



Photo by Dominiek Benoot

profile: aqbat jabr camp

jericho governorate

Overview

Aqbat Jabr camp, located southwest of Jericho in the Jordan valley, is the largest camp in the West Bank by surface area. Prior to the 1967 hostilities, it was also one of the most populated camps, with approximately 30,000 refugees. During the 1967 hostilities, around 25,000 residents fled. Currently, the camp shelters 8,000 refugees, making it one of the least densely populated camps in the West Bank. Despite this, the camp's large surface area and the climate of the Jordan Valley pose several challenges, including insufficient waste removal and flooding during winter.

In the absence of a sewerage network, residents use percolation pits that cause a wide range of problems and hazardous living conditions, especially during floods. In addition, residents struggle with high unemployment and poor shelter conditions. The camp has several active NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) that target different groups in the camp, especially women and youth. While boys have the chance to play sport in a recently-built football stadium, there are limited areas where young women and girls can be active and socialize.

Most of the camp is under full Palestinian control (Area A), with only a small part under Israeli control (Area C), the majority of which is agricultural land. Raising animals is an important source of income for many Bedouin families living in the camp.

UNRWA in Aqbat Jabr camp

General information

- **Established:** 1948
- **Size:** 1.67 sq km
- **Population before 1967 (OCHA):** 28,780
- **Estimated population (PCBS):** 8,600
- **Registered persons (UNRWA):** 8,000
- **Estimated density:** 4,790 per sq km
- **Places of origin:** Mainly from Jaffa, Gaza, and the area west of Hebron

UNRWA in Aqbat Jabr camp

Main UNRWA installations:

- Two schools
- One health centre
- One water treatment plant

UNRWA employees working in Aqbat Jabr camp:

- Education: 60
- Health: 16
- Relief and Social Services: 3
- Sanitation services: 10
- Administration: 2
- Water filtration plant: 2

Education

Aqbat Jabr camp has two UNRWA schools, with each serving approximately 800 students from first to ninth grade. The UNRWA Aqbat Jabr Girls' School was constructed in 2007, with a third floor added in 2012, the same year the UNRWA Aqbat Jabr Boys' School was built. The schools in Aqbat Jabr have a number of facilities, including a library and computer and science laboratories.

UNRWA psychosocial counsellors are present in the camp's schools. To assist under-achieving children, remedial classes in Arabic and mathematics are offered on Saturdays. However, there is a lack of after-school activities that might benefit school children. Due to extreme heat during the long summers in Jericho, both schools require air conditioning in the classrooms as well as shelters to provide shade in the schoolyards.

Health

Aqbat Jabr camp has one health centre that 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. UNRWA offers psychosocial counselling and family and child protection services. The health centre's buildings were constructed in the 1950s. Reconstruction is planned for 2015.

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 of consultations that doctors perform, though this number remains high. An electronic health information system for patient files has also been implemented. This system increases the accuracy of data and health information, as well as health service efficiency in the centre.

A common health risk specific to the Jericho area is leishmaniasis, a disease caused by the bite of sand flies. UNRWA cooperates with the Ministry of Health each year to eradicate these flies.





Photo by Dominiek Benoot

Relief, Social Services and Emergency Response

Through the Social Safety Net Programme, UNRWA provides food parcels to approximately 985 impoverished refugees in Aqbat Jabr camp and Ein el-Sultan, the other camp in the Jordan Valley. This is equivalent to about 9 per cent of the registered refugees in both camps.

The Emergency Cash for Work programme assists food insecure families by offering them 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 and include building concrete pavements and sidewalks as well as painting camp walls.

UNRWA works closely with CBOs in the camp to address specific issues faced by camp residents. This includes raising awareness about gender-based violence and diabetes, as well as organizing activities for the elderly, youth and persons with disabilities. The Women's Centre has a successful micro-credit programme funded by UNRWA, that gives women the opportunity to work.

Environmental Health

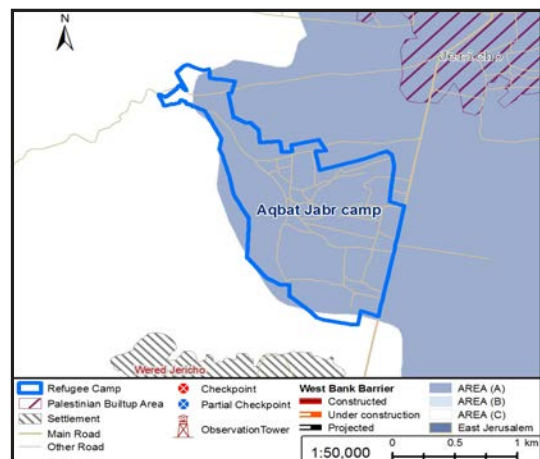
The UNRWA sanitation foreman conducts daily water examinations and manages the team of sanitation workers. Nine sanitation workers collect the solid waste from streets and shelters and transport it to containers spread around the camp. However, due to the camp's large surface area, they are not able to reach all the areas on a daily basis. Waste is transferred to a dumpsite by trucks from Jericho Municipality every three days. An UNRWA tractor also removes waste, although the tractor suffers from frequent breakdowns. Due to the warm climate, uncollected solid waste quickly begins to smell. As a result, residents often resort to burning the solid waste, producing toxic smoke that is dangerous for residents' health and can lead to respiratory diseases.

Aqbat Jabr camp is the only camp in the West Bank with an UNRWA water treatment plant. This plant filters water from a nearby spring. Water availability improved after a new water network was completed in 2013; however, residents complain about the high salinity of the water. The camp also houses an UNRWA water testing laboratory that tests the water quality of all central West Bank camps on a monthly basis.

Main Challenges

Shelters

Many shelters are old, lack proper ventilation and experience humidity issues during winter. In recent years, UNRWA has rehabilitated 50 shelters and reconstructed 17 in the camp; 140 are in urgent need of rehabilitation and are at risk of collapsing. Some of the shelters in the camp are made of mud, which keeps the shelters cool during summer. These mud shelters, however, require yearly maintenance that is often too expensive for residents.



Sewerage and Storm Water Network

As there is no sewerage network in Aqbat Jabr camp, all shelters use percolation pits that are often poorly constructed and not properly covered. The percolation pits are also expensive to maintain and are often not emptied regularly. This creates a dangerous and undignified living environment.

The construction of a new sewerage network in the camp, which could be connected to the newly-constructed network in Jericho, would significantly improve living conditions in the camp. In addition, the storm water network in Aqbat Jabr camp needs to be rehabilitated. During the winter months, floodwater mixes with sewage in the percolation pits and the contaminated floodwater then flows in the streets and enters shelters, posing significant health and safety risks.

Spotlight: Women's Centre and Community Managed Fund in Aqbat Jabr

The Women's Centre in Aqbat Jabr camp began in the 1950s as a sewing unit. While there is a Women's Centre in each of the 19 West Bank refugee camps, the centre in Aqbat Jabr is particularly active and influential in the community. The centre works to empower women through various projects and initiatives.

Of particular interest in the Aqbat Jabr Women's Centre is the Community Managed Fund (CMF). Established in late 2008 with an initial budget of US\$ 15,000, the CMF is a loan programme sponsored by UNRWA but administered by the Aqbat Jabr Women's Centre, and is designed to transfer capital into the poorest communities. The CMF offers loans at an interest rate of 7 per cent, a much lower rate than can be found elsewhere. The CMF has provided loans to students wishing to attend professional schools.

in Ramallah, for example. The CMF has also provided loans for small business ventures in Aqbat Jabr camp, such as the establishment of two small markets.

The CMF dedicates its financial resources and activities almost exclusively to refugees, and 55 per cent of all beneficiaries are women. In Aqbat Jabr alone, the CMF has provided over 190 beneficiaries with over 300 loans, the average of which amounts to US\$ 1,000. In 2013, the CMFs throughout the West Bank refugee camps provided an average of 30 loans per month, the value of which totaled more than US\$ 350,000.



Photo by Dominiek Benoot

"Back then we had more hope, we thought we could return home"



Photo by Dominiek Benoot

Waving her arms and balancing a large bucket on her head, Marriam Rashid demonstrates how she used to carry water from a well in the mountains outside of Aqbat Jabr camp. "In the past, we used to climb up the mountain, fill these buckets and carry the water on our heads every day. We didn't have fans or electricity, and our houses were made of mud and sand." Life is different now, but according to Marriam, it is not getting any easier.

At 53-years-old, the troubles Marriam has faced are well masked by her energetic, lively demeanour. In 2002, her husband left her to provide for herself and her five daughters. Marriam's daughters crowd around their mother, eagerly grabbing at fresh baked ma'janat, a local pastry filled with meat or vegetables. Islam, her eldest daughter, suffers from a disability that limits her movement, but certainly not her ambition. "I want to finish school and be a nurse, that's my dream," she says.

The hot, desert climate of Jericho brings its own struggles as well. Until recently, water was in constantly low supply and drinking water had to be purchased from an Israeli water company, a cost many families could barely afford. However, in 2013 a new water network was installed in the camp.

Without a sewerage network, residents of Aqbat Jabr use percolation pits, which are costly to maintain and often unsanitary. "It's just not healthy, the water, the sewage, the environment here - I worry that my children will become sick," she says.

Her fear is not unfounded. She explains that a neighbour's child recently died from meningitis, a disease sometimes linked to viruses carried in sewage-polluted water. Sixteen-year-old Sundos adds that last year, her five-year-old cousin nearly fell into an open percolation pit while playing outside.

Although currently unemployed, Marriam worked for three months as an attendant at the UNRWA office in the camp through the UNRWA Job Creation Programme (JCP). However, with no one to watch over her children, Marriam has not found reliable work for several years. "I want to work and I like to work. When I have a job, it's much easier to get by, I can even afford to buy dairy products and meat, which my daughters ask for," she says.

As Marriam reminisces about the past, she recalls how life has changed. She points out that settlements have expanded in the area and that many of the services that UNRWA used to provide, such as clothing, blankets and food hand-outs, have been discontinued. However, she also notes that many things have become easier, again balancing the bucket on her head, this time as a demonstration for her daughters.

"The days of the past were hard, but I remember them positively. Back then we had more hope, we thought we could return home." Today, Marriam is unsure if she will ever see her village of Deir Aban, west of Jerusalem, again, though she is not letting that get in the way of her future. "We deserve a good life and a clean place to live, so we will keep asking for that."

General Overview West Bank Refugee Camps

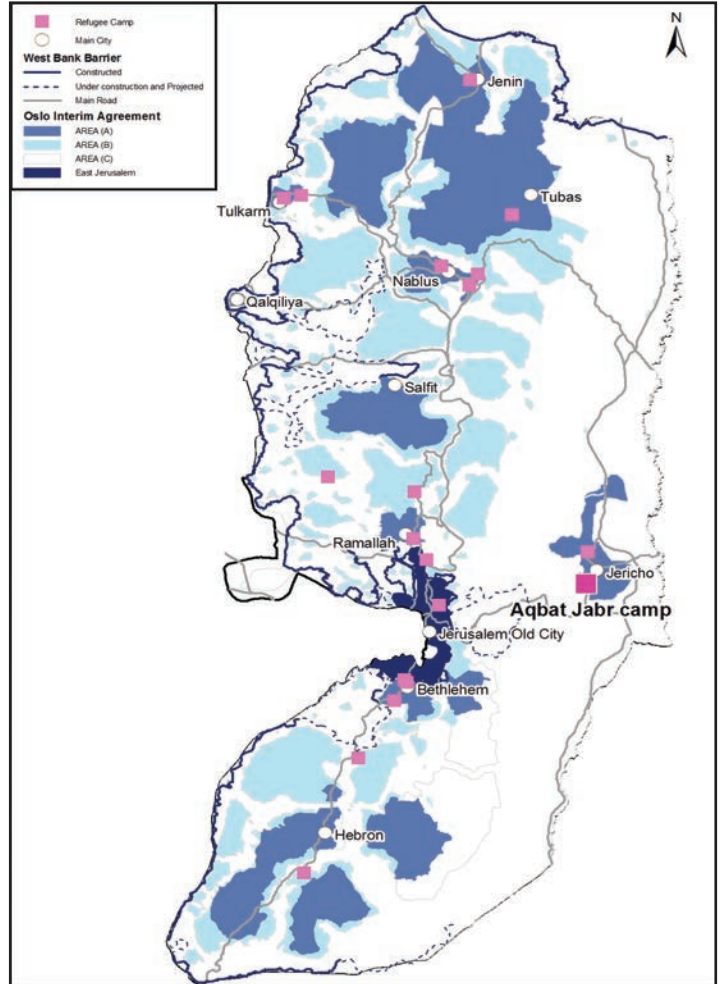
Who is a Palestine Refugee?

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.

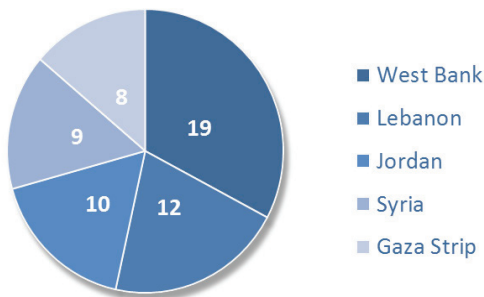
Palestine Refugee Camps

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.



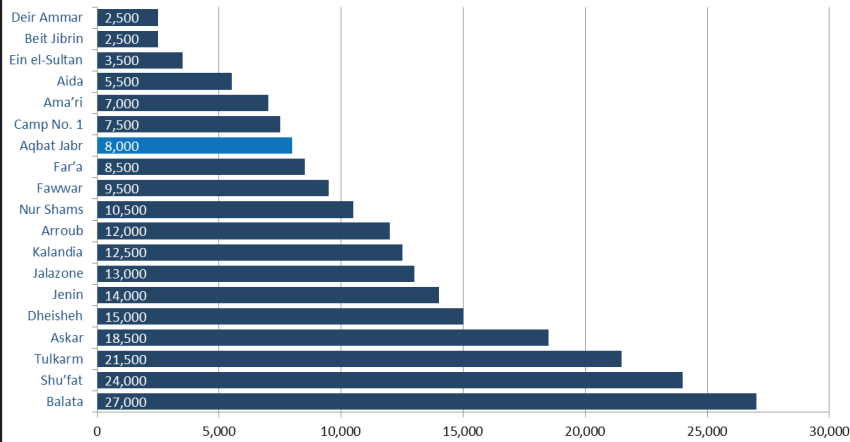
Number of UNRWA Refugee Camps per Field



West Bank Refugee Camps

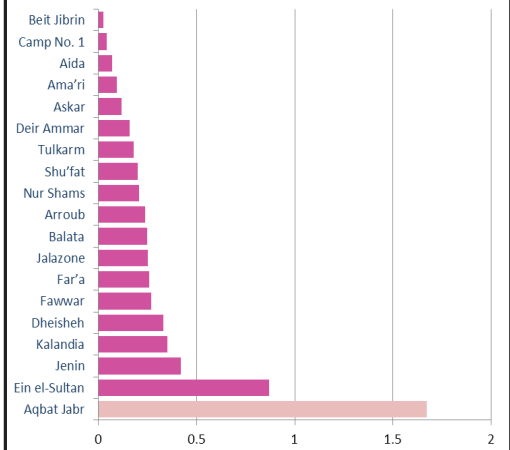
Estimated populations

Total population West Bank camps: 222,500



West Bank Refugee Camps

Camp surface in square kilometer



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 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.