



Photo by Dominiek Benoot

profile: aida camp

bethlehem governorate

Overview

Aida camp is located between the municipalities of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Jerusalem. It is partially surrounded by the West Bank Barrier and is near to Har Homa and Gilo, two large Israeli settlements that are illegal under international law. These factors, along with the constant military presence and the camps' proximity to the main checkpoint between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, have made the camp vulnerable to a number of protection concerns. These include regular incursions by Israeli Security Forces (ISF), clashes involving camp residents, many of whom are children, and an increasing number of injuries as a result of excessive force by the ISF.

After the Oslo Accords, the majority of Aida camp fell under Palestinian control (Area A), while some of its periphery (such as the main road running alongside the Barrier) fell under Israeli control (Area C). As a result of the Barrier and its associated regime, residents now have limited access to job opportunities in Israel and East Jerusalem. The Barrier has also isolated Aida camp from the surrounding recreational area that was once available to residents. Residents have responded by organizing a recreational space on the border of the camp, including a playground, garden and a soccer field.

UNRWA in Aida camp

General information

- Established: 1950
- Size: 0.071 sq km
- Population before 1967 (OCHA): 1,977
- Estimated population (PCBS): 3,150
- Registered persons (UNRWA): 5,500
- Estimated density: 77,464 per sq km
- Places of origin: 35 villages from Jerusalem and the area west of Hebron

Main UNRWA installations:

- One school

UNRWA employees working in Aida camp: 40

- Education: 26
- Relief and Social Services: 3
- Sanitation services: 8
- Administration: 3

Education

Children from Aida camp attend either the UNRWA Beit Jala Basic Coeducational School or the UNRWA Aida Basic Boys' School. The UNRWA Beit Jala Basic Coeducational School alone has approximately 1,200 students enrolled, while the UNRWA Aida Basic Boys' School has some 400 students enrolled. UNRWA psychosocial counsellors are present in both schools. Remedial classes in Arabic and mathematics are offered on Saturdays. 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 children.

The UNRWA Aida Basic Boys' School was built in 1951 and rehabilitated in 1996. The school, situated opposite the Barrier and an Israeli watchtower, is affected by frequent clashes in the camp that often leave teargas canisters and bullets in the schoolyard.

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 Beit Jibrin 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 approach has improved patient flow and reduced the number.



Photo by Dominiek Benoot

Relief, Social Services and Emergency Response

One social worker conducts regular home visits in the camp to identify families requiring special assistance. UNRWA provides food parcels to approximately 375 impoverished refugees in the camp (approximately 7 per cent of registered persons in the camp) through the Social Safety Net Programme. UNRWA works closely with several community-based organizations to provide additional assistance to vulnerable groups in the camp. This includes support to disadvantaged women, persons with disabilities and the elderly.

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 the work, helping them meet their basic food needs. The projects are designed to benefit the camp community as a whole, for example, sewerage and water network repairs, road rehabilitation and painting buildings. Recently, Cash for Work labourers have begun supporting sanitation work to help keep the camp clean.

The UNRWA Crisis Intervention Unit (CIU) provides financial assistance to residents whose houses have been damaged during incursions. This assistance helps with the repair of broken doors, windows and other damage. The CIU 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. Seven sanitation workers collect solid waste from shelters and streets. A compactor, owned by the Palestinian Authority, collects the waste five days a week. The sanitation foreman and workers hold awareness campaigns that focus on issues such as water usage and proper waste disposal. Recently, the UNRWA Cash for Work Programme funded the distribution of small waste containers to shelters, making the streets cleaner and safer for residents.

Main Challenges

Personal Safety and Access

Aida camp residents are vulnerable to clashes due to the camp's proximity to the Barrier. The camp has recently experienced a drastic increase in clashes. The ISF response to these clashes has become more severe, often resulting in serious injuries and fatalities. In addition, several children are arrested every year. In 2014, UNRWA reported one fatality due to ISF activities and 281 injuries, of which 33 were minors. A recorded 31 minors were detained by ISF in 2014.

In conversations with UNRWA staff, camp residents frequently note that the Barrier and its associated regime means the camp suffers from high unemployment rates due to the loss of employment opportunities in Israel. The Barrier has also made the open fields surrounding the camp inaccessible, thus cutting residents off from living space they once accessed and adding to the strain of Aida camp.

Infrastructure

While nearly all shelters are connected to water, electricity and sewerage networks, these systems are old and in poor condition. After a recent agreement with the Palestinian Water Authority, water is now provided to Aida camp for two days every other week, during which residents replenish their water tanks. However, the existing water network has not been upgraded since 1972 and the camp experiences constant water leakages. During the summer months, when water shortages are more frequent, camp residents are forced to purchase water.

The camp's electricity supply is weak and overloaded. Power supply expansion and the sharing of connections is often unsupervised, increasing the risk of fires and electrocution.

Only a limited area of Aida camp is covered by a storm water drainage network. UNRWA has made efforts to improve the storm water network, though further improvement is still needed.



Shelters

The camp boundaries have remained the same since it was established in 1950, while its population has more than doubled. Given the limitations in land, residents can only build upwards to accommodate the growing population. Many structures are unsafe, as the foundations of the original shelters were not built to sustain more than two floors. General overcrowding, poor ventilation and lack of privacy have a negative impact on residents' physical and mental health.

UNRWA has recently rehabilitated seven shelters and completed the reconstruction of three shelters in Aida camp. Currently, UNRWA has prioritized the reconstruction of the camp services and environmental health offices.

Spotlight: Protection activities

Protection concerns have drastically increased in Aida camp since the beginning of 2013 due to increasing ISF operations and activities in Aida camp.

Aida camp's proximity to the Barrier means a constant ISF presence in the vicinity of the camp. This has led to increased tensions and confrontations between the ISF and the camp population – particularly camp youth.

According to UNRWA statistics, 282 refugees (33 minors) were injured and one killed in Aida camp during ISF operations in 2014. In 2013, 215 refugees were injured (49 minors). In contrast, during 2012, only 23 persons were reported injured, of which two were minors. Search and arrest operations in the camp by ISF increased from 31 in 2012 to 101 in 2013 and 186 in 2014. It is often during such operations that confrontations erupt. Of the injuries that were sustained in camps in 2014, 36 per cent per cent occurred in Aida.

The UNRWA Operations Support Officer (OSO) Programme maintains a regular and consistent presence in Aida camp to monitor protection issues faced by residents, particularly at times of high tensions when confrontations most often occur. The presence of international staff serves as a deterrent against potentially excessive actions during clashes. The OSO Programme also keeps close contact with UNRWA staff in the camp to monitor developments and assist them during periods of heightened tensions.

The OSO programme systematically documents protection incidents and monitors violations of International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law affecting refugees in the camp. When protection concerns arise, the OSO programme conducts real-time interventions with the Israeli authorities and presents its findings during regular meetings with these authorities. The combination of intervention and programmatic response in Aida camp reflects the cross-cutting approach adopted by UNRWA in regards to addressing protection issues.



Photo by Alaa Ghosheh

"We can't wait for someone else to help us"



Photo by Dominiek Benoot

Islam Jameel pours sugary tea while her youngest daughter clings to her leg. The smell of maftoul wafts in from the kitchen. "What I've learned is that we can't wait around for someone else to help us, that's not living, we have to develop ourselves." Although her warm gaze and welcoming smile do not show it, the 34-year-old was forced to draw this conclusion early in life.

Islam grew up in Aida camp during the first intifada. Some of her family were killed and others injured or arrested during this time. Shortly after her marriage, Israeli forces arrested her husband, Ahmed. He was detained in prison for four years until he was released on a medical order. She describes his time in prison as the most difficult in her life. "For six months, I didn't hear any news of him, nor did I know where he was being held," she says.

Ahmed's release brought Islam only temporary relief, for "what happened to Ahmed in jail changed him, he was living in a different world, he didn't know us and we didn't know him". Only after years of care did Ahmed start to recover. In addition, Islam's second-born, Mohammad, now 13-years-old, suffers from a severe form of cerebral palsy, which limits his motor skills and neurological development.

Looking tenderly at her son, Islam describes the social and economic challenges of having a child with disabilities as an uphill struggle. Islam estimates that there are approximately 50 children with disabilities in Aida and Beit Jibrin camps, but no inclusive and specialized services. Some of the children with more limiting disabilities are unable to attend school at all, as the only schools in the area catering to students with special needs are private and thus not accessible to most camp residents. Furthermore, while in the past UNRWA provided physiotherapy for disabled; children and adults, the services have since been reduced due to budgetary constraints.

The only income for Islam's family came from the UNRWA Social Safety Net Program (SSNP), which provides basic food assistance to impoverished families. Because the SSNP does not cover all of a family's needs, Islam wanted a way to provide for herself and her children. More importantly, however, she wanted to do something that would benefit children with disabilities in the camp.

With this goal in mind, and with help from volunteers, Islam and 12 other mothers in the two camps started a project in 2010 called Noor Women Empowerment Group (Noor WEG). Noor, meaning 'light' in Arabic, strives to help mothers of disabled children address their daily challenges and assist disabled children in the camp. The idea is simple: the women invite visitors to their homes to learn to cook traditional Palestinian foods. In turn, visitors pay a modest price for the class, the meal and a tour of the camp led by the women.

With the limited income from the project, Noor WEG has helped women address the basic needs of individual children through the purchase of items such as crutches or wheelchairs. Noor WEG also sponsors activities for people with disabilities in the camp and with the help of volunteers, organizes English and computer classes as well as nutrition and health workshops for the women. Moreover, the project has had a profound social effect on the community. "Before, people were scared to take their disabled child out in public, it was seen as taboo," Islam explains, "but little by little, people are becoming more comfortable with the idea that a disability is not a shame on the child or family."

While they ultimately need a specialized public school for children with disabilities in the camp, Islam and the women of Noor WEG are working to expand the project, and hope in the meantime to use the additional income to offset the cost of their children's special education. Following her own advice, Islam and the women of Noor WEG are not waiting for anyone else to solve their problems.

General Overview West Bank Refugee Camps

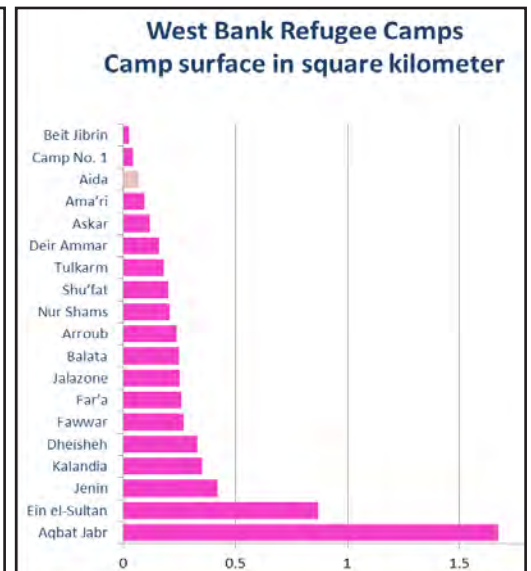
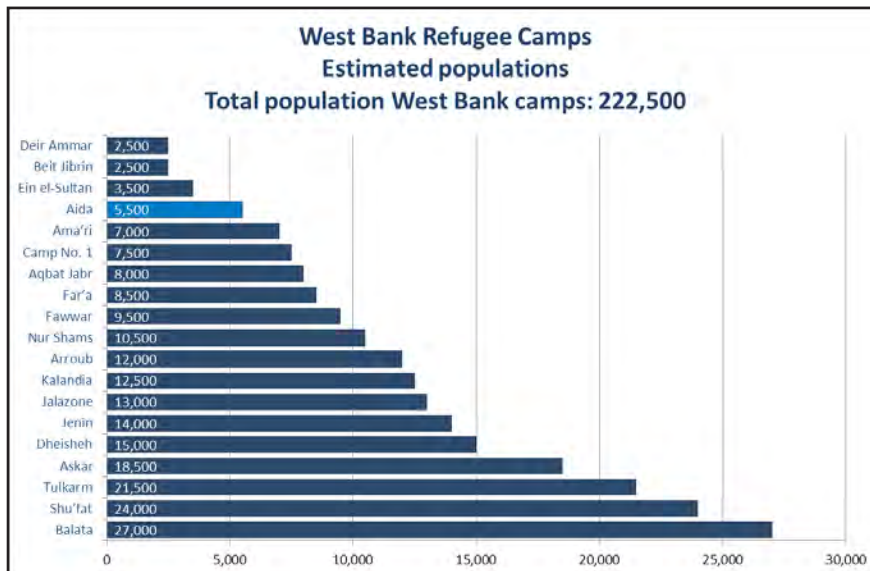
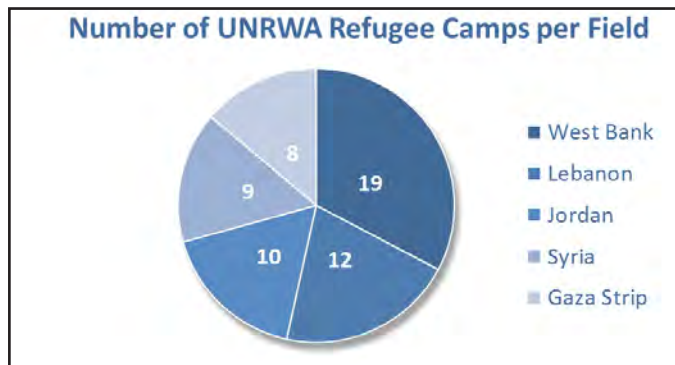
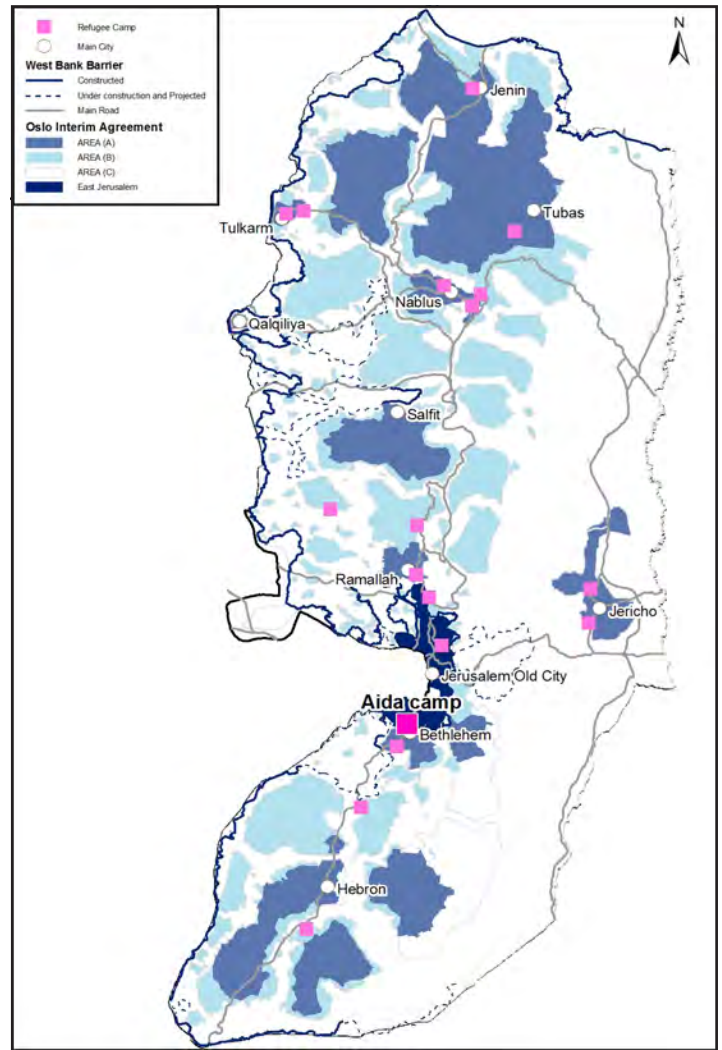
Who is a Palestine Refugee?

A Palestine refugee is defined as any person whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period of 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.



united nations relief and works agency
for palestine refugees in the near east

www.unrwa.org

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 some 5 million 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.