

2.7.5. Palestinians

Palestinians arrived in Syria in successive waves following regional conflicts, notably in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1982.The referenced text has been removed from the original report following a correction made in October 2026 690 The referenced text has been removed from the original report following a correction made in October 2026Prior to 2011, estimates of the Palestinian population in Syria ranged between approximately 560 000691 and 585 610.692 They mainly resided in twelve camps and surrounding areas,693 as well as in informal gatherings and urban neighbourhoods.694 Nine camps were officially recognised by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), while Yarmouk in Damascus, Latakia, and Ayn al-Tal in Aleppo were considered unofficial camps.695 During the war, Palestinian camps became battlefields, subjected to sieges and bombardment, and in many cases left largely depopulated.696

As of April 2026, an estimated 438 000 Palestinian refugees remained in the country,697 while many others had fled to Lebanon, Jordan, Türkiye or Europe.698 A large proportion of the Palestinian refugee population in Syria has experienced displacement. According to the latest UNRWA estimates, most Palestinian refugees in Syria have been displaced at least once during the conflict,699 and around 30 % (over 125 000 individuals) live in situations of protracted displacement.700

Following the escalation of the conflict in the region in March 2026, cross-border movements between Lebanon and Syria intensified,701 with over 189 000 people crossing from Lebanon into Syria by 26 March 2026,702 including more than 1 200 Palestine refugees from Syria.703

The legal status of Palestinian refugees in Syria is primarily governed by Law No. 260 of 1956. 704 This law grants Palestinians many civil and economic rights comparable to Syrian citizens, including access to employment, education, and public services.705 However, Palestinians are excluded from Syrian citizenship706 and political participation,707 including voting and standing for election.708 Restrictions on property ownership also apply,709 as Palestinians can only own a residential place but not agricultural, industrial or commercial real estate.710

The General Authority for Palestinian Arab Refugees (GAPAR), operating under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, remains the principal authority responsible for official issues related to the status of Palestinian refugees in Syria.711 Palestinians who arrived between 1948 and 1956 were eligible for registration with GAPAR, which maintains a registry linked to the Civil Affairs Directorate of the MoI.712 Registration enabled access to identity documents, family records, work permits, and travel documents.713 However, not all Palestinians were registered with GAPAR, particularly those arriving after 1956714 and they were instead treated as foreigners by

the Syrian authorities.715

Following the fall of the Syrian government, administrative procedures reportedly changed. Palestinians registered with GAPAR increasingly accessed civil registry offices used by Syrian citizens to register life events and obtain documentation.716

In July 2025, reports that some Palestinians had been recorded as ‘foreign residents’ in civil registries raised concerns,717 although authorities stated this resulted from a technical error that was later corrected. 718 In September 2025, the authorities called on undocumented Palestinians to regularise their status through GAPAR. 719 However, observers noted that documentation and residency requirements could make the process difficult for many Palestinians lacking valid residency card.720

Documentation gaps reportedly remained widespread due to lost records, destroyed registries, and administrative obstacles. Without documentation, Palestinians in Syria are unable to access services, claim housing, land and property rights, or obtain required security clearances for movement and return.721 The number of unregistered Palestinians living in Syria remains unknown.722

In January 2026, the Palestinian Embassy announced that holders of ordinary Palestinian passports and travel documents require prior approval to enter Syria, while holders of Syrian-issued travel documents remain exempt from this requirement.723

Socio-economic situation and living conditions

The socio-economic conditions of Palestinian refugees in Syria deteriorated significantly during the conflict.724 According to UNRWA, approximately 90 % of Palestinian refugees in Syria live below the poverty line.725 Food insecurity has increased significantly, rising from 46 % in 2022 to more than 60 % in 2024 and reaching 92 % in 2025.726 Unemployment is reported to be widespread, with high levels of household debt. Palestinian refugees’ households have historically relied on small-scale commerce, skilled labour, and public-sector employment; however, these sectors have largely collapsed during the conflict.727

The camps of Yarmouk, Ein el Tal, and Dera’a together hosted approximately one third of the Palestinian refugee population in the country.728 Despite ongoing efforts to rehabilitate them, 729 they have remained largely destroyed or damaged.730 As of December 2025, living conditions in these camps were severe, with many families residing in structurally compromised shelters and with limited access to adequate sanitation.731 Reconstruction efforts have been slow and uneven, as the removal and looting of building materials has further hindered progress. 732 As of December 2025, more than half of Syria’s sub-districts remained contaminated by explosive remnants of war, including in densely populated areas where many Palestine refugees reside.733

Despite extensive destruction of Palestine refugee camps –with partially destroyed housing and limited access to basic infrastructure such as electricity, water, healthcare–734 return movements to and within Syria have increased significantly following the fall of the Bashar al-Assad government in 2025.735 Returns were primarily driven by deteriorating living conditions in displacement, including inability to afford rent, as well as precarious legal status abroad,

alongside pull factors such as family reunification.736 According to UNRWA data, more than 42 000 Palestine refugees had returned to heavily affected camps by November 2025, compared to 12 638 in December 2024.737 Over 29 000 returns were recorded in the first half of 2025 alone, more than twice the total recorded over the previous five years combined.738

Over the years, some Palestinians have moved out of the camps to large informal settlements in rural areas.739 While UNRWA provides services in the camps, only a limited range of services are offered in such informal settlements. As a result, Palestinians living outside the camps or in informal settlements must either travel to the camps to access these services or rely on public services provided by the authorities.740

Access to UNRWA and provision of essential services

Palestinian refugees in Syria access services through both Syrian state institutions and UNRWA programmes.741 Palestinians registered with GAPAR were entitled to the same access to public services and employment as Syrian nationals. However, the Syrian conflict has significantly reduced the capacity and quality of public service provision across the country.742 UNRWA provides essential services to Palestine Refugees in Syria,743 constituting the backbone of service provision.744 Although under severe fiscal strain, parallel services have not emerged at sufficient scale to fill the gap.745 For more information on UNRWA's operations in Syria and on UNRWA's current funding overview, see April 2026 EUAA Query on UNRWA's ability to fulfil its mandate across its areas of operation.

Palestinian refugees internally displaced in Syria continued to face high levels of vulnerability, according to a survey conducted by UNRWA in October 2025. The survey indicates that 81 % of such households rely on humanitarian assistance to meet basic needs, while 55 % report difficulties in covering essential living costs. Many households reside in overcrowded or substandard housing, with irregular access to electricity, and access to healthcare remaining uneven, particularly for vulnerable groups. Female-headed households were found to have higher dependency ratios and more limited income-generating opportunities. The findings further indicated that most internally displaced households continue to rely heavily on UNRWA services.746

UNRWA has nevertheless experienced chronic underfunding for over a decade and currently describes its financial situation as an 'existential crisis'.747 With basic services remaining scarce and the security situation fragile, UNRWA's financial difficulties are increasingly limiting its capacity to sustain assistance, thereby weakening a last-resort safety net for Palestinians in Syria.748 A humanitarian organisation interviewed by DIS in 2025 stated that funding shortfall has had a significant impact on the provision of healthcare and education. According to the same source, UNRWA faced widespread criticism from Palestine refugees from Syria during community meetings and on social media for failing to meet its mandate, including in the provision of cash assistance and food support.749 In addition, UNRWA's free legal assistance programme — which covers issues such as civil documentation and gender-based violence cases— was suspended for several months over 2024-2025, as the Agency did not have sufficient funding to cover volunteer lawyers' transportation costs, court fees, and other related expenses. Beyond its impact on service delivery, the funding shortfall has also affected approximately 2 500 locally recruited UNRWA staff, who reportedly continued frontline work and

community engagement despite uncertainty over salaries and contract renewals.750

Despite these financial constraints, according to both UNOCHA751 and UNRWA, for the year 2026, the Agency would continue to prioritise the delivery of essential humanitarian assistance, especially for the most vulnerable Palestine refugees. Such support includes cash assistance for basic needs, food security and livelihoods assistance, sanitation services, hygiene items, and dignity kits, as well as assistance for shelter repairs and other essential non-food items in heavily conflict-affected camps, particularly Dera'a, Ein el Tal, and Yarmouk.752

Palestine refugees returning to conflict-affected areas from abroad or from internal displacement may access UNRWA services upon reactivating or transferring their registration. Returnees remain eligible for healthcare, education, protection and reintegration assistance, subject to funding availability.753 UNRWA also provides reintegration cash assistance. At the same time, those who remain displaced continue to rely heavily on the Agency for essential support, including multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) and protection services, such as legal aid to address barriers to obtaining or regularising civil documentation and legal status.754

Security and governance in camps

The Syrian authorities are in charge of security inside the camps. Police stations are present in the camps, although their operational capacity is reportedly limited, reflecting broader weaknesses in policing and governance throughout Syria.755

The collapse of former security and governance structures created uncertainty regarding governance arrangements in Palestinian camps. In response, local committees, municipal bodies and community networks had increasingly assumed responsibilities relating to dispute resolution, community coordination and assistance to returnees. Governance structures currently involve a combination of state institutions, local actors and humanitarian organisations, sometimes with overlapping responsibilities and unclear coordination mechanisms.756 Uncertainty regarding the future of Palestinian camps, combined with ongoing insecurity and destruction, has contributed to a broader sense of instability among Palestinian refugees in Syria.757

Treatment of Palestinians by the transitional government

Palestinians are generally able to move freely and reside throughout Syria, without reported restrictions linked to their status or background. There are no reports indicating that Palestinians are treated differently from Syrians at checkpoints. Access to UNRWA camps does not require documentation, although some camps maintain government checkpoints. Certain areas, particularly near military installations and airports, remain sensitive for all residents.758, 759, 760 The socio-economic hardship affecting Palestinians largely reflects the broader deterioration of living conditions across Syria. However, Palestinians remain subject to restrictions on property ownership, as they are not permitted to own agricultural, industrial or commercial real estate.761

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