Shatila camp was established in 1949 and is located in Beirut, east of the Sports City stadium, falling within the municipality of Ghobeiri. The camp was devastated during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and was frequently targeted during the Lebanese civil war, resulting in extensive destruction and dilapidation of shelters and infrastructure. Shatila camp and the adjacent neighborhood of Sabra in Beirut were the scene of a massacre on 16-18 September 1982 that claimed the lives of a large number of Palestinian and Lebanese civilians.

Initially comprised of around 500 residential units, the camp has grown tenfold since its establishment. Most of the growth has been vertical, with new shelters being erected on top of existing ones without proper foundations.

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

UNRWA in Shatila Camp

**General information**
- Established: 1949
- Official size: 0.068 sq km
- UNRWA registered persons: 11,458 as of March 2023
- Total population: 14,010 according to the official Population and Housing Census of Palestinian Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon of July 2017
- Places of origin of Palestine refugees: Upper Galilee region; Majd el Kroum, Barwa, Haifa, Jaffa, Acre, Amqa

**Main UNRWA installations serving the camp:**
- Community and Camp Services Office: 1
- Health Centre: 1
- School: 1
- Relief and Social Services Office: 1

**UNRWA employees serving the camp:**
- Administration: 1
- Health: 10
- Education: 12
- Relief and Social Services: 2
- Sanitation Services: 12

**Education**
Shatila camp is served by one UNRWA elementary school providing education for more than 650 children including Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS).
Health

Shatila 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 100 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 other 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 410 families (1,431 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 Shatila 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

Shelters are affected by dampness, water leakage, and poor ventilation, thus leading to health issues including asthma, allergies and skin diseases. In addition, the spiraling increase of population has created a major imbalance in the infrastructure of the camp that was already under severe strain. High salinity of the water a major problem in large parts of Beirut remains a key challenge.

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 electricity wires cross just above street level with water networks, internet, satellite and many other connections, constituting an extreme hazard which has caused deaths by electrocution. 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. The water and waste water systems were recently rehabilitated and replaced. This helped in solving a major flooding problem.

Protection

Shatila is an overcrowded camp with a complex demographic composition. Alongside Palestinian refugees, it has historically hosted numerous non-Palestinian residents such as Syrians, migrants, domestic workers and refugees from other countries attracted by the lower cost of living and the camp’s proximity to Beirut’s economic opportunities.

As elsewhere in Lebanon, restrictions on Palestinian 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 andPRS 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.