



Refugees

The Palestinian refugee problem was created as the result of two wars (*An-Nakba* of 1948 and *An-Naksa* of 1967), and numerous aggressions perpetrated by Jewish underground military groups (e.g. Haganah, Irgun, and Stern). After the War of 1948, the UN Conciliation Commission estimated that **726,000 Palestinians** (75% of the Arab population of Palestine) had fled, or were expelled, from what became Israel ("**1948 refugees**"), while 25,000 became so-called "border-line cases": they still lived at home, but without any means of income because they were separated from their lands by the armistice lines (UN, First Interim Report of the United Nations Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East, 16 Nov. 1949; see full document at <http://unispal.un.org>). Some 531 Palestinian villages and towns were destroyed and/or resettled with Jews.



In addition to the refugees, there are the **internally displaced** Palestinians, who were expelled from their villages but remained in the lands that became Israel. At the end of the 1948 war, they numbered 30-40,000 people and were not allowed to return to their homes and were instead placed under military rule to facilitate the expropriation of their land. Until today, Israel does not recognize internally displaced Palestinians, whose number (incl. their descendants) is now estimated at 263,000-300,000 (Badil, Bethlehem).

After the 1948 War, UN General Assembly Res. 302 (IV), of 8 Dec. 1949, established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (**UNRWA**) to address the needs of Palestine refugees. In 1950, 914,221 refugees were registered with UNRWA. In 1952, the Israeli government effectively **denationalized** the Palestinians who had fled or were expelled by adopting the Israeli Nationality Law. Their property was seized and ultimately transferred to the State of Israel.

During the 1967 War, about 300,000 Palestinians were displaced from the WBGS ('**1967 displaced persons**'), some 175,000 of them UNRWA-registered refugees who became refugees for a second time.

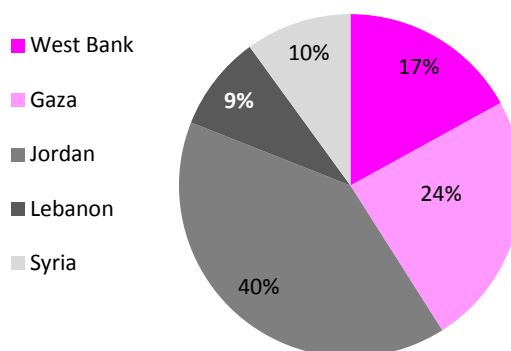
Today, the total Palestinian **refugee population** is estimated at over **7.9 million** (66% of the entire, worldwide Palestinian population, estimated at 12.1 million) (Badil, *Survey of Palestinian Refugees and IDPs 2013-15 (Vol. VIII)*), constituting the world's longest suffering refugee population. Among them are roughly 7.26 million **refugees** and 720,000 **internally displaced persons**. Of the total, almost 6 million are registered with UNRWA (those who aren't either simply did not register or did not need assistance at the time they became refugees in 1948).



Around half of the Palestinian refugees are **stateless**. The vast majority of the Palestinian refugees live in the OPT or neighboring countries, some 71% of them **outside** the **refugee camps**.

In 2016, there were over 5.6 million Palestinian UNRWA-registered refugees, constituting approx. 45% of the total Palestinian population worldwide. In the WBGS, they account for **some 42.8% of the total population** (WB: 27.3%, GS: 68%) (PCBS, *Special Statistical Bulletin on the 68th Anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba*, May 2016).

Distribution of Refugees



Source: UNRWA.

In **Jordan**, most Palestinians are full citizens and do not live in camps. In **Lebanon**, Palestinian refugees are stateless, live in poor and overcrowded camps, are subject to extensive employment restrictions, and barred from owning property. In **Syria**, Palestinian refugees live mostly outside camps and are considered non-citizens, but with access to employment and social services. In the ongoing Syria conflict, 5 of the 12 refugee camps have been either destroyed or are inaccessible. Of the 450,000 refugees who remain inside Syria (out of the total of 560,000 registered refugees 280,000 are internally displaced. About 59,000 have been forced again into exile, 42,000 fled to Lebanon and over 17,000 to Jordan (UNRWA, 2015).

UNRWA Registered Refugees (RR) and Persons (RP)

| | West Bank | Gaza Strip | Jordan | Lebanon | Syria ¹ | Total |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| 1950 | - ² | 198,227 | 506,200 ² | 127,600 | 82,194 | 914,221³ |
| RR 1975 | 292,922 | 333,031 | 625,857 | 196,855 | 184,042 | 1,632,707 |
| RR 2015 | 774,167 | 1,276,929 | 2,117,917 | 452,669 | 528,616 | 5,149,742 |
| Other RPs 2015 ⁴ | 168,017 | 72,544 | 95,556 | 40,465 | 63,164 | 439,746 |
| Total RPs 2015 | 942,184 | 1,349,473 | 2,212,917 | 493,134 | 591,780 | 5,589,488 |
| Increase over 2014 | 3% | 3% | 2.7% | 2% | 3.9% | 3% |
| No. of refugee camps | 19 | 8 | 10 ⁵ | 12 | 9 | 58 |
| RPs living in camps (in % of RPs) | 228,560 (24.3%) | 560,964 (41.6%) | 385,418 (17.4%) | 249,410 (50.6%) | 178,666 (30.2%) | 1,603,018 (28.7%) |
| Facilities: | | | | | | |
| Schools | 97 | 252 | 174 | 68 | 94 | 685 |
| Training Centers | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 8 |
| Primary Health Care | 42 | 22 | 23 | 27 | 23 | 137 |

¹ Figures for Syria are working estimates as the situation there remains volatile. ² West Bank figures included in Jordan until 1967. ³ Excl. 45,800 people who received UNRWA relief in Israel until 1952. ⁴ Includes those eligible to receive services. ⁵ Three other neighborhoods in Amman, Zarqa and Madaba are considered 'unofficial' camps by UNRWA. (Source: UNRWA in Figures, Jan. 2015.)

After Oslo, all camps in the WBGS except Shu'fat camp in Jerusalem came under the control of the PA, but the overall fate of the refugees still awaits a solution. To date, Israel refuses to discuss the rights of the Palestinian refugees, rejecting any responsibility for their plight and disputing the legality of their claims – this, although its admission to the UN in 1949 was conditional upon accepting *all* UN resolutions, including **UNGA Resolution 194**, which recognizes the right of refugees to return or receive compensation (and has been affirmed over 110 times so far). Israel refuses to repatriate refugees, given the demographic threat to the *Jewish* state, and advocates instead their resettle-

ment in Arab host countries, international efforts to improve their living conditions, and restricted readmission based on humanitarian considerations.

The **right to return** is also embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 Dec. 1948 (Art. 13 (2)), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 21 Dec. 1965 (Art. 5(d)(ii)), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 16 Dec. 1966 (Art. 12(4)) and has been applied to Bosnian, East Timorese, Kosovo, and Rwandan refugees.

Besides the right of return, **Palestinians demand** that international law be applied, including the recognition of **Israel's responsibility** in the creation and continuation of the refugee issue; the **restitution of Palestinian refugee properties**; full **compensation** for those properties (in cases where restitution is not possible or the refugee chooses compensation for losses), and compensation for the longstanding displacement and suffering of the refugees. While Palestinian refugees must be given the option to exercise their right of return, they may prefer **other options** such as resettlement in a Palestinian state or in third countries, or normalization of their legal status in their current host country.



Distribution of UNRWA Registered Refugees living in Camps (RC)

| West Bank | | | Gaza Strip | | |
|--------------|---------------------|----------------|--|---------------------|------------------|
| District | Camp (year of est.) | Population | District | Camp (year of est.) | Population |
| Nablus | Askar (1950) | 19,987 | Gaza North | Jabalia (1948/49) | 242,901 |
| | Balata (1950) | 28,129 | | | |
| | Camp No. 1 (1950) | 8,125 | | | |
| Jenin | Far'a (1949) | 9,369 | Gaza City | Rimal | 228,589 |
| | Jenin (1953) | 20,598 | | Zaitun | 147,172 |
| Tulkarem | Nur Shams (1952) | 11,658 | Gaza South | Khan Yunis (1949) | 227,669 |
| | Tulkarem (1950) | 23,549 | | Rafah (1949) | 216,879 |
| Ramallah | Al-Ama'ri (1949) | 13,231 | Gaza Center | Nuseirat (1948) | 156,007 |
| | Deir Ammar (1949) | 3,003 | | Deir Balah (1949) | 110,445 |
| | Jalazon (1949) | 14,064 | | | |
| | Qalandia (1949) | 13,730 | | | |
| Jerusalem | Shu'fat (1965/66) | 13,795* | TOTAL | | 1,329,662 |
| Jericho | Aqabat Jaber (1948) | 8,561 | * The actual camp population is much higher as many non-refugees have moved there due to unaffordable rents elsewhere in Jerusalem. ** The total number of people registered with UNRWA is much higher: an additional 736,402 people live not in camps. | | |
| | Ein Sultan (1948) | 2,688 | | | |
| Bethlehem | Dheisheh (1949) | 16,180 | Source: UNRWA estimates, 2016. | | |
| | Aida (1950) | 6,013 | | | |
| | Beit Jibrin (1950) | 2,605 | | | |
| Hebron | Fawwar (1949) | 10,275 | | | |
| | Arroub (1950) | 13,092 | | | |
| TOTAL | | 238,652 | | | |

Recommended Research Sources:

<http://www.palestineremembered.com>

<http://www.badil.org> <http://www.unrwa.org>

<http://www.prc.org.uk> (Return Center, London)

<http://al-awda.org>

<http://www.righttoenter.ps/>

<http://prnblog.wordpress.com> (Palestinian Refugee ResearchNet)

Abu Sitta, Salman. *From Refugees to Citizens at Home*. London: Palestine Land Society & PRC, 2001.

Badil, *Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (2013-2015)*, Vol. VIII, 2016.

Brynen, Rex & Roula El-Rifai (eds.). *The Palestinian Refugee Problem: The Search for Resolution*, London, Pluto Press, 2012.

____ (eds.). *Compensation to Palestinian Refugees and the Search for Palestinian-Israeli Peace*, London, 2013.

HRW, *Forget about Him, He's Not Here- Israel's Control of Palestinian Residency in the West Bank and Gaza*, 2012.

International Crisis Group, *Bringing Back the Palestinian Refugee Question*, Middle East Report No. 1569, Oct. 2014.

Morris, Benny. *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Pappe, Ilan. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Oxford, 2006.

PASSIA. *Palestinian Refugees Special Bulletin*. Jerusalem, 2004.

Takkenberg, Lex. *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

Tamari, S. *Palestinian Refugee Negotiations: From Madrid to Oslo II*. Washington, DC: IPS, 1996.

Zureik, Elia. *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process*. Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1996.