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For Relief and Youth Development

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# Palestinian Refugees in Syria and Lebanon Advocacy Paper

## BACKGROUND

### Palestinian Refugees in Syria

Prior to the crisis in Syria, which began in 2011, there were over 560,000 Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA in Syria, distributed on 14 camps and main gatherings.

Palestinian refugees living in Syria, like Syrian nationals, have been deeply affected by the ongoing conflict and deepening humanitarian crisis in that country. A number of refugee camps and neighbourhoods in Syria where Palestinian refugees live have come under attack and this has led to displacement -both internally and to neighbouring countries- of over 50% of the total Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA in Syria. Surveys indicate that approximately two thirds of all PRS were displaced from their places of residence during and after 2012. According to UNRWA estimates, currently 438,000 Palestine refugees in Syria out of 560,000 before 2011, and 120,000 fled to other destinations, including 30,000 to Lebanon and 17,000 to Jordan.

The escalation of violence has placed an increasing burden on the freedom of movement of Palestinian refugees as Jordan effectively closed its borders to Palestinian refugees from Syria early during the conflict; This was followed by Turkey, which



closed its borders to holders of Pal-

estinian-Syrian travel documents in the summer of 2013 and Lebanon in May 2015. With the countries surrounding Syria closing their borders to Palestinian refugees, thousands were forced to take the illegal immigration route, forcing them to resort to dangerous routes, during which dozens died, were missed or exposed to arrest as illegal immigrants.

Therefore, over 70,000 Palestinians have managed to enter Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon yet continue to face serious protection issues, including harassment, arrest, detention, a lack of legal status and refoulement.

## Current situation

According to UNRWA estimates, in 2023, more than 93% of PRS families in Syria live below the poverty line, and 40% of them are still in a state of prolonged displacement as a result of the conflicts and the destruction of their homes. The recent sharp depreciation of the Syrian pound (which lost 99.3% of its value since the crisis began in 2011) has increased the socio-economic burden on the population struggling to secure a minimum standard of living with multiple challenges. This has in particular increased the hardship facing Palestinian refugees whose resilience is on the verge of collapse.

It is estimated that 40% of UNRWA schools and 29% of its health facilities are currently out of duty due to the damage sustained during the conflict.

On the other hand, UNRWA has been suffering for years from a chronic crisis in securing the necessary funding to continue its operations.

PRS are expected to continue serious protection challenges including but not limited to protection risks related to issues of population, land, property, civil documentation, explosive remnants of war, gender-based violence, risk of violence against children, etc.

Recently, more than 25,000 Palestinian refugees in 4 PR camps in northern Syria have been affected by the devastating earthquake that hit southern Turkey and northern Syria on February 6, 2023. As a result, the disaster affected thousands of Palestinian refugees who lost their homes and the ability to access basic living needs. Schools have also stopped functioning due to the damage they sustained, or converted into shelters for those affected.

### PRS Forced to Northern Syria

Thousands of PRS have been forced to the north of Syria following the signing of reconciliation agreements between the GoS and the Armed Opposition groups, such as in Yarmouk, Khan Eshieh, Dar'a, Handarat, Homs, eastern Ghouta, etc., today's estimated 7,000 refugees (1,600 families) spread over three main areas of the north, Idlib, rural Idlib, Afrin (Olive Branch) and the northern countryside of Aleppo (Euphrates Shield), given that Idlib has the largest number of Palestine refugees.



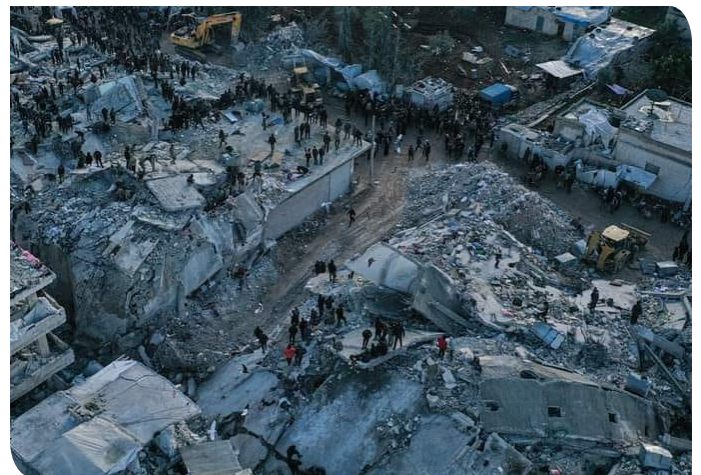
## Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

Lebanon has faced a deep economic and financial crisis since late 2019, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating explosions in the Beirut port on 4 August 2020. Currently, the country is suffering severe devaluation of the Lebanese pound vs US Dollar, to lose around 98% of its value so far, alongside the acute shortage in foreign reserves, used to fund a subsidy programme for basic goods including fuel, medicine and wheat.

More than 479,000 refugees are registered with UNRWA in Lebanon. About 45% of them live in the country's 12 refugee camps. Conditions in the camps are dire and characterized by overcrowding, poor housing conditions (5,500 houses are in need to be rehabilitated all over the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon), unemployment, poverty (73% of individuals live below poverty line), while the overwhelming majority (92%) rely heavily on assistance provided by UNRWA as a main source of income. Furthermore, food is a major source of concern with 63-75% of the camps population are worried that they would not have enough food to eat over the month of Ramadan 2023. The electricity blackout for long hours per day has been exacerbating the household's plight.

Furthermore, Turkey Earthquake has carried serious potential threats to the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.

Some sources indicate many cases of cracks in the foundations of buildings, days after the earthquake, as the households demanded the formation of a disaster management committee to conduct an examination of the buildings in risk of collapse and evacuate their



residents. UNRWA, indicates 5,500 homes in 12 Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon need to repair and restoring, including many classified as dangerous. The past two years have witnessed cases of roofs, balconies, and walls of houses falling in several camps, the most recent of which was the collapse of a balcony of a house in Burj El-Barajneh camp in Beirut on 14/2/2023.

## Political, Legal and Economic Exclusion

Over decades, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and Syria have been suffering from prolonged exclusion. Oslo Accords held in 1993, have excluded the Palestinian refugees politically and denied their legitimate rights as stipulated in the International Law, in particular the right to return to their homeland, compensation and self-determination.



Palestinians in Lebanon do not enjoy several important rights; for example, they cannot work in as many as 39 professions and cannot own property (real estate). Because they are not formally citizens of another state, Palestine refugees are unable to claim the same rights as other foreigners living and working in Lebanon. The Lebanese authorities, according to a law issued in 1996, prevent the entry of building and restoration materials into the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon without a permit, while the Law No. (296) prevents Palestinian refugees in Lebanon from owning or building.

The conflict in Syria has forced many Palestine refugees from Syria to flee to Lebanon in search of safety. Most are receiving UNRWA assistance in the country, including cash assistance, education, health care, and protection.

Furthermore, there has been much talk lately about the calls to repatriate of Syrian refugees (including some 30.000 Palestinians from Syria) to Syria, with regard to refugees in Lebanon and Jordan in particular, under the pretext of the end of military operations in most Syrian regions. This approach, however, poses an important legal complication when it comes to Palestinian-Syrian refugees. While the Syrian refugee, in the event that it becomes possible for them, will return to their own country, the country of origin of the Palestinian refugee is Palestine, not Syria. Another serious challenge is the lack of guarantees for a safe return, the widespread destruction of the PRS camps, and conscription issue.



Aforementioned narrative sheds light on the need for an urgent response to provide humanitarian support for the affected refugee households inside their camps. Accordingly, Jafra Foundation for Relief and Youth Development urges humanitarian responders able, to save no effort to support the resilience of the vulnerable refugee households through building their capacity and empowering them to access the labor market. We also call to advocate the rights of the Palestinian refugees in Syria and Lebanon and consider early recovery program in order to prevent additional suffering for those vulnerable families inside the camps.

More broadly, to support the Palestinian refugees all over the globe in get their legitimate rights as stipulated in the International Law, in particular the right to return to their homeland, compensation and self-determination, after 75 years of displacement, exclusion and deprivation.

**Jafra Foundation for Relief and Youth Development**

**Beirut 22/03/2023**

# Jafra Foundation for Relief and Youth Development

## Background and Scope of Work

Jafra is a Palestinian Youth organization working on a participatory approach to promote resilience in the Palestinian society in all its places of existence, starting with the role of the youth to assume their responsibilities towards their community and its just causes. In its works, Jafra relies on humanitarian standards to carry out its activities with integrity, effectiveness and consistency.

To be able assisting all populations in need within a given location, respect the DONOHARM principles and promote social cohesion, the host communities are encouraged to participate in all projects that are carried out.

Working in Syria since 2002 and in Lebanon since 2018 through a large variety of programs, Jafra has the mission to strengthen the elements of resilience of the communities, strengthen the mechanism for their participation and build the potential of its main target groups; the children, the youth and the women.



Jafra's main mission is also to build local capacities by offering trainings to individuals and CSOs. In all locations, Jafra Centers are gathering the stakeholders around trainings specifically designed to respond to the local needs. These actions allow an increased coordination between the local partners and empowers youth and women. Vocational Training Centers are organized around topics that are the most needed locally and welcome participants from all nationalities, ages and genders.

Jafra follows strategic objectives that are regularly reviewed and collectively discussed, through processes settled by Jafra's policies and documentations such as bi-yearly Needs Assessments, Accountability to Affected Populations, Complaint Response Mechanism. Additionally, Jafra promotes a culture of volunteering among young people and works on qualifying them to play an effective role in the community.



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