



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

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PALESTINE REFUGEES

WHO ARE PALESTINE REFUGEES?

Palestine refugees are defined as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.”

UNRWA services are available to all those living in its area of operations who meet this definition, who are registered with the Agency and who need assistance. The descendants of Palestine refugee males, including adopted children, are also eligible for registration. When the Agency began operations in 1950, it was responding to the needs of about 750,000 Palestine refugees. Today, some 5 million Palestine refugees are eligible for UNRWA services.

WHERE DO PALESTINE REFUGEES LIVE?

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Nearly one-third of the registered Palestine refugees, more than 1.5 million individuals, live in 58 recognized Palestine refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

A Palestine refugee camp is defined as a plot of land placed at the disposal of UNRWA by the host government to accommodate Palestine refugees and set up facilities to cater to their needs. Areas not designated as such and are not recognized as camps. However, UNRWA also maintains schools, health centres and distribution centres in areas outside the recognized camps where Palestine refugees are concentrated, such as Yarmouk, near Damascus.

The plots of land on which the recognized camps were set up are either state land or, in most cases, land leased by the host government from local landowners. This means that the refugees in camps do not 'own' the land on which their shelters were built, but have the right to 'use' the land for a residence.

Socioeconomic conditions in the camps are generally poor, with high population density, cramped living conditions and inadequate basic infrastructure such as roads and sewers.

UNRWA'S RESPONSIBILITY IN CAMPS

UNRWA's responsibility in the camps is limited to providing services and administering its installations. The Agency does not own, administer or police the camps, as this is the responsibility of the host authorities.

UNRWA has a camp services office in each camp, which the residents visit to update their records or to raise issues relating to Agency services with the Camp Services Officer (CSO). The CSO, in turn, refers refugee concerns and petitions to the UNRWA administration in the area in which the camp is located.

1967 HOSTILITIES

In the aftermath of the hostilities of June 1967 and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, ten camps were established to accommodate a new wave of displaced persons, both refugees and non-refugees.

CITIES AND TOWNS

The remaining two thirds of registered Palestine refugees live in and around the cities and towns of the host countries, and in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, often in the environs of official camps. While most of UNRWA's installations such as schools and health centres are located in the Palestine refugee camps, a number are outside; all of the Agency's services are available to all registered Palestine refugees, including those who do not live in the camps.

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