Overview

Beit Jibrin is the smallest camp in the West Bank in both size and population. It is also one of the most densely populated camps. The camp is sometimes referred to as al-Azza Camp, as many of the residents are members of the Azza family. The camp has one main street, approximately two hundred and fifty metres long, that runs through the entire camp. In addition to the lack of services and overcrowding, Beit Jibrin also suffers from insufficient water and sanitation infrastructure.

The camp is located within the Bethlehem municipality and is close to the main checkpoint between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. As Aida camp is only a ten-minute walk away, the two camps are served by the same UNRWA camp services officer, sanitation foreman and social worker. There are no schools or active community-based organizations (CBOs) in Beit Jibrin. Residents instead use the institutions located in Aida.

UNRWA in Beit Jibrin camp

General Information
- Established: 1950
- Size: 0.027 sq km
- Population before 1967 (OCHA): 1,337
- Estimated population (PCBS): 1,800
- Registered persons (UNRWA): 2,500
- Estimated density: 92,592 per sq km
- Places of origin: Beit Jibrin village on the western hills of Hebron

Education

Children in Beit Jibrin attend the same schools as children in Aida camp, these being the coeducational school in nearby Beit Jala and the boys’ school in Aida camp. The coeducational school has roughly 1,200 students, while the boys’ school has some 400 students. UNRWA psychosocial counselors are present in both schools and remedial classes in Arabic and mathematics are offered on Saturdays. While the schools have a number of facilities, such as a library and a science lab, there is a lack of after-school activities that might otherwise benefit the students.

There are several security issues related to the boys’ school in Aida. In order to access the school, students must cross a main road close to the West Bank Barrier and an Israeli military watchtower. This area is subject to frequent clashes, and tear gas canisters and bullets are occasionally found in the schoolyard. The school organizes activities to relieve the tension and stress caused by incursions and clashes.

Relief, Social Services and Emergency Response

There is one social worker for both Aida and Beit Jibrin who conducts regular home visits to identify families requiring special assistance. Additionally, UNRWA provides food parcels to approximately 230 impoverished refugees in the camp (approximately 9 percent of registered persons in the camp) through the Social Safety Net Programme. As there are no CBOs active in Beit Jibrin, residents use CBOs in Aida.

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.
Health

There is no health centre in the camp, with residents accessing the UNRWA health centre in Bethlehem one kilometre away. This centre also serves Aida camp, as well as other refugees in the surrounding area. The health centre provides primary health services 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 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 consultations that doctors perform daily, though this number remains above 100.

Checkpoints and transportation costs make access to the centre difficult, especially for the elderly and persons with disabilities. The health centre in Bethlehem is also not wheelchair accessible. The relocation of the health centre to a more accessible location has been identified as a priority by both the community and UNRWA.

Environmental Health

The UNRWA sanitation foreman who covers Aida and Beit Jibrin camps conducts daily water examinations and manages two sanitation workers who collect waste from shelters in Beit Jibrin. The waste is collected in two containers located at the edge of the camp. A compactor from the Bethlehem municipality empties the containers five days per week. In addition to handling solid waste, the workers also maintain the storm-water and sewerage network.

Main Challenges

Water and sewerage network

A recent agreement with the Palestinian Water Authority, which provides water to the camp for two days every other week, now allows residents to replenish their water tanks on regular basis. UNRWA also provides water to residents through a water reservoir located inside the camp. However, the water network has not been upgraded since 1972 and needs to be rehabilitated due to its poor condition and frequent leakages.

While all camp shelters are connected to the sewerage network that was built in 1989, both the storm-water and sewerage networks are now overburdened by the current camp population and are subject to frequent blockages.

Lack of services

There are no schools, health facilities, youth centres, rehabilitation centres, women’s centres, playgrounds or open spaces in the camp. The only available services are located in Bethlehem or in Aida camp. Due to travel and safety concerns, however, women and children find it difficult to use services located in Aida camp.

Overcrowding

One of the primary concerns in the camp is a lack of living space. Overcrowding contributes to a lack of living and recreational space and intensifies the difficulties of living in cramped shelters. The congestion of the camp worsens during rush hour when commuters from Bethlehem use Beit Jibrin’s main road as an alternative route. This also raises safety concerns for young children whose only play area is the camp’s streets.
Spotlight: Social Safety Net Programme

In Beit Jibrin camp, roughly 325 people, or 13 per cent of the registered persons in the camp, receive food parcels from the UNRWA Social Safety Net Programme (SSNP). Beit Jibrin camp has one of the largest percentages of SSNP beneficiaries in the West Bank.

Across the West Bank, UNRWA supports 36,000 of the poorest Palestine refugees under SSNP. Each quarter, beneficiaries receive a food parcel that provides 85 per cent of one's daily caloric needs and contains 30 kg of flour, 3 kg of rice, 3 kg of sugar, 3 L of vegetable oil and 1.5 kg of powdered milk. Additionally, it includes US$ 10 in cash. Beneficiaries are targeted through a proxy-means test that assesses the poverty level of households. Roughly half of all SSNP beneficiaries live in West Bank refugee camps.

UNRWA has also sought to improve its food distribution methodology. Many distribution sites have been replaced or improved to ensure distribution takes place in safe and more accessible localities. Distribution procedures have also improved, meaning that food parcels are provided in a timely and dignified manner, while also ensuring that the elderly and other vulnerable persons are prioritized.

“I have not been defeated.”

Issa Muhammad ‘Abu Ra‘id’ is a survivor. As he welcomes us into his home and offers us tea and coffee, he glances to the corner of his living room where a large Palestinian flag is stationed against the wall. “I am a refugee living in Beit Jibrin refugee camp,” he says, “and I have been moved by force from my home.” Issa exudes pride for his country and respect for his people. He believes that Palestine has a future, and despite his current difficulties, Issa remains strong. “I have not been defeated,” he tells us.

Seventy-eight-year-old Issa was born in Tell es-Safi village in 1936. He and his family, who were forced from their home in the early 1950s, arrived in Beit Jibrin camp in 1952, two years after the camp’s establishment. “I picture my childhood as a time of misery,” Issa says. “There were seven of us living in one tent, and when the winds would come the tent would blow away.” Issa then lets out a small laugh, recalling a memory. “At times we would manage to catch the tent before the wind took it,” he says. “We would all grab a corner and try to keep it down.” But thoughts of his childhood difficulties reach his eyes, and Issa tells us, “There was a feeling of poverty in those days. The feeling of war was always with us.”

As a child, Issa attended school in Dheisheh camp, and he recalls that the first schools were nothing more than tents. What Issa remembers most vividly, however, was the walk to school. “I never had shoes,” he says. “I walked long distances barefoot. And I wasn’t alone. None of us had shoes.” He continues, “I remember asking why this was happening to me, to my people.”

Hardship did not dull Issa’s ambition, however, and he moved to Jordan to attend teacher training school. After working for four years in an UNRWA school in Jordan, Issa moved back to the West Bank, where he worked at UNRWA schools in both Dheisheh and Aida camps. A dedication to academics is a trait Issa instilled in his family members as well, and when we ask about his children, a smile stretches widely across Issa’s face – we have reached his favorite discussion topic. “I have 11 children,” he says. “Five girls and six boys.” Each of his children is married, and he has 34 grandchildren. “Every single one of my daughters studied at university,” Issa states proudly, “because I believe that education is a weapon.”

Issa then tells us that although he and his wife, Abla, have the means to move outside of the camp, they have chosen not to leave. “I believe that this camp is a symbol of our return, even if we live a hard life here,” says Issa. He continues, “I refuse to vanish from the camp before we are granted our return.” Issa is steadfast in his love for his country. He is proud that he and his family have survived the years of adversity and hardship that have been inflicted upon them.
General Overview West Bank Refugee Camps

Who is a Palestine Refugee?

A Palestine refugee is defined as any person whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period from 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict. The descendants of Palestine refugee males, as well as legally adopted children, are also eligible to register as refugees.

Palestine Refugee Camps

There are 58 Palestine refugee camps located in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Gaza and the West Bank. The camps were first established as temporary tented cities for Palestine refugees who fled their homes during the 1948 conflict. For more than 60 years, this unresolved situation has challenged the camps and its residents.

The 19 Palestine refugee camps throughout the West Bank have since developed into urban areas home to more than 200,000 people (almost a quarter of the total registered persons with UNRWA), with the population in each camp varying from 2,500 to 27,000. The camps face challenges related to overcrowding, poor infrastructure, high levels of unemployment, food insecurity, and protection issues.

West Bank Refugee Camps

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Camp</th>
<th>Estimated Population</th>
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<tr>
<td>Deir Ammar</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Elin el-Sultan</td>
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<td>Amman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balata</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total population West Bank camps: 222,500

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.