registered under its umbrella. However, this number has declined recently and currently stands at 180,000 refugees.

The most recent official census²¹ on the Palestinian Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon (PHCPCG-2017) used advanced data collection, monitoring, validation, and quality assurance technology. Conducted by 1,000 young Palestinian refugees, the census covered 12 Palestinian camps and 156 gatherings. The total number of people counted was 224,901, with the following breakdown:

- In the twelve camps, there were 114,206 inhabitants, consisting of 74,687 (65.4%) Palestinian refugees (PRL), 8,487 (7.4%) Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS), 26,378 (23.1%) Syrian

¹⁹ <https://www.lpd.gov.lb/DocumentFiles/unified%20vision-636365069171725661.pdf>.

²⁰ <https://balfourproject.org/palestinians-continue-to-suffer-in-lebanese-refugee-camps/>.

²¹ Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee, Central Administration of Statistics, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2018). *The Population and Housing Census in Palestinian Camps and Gatherings - 2017, Key Findings Report (Population, Buildings and Housing Units)*, Beirut, Lebanon: <https://www.lpd.gov.lb/DocumentFiles/Key%20Findings%20report%20En-636566196639789418.pdf>

refugees (SR), and the remaining population included 4,058 (3.6%) Lebanese and 596 (0.5%) from other nationalities.

- In the Gatherings, there were 90,862 people, with 54.9% being Palestinian refugees (PRL) and 45.1% living in the Camps.

- The gender distribution of Palestinian refugees was 50.4% male and 49.6% female.

There were 55,473 households, 42,748 of which were Palestinian refugee households. Of these, 45.7% (19,563) were in the Camps, and 54.2% (23,185) were in the Gatherings.

12 Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon²²

After decades of marginalization of Palestinian refugee camps by the Lebanese state due to anti-refugee laws, such as restrictions on employment, property ownership, and construction, the camps have become unsafe environments. young people are forced to seek survival through dangerous routes, including risky sea journeys²³.

1. Shatila camp

The Shatila camp was set up south of Beirut in 1949 by the International Committee of the Red Cross to shelter hundreds of refugees who flocked to it from the villages of Amka, Majd al-Krum, and al-Yajour in northern Palestine after 1948. The camp was destroyed during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and was repeatedly targeted during the civil war, leading to the destruction of property and the displacement of refugees. It is in the Lebanese capital, Beirut, east of the Sports City, and administratively follows the Baabda district of Mount Lebanon Governorate.

The area of Shatila camp remained unchanged until 1969, when it expanded to include the western neighborhood and the adjacent regions. Part of the camp's land is leased to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for 99 years, and another part belongs to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Environmental health conditions in the camp are severely poor. Shelters are damp and overcrowded, with open drainage ditches. The camp's sewage system requires significant expansion. An infrastructure project is underway to expand the sewage, rainwater drainage, and water networks. The camp's population is estimated to be between 22 and 25 thousand people who live in inhumane conditions.

A milestone in the history of Shatila camp was the witness to one of the most heinous massacres in modern history. It is the most famous of the Palestinian camps in Lebanon, resulting from the horrific massacre conducted by the Lebanese phalange forces, supported by the Israeli occupation army, in September 1982, after the withdrawal of the Palestinian guerrillas from Lebanon. The number of martyrs is not accurately specified, with estimates ranging between 3,000 and 5,000 martyrs according to the Encyclopedia of the Nakba.

Since its establishment, the camp has grown vertically, initially forming around 500 residential units.

There is one UNRWA health center in Shatila camp that provides primary health care to Palestine refugees from Lebanon (PRL) and Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS). The services include only maternal and child healthcare, including vaccination, essential medication,

²² NISCVT camps' report 2022, not published.

²³ <https://refugeesps.net/post/24893> (<https://tinyurl.com/bdff2hw>)

laboratory testing, non-communicable disease services, and control. School health examinations are also conducted, and psychosocial support is offered to children in need²⁴.

2. Burj al-Barajneh camp

It is situated in the southern suburbs of Beirut, approximately two kilometers from Beirut International Airport. The neighborhoods of Raml al-Aali, Haret Hreik, Baajour, and Ain al-Sikka surround it. The League of Red Cross Societies showed the camp in 1948 to accommodate Palestinian refugees who had been expelled from their towns and villages in the Galilee region of northern Palestine.

In 1950, UNRWA assumed responsibility for the camp. Its establishment was authorized by Resolution No. 302 of the United Nations General Assembly on December 8, 1949, to provide direct relief and employment programs to Palestine refugees and started operations on May 1, 1950.

The first arrivals in the camp were the people of Tarshiha, who settled in a line extending from the north to the south of the camp along the main street that separates it from the Burj al-Barajneh area. They were followed by residents from Cabri, Kuwaikat, Sheikh Dawood, and other villages, who settled in close intervals.

Currently, the camp faces significant issues, particularly concerning the electricity and water networks, which are the most problematic among all the camps in Lebanon. The haphazard placement of electricity cables has led to several annual fatalities, reaching around 50 cases as of mid-2018. There is no specialized authority for electricity distribution, as there are four networks.

Four UNRWA schools are running within Burj al-Barajneh, providing education for over 2,000 children, including Palestine refugee children from Syria (PRS). Due to a lack of space, all UNRWA schools are outside the camp.

UNRWA helps more than 775 families through social protection through e-cards, with an annual rate of US\$ 120 per person. The Agency also offers soft loans and mini-loan programs to Palestine refugees²⁵.

3. Mar Elias Camp

Mar Elias camp is one of Lebanon's smallest Palestinian camps, covering only 500 square meters. It is known for its location within the capital, Beirut, near the area known as *UNESCO*. The camp was set up in 1952, four years after the Palestinian Nakba, on land owned by the endowments of the St. Elias Orthodox Church, which provided it to Palestinian refugees at the time.

The internal and external conflicts that Lebanon saw affected not only the Lebanese population but also the Palestinian presence, leaving an impact on the camp's demographics. Due to the significant displacement, the camp lost its predominantly Christian character. After the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and during the 1985 war in the camps, only two Christian refugee families remained. The families displaced from Mar Elias were replaced by individuals displaced from other destroyed camps, such as Nabatiyeh camp (destroyed by Israel in 1973) and Tel al-Zaatar camp (destroyed in 1976).

²⁴ <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon/shatila-camp>.

²⁵ <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon/burj-barajneh-camp>.

Although Mar Elias camp is home to a group of educated young people with higher degrees, it faces the same challenges as other camps, including significant levels of unemployment. Palestinians are restricted from working in many professions due to specific laws, leaving many with limited options and often forcing them to emigrate abroad. The camp has a dispensary and a school called Capri Primary School, both affiliated with UNRWA. Additionally, there is a popular committee consisting of over 200 students. Before the 1985 war, in the camps, there was a Palestinian Red Crescent dispensary and emergency hospital. Still, they ceased operations, along with specialized few institutions affiliated with the Palestine Liberation Organization, which began to reduce their presence, particularly after the Oslo Accords.

Mar Elias has one health center that provides primary healthcare services to the camp's residents. It manages around 680 active family files and receives an average of 50 patients per day²⁶.

4. Nahr al-Bared camp

Nahr al-Bared camp is found 16 kilometers from Tripoli, near the coastal road in northern Lebanon. The camp was initially set up by the League of Red Cross Societies in 1949 to provide shelter for Palestinian refugees from the Lake Hula area in the north of Palestine. UNRWA commenced its services for the refugees in 1950.

In mid-2007, due to the conflict between the Lebanese army and the extremist group Fatah al-Islam, which was based in the camp, approximately 27,000 Palestinian refugees were displaced from Nahr al-Bared camp and its surrounding areas in northern Lebanon. The camp endured heavy bombardment during a three-month siege. It is estimated that nearly 95 percent of all buildings and infrastructure were destroyed or irreparably damaged, compelling the residents to seek refuge in the neighboring Beddawi camp.

The camp's original area during its establishment was estimated to be around 1 km², but today it covers approximately 2 km². Nahr al-Bared camp was a thriving commercial hub with diverse markets on which most residents depended to sustain a decent living. The camp is home to thousands of educated professionals, including doctors, engineers, and a highly skilled workforce, making education and commerce the dominant features of the camp. Officials estimate that the camp's population was 6,000 individuals at its establishment, but today, it has grown to over 38,000 people. Moreover, the camp has faced the other challenge of receiving refugees from Syria since 2011, with approximately 504 Palestinian refugees displaced from Syria (as of April 2021).

The UNRWA compound, which housed the Agency's local health clinic, schools, and relief offices, was also left in ruins. Around 6,000 Palestinian refugee families (27,000 residents) and over 1,600 Lebanese residents were compelled to evacuate. More than 9,000 Palestinian refugees continue to remain displaced, living in temporary and often substandard accommodations while struggling to cope with their deteriorated socioeconomic conditions.

Since the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) entered the camp in September 2007, the Lebanese authorities have exerted a level of control over Nahr el-Bared camp that differs from other refugee camps. Currently, there are five LAF checkpoints at the camp entrances, regulating movements into and out of Nahr el-Bared through a permit and access system encompassing the Old Camp and adjacent areas.

²⁶ <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon/mar-elias-camp>.

As of April 2021, the available funding will enable 479 families to return to Nahr el-Bared camp by the beginning of 2022, resulting in 82 percent of the camp's population being able to return²⁷.

5. Beddawi Camp

Beddawi camp was set up in 1955 on a hill in northern Lebanon, 5 kilometers north of Tripoli. It is approximately 89 km from the Lebanese capital, Beirut. The camp has two main entrances: the southern entrance from the Tripoli side of the dome and the northern entrance on the Beddawi mountain road, overlooking the city of Beddawi. It is surrounded by the hill of the afflicted and the mountains of Mount Terbil, rising about 150 meters above sea level.

The name of the camp originates from the Beddawi village in the Tripoli district. Its foundation stone was laid in 1957 on a plateau near Tripoli. The land on which it was built belonged to the Lebanese private sector and was leased from UNRWA, which supervised its construction. At the time of its construction, it covered an area of approximately one kilometer. However, the camp's organization has been altered due to demographic changes. Construction has expanded both horizontally and vertically, leading to construction chaos. Nevertheless, the camp's inner streets stay wider than other Palestinian refugee camps.

Beddawi camp is divided into sectors A, B, and C, including the old and new. Its neighborhoods include Shfaram, Hay Al-Souq, Abu Al-Fawz Street, and Tal Al-Zaatar. The neighborhood also includes displaced people from various Lebanese camps and cities who sought refuge in the camp during the wars and security events that Lebanon experienced between 1975 and 1982.

Like other camps, the Beddawi camp faces infrastructure challenges and various issues. UNRWA manages all wells and water tanks; a single water network has been provided. The camp has experienced urban development due to population growth and the influx of residents from neighboring areas, particularly after the events in Nahr al-Bared camp.

In 2018, a Joint Security Forces Committee was proven in the camp to help control the increasingly insecure situation. The committee coordinates with Lebanese authorities on security matters.

There are two elementary schools, one preparatory school, and one secondary school in the camp, providing education to approximately 3,700 students. In 2007, two prefabricated schools were founded just outside the camp, offering elementary, preparatory, and secondary education in English to students from the camp.

The UNRWA health center in Beddawi camp underwent rehabilitation in 2015 and provides medical services to an average of 560 patients per day. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes mellitus and hypertension are prevalent in the population, with 11 percent diagnosed with NCDs by the end of 2016²⁸.

6. Rashidieh Camp

Rashidieh camp is divided into two parts: the old section and the new section. The old section was built by the French government in 1936 to house Armenian refugees who had fled to Lebanon. The new section was constructed by UNRWA in 1963 to accommodate Palestine refugees evacuated from Gurwad camp in the Baalbek area of Lebanon. The majority of

²⁷ <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon/nahr-el-bared-camp>.

²⁸ <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon/beddawi-camp>.

Rashidieh camp's residents originally come from Deir al-Qasi, Alma al-Nahr, and other villages in northern Palestine.

The camp was severely affected during the Lebanese civil war, particularly between 1982 and 1987. Nearly 600 homes were either entirely or partially destroyed, resulting in the displacement of over 5,000 refugees. The remaining shelters also require extensive rehabilitation. Job opportunities within the camp are scarce, with most residents working in agriculture and construction. While the shelters in the camp generally have proper ventilation, water, and electricity supply, the camp lacks a sewage system.

Rashidieh camp has four schools that serve over 2,000 Palestine refugees. As part of the Inclusive Education and Learning Support Program, a dedicated resource center within Ein al Assal School supports children with vision impairment.

The camp has one health center through which UNRWA provides primary healthcare services, and school health services²⁹.

7. Burj Al Shamali Camp

Located 3 km east of Tyre and approximately 24 km from the border with Palestine, the camp was set up by UNRWA in 1955 to accommodate refugees from the Bekaa Anjar and Marjayoun regions in southern Lebanon.

The camp covers an area of 13,600 m² and is situated on fallow land leased by UNRWA for 99 years and has a main entrance where the Lebanese army sets up a checkpoint.

The camp suffers from severe overpopulation that exceeds its geographical ability. The average number of family members varies, with many families forming up to seven members, particularly among the predominantly Bedouin Ghawarneh clans from the Houla area. Most residents of the camp originate from various villages in the Galilee region of northern Palestine, such as Zouk, Naameh, Absiya, Lubiyeh, Sepphoria, Shaab, Shafa Omar, Kassayer, Dishum, Husseiniya, Hittin, Deir al-Qasi, Hawassa, Sa'sa, Salha, Shajara, Ibilin, al-Qaytiya, Maaloul, and Sambriya.

Three UNRWA schools provide education in the camp. Jabalia School for Girls and Sarafand School are found within the camp and serve students from grades four to nine and one to three, respectively. The Palestine School for Boys serves students from fourth to ninth grades, outside the camp's boundaries. Notably, there is no secondary school within the camp, so students must continue their secondary education at Al-Aqsa High School in Rashidieh camp.

Associations oversee four kindergartens in the camp: Dignity, Al Sumud, Happy Baby, and Paradises.

Currently, camp residents face a shortage of drinking water, as the distributed water is unsuitable for consumption or cooking. Consequently, residents are forced to buy water from shops or water treatment companies. In terms of sanitation, UNRWA established a network in 2008 to cover the entire camp for sewage and rainwater drainage purposes.

Burj Shemali is one of the poorest camps in Lebanon, with a high prevalence of thalassemia and sickle cell disease among its inhabitants. Unemployment is extremely high, with seasonal agricultural work being the most common source of income for both men and women.

²⁹ <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon/rashidieh-camp>.

UNRWA provides aid to over 1,100 families at a rate of US\$ 120 per person per year through e-cards as a form of social protection.

8. Al-Buss Camp³⁰

Al-Bus refugee camp is 1.5 km south of Tyre. Its name derives from the former bus station at the eastern entrance to Tyre, hence the abbreviation *Al-Bus*.

Initially built by the French government in 1939 to house Armenian refugees, the camp later welcomed Palestinians from the Acre region of Galilee in the 1950s after the Armenians were moved to another area.

The camp's residents are primarily engaged in seasonal farming and construction. They live in cement brick housing constructed by the refugees themselves. The water, sanitation, and rainwater drainage systems were rehabilitated between 2007 and 2008.

Currently, the camp has one main entrance for cars, where the Lebanese army sets up a checkpoint.

In addition to Palestinian Muslims and Christians, the camp is home to several Christian and Armenian families, as well as Lebanese and Syrians.

UNRWA operates two preparatory schools and one secondary school in the Al-Buss camp, serving over 1,600 Palestine refugee students, including PRS.

The UNRWA health center in Al-Buss provides primary healthcare services to camp residents. On average, the health center receives 230 patients per day.

9. Ain al-Hilweh Camp³¹

The Ein al-Hilweh camp, located near the city of Sidon, was established in 1948 by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to provide shelter for refugees from various towns in northern Palestine, such as Amqa, Safuriyya, Shab, Taitapa, Manshiyya, Samira, Nahr, Safsaf, Hittin, Ras al-Ahmar, Tira, and Tarshiha. UNRWA began running in the camp in 1952 and gradually replaced the tents with concrete shelters.

Ain El Hilweh camp is the most significant and crucial camp in Lebanon. According to UNRWA statistics, it has the largest population, approximately 35,000 people. However, the estimated population of Ain al-Hilweh camp is about seventy thousand people or more, making it the largest in terms of area and size. The camp also suffers from structural overcrowding, which is a significant issue due to the refugees' diverse and contradictory political affiliations.

Seven elementary and preparatory schools provide elementary and preparatory education, and one secondary school serves students outside the camp. These schools cater to 6,000 Palestine refugee students in the camp, including PRS.

Two primary healthcare centers offer general consultations, specialist consultations, and mother and child healthcare. Secondary and tertiary care is provided through a network of contracted hospitals in Saida and its suburbs, including governmental, Palestine Red Crescent Society, and private hospitals. The health centers receive an average of 1,000 medical consultations every day.

³⁰ <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon/el-buss-camp>.

³¹ <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon/ein-el-hilweh-camp>.

10. Mieh W Mieh camp³²

Established in 1954, the Mieh W Mieh camp is 4 kilometers east of Sidon. The refugees living in the camp predominantly come from Sepphoriyya, Tira, Haifa, and Meron, Palestine.

The camp experienced significant destruction during years of Lebanese civil conflict, particularly in July 1991. During this period, 15 percent of the camp's housing was destroyed, including the Agency's school and distribution center.

Recently, efforts have been made to rehabilitate the sanitation systems, and all shelters are now supplied with water through a network connected to the UNRWA water plant. However, frequent water shortages persist, highlighting the need for an added well. The camp currently has only one UNRWA elementary-middle school, Ashkelon, which runs in two shifts during the morning and afternoon, catering to over 400 students. As for secondary education, students must attend either Ein El Hilweh Secondary School or schools in Saida since there is no secondary school within the camp.

The camp is served by a single health center, which runs three and a half days weekly. On average, the clinic receives 80 patients per day.

11. Galilee Camp³³

Galilee Camp, officially known as *Wavel* Camp in UNRWA files, was named after an old barracks used by the French army under one of its commanders. It is situated in the Baalbek area near the famous Roman castle in the Bekaa region of eastern Lebanon. Galilee Camp is one of the smaller Palestinian camps in Lebanon.

One significant challenge the camp faces is the lack of potable water. Laboratory tests revealed that the extracted water was unsuitable for drinking.

Currently, residents are compelled to buy water despite UNRWA being under contract with the Baalbek Water Utility to provide a daily rate of 150 cubic meters. However, this amount falls short of half the required rate and is not suitable for drinking.

The camp has two schools: Tiberias, which offers primary education, and Qastal, which provides middle-secondary education. These schools serve approximately 960 students. Due to UNRWA's policy of reducing services, both schools face a shortage of teaching positions. The camp also has two kindergartens managed by local non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Medical services in the camp are provided by two medical officers and three specialists who visit the camp's health center. The health center average sees around 170 patients daily, including PRS. Due to the camp's remote location, accessing hospitalization services is difficult and expensive.

12. Dbayeh camp³⁴

UNRWA records show that the Dbayeh camp is home to 4,591 registered individuals. Established in 1952, the camp is on a hill overlooking the Beirut-Tripoli highway. Initially, it occupied 61,450 sq m of land, and 22,850 sq m was added in 1963.

³² <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon/mieh-mieh-camp>.

³³ <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon/wavel-camp>.

³⁴ <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon/dbayeh-camp>.

Until 2013, UNRWA operated the Carmel School in Burj Hammoud, catering to students from the Dbayeh camp. However, due to low enrollment, the school was closed.

Currently, there is no UNRWA school serving the Dbayeh camp. One key focus of social protection in the camp is providing support through the Social Safety Net (SSN) program. This initiative aims to aid poor Palestine refugees in meeting their basic food needs.

Under the SSN program, limited aid is provided quarterly via e-cards to over 70 SSN families, with an allocation of US\$120 per person per year.

Challenges

The World Bank has described the Lebanese crisis as one of the top 10 crises worldwide since the 19th century. Since 2019, Lebanon has been experiencing a deteriorating economic crisis, which has further compounded the already dire living conditions of Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon's camps³⁵.

In addition to the social impact felt throughout the country, there has been a continuous rise in prices for essential goods such as food, medicine, and fuel. Job opportunities have nearly vanished, posing a threat to the livelihoods of most families in Lebanon, including those living in Palestinian refugee camps. These families already endure misery, refugee distress, oppression, essential levels of poverty, and unemployment.

In this context, UNRWA has faced a reduction in its services for providing relief help to all Palestinian families. The economic and social situation of Palestinian refugees has deteriorated due to the lack of job opportunities and a significant increase in unemployment rates. Poverty has affected all families, leaving them without any sources of support. Consequently, UNRWA has been compelled to launch an emergency program to address the catastrophic economic and social conditions faced by Palestinian refugees amidst the protracted Lebanese crisis and the absence of a solution on the horizon.

Currently, over 90% of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live in extreme poverty, unable to afford more than one meal per day. This dire situation has resulted in severe social and psychological losses among Palestinian refugees, who increasingly feel that their prospects for a better life are closed off, laden with difficulties, and nearly impossible to attain. Consequently, Palestinians have resorted to embarking on high-risk journeys in overcrowded and dangerous boats. Notably, 21 percent of Palestinian refugee workers in Lebanon work seasonal jobs, while only 7 percent work under legal contracts. Despite their long-term residence in Lebanon, the Ministry of Labor has imposed policies restricting Palestinians from working in approximately 70 job categories through Ministerial Decree No. 17561³⁶.

Palestinian refugees account for one-tenth of Lebanon's population, yet they are not considered official citizens of any other country. Consequently, they cannot get the same rights as foreign residents in Lebanon, worsening their suffering.

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon face significant challenges, with food insecurity being one of the most critical issues. The emerging social, economic, and health crisis has affected all families, resulting in alarming levels of poverty and loss of livelihoods. Despite the efforts of various organizations, the role played by UNRWA and Palestinian factions in addressing the

³⁵ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/05/01/lebanon-sinking-into-one-of-the-most-severe-global-crises-episodes>(<https://tinyurl.com/38vk5a6s>) .

³⁶ <https://arabicpost.net> (<https://tinyurl.com/v4xf5wcj>)

needs and suffering of Palestinian refugees falls short of the current reality. This underscores the urgent need for comprehensive and large-scale action, particularly considering Lebanon's other economic collapse³⁷.

Conclusion

The misery experienced by Palestinian refugees in Lebanon can be summarized as follows:

Educational Level: UNRWA schools in Palestinian camps face overcrowding issues, as Palestinian students are not allowed to enroll in Lebanese public schools, unlike Syrian refugee students who can attend in the afternoon shift. This creates an injustice in Lebanon's education sector.

Health Level: Hospitals within Palestinian camps, such as Haifa Hospital and UNRWA health centers, provide partial coverage with limited services and procedures for healthcare costs. Suppose a Palestinian patient is transferred to Lebanese hospitals outside the camps, UNRWA only covers a limited percentage of the expenses, while the patient must bear most costs.

Labor Market: In 2021, the Lebanese Minister of Labor issued a decree allowing Palestinian refugees born on Lebanese territory and officially registered with the Ministry of Interior to work in professions previously restricted to Lebanese citizens. However, Palestinians still face challenges in entering the Lebanese job market, experiencing discrimination, and often earning lower salaries than their Lebanese counterparts. The decree also excluded foreigners from these work opportunities.

Residential Environment: Palestinian camps in Lebanon are densely populated and confined to small areas. For example, Shatila camp, with an area of no more than one square kilometer, is inhabited by over 12,000 refugees, making it one of the most densely populated areas. These camps need proper hygiene conditions and organized construction. The entry of construction materials into the camps is restricted, hindering building rehabilitation and maintenance and resulting in damage such as cracks in walls and insufficient wooden supports. Electricity wires are often improperly attached, creating hazardous conditions known as *death wires*. Burj al-Barajneh camp is particularly dangerous, with high mortality rates due to poorly maintained electricity networks.

Property Ownership and Housing Conditions: Palestinian refugees are prohibited from owning property or houses in Lebanon, leaving them with little hope for housing rehabilitation or improvement. They live in harsh conditions without respect for minimum human rights. Dilapidated infrastructure in the camps leads to mixing freshwater with seawater, resulting in high salinity. Palestinians are forced to buy water, adding to their daily burdens. During the winter, poor drainage and neglected sewage cleaning cause houses in the camps to flood with rainwater. Additionally, adjacent houses block sunlight, increasing humidity, breathing problems and other diseases.

Security: The presence of Lebanese security forces is limited to checkpoints at the camps' entrances. They do not provide protection or intervention, except in the case of Nahr al-Bared camp, where the Lebanese army prevented attacks by radical Islamists. Security within the camps is kept by Palestinian armed parties known as security committees, including Fatah, Hamas, the Popular and Democratic Party, Islamic Jihad, the Liberation Party, At-Tahrir, and others. Despite coordination with the Lebanese state, corruption often undermines their effectiveness, especially in investigating crimes and protecting children. Gender-based, sexual,

³⁷ Previous reference.

and other forms of violence are prevalent despite the presence of popular committees responsible for resolving social issues. Tensions between Fatah and Hamas worsen the continuous turmoil in the camps, particularly in the Ain El Hilweh camp.

In conclusion, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon face significant challenges and violations of their human rights. Their unique accent often stigmatizes them, and their forced presence in Lebanon against their will leads them to risk their lives in search of hope and escape from the painful reality they endure. After seventy-six years away from their homes, they deserve recognition and support.

Statements and Declarations

The author shows that no financial or non-financial interests are directly or indirectly related to the work submitted for this publication.

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