Overview

Arroub camp is located in the southern part of the West Bank between Bethlehem and Hebron. It is situated mainly within Area B, although the section along Road 60 falls within Area C. An Israeli watchtower is located immediately outside the camp. Arroub camp has one of the highest numbers of incursions of all refugee camps in the West Bank. Clashes are frequent, as is the use of tear gas, sound bombs and plastic-coated metal bullets by Israeli security forces (ISF). Arrests and the detention of children in Israeli prisons are not infrequent during these clashes.

As with other camps in the West Bank, Arroub is characterized by high unemployment, overcrowding and poor living conditions. Many refugees continue to live in substandard shelters. The sewerage and storm-water network is in need of rehabilitation and contributes to flooding in some parts of the camp during the winter months.

UNRWA in Arroub camp

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Information</th>
<th>UNRWA in Arroub camp</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Established: 1949</td>
<td>Main UNRWA installations:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Size: .24 sq km</td>
<td>• Four schools</td>
</tr>
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<td>• Population before 1967 (OCHA): 8,353</td>
<td>• One health centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Estimated population (PCBS): 9,850</td>
<td>• One distribution centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Registered persons (UNRWA): 12,000</td>
<td>UNRWA employees working in Arroub camp:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Estimated density: 50,000 per sq km</td>
<td>• Education: 91</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Places of origin: 30 villages in Ramleh, Gaza and the area west of Hebron</td>
<td>• Health: 14</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Relief and Social Services: 2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sanitation services: 12</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Administration: 6</td>
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Education

There are four UNRWA schools in the camp that serve a total of roughly 2,000 children. In 2014, UNRWA reconstructed the Arroub Preparatory Boys’ School and added extra classrooms in order to address overcrowding issues. The schools in Arroub include libraries and computer and science laboratories. Psychosocial support is available and remedial classes in Arabic and mathematics are offered on Saturdays. However, there is a lack of organized after-school activities, which would otherwise benefit the children of Arroub camp.

Health

The health centre in Arroub provides primary health care including reproductive health, infant and child care, immunizations, screening and medical check-ups, and treatment of communicable and non-communicable diseases. Psychosocial counselling and family and child protection are also available at the health centre. A dentist is available twice per week. The centre lacks an x-ray machine as well as physiotherapy services, which can only be accessed in Hebron or Bethlehem.

The centre has recently implemented the Family Health Team approach. This new approach focuses on the family with the aim of providing comprehensive, continuous care. The Family Health Team has improved patient flow and reduced the number of daily consultations that each doctor performs, though this number remains above 100. An electronic health information system for patient files has also been implemented. This system has increased the accuracy of data and health information, as well as health service efficiency in the centre.
Relief, Social Services and Emergency Response

Through the Social Safety Net Programme, UNRWA provides food parcels to some 700 impoverished refugees, which is the equivalent to 6 per cent of registered persons in the camp. Social workers in the camp also conduct home visits to identify cases that require additional support. UNRWA works with a number of community-based organizations in the camp in order to implement social services for vulnerable groups including the elderly and persons with disabilities.

The Emergency Cash for Work Programme assists food insecure families by offering three-month work opportunities inside the camp. The family receives a cash subsidy in return for their work, helping them to meet their basic food needs. The projects are designed to benefit the camp community as a whole. These have included constructing Arroub Park, building retaining walls, and carrying out road repairs.

Through the UNRWA Crisis Intervention Unit, UNRWA also provides financial assistance to residents whose shelters have been damaged during ISF incursions. This includes the repair of broken doors and windows, as well as other damages. The unit also refers victims to services such as mental health counselling and legal assistance.

Environmental Health

The UNRWA sanitation foreman conducts daily water examinations and manages the team of sanitation workers. Eleven sanitation workers are employed in Arroub camp, each managing a certain segment of the camp. These workers collect waste from the shelters and transport it to containers spread around the camp. In addition to handling solid waste, the workers also maintain the sewerage and storm-water network. Due to the poor condition of the sewerage network, pipes require continuous maintenance by the sanitation workers.

Main Challenges

ISF Incursions and Clashes

The camp’s location leads to frequent incursions by the ISF, which in turn often result in clashes between the ISF and the youth in the camp. Incursions and clashes have recently increased in number, resulting in arrests and exposing camp residents to tear gas, sound bombs and the use of bullets. In 2014, two adults were killed and 255 injured during such ISF operations. Out of the 79 persons detained, 17 were minors.

Children in the camp are especially vulnerable to this violence. As a result, UNRWA has established specially designed group counselling in order to support the most affected minors.

Unemployment

Unemployment and poverty continue to affect the lives of a significant proportion of Arroub residents. The construction of the West Bank Barrier has blocked access to the labour market in Israel, where many of the residents previously worked. The ISF presence at the camp entrance, as well as mobile checkpoints in the area, further aggravate the situation. This leads to unpredictable restrictions on mobility, making employment in neighbouring villages and cities difficult.

Infrastructure

Overcrowding and a lack of living space characterize Arroub camp. Because camps are confined to geographical boundaries, shelters are built in close vicinity, and there is a general lack of recreational and social space. In many cases, residents have had to add extra floors to their shelters to accommodate their families, in some cases without proper design. Many also live in substandard conditions. UNRWA in recent years has rehabilitated 44 shelters and finalized the reconstruction of 8 shelters in Arroub camp. Currently, UNRWA has prioritized the reconstruction of camp services and sanitation offices.

Sewerage and Storm Water Network

The haphazard sewerage network constructed by camp residents is old and dilapidated. Pipes need to be unlogged on an almost daily basis. Clogging also leads to sewage floods in shelters. As Arroub camp is located in a valley, flooding after heavy rain and snow causes damage to camp buildings and shelters. The old sewerage network, combined with an insufficient storm-water network, also increases health risks during flooding when sewage and storm water is mixed.
Spotlight: Family and Child Protection Programme

The UNRWA Family and Child Protection Programme works to engage women and girls as active members and leaders of their families and society. Through mother-to-mother support groups, women gain life skills and knowledge such as communication skills, leadership and advocacy skills, marriage and parenting skills, human and child rights, and reproductive health and rights. The programme discusses issues such as economic dependency, isolation and domestic violence. Through these groups, women are able to unleash their potential and assume their roles as active and productive members of society.

In Arroub camp, the Family and Child Protection Programme has been working with mother-to-mother support groups for four years. The impact of the programme has been “life-changing,” as expressed by one of the mothers, who through the programme learned skills to communicate effectively with her husband and children and gained confidence to begin working as a tutor to help her family through the economic hardships they were facing. All of the mothers participating in the programme have reported improved relations within their family. The success of the programme has led to an expansion of the programme to 16 camps, with fundraising currently taking place for the remaining three camps.

“We don’t want a castle; we just want a place for our children to breathe and grow.”

At present, Mohammad's family subsists almost completely on food assistance from UNRWA, which they say is never sufficient to support their growing family. “I have tricks for rationing the food to make it last longer,” says Mohammad’s wife Suzanne. “But even so, the only thing that doesn’t run out is the flour.”

Mohammad adds that the house often floods with sewage in the winter, electricity comes infrequently and the air inside the house is stifling due to the lack of windows, a problem exacerbated by the smell of tear gas from almost daily Israeli law enforcement operations.

The smell of standing water in the house is palpable, confirming Mohammad’s complaints. Mohammad explains that this is due to the fact that although water in the camp is relatively reliable, the sewage drainage system is insufficient. Moreover, he adds, the runoff from the apartments above him flows into his house if the pipes break. He motions to stains on the walls, saying that when heavy rains come, almost thirty centimeters of rainwater mixed with sewage water will flood the house.

Despite these challenges, Mohammad says he hasn’t lost hope. He recently opened a small shop selling groceries, which, despite not generating substantial income, allows him to feel a greater sense of agency in his life. Through the shop, Mohammad is able to teach his children valuable life skills, while his children are able to enjoy tasty snacks from the store’s counter.

Mohammad’s eldest daughter, 13-year-old Fathin, displays a similarly positive outlook. “I like to write stories about our life,” she says. “They help me to express myself.”

However, when her mother prods to ask if she wants to be a journalist, Fathin emphatically shakes her head. She proudly states that her good grades in math class at the UNRWA girls’ school in the camp will help her to become a doctor when she grows up.

Mahmoud and Suzanne beam at their daughter, visibly proud. “We don’t want a castle; we just want a place for our children to breathe and grow,” Suzanne says, smiling as 2-year-old Karim climbs on her lap.
UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and is mandated to provide assistance and protection to a population of registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank, and the Gaza Strip to achieve their full potential in human development, pending a just solution to their plight. UNRWA’s services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance and emergency assistance. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions.