



Photo by Dominiek Benoot

## profile: askar camp

### nablus governorate

#### Overview

Askar camp was established in 1950 and borders the Nablus municipality. The camp population grew significantly between 1950 and 1960. Some residents subsequently settled in an area one kilometre away that is now known as New Askar. Residents of New Askar originally utilized many facilities in Askar camp. However, as the refugee population in New Askar increased, UNRWA began providing education and health services in this locality. After the Oslo Accords, Askar camp fell under Palestinian control (Area A) while New Askar fell under joint Palestinian and Israeli control (Area B).

With nearly 18,500 registered persons, Askar camp is among the most densely populated West Bank camps. Overcrowding and unemployment are among the most serious issues. Poor shelters and cramped living conditions offer no privacy for residents in their personal lives, adding to the residents' physical and psychological strain. Despite its challenges, Askar camp has an active civil society with numerous community-based organizations (CBOs) in the camp.

#### UNRWA in Askar camp

##### General information

- **Established:** 1950
- **Size:** .119 sq km
- **Population before 1967 (OCHA):** 6,209
- **Estimated population (PCBS):** 18,081
- **Registered persons (UNRWA):** 18,500
- **Estimated density:** 155,462 per sq km
- **Places of origin:** 36 villages in the Lydd, Haifa, and Jaffa areas

\* Many refugees left the camp and settled in Ramallah, Bireh, Bitunia, and Um al-Sharayet neighbourhoods but maintained their registered residence in Am'ari camp.

##### UNRWA in Askar camp

###### Main UNRWA installations:

- Four schools
- One health centre

###### UNRWA employees working in Askar camp:

- 156
- Education: 91
- Health: 41
- Relief and Social Services: 3
- Sanitation services: 16
- Administration: 5

#### Education

Four UNRWA schools in Askar camp serve nearly 1,500 students. Each school in Askar has a library and a computer and science laboratory. A psychosocial counsellor is available in each of the schools and remedial classes in Arabic and mathematics are offered on Saturdays. As in many camps, the education of students is affected by the conditions in which they live. The two boys' schools in Askar camp share a playground, providing limited space for play and sports including after-school activities. UNRWA has prioritized the rehabilitation of the girls' school.

School dropouts are another issue in Askar camp as many students face dire socioeconomic issues at home, with some having to leave school in order to support their families. School faculty members work closely with social workers and parents to encourage these students to return to school.

#### Health

One UNRWA health centre in Askar camp 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 four times per week. UNRWA has prioritized renovation works for the health centre.

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.



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### Relief, Social Services and Emergency Response

Three UNRWA social workers conduct regular home visits in the camp to identify families requiring special assistance. Every three months, UNRWA provides food parcels to approximately 1,900 impoverished refugees in the camp (approximately 10 per cent of the registered persons in the camp) through the Social Safety Net Programme. Food distribution is problematic, as the food distribution centre in Askar camp is small and cramped. In addition to direct services by UNRWA, CBOs in Askar camp provide residents with services ranging from awareness campaigns aimed at empowering women to after-school activities for students. UNRWA works closely with several of these CBOs to support vulnerable groups in the camp, such as 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. Families receive a cash subsidy in return for this work, helping them to meet their basic food needs. The projects of the programme are designed to benefit the camp community as a whole, including the maintenance of basic infrastructure.

### Environmental Health

UNRWA provides basic sanitation services in Askar Camp including daily water examinations and the removal of solid waste. This is carried out by 15 sanitation workers who collect and compile waste throughout the camp. The Nablus municipality transfers the waste to landfills. In addition, the sanitation team maintains the sewerage network in the camp. The network in Askar camp remains insufficient for the large camp population, resulting in blockages and the flooding of exposed shelters during heavy rains.

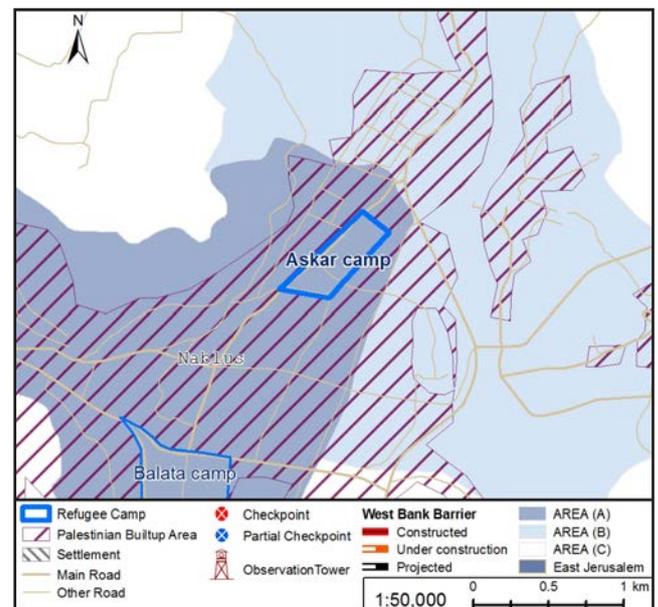
### Main Challenges

#### Unemployment

Prior to the second intifada, Askar camp residents depended significantly on employment within Israel. The access restrictions and the permit regime imposed by Israel on Palestinians have therefore severely affected the socioeconomic conditions in the camp. Unemployment is of particular concern, as many of the unemployed are university educated. An emerging issue is that Askar camp youth no longer view a university education as a means to employment.

### Shelter and Infrastructure

Because there is limited land available in the camp, residents can only build upwards to accommodate the increase in families and overall population. Many shelters in Askar camp now have more than four floors and are built on foundations that were originally intended to support no more than two stories. The shelters themselves are often in poor condition and subject to high humidity and poor ventilation, which carries serious health concerns for children and the elderly especially. In recent years, UNRWA has rehabilitated 51 shelters and finalized the reconstruction of 13 shelters in Askar camp.



#### Overcrowding

Despite some residents moving to New Askar in 1965, overcrowding remains a serious issue in Askar camp. The land surrounding Askar camp is expensive, meaning residents have little opportunity to move out of the camp. Shelters are built in close vicinity to one another and the streets are narrow, offering little space for social and recreational activities. The lack of privacy and living space adds to the strain of camp living.

## Spotlight: UNRWA Askar Girls' School

Jameela Khalid is a science teacher at the UNRWA Askar Girls' School. As an educator, Jameela believes science is best learned through its application to real-world scenarios. As such, each year Jameela conducts science projects with her students that aim to benefit the local community. Jameela's work has been recognized by various institutions, and she won the Palestinian Award for Creativity and Excellence in 2010.

Jameela's most notable project was developing an electronic stick for the blind. Jameela worked on this project with two 15-year-old students, Nour al-Ardan and Asil Sha'ar. The girls worked with Jameela to develop a walking stick that detects holes and obstacles and provides assistance when utilizing stairs. The walking stick is equipped with two buzzers, two sensors and a vibrating handle.

Their work and dedication paid off when Jameela, Nour and Asil won a local science competition in Ramallah that paid their way to the 2010 International Science and Engineering Fair in San Jose, California. The project was also recognized by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who had the girls flown to New York to meet with him after the conclusion of the fair.

The project had a serious impact on the lives of Nour and Asil, who are now pursuing degrees at An-Najah University in biotechnology and civil engineering, respectively. Jameela still teaches science at the girls' school and continues her dedication to improving lives in her community through science. With 99 schools in the West Bank, UNRWA teachers continue to encourage students to pursue and excel in their talents in order to reach their full potential.



Photo by Dominiek Benoot

## "I want an opportunity to build myself."



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Yassin Jamal Ibrahim is a 24-year-old refugee living in Askar camp. Born in 1990, Yassin knows well the pain of conflict. He does not hesitate to share one of his more memorable childhood recollections, and as he begins his story, grief is visible in his eyes. "It was 2003, and I was 13 at the time. I was woken in the night by a loud speaker telling the residents of my building that we had 15 minutes to evacuate the premises." Israeli forces were conducting a search operation whose target was living in Yassin's apartment building.

The soldiers' target lived on the fourth floor, while Yassin and his family lived on the first. Yassin recalls the soldiers shooting at the building while the target responded with gunfire of his own. Meanwhile, he and his family remained inside, unsure of what to do. After a number of hours, Yassin and his family realized that the grenades that had been fired at the building punctured a water tank, which began flooding the apartment. "We were swimming," says Yassin, "and we knew we had to get out of the building."

"My father opened the front door of the apartment and a soldier fired at him," says Yassin. The bullet missed, and Yassin was sent out of the building, his family hoping that the soldiers would not shoot a child. Yassin remembers a soldier waving him over to safety, although on the way, he passed the corpse of the operation's target. "He had a hole in his chest," Yassin remembers, placing his hand on his own chest as he recalls the devastating scene. Eventually, Yassin's family was safely evacuated from the building, but as Yassin stood in the street, he watched the soldiers destroy the entire building and flatten the structure. Yassin's home was demolished before his eyes. "The women surrounding me were all crying, but I started laughing," says Yassin. "I laughed because I didn't understand."

Yassin and his family spent the next three months living in an uncle's home in a nearby refugee camp. UNRWA then provided the family with a small apartment near Askar, where they lived for about a year. Yassin and his family returned to their reconstructed apartment building in 2004, but Yassin claims that everything was different and the memories were gone. "I hated them all," he continues, "every-one involved with the operation and the demolition."

Yassin remembers that in the years following the destruction of his home, he grew more aggressive and often wanted to be left alone. "I didn't believe I had a future," he says. With the help of friends and family, Yassin persevered. He attended An-Najah University, where he studied English Literature, naming Shakespeare's As You Like It among his favourite literary works. Yassin excelled as a university student, achieving high marks academically and becoming involved in campus organizations.

Since graduating in 2013, however, life has not been easy. "There are no jobs here," he says. "I don't have experience, so no one will hire me. I studied for four years and I was a good student, and still, no one will give me a chance." With the exception of occasional substitute teaching positions, Yassin has not been able to secure a job pertaining to his degree. "I haven't spoken a word of English for over a year," he says. Yassin takes work wherever he can find it these days, often as a server or a construction worker.

Unfortunately, Yassin's situation is not unusual for university graduates in the West Bank. "Everything is based on connections," says Yassin. "I believe that studying here is a waste of time; it brought me no work." Despite his frustrations, Yassin remains focused on finding a job. He dreams of earning a scholarship to study abroad, where he then hopes to find work. "I want an office," he says, "and the opportunity to build myself. I am desperate for work. We are all desperate."

# General Overview West Bank Refugee Camps

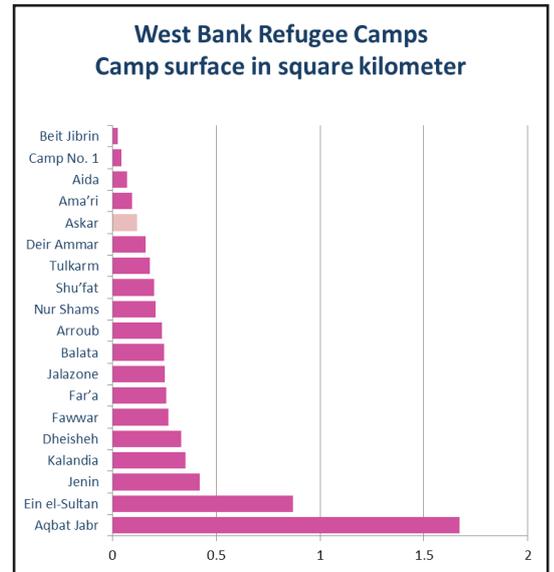
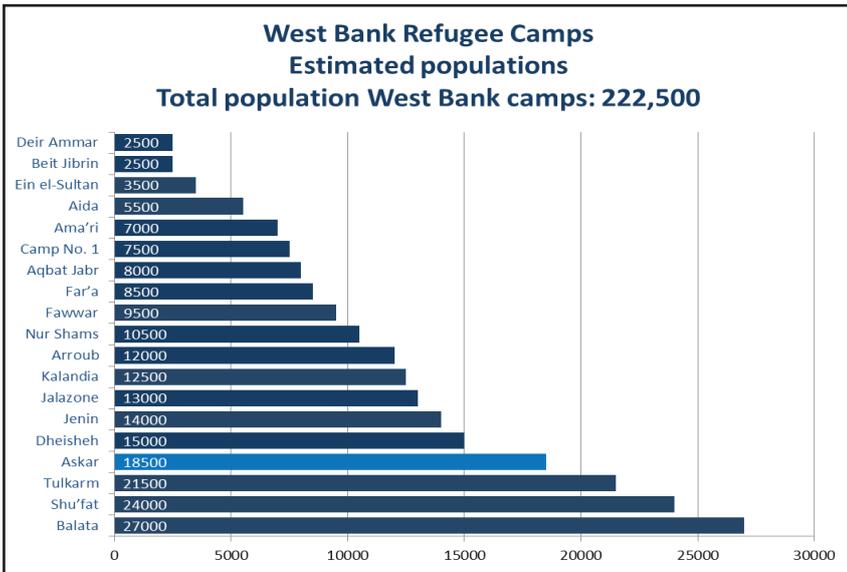
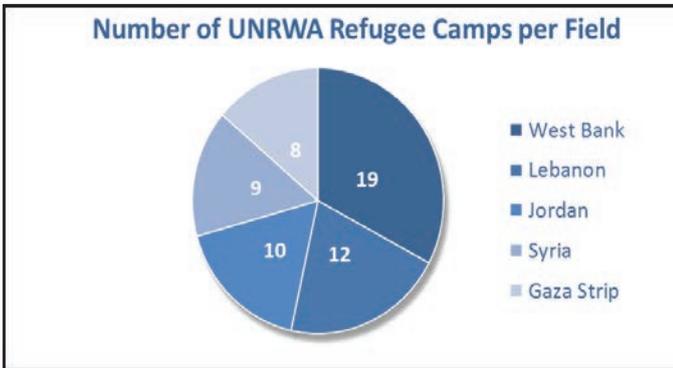
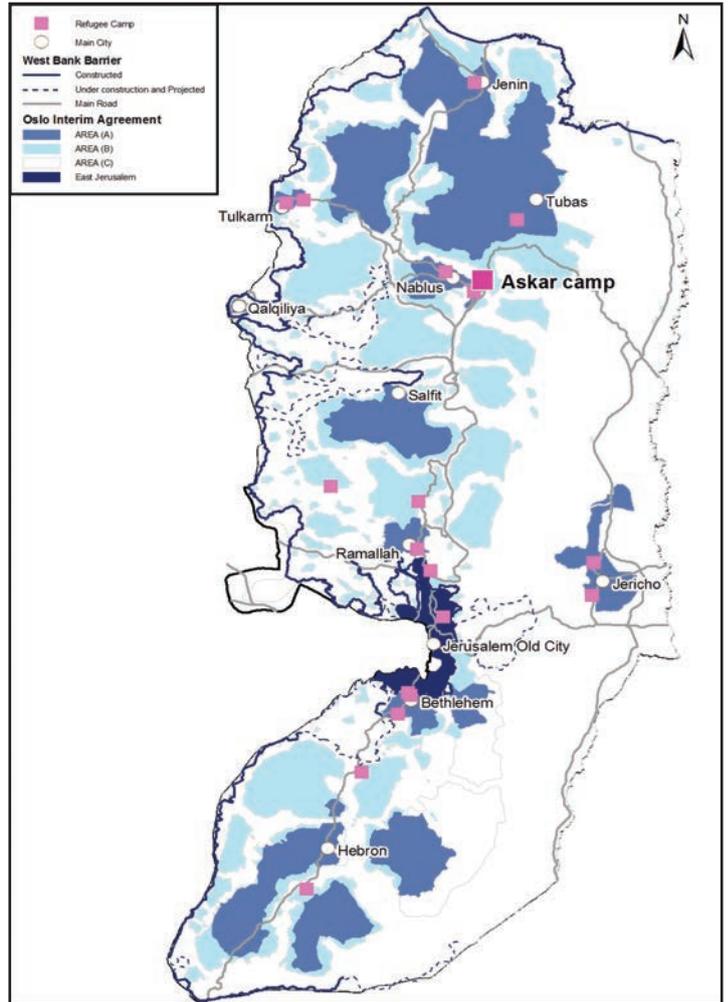
## Who is a Palestine Refugee?

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.



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

[www.unrwa.org](http://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.