Mar Elias Camp is located to the south-west of Beirut, founded in 1952 by the Congregation of St. Elias to host Palestine refugees who arrived from the Galilee region. Its area is about 200 sq meters and is inhabited by Palestine refugees, as well as a large non Palestinian population.

The Palestinian population currently living in Mar Elias camp is comprised of people who have had different migratory experiences, whether internal displacement because of war or other forms of internal migration (e.g. economic opportunity, the rental market, geographical location, etc.). These days, only a few Christian Palestine refugee families reside in the camp.

The ongoing Syria crisis has also led to the additional presence of Syrian refugees and Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS) in the camp.

Security and governance in the camp are the responsibility of Popular Committees and Palestinian Factions.

UNRWA in Mar Elias Camp

**General information**
- Established: 1952
- Size: 0.019 sq km
- UNRWA registered persons: 747 as of March 2023
- Total population: 1,767 according to the official Population and Housing Census of Palestinian Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon of July 2017
- Places of origin of Palestine refugees: Galilee

**Main UNRWA installations:**
- Community and Camp services office: 1
- Health centre: 1
- School: 1

**UNRWA employees working in Mar Elias camp:**
- Administration: 1
- Health: 7
- Education: 11
- Relief and Social Services: 3
- Sanitation Services: 1

**Education**
Mar Elias camp is served by one UNRWA school providing education for more than 230 children including Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS).
Health

Mar Elias camp has one UNRWA health centre providing primary health care. Health services in the camp include general curative care and specialized consultations, prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases, mental health, provision of maternal and child health, and school health campaigns. The centre receives an average of 52 patients per day. It also includes a pharmacy, a dental care unit and a laboratory for essential tests.

In addition, UNRWA covers a percentage of hospitalization expenses by Palestine refugees. The majority of them do not benefit from any additional forms of health insurance and rely on UNRWA’s support. The agency supports both secondary and tertiary health care through yearly contracts with hospitals including the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) as well as private and governmental hospitals. Despite the support provided by UNRWA, many patients have difficulties in paying for their share of the costs.

Relief and Social Services

A core focus for social protection is providing Social Safety Net (SSN) support to the most vulnerable Palestine refugees to ensure that they are better able to meet their basic food needs. Assistance is issued quarterly to more than 28 families (118 individuals) in the camp. UNRWA underwent a reform to strengthen social service interventions through professionalizing its social workers. Through this, a family-based approach has been provided to support beneficiaries, helping strengthen their psychosocial resilience and social inclusion. Community-based organizations (CBOs) in Mar Elias also provide services including social development, recreational activities, employment opportunities for women and activities for the elderly. UNRWA works closely with several of these CBOs to support vulnerable persons in the camp.

Infrastructure and Camp Improvement

UNRWA sanitation services include the collection and disposal of solid waste; the cleaning of roads and streets; insect and rodent control; maintenance of water; and sewer and storm water systems. These services were expanded following the Syria crisis and the additional influx of people.

The water and sewage systems recently underwent rehabilitation which solved a major flooding problem and provided the camp with a new water treatment plant and distribution network. Further interventions are planned to tackle the remaining elements of the sewage system. However, high salinity of the water remains a major problem in large parts of Beirut. A reverse osmosis system was installed for water desalination allowing Mar Elias households to receive potable water in their shelters. Recently, UNRWA implemented a rehabilitation project for infrastructure networks. The entry of building materials for the rehabilitation of shelters and infrastructure requires permissions from the Lebanese authorities.

UNRWA is not responsible for provision of electricity in the camp: a few hours a day are provided by the Lebanese national grid, and generators are operated by private entities. Since 2021, the cost of electricity has risen dramatically with the rising cost of fuel, making it increasingly out of range for some, and leading to changes in daily life such as not running a fridge or limiting hours of electricity at night.

Protection

As elsewhere in Lebanon, restrictions on Palestine refugees right to work in addition to the ongoing socioeconomic crisis in the country have led to high levels of poverty in the camp. Security and governance are the responsibility of Palestinian factions. The Lebanese criminal justice system does not reach inside the camp which can lead to difficulties in accessing justice. There are occasional violent incidents in the camp as personal disputes often escalate. While people move freely in and out of the camp, young men and women describe how they feel safer inside.

Lebanon’s worsening socioeconomic situation has exacerbated the mental health and psychosocial needs of many in the camp, particularly given the existing vulnerabilities of the Palestine refugee community before the crisis. Increasing stress has contributed to greater tensions or conflict within families and between individuals. Street crime, drug use and theft have increased as poverty and desperation grow. Violence against women and children is an ongoing concern, and the economic crisis has led to an increase in gender-based violence, child marriage, school dropout, child labour and overall parental neglect as parents struggle with the situation. UNRWA works with partner organizations on gender-based violence, mental health, psychosocial support and child protection programmes. The Agency also provides legal aid and emergency cash assistance and participates in activities such as campaigns to tackle harassment, bullying and drug abuse.

Crammed living conditions and unregulated building remain protection concerns, with many shelters in precarious conditions and at risk of crumbling and poor accessibility for persons with a disability and older persons. Electricity shortages and poorly lighted public pathways also leave women and children particularly vulnerable at night.

The ongoing Syria crisis has led to the presence of Syrian refugees and PRS in the camp, putting further strain on infrastructure and increasing competition for informal employment. As many PRS have entered Lebanon irregularly, their lack of regular legal status puts them at risk of detention and deportation.