

7.7. Palestinians in Lebanon

7.7.1. Legal status, demographics and socio-economic situation

Palestinians have been residing in Lebanon for decades.[778] Lebanon has not ratified the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol[779] and lacks a comprehensive national legal framework and policy on refugees.[780] Palestinians who are registered as refugees with the UN Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) fall under the UNRWA mandate.[781] Apart from these refugees, there is a smaller group of Palestinians who fall outside UNRWA's mandate but who, like those registered with UNRWA, hold an ID card issued by the Lebanese Directorate of Political Affairs and Refugees (DPAR)[782] known as the Identification Card for Palestine Refugee, which officially confirms their legal residence in the country.[783] A third group of Palestinians is known as non-ID Palestinian refugees as they are neither recognised by the authorities nor covered by UNRWA's mandate.[784] Notably, Palestinian refugees from Syria have faced difficulties maintaining their legal residency and obtaining civil documentation[785] and remained excluded from UNHCR's system of support for Syrian refugees.[786]

According to UNRWA, the overall number of UNRWA-registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon was nearly 500 000 as of February 2025. However, registration was voluntary. At the same time, emigration and deaths often went unreported, while refugees were able to register newly born children online even after moving to other countries.[787] Thus, a June 2025 assessment by UNRWA put the number of Palestinian refugees effectively living in Lebanon at around 248 000, as confirmed through a digital verification procedure conducted in 2023–2024. An estimated 23 000 of these individuals were Palestinian refugees from Syria.[788] Palestinian refugees are not eligible for Lebanese citizenship, lack political rights[789] and have no access to state-provided services[790] in the domains of healthcare and education.[791]

There are 12 official refugee camps for Palestinians across the country[792] where UNRWA acts as the sole provider of basic services, housing about half of the country's Palestinian refugee population.[793] For information on the 12 Palestinian refugee camps, see section 6.3 Areas controlled by different actors. Many camp-based Palestinians, particularly those from Syria and unregistered individuals, lacked legal documentation.[794] The camps have long been affected by funding shortages[795] with reports of overcrowding,[796] poor ventilation and constant power outages. In some camps such as Nahr al-Bared, drinking water had turned salty and unsuitable for domestic use. According to the Lebanon-based Palestinian Association for Human Rights (Witness) (PAHRW), infrastructure in most camps was 'near total collapse' as of mid-2025.[797] In June 2025, the UN noted that UNRWA was to face projected cash-flow gaps starting from July 2025 that put the continuous provision of essential services at risk.[798]

Discrimination in access to employment and property ownership,[799] along with the impact of the economic crisis striking Lebanon in recent years[800] have resulted in high poverty rates among Palestinian refugees[801] (exceeding 85 % in most camps as of mid-2025),[802] as well as wide-spread unemployment and underemployment.[803] As PAHRW observed, unemployment among camp residents, particularly among youth, was at 'unprecedented' levels, with a rising number of families dependent on remittances, irregular day labour and humanitarian assistance.[804] Indeed, as of 2024, the UN estimated that 168 026 Palestinian refugees needed humanitarian aid.[805] These socio-economic conditions had resulted in 'dangerous' levels of food insecurity in the camps as of mid-2025, according to PAHRW.[806]

As of mid-2025, UNRWA operated 61 schools educating around 38 000 children.[807] The situation at educational facilities in camps was marked by overcrowding, shortages in equipment, and poor infrastructure, with some schools recording drop-out rates of 16 %.[808] In Ein el-Hilweh Palestine refugee camp, located in Sidon,[809] fighting between armed factions forced UNRWA schools to remain closed for much of the first half of 2025. By June 2025, some schools had reopened, while others continued to be occupied by armed groups.[810] While around undocumented 3 000 Palestinian Syrian students were unofficially studying at UNRWA schools, Palestinian Syrian children faced persistent barriers to education.[811]

UNRWA ran 28 health centres, providing more than 200 000 medical consultations on an annual basis, whilst the agency financially supported hospitalisations of over 30 000 individuals per year.[812] However, funding cuts led to a significant reduction in UNRWA's health services, with serious shortages of medical personnel, equipment, and medicines for the treatment of chronic diseases.[813] UNRWA lacked the financial resources to fully cover the health-related needs of the Palestinian refugees.[814] As coverage of hospitalisation costs decreased to 60 % or less,[815] patients were no longer able to cover their share of hospitalisation expenses.[816] In 2024, in-patient care was denied to over 5 000 individuals.[817]

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