



october 2017

protection brief

palestine refugees living in lebanon

Palestine refugees in Lebanon face substantial challenges to the full enjoyment of their human rights. The presence of large numbers of refugees from Syria has placed already limited resources, infrastructure and services for Palestine refugees in Lebanon under additional strain. In recent years, the arrival of displaced Syrians (currently over a million) and of Palestine refugees from Syria (currently close to 33,000) seeking refuge from conflict in neighboring Syria, has impacted the Lebanese economy and exacerbated the precarious condition of the "host community" of Palestine refugees in Lebanon (PRL). PRL, an estimated 270,000 people, the majority of whom have either been residing in Lebanon since 1948 or have been born in the country, already face high poverty rates, it is estimated that 65% of PRL live under the poverty line. Meanwhile, communities of Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS), in addition to their original displacement in 1948 and subsequent displacement from Syria, are now exposed to a protracted displacement in Lebanon often resulting in acute vulnerability and multiple protection threats.

UNRWA has been providing services to Palestine refugees since 1950 and is relying on the longstanding support of the Government of Lebanon to do so. Most Palestine refugees in the country depend on the Agency's services as they face limitations accessing public services. In the absence of a just and durable solution to the plight of Palestine refugees, UNRWA services strengthen dignity and provide crucial stability to one of the poorest and most vulnerable communities in Lebanon, which has endured the effects of protracted conflicts and dispossession for over 65 years.

In the absence of Lebanese government presence in most of the 12 Palestine refugee camps, Palestinian political factions and armed groups exert some form of control. As a result, no single recognized authority exercises responsibility, including with respect to law enforcement. This has created an insecure environment, with recurrent physical threats, sporadic fighting among non-state armed actors (such as the repeated clashes in Ein El Hilweh refugee camp) and limited access to safety and justice for all camp inhabitants, including Syrian refugees or other populations such as migrants and Lebanese citizens.

1. palestine refugees from lebanon

Right to work and access to employment

- Changes to Lebanese law in 2005 and 2010 have in principle improved PRL's right to access formal employment and related social protection mechanisms, giving them partial access to the National Social Security Fund. However, they are required to obtain an annual work permit which is dependent on the willingness of the employer to request it and involves a lengthy administrative process.

Syndicated liberal professions have not been required to amend their bylaws, and as a result, in practice, PRL are prevented from employment in at least 39 professions (such as medicine, law, engineering, etc.).

- Palestine refugees' unemployment rate was estimated at 23.2% in 2015 and Palestine refugees consistently report discrimination in hiring and opportunities for employment due to bureaucracy and stigma. They are faced with informal restrictions on the types of jobs and industries they can be hired for; with 36% employed in elementary occupations such as agricultural labourers, sales and service workers, cleaners, etc.



PRL unemployment is estimated at **23.2%** in 2015

refugees are often unable to access better paid positions and are paid less than their Lebanese counter-parts for the same work.



only **61%** of PRL children between the ages of 16 to 18 are enrolled in school

Right to adequate housing and property

- 63% of PRL reside in the 12 official Palestine refugee camps of Lebanon. The camps are overcrowded and are affected by sub-standard infrastructures, sanitation and housing. In addition, camp inhabitants have extremely limited abilities to improve their housing conditions, partly for economic reasons but also due to the Lebanese authorities' restrictions on the movement of building materials in and out of the Palestine refugee camps.

- While prior to 2001, Palestine refugees were entitled to property ownership, following a change in the law, Palestine refugees are now prevented from legally acquiring, and transferring immovable property in Lebanon [Law 296/2001]. This has led to insecurity of tenure as many have been forced into informal rental arrangements and deprives refugees from benefits of property ownership.

2. palestine refugees from syria in lebanon

Access to territory: PRS have very limited possibilities to flee Syria and enter Lebanon

+
33000
Palestine
refugees
from Syria
displaced to
Lebanon due
to the conflict

- At the onset of the conflict, the General Security Office (GSO) initially facilitated access of PRS to Lebanon. However, these measures were never formalized by the GSO and since August 2013 and then May 2014, facilitating measures were removed and additional restrictions were imposed. Since then, entry visas are only granted at the border to PRS with either a verified embassy appointment in Lebanon, or a flight ticket and visa to a third country. Most of these cases are issued with a 24 hour transit visa. In addition, limited

numbers of PRS remain able to secure a visa for Lebanon by obtaining prior approval from the GSO, which requires a sponsor in Lebanon and cannot be processed at border posts. Consequently, UNRWA estimates that only 10% of the PRS currently in country arrived after May 2014.

- Compared to the policy applied to Syrian nationals, tighter conditions are applied to PRS (notwithstanding restrictions on Syrians announced in January 2015). For example, Syrian nationals can, in principle, enter with 'humanitarian' visas, while this is not available to PRS. Some PRS have consequently sought to enter Lebanon through irregular border crossings, placing them at additional risk of exploitation and abuse. Under current regulations, irregular entry into Lebanon is also an obstacle to later regularize one's legal status.

Legal Stay: PRS are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain their legal residency in Lebanon

- Since October 2015, several memoranda have been issued by the GSO, few of them accessible to the public, allowing for a free-of-charge renewal of residency documents, with the exception of those who entered irregularly. Starting in July 2017, it was specified that unlimited free-renewal is available for 6 months for those PRS who entered Lebanon before September 2016, with no penalty charge for delays. In addition, visa renewal has been allowed for PRS who have turned 15 in Lebanon using easily accessible documentation. However, the July 2017 memorandum excludes persons who entered Lebanon after September 2016, as well as those who entered irregularly and those with an exit order. A considerable number of PRS are therefore still unable to regularize their stay in Lebanon.



Living conditions, Burj Barajneh camp, Lebanon - © UNRWA Photo by Firas Abo Aloul

- Since the arrival of the PRS in Lebanon, UNRWA has observed that the terms and conditions of these memoranda have been applied inconsistently across the country. In addition, the prohibitive cost meant that some PRS did not renew their documents and were then considered illegally present in Lebanon by the authorities.

- As of September 2016, almost 40% of PRS present in Lebanon did not hold valid residency documents, with at least 18% stating that it was due to their previous inability to pay the fees.



As of September 2016

some
40%
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in Lebanon didn't
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residency documents

Civil Registration: the impact of lack of legal status

- Until October 2017, a valid legal status was a prerequisite for most civil registration processes in Lebanon. Difficulties in obtaining legal residency documents had a wide-reaching impact for PRS. Of particular concern is the registration of newborns, marriages and divorces. Based on a circular issued by the Ministry of Interior on October 2017, valid legal residency is no longer required for birth and marriage registration.

- Since 2011, almost 2,500 PRS new births were recorded by UNRWA in Lebanon. Using conservative estimates, at least a third of parents could not finalize the registration process in Lebanon, mainly due to the costs, lack of valid legal status and/or lack of required documentation (IDs, marriage certificates, etc.). In addition, more than a third of the parents registered their newborn children in Syria, some of whom did so to avoid the registration process in Lebanon. UNRWA is closely monitoring the implementation of the October 2017 circular to avoid obstacles to marriage and birth registration which would result in the emergence of 'undocumented' Palestine refugees, leading to challenges in accessing education outside of UNRWA, gaining employment, moving outside the country and marrying.



61%
of PRS
fear
deportation
which causes some
to self-impose
limitations on their
movements

Access to services and vulnerability to abuse

- The scarcity of livelihood opportunities for Palestine refugees, as well as their extreme reliance on debt, charity and humanitarian assistance, has resulted in 89% of PRS in Lebanon living in poverty, unable to meet their basic food and non-food needs, including 9% in extreme poverty. In 2016, 78% of PRS families in Lebanon did not have a single working family member, severely reducing their resilience and coping capacity. The financial instability of PRS augments associated protection risks, such as exploitation, abuse and negative coping mechanisms, including child labour and child marriage.

- The lack of valid legal status, lack of up-to-date civil registration

documents and restriction of movement severely limit access to services for PRS and also contribute to increased protection risks.



Palestine refugee from Syria working in a juice shop in North Lebanon
© 2016 UNRWA Photo by Maysoun Mustafa

Freedom of movement and migration

- PRS without valid legal status face limitations to their freedom of movement, mainly due to the fear of arrest at checkpoints and detention. Many of those with expired visas have also been issued with "departure orders". While these orders have not been actively enforced, the erosion of the protective environment for PRS means that 61% of

93%
of PRS households
rely on UNRWA
assistance as their
main source of
livelihood

PRS report fear of deportation which causes some to limit their movements and avoid approaching the authorities for civil registration or other services.

- In order to move in and out of some Palestine refugee camps (notably Nahr el-Bared, Ein el-Hilweh and the camps in Tyre Area), a permit is required for which a valid legal status is often a pre-requisite. Therefore, some PRS living in these areas without valid legal status in Lebanon do not leave the camps for fear of being apprehended.

- UNRWA records indicate that migration to third countries and small numbers of returns to Syria have reduced the number of PRS in the country from 41,413 in December 2014 to 32,831 as of October 2017. Restricted by non-admission policies set by some neighboring and regional countries, some PRS have been reportedly exploited by smugglers while trying to irregularly leave Lebanon, sometimes with forged documents. When intercepted by the Lebanese authorities, such individuals were detained and, in several instances, deported to the Lebanese border with Syria where they became stranded in no-man's-land. Following intervention by the international community [including UNRWA], some were exceptionally allowed back in the country. In an isolated incident in May 2014, a group of around 40 PRS were arrested at the airport and deported back to Syria as they were trying to leave the country with allegedly falsified documents. However, UNRWA is concerned with the deportations it has observed since August 2017 and is advocating with the authorities to protect Palestinians fleeing the conflict in Syria.

- It is understood that similarly like PRS, PRL are leaving the country because of the pressure of the Syrian crisis and the hope of better perspectives abroad. Some have been returned to Lebanon, a recent phenomenon that UNRWA is monitoring in partnership with other humanitarian organizations.



Palestine refugee children at the beginning of the school year in Beirut
© 2017 UNRWA Photo by Firas Abo Aloul

89%
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9%
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- For PRS children without legal status, access to and retention in education is particularly challenging as they face additional difficulties and limitations in obtaining official certifications for the intermediate and secondary state examinations. Alongside financial difficulties, lack of valid legal status in Lebanon is one of various factors contributing to lower enrollment of PRS children, with only 88% of those between 6 and 12 years old enrolled in schools, compared to 97% of PRL of the same age.

- PRS who are in need of secondary and tertiary health-care may face limitations to access UNRWA-contracted hospitals which are located outside refugee camps, as they fear possible arrest at checkpoints and/or detention.

- As marriages and divorces cannot be fully recorded, this can affect access to humanitarian support and assistance to families.

3. non-id palestinians

- There are an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 Non-ID Palestinians in Lebanon. These are Palestinians, who began to arrive in Lebanon in the 1960s and do not hold formal valid identification documents. They are not registered as Palestine Refugees with UNRWA in Lebanon [but may be registered in other fields of operation] and are not recognized by the Government of Lebanon as they do not have valid legal status in the country.
- Without documentation and legal status in Lebanon, Non-ID Palestinians face restrictions of movement, risk arrest or detention and face severe obstacles completing civil registration procedures; all of which have acute humanitarian consequences, in particular limiting access to public services and formal employment. They are also denied the possibility to travel abroad.
- UNRWA Lebanon has extended a number of the Agency's services to Non-ID Palestinians, notably UNRWA's Education and Primary Health Care services

4. age, gender and diversity related protection concerns

- 48% of the PRL and 54% of the PRS populations in Lebanon are under 25 years old. In 2015, 72.4% of PRL and 93.4% of PRS youth (between the ages of 15 and 25) were living in poverty, representing in both cases the most impoverished age group of their populations. The lack of livelihood opportunities, compounded by poverty and security challenges to which they are exposed, leads to an environment conducive for their recruitment by political and armed factions.

49%
of the total
Palestine refugee
population in
Lebanon
is less than
25 years old

- Women continue to be discriminated against within their communities and have more limited access to employment opportunities and services. Female PRL are five times less likely to be employed than males and their unemployment rate sits at 32%.
- The lack of formal legal authority within the camps has resulted in limited access to safety and justice for survivors of GBV, and children at risk of violence, exploitation and abuse. In addition, difficult social conditions, including crowded living conditions and poverty, contribute to a high prevalence of GBV and child protection incidents

1 This briefing document provides background information on protection issues faced by Palestine refugees currently living in Lebanon. UNRWA's consolidated eligibility and registration instructions define Palestine refugee as "persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period of 1st June 1946 and 15th May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict. The descendants of Palestine refugee males, including legally adopted children, are also eligible for registration". This briefing has been developed based on information collected from testimonies of Palestine refugees living in Lebanon, as well as reports of organizations working in the country and data collected by UNRWA, including the following sources:

- UNRWA & American University of Beirut (AUB), Survey on the Socioeconomic Status of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon 2015, available at: <http://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/survey-economic-status-palestine-refugees-lebanon>
- UNRWA, PRS vulnerability assessment (unpublished), 2016
- UNHCR, The Situation of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon, February 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56cc95484.html>
- UNICEF, Child Protection and Gender Based Violence, Baseline Survey, Preliminary Results, 2015, unpublished



Palestine refugee women from Syria participate in focus group in North Lebanon to learn about legal aid - © UNRWA Photo by Maysoun Mustafa

amongst the Palestine refugee community. 13% of PRS adolescent girls and young women aged 15 to 19 are currently married or in a union, and 25% of those aged 20 to 24 were married before their 18th birthday; while 82% of PRL children under the age of 15 experience violent forms of discipline at home

- Specialized service providers for mental health and those responding to incidents of GBV and child protection are scarce, particularly within the camps. In addition, safety concerns and stigma as well as the lack of confidentiality within the camps hinder access to existing services. Accessing services outside the camp is challenging due to limited awareness, mobility restrictions often placed on women and girls, and the strain on available services in the country.
- 1 in 10 Palestinian households in Lebanon have at least one family member with a disability. There is a strong correlation between disability and poverty in Palestinian communities in Lebanon, with the extremely poor PRL households being twice as likely to have a family member with a functional disability living in their household, as compared with the average PRL household. In addition, many Palestine refugees with disabilities and their families are marginalized due to general issues facing people with disabilities in the country; among which include: limited access to and limited availability of specialized services, inadequate awareness of needs and insufficient protection of their rights. Furthermore, Palestine refugees with disabilities are (like all other PRL) considered as foreigners and are therefore not protected by the Lebanese Law 220/2000 that recognizes the rights of Lebanese with disability. Women, children and older persons with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation and violence and 29% of children with disabilities are not enrolled in any educational institutions.



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 some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip achieve their full potential in human development, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, protection and microfinance.