Palestinian Refugees Fleeing Syria to Lebanon

Research on Palestinian Refugees Fleeing Syria to Lebanon

Palestinian Human Rights Organization
PHRO

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About PHRO

The Palestinian Human Rights Organization (PHRO) is an independent, non-governmental, non-partisan and non-profit Human Rights NGO which was formed by a private initiative. Established in 1997 and based in Mar Elias Refugee Camp, in Beirut, it is recognized in Lebanon under registration no. 36/AD. PHRO is devoted to the promotion, protection and defense of the Human rights of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon and the wider MENA region.

PHRO feels the need to be responsive to the dynamic changes within the MENA region as a result of the ongoing “Arab Spring”. In this specific context, PHRO advocates that vulnerable populations should be granted particular attention from local, national and international stakeholders. Palestinian Refugees living in the countries involved in the “Arab Spring” are especially vulnerable owing to the protection gap they are facing and the changing political scenes within these countries. Thus, PHRO decided to extend its mandate to cover other countries in the MENA region in addition to Lebanon.

PHRO is an active member of the following coalitions: the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) and the Arab Organization for Human Rights (AOHR). PHRO’s working standards are presumed from the International Human Rights Norms, the Arab League Pacts, the Barcelona Process, the Association Agreement (AA) between the EU and the Palestinian Refugees hosting countries and its related Action plan, and on UN Mechanism & Resolution especially 194 which calls for
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Executive Summary
This research was conducted amongst Palestinian Refugee families who fled from Syria to Lebanon. The research was conducted based on a human rights perspective. It investigates and addresses the status of Palestinian Refugees who fled from Syria to Lebanon during 2012 and the beginning of 2013. The focus is on the political, social, economic and human rights issues facing these refugees. The research aimed to:

- Collect data concerning Palestinian Refugees who fled from Syria to Lebanon, through meeting with 20% of the families who arrived in Lebanon up until October 2012.
- Provide an overview of the Human Rights situation in Syria from the perspective of Palestinian Syrian Refugees.
- Describe the situation of Palestinian Refugees from Syria who fled to Lebanon.
- Analyze and present the experiences of Palestinian Refugees from Syria with regards to the Syrian conflict and their exile in Lebanon.
- Raise awareness on Palestinian Refugees' plight as a result of the Syrian conflict.
- Identify critical areas that Palestinian Refugees need support for in the short, medium and long term. Critical areas include: legal (such as permits); economic (such as financial assistance to cover food and other daily needs); social (such as housing) and educational (such as schooling...etc).

The first chapter outlines the Palestinian Refugee’s situation in Syria. It addresses their experiences before they left Syria for Lebanon, and analyses the current situation of Palestinian Refugees who are still there. Furthermore, it highlights the legal status of these Refugees during the Syrian crisis.

The second chapter addresses the different standpoints taken by Palestinians regarding the Syrian crisis. This section discusses the attitude of Palestinian Refugees towards what is happening in Syria and the reasons why they took sides in this conflict. The Palestinian Factions attitudes toward the Syrian crisis are also addressed.

The third chapter highlights the field research undertaken by PHRO. During November and December 2012, PHRO interviewed 192 representatives from Palestinian Syrian families, living throughout Lebanon. This questionnaire addressed four major areas: the current situation (legal and living); the violations that the families had witnessed in Syria; their experiences while fleeing from Syria to Palestinian Camps or gatherings in Lebanon; and finally their future perspectives and expectations. This chapter provides the key findings from the data collected from the questionnaire.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Since the end of 2010 the MENA region has experienced a wave of popular movements. It is currently the scene of deep changes and instability. At such a time, mass human rights violations are likely to be on the increase. In this specific context, vulnerable populations should be granted particular attention from local, national and international stakeholders. Established in all the countries involved in the Arab Spring, Palestinian Refugees are especially vulnerable due to the protection gap they face and the political abuse they are/might be subjected to.

Defending Palestinian Refugees' rights since 1997, the Palestinian Human Rights Organization (PHRO) has conducted, with the support of the German Embassy in Beirut, a small representative research on Palestinian Refugees who fled from Syria to Lebanon. The broad intention of this research is to highlight the situation of these refugees from a human rights perspective.

The situation of Palestinian Refugees in Syria

A. Background:

Owing to attacks and forced displacements over the last century, thousands of Palestinians were forced to seek refuge in Syria. These mass movements of Palestinian Refugees to Syria occurred primarily in 1948, 1967, 1970 and 1982. In Syria there are 510,444 Palestinian Refugees. Of these, 30.1% of them (i.e. 154,123) are living in the nine existing camps, while the rest live in gatherings, or in villages and cities. The Syrian law grants Palestinians living in Syria the same rights and responsibilities as Syrian citizens. However, they are not entitled to the right of nationalization nor to political rights. Both Hafez Al Assad and his son Bashar Al Assad, leaders of the regime, have used the Palestinian Cause for decades as a political tool to strengthen the regime’s power. The regime has exploited the Palestinian resistance and Palestinian parties whose current presence in Syria is dependent on condition of their loyalty and de facto dependence on the Syrian authorities. Thus, some Palestinian factions, mainly the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestinian – General Command (PFLP-GC), are now acting as an extension of the Syrian regime inside Palestinian camps.

Since spring of 2011, demonstrations against the Syrian regime spread throughout the country. The Syrian regime used the Palestinian Refugees’ legitimate claim to ‘Right of Return’ to divert

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1 UNRWA ‘UNRWA In Figures as of 1 January 2012’ (January 2012) Communications Office, UNRWA Headquarters, Gaza; available at http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/20120317152850.pdf


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the Palestinians focus from the country’s internal crisis. They hereby sought to weaken the opposition’s movements. At the Al Nakba and Al Naksa commemorations on May 15 and June 5, 2011, the regime and its extensions within Palestinian camps, prompted Palestinian youth to march to the occupied Golan Heights. These border marches could have potentially been organized for decades. However, the regime suddenly encouraged the Palestinian youth to march at the cease fire line during this critical time. As a result of these marches, Palestinian youth met with Israeli gunfire. These incidents resulted in the wounding of hundreds, and the death of four Palestinians on May 15, and the death of 32 on June 5. The blood spilled on the anniversary of Al Naksa, triggered outrage amongst the inhabitants of the Palestinian camps. The camp inhabitants felt that the Syrian regime had abused them and was responsible for the massacre of their children. On June 6, 2011, as the bodies were buried in the new Martyrs Cemetery in Yarmouk camp, the mourning crowd protested against the regime and its Palestinians proxy, particularly the PFLP-GC. The PFLP-GC members responded by shooting protesters. The fighting lasted for several hours and resulted in 40 Palestinians being wounded and 14 being killed. In August 2011, the regime forces launched a massive attack on Latakia and shelled the Ramel Gathering. This incident endangered the lives of more than 5,000 Palestinian Refugees and resulted in them being forced to flee Syria.

These events were strategic in affecting the positions held by Palestinians in the conflict. Though the majority tries not to interfere, as the conflict has unfolded, more and more Palestinians have sided with the revolution while pro-government Palestinian parties are showing more than ever their loyalty to the regime. Thus, the situation in Palestinian camps has become increasingly tense.

B. Analysis of the current situation

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, on 23 July, 2012, the death toll in Syria had risen to over 19,000. Ban Ki Moon repeatedly warned about the risk of “a full-scale civil war with catastrophic effects within Syria and across the region” and on the 16 July, 2012 the International Committee of the Red Cross finally declared that there was a civil war in Syria. This change in status means that international humanitarian law now applies throughout the country and all sides are required to respect the Geneva Conventions.

As intense fighting continues to rage between Syrian forces and rebels, the number of people fleeing their homes in Syria is dramatically increasing. According to UNHCR spokesperson Melissa Fleming, it is “estimated that 1 million people may have been forced to flee inside the country since the conflict began”. By the “18 July, 120,000 Syrian refugees sought protection in Jordan,

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5 Syrian Observatory for Human Rights; available at http://www.syriaahr.com
7 AFP ‘Syria in a state of civil war: Red Cross’ (16 July 2012); available at http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/AeqM5jYS-31wTcNcpQj20mnkTuSWhM4Aw?docid=NNG.0c9a2761cc8aca6cebbfc91d16f6db90.121
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Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey”. However, the governments of these countries are estimating that these numbers are in fact, far higher.

In this complex and unstable situation, Palestinian Refugees are in a vulnerable position. Accused by both the opposition and the regime of supporting the other side, Palestinians have gradually been caught up in the conflict and are now threatened through targeted attacks. Since spring 2012, there has been an increase in support for the opposition amongst the Palestinian community in Syria. According to Al Jazeera Reports and Maan News Agency, during the month of March 2012, Syrian security forces orchestrated an arrest campaign in the camps and “threatened to raid the Yarmouk Refugee Camp due to Fatah’s alleged support of demonstrations against Syrian leader Bashar Assad”. In March 2012 a Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA) vehicle exploded in Yarmouk Camp. The purpose of this attack was to target the personnel of the PLA (which is now integrated under Syrian military command). After the murder of six officers in the past few months, 15 soldiers of the PLA were kidnapped and found dead on 11 July 2012. Following this event, at least four Palestinians were killed by Syrian forces in Yarmouk Camp during a protest held against the killing of their counterparts.

These recent clashes marked a clear escalation in conflict in Yarmouk Camp, where regular protests have been held since February 2012 in solidarity with the besieged Syrian cities. Owing to a growing sympathy towards the uprising amongst Palestinian Refugees in Syria, a number have joined the anti-regime movement and a number of Palestinian youth activists are now members of the Free Syrian Army. Sheltering thousands of displaced Syrians within their camps, Palestinian Refugees have organized themselves into civil and medical teams to house displaced individuals and to treat those who are injured.

The growing involvement of Palestinians alongside Syrian rebels stands in stark contrast with the active support of some Palestinian factions for the regime. As Palestinian neutrality is eroding

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and positions are diverging, the risk of violence against Palestinian Refugees is rapidly increasing. Besides targeted repression, Palestinian Refugees are also threatened by the indiscriminate violence against civilians in Syria. As of the 28th March 2013\textsuperscript{16} the total number of Palestinian Refugees who have died in Syria was 1 130\textsuperscript{17}.

Like Syrian citizens, some Palestinian Refugees have tried to flee the violence and seek refuge in other countries. The majority have sought asylum in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. It is difficult to gain accurate statistics concerning the number of Palestinian Refugees who have fled Syria as they are especially difficult to register in asylum states, because they fall under the scope of different registration. Furthermore, some Palestinian Refugees from Syria lack IDs.

Palestinian Refugees from Syria are frequently victims of discrimination by asylum states. This is particularly the case with Jordan who has refused to allow any more Palestinian Refugees to cross their borders. The Jordanian authorities “have forcibly returned some newly arriving Palestinian from Syria [and] threatened others with deportation”. Furthermore, since April 2012, Jordanian authorities “have arbitrarily detained Palestinians fleeing Syria in a refugee holding centre without any options for release other than return to Syria”\textsuperscript{18}. The actions of the Jordanian state in relation to Syrian Palestinian Refugees are in direct violation of a core principle of international refugee law, that of non-refoulement.

Assuming that Syria is slipping into a situation of generalized violence, there is a high probability that over the next few weeks and months, there could be a significant increase in the number of Palestinian Refugees attempting to flee the country. In this case, as highlighted by a Human Rights Watch report, the risk of a repeat of the Iraqi scenario is extremely high\textsuperscript{19}. Besides cases of forced return and detention, Syrian Palestinians who manage to leave then face a ‘protection gap’. This protection gap results in these refugees being particularly vulnerable to human rights


\textsuperscript{17} ‘Bomb attack targets Yarmouk refugee camp in Syrian capital’ (6 February 2013) Press TV ; available at http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/06/287649/bomb-attack-hits-yarmouk-camp-in-syria/; also see Allison Deger and Tareq Alsamman ‘Syrian crisis moves into the camps: 20 Palestinians killed in Damascus refugee camp’ (4 August 2012); available at http://mondoweiss.net/2012/08/syrian-crisis-moves-into-the-camps-is-assad-targeting-palestinian-refugees.html


\textsuperscript{19} A number of Palestinian Refugee families who fled Iraq, after the US invaded the country, were denied entrance to Syria and Jordan. As a result they have been forced to live in the desert in dire conditions and without the surrogate protection of a host state (Rafeef Ziadah ‘Palestinian Refugees of Iraq’ (11 March 2011); available at http://electronicintifada.net/content/palestinian-refugees-iraq/6801)
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violations. Thus, Syrian Palestinians seeking protection in other countries should receive special attention due to the particularly vulnerable position they are in.

In addition to these fears, the fall of the regime could also lead to a critical situation for Palestinians in Syria. As previously mentioned, Syrian Palestinians have been perceived as privileged by the regime, while some Palestinian factions and parties are clearly subordinate to the regime. Given these perceptions, the risk of harassment, forced displacement and targeted attacks against Syrian Palestinians by regime opponents must be taken into serious consideration. Once again it is important to remember what occurred in Iraq where numerous acts of violence were carried out against Palestinian Refugees in the aftermath of the fall of Saddam Hussein.

In the long term, the current change in Syria might also lead to a reshaping of the Syrian-Israeli relationship. Syrian Palestinians could be affected positively or negatively by this and thus they should be given particular attention with regard to this.

C. The legal status of Palestinian Refugees living in Syria during the current crisis

Following the development of events in Syria, Filipoa Grande, the Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), expressed his concern regarding the vulnerable situation of more than 500 000 Palestinian Refugees in Syria, who are suffering the repercussions of the conflict. Given the escalation of the conflict and its transformation into an internal armed conflict (non-international), the legal status of the Syrian Palestinians lies in Common Article 3 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which states:

\[ \text{In the case of armed conflict not of an international character occurring in the territory of one of the High Contracting Parties, each Party to the conflict shall be bound to apply, as a minimum, the following provision:} \]

\[ \text{“Persons taking no active part in the hostilities shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or any other similar criteria”}. \]

Furthermore, the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II) of 1977 is relevant to the status of Syrian Palestinian Refugees. This Protocol complements the provisions contained in Common Article 3 of the Fourth Geneva Convention regarding the general protection of persons who are civilians. It calls for the special protection of refugees and stateless persons, as civilians. The articles of this protocol also include safeguards for the adequate protection against any attack on the lives and dignity of refugees and stateless persons, as outlined in Common Article 3. Article 13 of Additional Protocol II provides Palestinian Refugees with the following protection entitlements:

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Art 13. Protection of the civilian population

1. The civilian population and individual civilians shall enjoy general protection against the dangers arising from military operations. To give effect to this protection, the following rules shall be observed in all circumstances.

2. The civilian population as such, as well as individual civilians, shall not be the object of attack. Acts or threats of violence the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population are prohibited.

3. Civilians shall enjoy the protection afforded by this part, unless and for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities.

Article 54 (1) of Additional Protocol I states:

1. Starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited.

2. It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as food-stuffs, agricultural areas for the production of food-stuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works, for the specific purpose of denying them for their sustenance value to the civilian population or to the adverse Party, whatever the motive, whether in order to starve out civilians, to cause them to move away, or for any other motive.

Article 17 of Additional Protocol II states:

1. The displacement of the civilian population shall not be ordered for reasons related to the conflict unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand. Should such displacements have to be carried out, all possible measures shall be taken in order that the civilian population may be received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition.

2. Civilians shall not be compelled to leave their own territory for reasons connected with the conflict.

Furthermore, Article 73 of Additional Protocol I refers specifically to Refugees and Stateless people. It states:

Persons who, before the beginning of hostilities, were considered as stateless persons or refugees under the relevant international instruments accepted by the Parties concerned or under the national legislation of the State of refuge or State of residence shall be protected persons within the meaning of Parts I and III of the Fourth Convention, in all circumstances and without any adverse distinction.


Article 4 (2) of Additional Protocol II states

The parties to the conflict are prohibited from:

(a) violence to the life, health and physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular murder as well as cruel treatment such as torture, mutilation or any form of corporal punishment;

(b) collective punishments;

(c) taking of hostages;

(d) acts of terrorism;

(e) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, rape, enforced prostitution and any form or indecent assault;

(f) slavery and the slave trade in all their forms;

(g) pillage;

(h) threats to commit any or the foregoing acts.

Article 4 (3) of Additional Protocol II states

Children shall be provided with the care and aid they require, and in particular:

(a) they shall receive an education, including religious and moral education, in keeping with the wishes of their parents, or in the absence of parents, of those responsible for their care;

(b) all appropriate steps shall be taken to facilitate the reunion of families temporarily separated;

D. The Protection Gap

The instability and violence in Syria places marginalized populations at particular risk. Syrian Palestinian Refugees are a particularly vulnerable and marginalised population. These refugees sought refuge in MENA countries after they were expelled from their land during the 1947 – 48 events following the creation of the State of Israel. This massive population displacement compelled the United Nations to create a specific agency to provide for their relief needs.

Established in 1948 to provide protection and promote a durable solution for Palestine Refugees, the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) failed in its mission. In 1949 the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 302 (IV). This resolution established UNRWA who’s mandate is to provide relief and human development services to Palestine Refugees and persons displaced by the 1967 hostilities. Its mandate covers five fields of operation: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria the West Bank and Gaza. According to UNRWA, Palestinian Refugees are defined as “people whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict”. Article 1D of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees states:

This Convention shall not apply to persons who are at present receiving from organs or agencies of the United Nations other than the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees protection or assistance.

This article indicates that Palestinian Refugees receiving assistance from UNRWA do not fall under the scope of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Thus the UNHCR, the institution monitoring the implementation of the 1951 Convention, does not consider the Palestinian Refugees receiving assistance from UNRWA as falling under their mandate.

The Palestinians Refugees who fall under UNRWA’s mandate are only entitled to receive humanitarian relief. UNRWA does not offer them basic protection of their human rights that refugees falling under the 1951 Convention are entitled too. As a result, Palestinian Refugees face a “protection gap”. Thus, Palestinian Refugees are less protected under international law than any of their counterparts in the world. Considering the current changes in the MENA region, this vulnerability must be highlighted. History has taught us about the risks that Palestinian Refugees are exposed to as a result of this protection gap.

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Chapter 2

The Palestinian Positions toward the Syrian Crisis

The Attitude of Palestinian Refugees towards the Syrian Crisis

Since the beginning of the protests in Syria, the Palestinians in Syria have sought to apply the principle of neutrality, by disassociating themselves from all parties to the conflict. This Palestinian position is due to a combination of factors including demographic, political and historical reasons:

First, the Palestinian Refugees do not constitute huge manpower in Syria. Of the Palestinian Refugees in Syria, 487,000 live in nine official camps and three unofficial gatherings. They constitute 3% of the population of Syria;

Secondly, owing to their status as refugees they do not hold Syrian citizenship;

Thirdly, Palestinian Refugees have been non-involved in Syrian political life, staying on the political side-lines for the past 64 years;

Fourthly, this position was influenced by the historic, tragic experiences of Palestinian Refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Kuwait; and

Finally, this position was initially chosen owing to the absence of national reference as a result of the division taking place in their national movement.

The position which Palestinian Refugees have been characterised to hold since the beginning of the protests is very complicated. Each party to the conflict claims Palestinian Refugees support the opposing party. The opposition accuses them of supporting the regime, while regime forces say they support the opposition. The Syrian regime tried to drag the Palestinians into the conflict under the directions of Vice President Bothayna Shaaban. After ten days of protests, at a press conference on 26 March 2011, the Vice President Bothayna Shaaban blamed the Palestinians from Ramle Camp in Latakia for igniting a fire of sedition. Following this in August 2011 the Bawarj war occurred, where the Syrian regime bombed Camp Sand south of Latakia. This bombing was part of the regime’s campaign to forcibly displace refugees living in these areas. Following the siege of the camp, the camp was shelled. Those who were displaced from this camp sought refuge in Yarmouk Camp in Syria as well as in Jordan.

In turn, the Syrian Regime accused the Syrian opposition for being spies for the Zionist project in Syria. However, the Syrian opposition denied this accusation and emphasised that the Palestinian case will be a priority on their political agenda after the fall of the regime. At the same time the

Regime accused the opposition of persecuting the Palestinians, and abusing the Palestinian case to serve their own interests.

UNRWA called on its Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi, to dialogue with the conflicting parties regarding their obligations to protect civilians and refugees. He further called on parties to respect the neutrality of Palestinian Refugees and he warned them against any attempts to directly involve Palestinian Refugees in the conflict. The relationship between the Palestinians and the Syrian revolution changed on the 6th of June 2011. On this day, there was a funeral march to commemorate the anniversary of the Al Naksa day. However, this day of commemoration turned into a day of demonstration against the Regime and the Palestinian factions (those who were particularly in support of the Syrian regime). After going to the PFLP headquarters in the Yarmouk Refugee Camp in Damascus, the PFLP General Command fired on peaceful pro-opposition protestors in the camp. A number of Palestinians were killed and others were wounded in this incident.24

The Attitude of Palestinian Factions towards the Syrian Crisis

Since the beginning of the crisis in Syria the Palestinian Factions and forces have needed to take a neutral stance towards the crisis. However, there was no national consensus between Palestinian forces and factions regarding more specific steps which could be taken towards addressing developments that have taken place on the ground, including exposure in the Palestinian Camps and Palestinian communities to violence and danger. As a result, different Palestinian factions hold different positions with regard to the conflict. The various positions held by these parties and factions are listed below:

First: This position calls for the protection of camps and gatherings of Palestinian Refugees through forming popular committees. These committees would be armed with the task of protecting the Palestinian areas and preventing the entry of "insurgents" or members of the "Free Syrian Army" into these areas. This would prevent clashes between those forces and Syrian troops inside the camps. The factions which have supported this approach include: the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), Saeka and Fatah al-Intifada.

Second: This position calls for the formation of a popular committee which consists of both factional and future forces. The popular committee would be responsible for social, humanitarian and purely national issues. However, they believe that this should be done without arming the Palestinian communities, as arming them could result in the "militarization" or "mobilization" of these communities. The parties which have advocated for this position include: PLO factions, Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP).

Third: The third position is purely focused on a social, humanitarian perspective and on relief work. This position is commonly held by members and supporters of Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

The PFLP-GC stands in favour of the Syrian regime as identified by its secretary general and spokesman25. In addition the faction Fatah al-Intifada also supports the Syrian Regime. The official position of the Hamas movement changed when Deputy Chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau, Moussa Abu Marzouk, rejected "Hamas" getting involved in resolving the security situation in Syria. He called for his followers to respect the will of the Syrian people and called for the transfer of Hamas offices from Damascus to Doha26. This has resulted in the closure of Syrian Hamas offices in Damascus27. Hamas has also accused the Syrian regime of committing atrocities against the Palestinian Refugees in the Yarmouk Refugee camp28.

25 Middle East Online ‘Syrian Air Strike - Ahmed Jibril Divided’ (17 December 2012); available at http://www.middle-east-online.com/?id=145531
26 Al Safeir Newspaper Issue 12120 (27 February 2012)
27 Al Jazeera ‘Closure of the Hamas Office in Syria’ (5 November 2012); available at http://www.aljazeera.net/news/pages/32af81c-06e5-4a02-b53a-c65d893cad11
28 Sky News ‘The denouncing of the Yarmouk Massacre by the Palestinian Refugees’ (3 August 2012)
Chapter 3

Palestinian Refugees who have fled Syria

According to information collected by PHRO up until the 30 July, 2012, there are approximately 758 Palestinian refugee families who have fled from Syria to Lebanon. They have settled within the 12 Palestinian Camps, the Palestinian gatherings, and villages and their surrounding areas. The majority of these Palestinian families are staying with relatives and friends. However, there are also a large number who have had to resort to “staying in public spaces in the camps.”

The number of the Palestinian Refugees fleeing Syria (PSR) is constantly increasing as the conflict in Syria continues. As a result it is difficult to gain accurate statistics on the exact number of PSR in Lebanon at any given time. However, according to UNERA on 28 March 2013 there were 30,000 PSR in Lebanon. According to a briefing issued by UNRWA on the 2 April 2013, they estimated the number of PRS in Lebanon to be around 37,000. However, the number could be higher as not all Palestinian Refugees from Syria are registered with UNRWA.

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29 The American near East Refugee Aid (ANERA), in coordination with The National Institution of Social Care and Vocational Training released the outcomes of the research it had conducted, in a conference that they held in Rotan Hotel, Beirut. Attendees at the conference included: Ashraf Dabour (the Palestinian Ambassador to Lebanon), Robert Heat (Deputy Director of UNRWA); ANERA members and other Palestinian civil society organizations. The research discussed the situation of Palestinian Refugees fleeing from Syria (PSR) to Lebanon. Marten Batesh, of ANERA, opened the conference with a speech regarding PSR. He indicated that there were currently 25,000 PSR in Lebanon. Following this Samar Al Yasser, Country Director of ANERA in Lebanon, took the floor. She indicated that the number of PSR is in fact 30,000. She described how these refugees are in great need of warm, blankets, clothes, water and sanitation. The greatest immediate burden that most of these refugees are facing is the need for food; however, one of the most neglected areas of aid for PSR is that of legal aid. [National News Agency ‘Council of Ministers held at the Grand Serail’ (19 December 2012); available at http://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/10215/]

30 After a session was conducted with the council of ministries, the minister of state, Marwan Khayer Al Deen, mentioned that the PRS subject needed to be discussed in order to better organize it. He then stated “our constitution stated the right to return for the Palestinian Refugees, and the recent reports stated that there is about 20 to 30 thousands Palestinian refugees fleeing Syria to Lebanon, this number could exaggerated, because the General Security told that in the previous 48 hours 2000 Palestinian Refugees inter [entered in] to Lebanon, whatever the number is, this subjected have to be treated, because we are can’t deal with the subject of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, so how rather for those coming from Syria?” [National News Agency ‘Council of Ministers held at the Grand Serail’ (19 December 2012); available at http://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/10215/]


32 UNRWA ‘UNRWA’s response and services to Palestine refugees from Syria’ (2 April 2013) UNRWA Bi-Weekly Briefing (13).
PSR entering Lebanon are required to pay LL 25,000 to receive a stamp to stay in Lebanon. This fee is preventing a number of PRS from crossing the border. With this stamp they are permitted a one-week stay in the country, during which time they have to go the nearest General Security Office to register i.e. provide information on where they are living and obtain a one-week permit which allowed them to move freely in Lebanon. Previously, this permit had to be renewed continuously. Palestinians had to pay LL 50,000 for a one-month extension of their visa. If a PSR failed to renew their visa they would be subject to a fine that amounted to approximately 34 US Dollars for the first non-renewed month. At that time, if a Palestinian Refugee failed to renew their permit for two months he/she would likely be subjected to the following; a fine that amounts to approximately 134 USD; detention for 3 to 10 days; followed by deportation to Syria. Not all Palestinian Refugees that arrived from Syria were aware of this General Security Administrative Measure.

Some PSR who became aware of this measure preferred to go back to Syria, despite the dangerous situation there, because they could not afford the expense of these permits especially if their temporary refuge in Lebanon needs to be prolonged. It is noteworthy to mention that Syrian Refugees were not subject to this administrative measure. Palestinian Refugees, who failed to visit the General Security after one week, were often too fearful to visit the General Security because of the severity of the repercussions.

However, a high-ranking General Security official said in reality security bodies were not actively arresting or expelling Palestinians who failed to renew their visas. Furthermore, in mid-September the General Security temporarily suspended the LL 50,000 fines, which Palestinians returning to Syria after overstaying their visas were required to pay. PSR now staying in Lebanon are able to receive a three month visa extension at no cost.

On the 21 February 2013 the General Security issued a statement which stated:

“If a Palestinian Refugee from Syria exceeds his/her stay in Lebanon by more than 15 days, then he/she must convert his/her transit status to a three month residency status, free of charge. They are permitted to enjoy this measure because of their current circumstances. Those who entered Lebanon and violated the residency system can regularize their status upon departure without paying additional charges (on condition that they regularise their status no later than one year from the date of their entry into Lebanon). The General Security also demands that Palestinian Refugees from Syria, inform the General Security Centres in Lebanon, concerning their whereabouts, in order to regularize their status in this regard.”

The General Security also decided to equalize the status of PSR with that of Syrian Refugees, after coming under great pressure from the Palestinian factions, Palestinian and Lebanese...
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Human Rights NGOs and other International Organizations. This decision was published in an announcement on the 8 March 2013, which was titled “Extending the stay for the PSR”.

“Further [with regard] to its previous statements, the General Security announces that the PSR in Lebanon can extend their stay in Lebanon till 3 months for as for the Syrian Refugees”36.

Furthermore, on the 28 March 2013, the General Security announced:

“Further to the previous statement, the General Security informs the PSR that are in Lebanon for more than 3 months, [that they] are now able [to] settle their situation when they progress [with] their documents to borders until the 20 April 201337.”

Field Research

A. Research Tools/Preparing for the Questionnaire:

The number of Palestinian families fleeing from Syria to Lebanon reached 2174 by the time38 this field research had commenced. During November and December 2012, PHRO interviewed 192 family representatives throughout Lebanon. The distribution of these families throughout Lebanon was 38 in Tyre, 44 in Saida, 15 in Beirut, 35 in Tripoli (North Lebanon) and 60 in Beqaa, as illustrated in the graph below:

![Sample Distribution over Governorates](image)

38 According to information collected by PHRO (October 30th, 2012) from Camps’ Popular Committees, and UNRWA area offices (when PHRO received acceptance for having funds for the research).
Each Governorate sample was sub-distributed over the localities (camps, gatherings and neighbourhoods) so as to ensure that the sample was representative.

**PHRO** developed a seven pages questionnaire. This questionnaire was the primary tool used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into four sections:

- **Section 1:** Personal Data
- **Section 2:** Data on the situation before fleeing **Syria**
- **Section 3:** Data on the situation while fleeing **Syria**
- **Section 4:** Data on the situation since arriving in **Lebanon** and future expectations

**PHRO** conducted a training workshop at its premises for its team, who were conducting the family interviews. The purpose of the training workshop was to introduce the team to the objectives of the research and to familiarize them with the questionnaire structure. In addition, the aim of the training was to receive feedback from the team. This feedback would be considered when drawing up the final layout of the questionnaire. This questionnaire was tested in the field on 5 families. Notes collected during the workshop and the testing phase, were accordingly integrated into the final version of the questionnaire. The final questionnaire was composed of 35 questions.

Collected data was entered into an electronic data base. Data entered was checked by a second officer. Analysis of data was conducted by a third officer directly after the data collection and data entry phases were completed.

**B. Results and Major Findings:**

The research targeted **192** families. Interviews were conducted with adults. Of these adults: **85.41%** were married; **4.17%** were single; **3.64%** were divorced and **6.78%** were widowed. It is noteworthy to mention that **43.75%** of the interviewees were males compared to **56.25%** who were females.

Family sizes ranged from between **1** to **13** members. The average family size was **6**. The age range of family members varied a lot. However, it was noted that more families had children between the ages of **0 – 9** years or adolescents between the ages of **10 – 18** years, than youth between **19 – 29** years, adults or elderly persons.

**75.52%** of the families indicated that they owned houses/apartments in **Syria**, while **11.98%** only rent houses/apartments there. **5.20%** said that they neither owned, nor were renting a place in **Syria**, but were living with parents or relatives’ there. **7.30%** of interviewees did not respond to this question.

**C. Presence of Identification Papers:**

It is significant to mention that no one out of the **192** families interviewed, carried all the necessary identification papers. There was a greater number of Personal IDs, **UNRWA** Ration Registration Cards and Authorities’ Family Cards brought compared to Passports and Personal Registry Papers. **97.91%** of the families brought their IDs; **89.06%** brought their **UNRWA** Ration Registration Cards and **83.85%** carried their Family Cards. In comparison, only **40.10%** carried
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their Personal Registry Papers; **35.41%** carried their passports; and **3.12%** brought other proof of identity documents.

### Identification Papers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>others</td>
<td>3.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal registry paper</td>
<td>40.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family card</td>
<td>83.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNRWA ration card</td>
<td>89.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>passports</td>
<td>35.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDs</td>
<td>67.91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**D. Arrival in Lebanon and Area of Residency:**

All the families interviewed indicated that they arrived in Lebanon between February and December 2012. Of these families, **23.31%** had lived in more than one area since their arrival while **78.13%** were still residing in their first place of residency. **1.56%** did not respond to this question.

It is significant to mention that **63%** of the interviewed families left Syria directly, while **37%** were internally displaced in Syria before heading to Lebanon.

**84.90%** mentioned that they had witnessed violations in their area of residency, whereas **14.06%** said that they had not and **1.04%** did not respond to this inquiry.

**E. Reasons for Fleeing Syria:**

There were a number of reasons behind families’ decision to flee Syria. The most common reason was the security situation (**93.75%**). The second most common reason was the siege of the area where the interviewed families were residing (**66.67%**). The third most common reason was fear of family members getting hurt (**66.15%**), and the fourth most common reason was leaving due to deteriorating economic conditions (**65.63%**).

**Further reasons were:**

- **56.78%** heard rumours that frightened them;
- **54.17%** were afraid that the females in their family would be raped;
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- 35.94% mentioned that food supplies were decreasing in nearby markets or they did not have access to food supplies;
- 32.30% said that they were worried because the conflict was escalating and they were afraid they would not be able to escape if they stayed longer;
- 15.11% left due to deteriorating health conditions (including depression and anxiety);
- 7.30% lost family member(s) and fled to avoid losing more;
- 6.78% left due to threats they received;
- And 6.25% left because they had had family members who were kidnapped.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Fleeing Syria</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family members: left...</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleeing Syria and Entry into Lebanon:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is essential to mention that for 99.48% of the families interviewed, there were necessary administrative obligations that needed to be completed in order for them to leave Syria. Only 0.52% mentioned that they did not have to adhere to these obligations. This administrative process required a visit to the Directorate of Palestinian Refugees Affairs at Ain Kersh in Damascus to apply for an exit permit. Notably this measure only applies to Palestinians. Palestinians can not cross the Syrian Boarder without an exit permit. If they reached the border without such a permit, they will either be forced to return and apply for one, or they will not be allowed to leave at all.

**F. Fleeing Syria and Entry into Lebanon:**

8.34% of interviewees mentioned that they had tried, unsuccess fully to flee to another country before Lebanon. However, the majority (91.14%) indicated that Lebanon was their first choice of asylum state. 0.52% of the participants did not answer this inquiry. Furthermore, 99.48% of participants mentioned that they entered into Lebanon legally and 0.52% mentioned entering “illegally”.

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89.06% of those who entered legally mentioned that the reason for entry which they had provided at the Lebanese – Syrian border, was visiting family or relatives. 8.34% gave other reasons such as escaping the conflict or entering for employment reasons, 2.08% did not respond to this inquiry, 0.52% mentioned that they had entered for medical care, and one indicated that his residency in Syria had reached its end and so he had to leave. It is significant to mention that all interviewed families, thus 100%, said that while on the borders, they were not provided any information about where to go in Lebanon. Regarding the treatment they had received at Lebanese Customs: 81.25% mentioned that the treatment ranged from normal to good; 13.55% did not respond to this question, and 5.20% described it as not being good.
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G. Violations Witnessed or Obstacles Experienced while fleeing:

While 73.96% of the families interviewed indicated that they had not witnessed, or experienced any obstacles or violations while fleeing Syria (i.e. from their area of residency until reaching the Lebanese-Syrian border), 26.04% said that they had. Types of obstacles and violations included:

- Being stopped multiple times at military checkpoints;
- Strict inspections by soldiers without respecting gender differences. These inspection measures were particularly humiliating for the women;
- Killings and murder threats;
- Arrests of family members, and prolonged inspections and questioning;
- Insults and shots fired on their cars (by veiled persons);
- Transportation was intermittent and very expensive;
- Being forced to pay bribes in order that their belongings would not be burned and they would not be forced to return to Syria.

H. Reasons for choosing Lebanon as an Asylum Destination:

Several reasons emerged as to why Palestinian Refugees fleeing Syria chose Lebanon as an asylum destination. The results revealed the following:

- 81.77% have relatives residing in Lebanon;
- 46.88% mentioned that they were not allowed entry into another country39 (this was particularly the case with Jordan);
- 44.79% chose Lebanon because it was not too far to travel to;
- 35.94% said that they are acquainted with Lebanon;
- 31.25% chose to seek asylum in Lebanon because of the similarity in customs and traditions between Syria and Lebanon;
- 12.5% chose Lebanon for language reasons;
- And 3.12 % mentioned other reasons such as: a) relatives who left before them chose Lebanon so they followed them and b) the flexibility of moving within the country (they knew they would not be forced to stay in camps along the borders).

39It is noteworthy to mention that Palestinian Refugees in Jordan mentioned that if they were allowed entry into the country, they would have to stay at Zaatari Camp. In Turkey Palestinian Refugees are only allowed entries into camps established on the borders.
I. Moving within Lebanon:

While 6.77% of the interviewed families indicated that they experienced difficulties in moving freely in Lebanon, 93.23% said that they did not experience such difficulties. Families who responded positively mentioned that this was not the case during May to August 2012. Amongst the families interviewed who experienced difficulties in freedom of movement in Lebanon, reasons for difficulties included:

- 53.84% were afraid of being arrested.
- 23.08% did not know, or were not familiar with the country.
- 7.70% did not possess identification papers.

Before August 2012 Palestinian refugees coming from Syria used to get their passports stamped at the boarders by the Lebanese General Security. With this stamp they were allowed a one-week entry during which they had to go to the nearest General Security Office to register i.e. provide information on where they are living and obtain a one-week permit that allows them to move freely in Lebanon. This permit had to be renewed continuously; otherwise the holder of the permit would be subjected to a fine that amounts to approximately 34 US Dollars for the first non-renewed month. Should Palestinian Refugees skip another month without renewing this permit, he/she might be subjected to a fine that amounts to approximately 134 USD; detention for 3 to 10 days; followed by a transfer to Syria. In August 2012 these entry and residence requirements changed, Palestinian refugees entering Lebanon are still getting their passports stamped at the borders by the Lebanese General Security, but the latter adopted a policy of “turning a blind eye”. As a result, registration of their entry takes place at the borders only in addition to keeping coordination with Palestinian Political Parties who are “governing” the camps and these Political Parties representatives through the Popular Committees who have the main registry of families within the camps and gatherings.
J. Assistance Received in Lebanon:

76.56% of the families interviewed mentioned that they had received several types of assistance since they had arrived in Lebanon. However, 23.44% mentioned that as of yet no one had supported them. The types of assistance received included:

- 100% received financial assistance (in Ramadan mainly, and the majority received it only once-off);
- 79.60% received ‘assistance in kind’ such as clothes, kitchen appliances and blankets;
- 78.91% received food;
- 38.09% received medical assistance (mainly from UNRWA clinics, medication and hospitalization was also covered by Qatar Red Crescent);
- 31.97% received educational assistance (mainly at UNRWA schools and stationary from NGOs);
- and 2.04% received other forms of assistance (this does not include legal assistance).

94.27% said that the assistance they received met their needs. However, the constant challenge is how to sustain the provision of such assistance. This is particularly a challenge owing to the continued deterioration of the situation in Syria, and the resulting increase in flow of refugees to Lebanon. 5.21% said that their needs were not met at all and 0.52% did not respond to this question.

It is significant to mention that the main and most essential assistance requested is financial assistance. This is primarily required to cover the costs of renting accommodation. All families who were interviewed, indicated that accommodation became a pressing need, especially for the families that were hosting them. They also indicated that financial assistance for hosting families is essential to cover needs and supplies for the families’ members who are living together. This is particularly important considering the economic situation of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon, many of whom are unemployed and living in poverty. It is also significant to mention that most families said that if they have, excess food, they would accept more, because they would be able to sell the excess for extra money!

41Interviewed families mentioned that when visiting Centres providing assistance to Palestinian refugees from Syria, they receive answers such as, we’ve supported you once and we have to support new refugees.
It is important to mention that Palestinian Refugees Fleeing Syria to Lebanon to education at schools or universities in Lebanon. However, most were being underpaid and often the work was intermittent. The majority (i.e. 75.52% of the interviewed families) did not have any family member working.

It is important to mention that Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon are already facing restrictions in the job market due to restrictive policies. Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon do not enjoy the right to work in as many as 20 professions. As Palestinian Refugees are not ‘formally citizens of another state they are not able to claim the same rights as other foreigners living and working in Lebanon’. 42

L. Education:

42.70% of the families interviewed indicated that they had registered their children to continue their education at schools or universities in Lebanon. However, 57.30% of families had not registered their children for continued education. The reasons for not enrolling children in the scholastic year of 2012-2013 were:

- 28.18% because of the difference in curriculum;

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- **20%** because of their financial situation (insufficient funds to pay their children’s allowances or educational needs);
- **14.54%** of the children did not want to go to school;
- **4.54%** of the children had not been accommodated yet;
- **3.63%** because there were so many children in the family;
- **3.63%** because of discontinuity as a result of constantly moving from place to place;
- **3.63%** had difficulties with transportation;
- **2.72%** because there were no schools available for children with disabilities;
- And **0.91%** did not respond to this question.

![Reasons for not registering in Schools](chart)

**M. Significant incidents such as Births, Deaths, and Marriage while in Lebanon:**

1.56% of the families interviewed mentioned that they had had children since arriving in Lebanon. Of this 1.56%, 0.52% were married 4.17% of those interviewed had had abortions. **It is important to consider whether these abortions were definitely intended, or were chosen as a last resort owing to the economic, housing and other difficulties faced by these refugees.** There has also been an increase in the number of abortions performed in Syria since the start of the conflict, owing to the precarious financial situation many pregnant mothers face. New births are given a

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certificate from the hospital, yet are not registered in the official directorates. Marriages can only take place religiously, but cannot be registered in courts. This indicates the essential need for legal aid counselling and assistance for Palestinian Refugees fleeing Syria, inorder to limit possible legal obstacles in the future.

N. Violations or Harassments experienced in Lebanon:

6.25% of the interviewed families mentioned that they experienced harassments or were subject to violations since arriving in Lebanon. 93.75% negatively responded to this question, which is a good indicator about the hospitality and care they are receiving within the Palestinian community in Lebanon. Families who mentioned that they experienced harassments or were subjected to violations identified the following types of violations/harassments:

- Family member(s) managed to find a job, but did not receive any payment in return. Owing to the fact that they were not working “legally” they could not complain about this treatment;
- Abuse at work (long working hours and being under paid);
- Unequal distribution of Aid and favoritism in distribution;
- Theft of identification papers and money;
- And eviction from their rental apartments in Lebanon because of delays in paying rent.

Testimonies

Palestinian refugees fleeing Syria to Lebanon are victims twice over. They are living in inadequate, overcrowded shelters, under poor conditions. Many of the refugees are now accommodated in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon (UNRWA’s latest statistics, from March 2013, indicate that the number of PSR in Lebanon is estimated to have exceeded 37,000. Half of these refugees live in the South (31% in Saida and 15% in Tyre), 19% live in the Beirut area, 15% in the North and 21% in Beqaa[44]). These camps lack the most basic necessities and proper infrastructure (non-paved streets, narrow pathways, overcrowded homes, dangerous and inadequate electricity supply, inadequate hygiene services, inadequate water system and play grounds). Over 20% of homes occupied by Palestinian families are not fit to live in. Many of these homes lack walls, roofs, windows or toilet facilities. In the area of Tyre, in south Lebanon, UNRWA has indicated that 42% of Palestinian homes are unfit to live in.[45]

[44] Bi-weekly briefing issued by the UNRWA Office in Beirut (UNRWA’s response and services to Palestine refugees from Syria, 2 April 2013, issue 13
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“Palestinians who’ve recently fled their homes in Syria have become double refugees,” said Francis Lacasse, Oxfam’s Syria crisis response manager. “They’re highly vulnerable, and many are in danger of falling through the aid safety net and not getting the help they urgently need.”

In this section we provide 4 testimonies received by PHRO which reflects the suffering of the Palestinian Refugees:

First Story: Khould

Khould is a 35 years old Palestinian refugee woman from Syria. She left Syria for Lebanon on the 15 September 2012. She was living in Chatela camp with her 2 years old baby. However, now she and the baby are renting a home with her refugee brother and his family in Borj Al Barajneh camp. Before we met Khould, we were told that Khould did not know that her husband had been killed in Syria. She still thought that he was missing. Khould is an educated woman, with a university degree, and she is seeking work in Lebanon.

Khould told us she moved a lot inside Syria before she decided to come to Lebanon. While in Syria, she witnessed many human rights violations and atrocities. These violations and atrocities included: bombardments, clashes, thefts, raids, arrests, torturing and a massacre of approximately 319 people in Sayeda Zeinab.

The main reasons which Khould gave for fleeing Syria, beside the violations she witnessed, were: the economic situation; the security situation which made her particularly fearful for her child’s safety. Furthermore, she was afraid that she would be raped. While fleeing the country, she witnessed many bombings and she was forced to stop at numerous check points.

Now that she is in Lebanon, Khould said that she is completely unhappy with her situation. She complained of being badly treated (hearing bad, disrespectful words). She is also constantly worrying about her husband, unaware of the fact that he has passed away. She is also in need of a lot of material assistance. The aid she has received has been helpful but insufficient to meet her needs.

Khould’s last words to us were:

“I’m afraid that I won’t go back to my home, and if I go back I’m afraid that it will be destroyed. I’m very optimistic that the regime will fall soon, and that President Bashar will be killed. Now I know why the Palestinian – Lebanese Refugees are the people who are in the most demand for the Right to Return, because living in Lebanon is not considered to be a life”.

46 Ibid.
Second story: Haneen

Haneen is a newly arrived refugee from Syria. She is 20 years old and has been married for five months. At the time of her interview she was two months pregnant. She said she had to get married quickly without any engagement period or wedding celebration, because her father was worried about her and her 17 year old sister’s safety.

Haneen left Syria on the 27 November 2012 with her husband. They left to join her family, who were living in Chateila camp. Her family was living in the camp with her uncle, who had left before them. She told us that her father had escaped because he was afraid of the safety risks facing his daughters (who are six and 17 years old respectively). The father is now trying to marry off Haneen’s 17 years old sister to anyone who asks for her hand in marriage. Haneen described her father as bigoted and restrictive, and mentioned how he does not allow them to leave Chateila camp on their own.

Haneen does not have all her documents with her because she is newly married and she did not have time to get an UNRWA ration card for her and her husband before they left Syria. However, now that she is pregnant, she needs to get a ration card before she can start receiving treatment. She also does not have a family card.

Before Haneen came to Lebanon she moved between many different camps in Syria. In every camp she stayed in, she witnessed many human rights violations. While staying in Al Yarmouk camp, where she was living with her husband and her husband’s family, half of the house fell down on them. She said that she was grateful to God that she was on the side of the house that did not fall down. However, this incident still shook her up considerably. After this incident she started trembling, and she left the house without taking any clothes with her.

Haneen witnessed bombardments; she saw dead people (children and old people) and she talked about the massacre which had occurred in Jobar (Jobar is the camp where Haneen lived with her family before she got married). Women were being raped in this camp, and this was the main reason why her father forced her to get married and flee to Lebanon.

While travelling to Lebanon she was very scared that her baby would die because the Taxi driver she was travelling with had to drive at high speed to escape the bombings and other forms of conflict. Haneen described the terrifying sounds she heard on this journey.

In spite of all that she had experienced and witnessed, Haneen was still able to laugh and joke about her situation, and about how funny she looked now that she had to wear her mother-in-law and her sisters’ clothes. Her answer to the question: “Have you facing any difficulties in moving within Lebanon?” was funny and at the same time sad. She said: “Yes, I have. I’m afraid to leave the house because there are so many rats and mice. One night I opened the door and I thought that a rat standing on the stairs was a cat, because it was so big. I almost played with it! But I have to live and so I have to become accustomed to living with them.”

In order to be able to afford to pay for the taxi journey to come to Lebanon, Haneen had to sell her wedding ring. She now hopes that her husband will be able to find a job, as he told her on their way to Lebanon: “I hope to find a job in Lebanon and I don’t need any aids.”
Third story: Ahmad

Ahmad is a 35 years old male, Palestinian refugee from Syria. He fled Syria in March 2012 with his wife, who was pregnant at that time, and his two children.

Neither Ahmad nor his wife have an identity card or a family card, because they were stolen together with the money that he was saving up for his baby’s delivery costs, from his rented home in Chatela camp. Ahmad described the difficulties faced by those who lose their IDs. It is particularly hard for those who lose their IDs in Syria. If someone loses his/her ID in Syria he/she can face punishment and torture. In addition to this risk, Ahmad cannot go back to Syria to apply for another ID because he will not be allowed to enter the country without an ID.

Ahmad witnessed atrocities and human rights violations. These atrocities and violations included: house attacks, sniping, indiscriminate killing and kidnappings. He also witnessed two whole families (Al Hassan and Al Zahra) that had been slaughtered with their children.

Ahmad talked about the prosperous life he had once lived in Syria. He described the nice home that he was building before he fled the country. He said that he had to flee Syria because he was afraid for the safety of his family. His fears were exacerbated when the camp came under siege and his sister was kidnapped. He sought asylum in Lebanon because he is familiar with the country, and he has previously worked in Lebanon. Furthermore, as a Palestinian, Lebanon is the only country out of the countries neighbouring Syria where he can seek asylum.

Ahmad was grateful to UNRWA for the Aid that they are giving him. He said the small amount of Aid they are receiving from UNRWA is better than not receiving anything at all. However, he said that he went to speak to the Palestinian Ambassador in Lebanon about all the cleaning aids they are receiving. Ahmad said: “Why does everyone give us cleaning materials? Are we a contaminated people?”

All that Ahmad wants to do is to work freely, because now, without his ID he cannot work outside the camp. He is only able to work inside the camp. He receives many requests for work outside the camp, but he has to refuse because he does not have an ID. He asked the Ambassador to give him a permanent document to show that he is a Palestinian-Syrian Refugee. Owing to the fact that Palestine was declared a non-member state in the United Nations, Ahmad said that this should lead to eased restrictions on freedom of movement for Palestinian Refugees.

Ahmad said: “I’m a human being and I have a right to work, to move freely, to have a car and drive but all that... I can’t do, because I don’t have an ID. I don’t need any aids; I have my own work that I can use to support my family. I have knocked on the door of UNRWA and the Embassy, but no one listened to me. The Palestinian Embassy told us to go the Syrian Embassy, but are we the responsibility of the Syrian Embassy? Is it a good reputation for our state that we have to demonstrate near the embassy and near UNRWA? My wife was accused of adultery when she delivered our baby in Haifa Hospital, because we don’t have IDs and family cards! They also took from us money ($350) in spite of the fact that they know we are refugees! All that I can think about now is how we, as refugees, can gather together and find a way to discuss our situation on
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the Lebanese TV show (Lelnasher). On this show we would be given a platform where we could talk about our suffering in Lebanon and about the nepotism in distributing aid here.”

Ahmad now fears that he will not be able to go back to Syria. The war made him lose everything that he has and he fears he will be homeless for a second time. He expressed his love for the Syrian people and their treatment of the Palestinian Refugees. He hopes that the regime will eventually fall and that all in Syria will be able to coexist better in the future. He also hopes that the destiny of Palestinian – Syrian refugees’ will not to be like that of the Palestinian – Iraqi people. He is also afraid that growing tensions between different religious groups in Syria will eventually result in a war between Muslims and Christians there.

Fourth story: Mohamed

Mohamed is a 33 year old Palestinian refugee who left Syria in July 2012 with his wife and his sister-in-law. His sister-in-law’s dad told them to take his daughter with them, because of the high risk of her being raped in Syria. Mohamed’s wife mentioned six rape cases she had heard of. The families of the rape victims had the rape victims undergo surgery to reconstruct their hymen. This surgery provided these women with a ‘second virginity’ and hereby reduced their shame from being raped.

Mohamed entered Lebanon illegally. As a result, he faced many obstacles during his journey. He resorted to hiding in refrigerators and walking very long distances, in order to escape from being caught. The main reason for Mohamed’s choice to illegally enter the country was that before the war in Syria he had entered Lebanon and visited a Palestinian camp on numerous occasions. These visits to the camps had made the Syrian government believe that he belonged to an organized Palestinian resistance. As a result, the government had placed him in jail, where he was tortured. Now his name is on the Syrian government’s watch list. As a result of being placed on this watch-list, if he entered Lebanon legally, he would face the risk of being investigated at every checkpoint. If they discovered that he was on the watch list he would face great risk of persecution from the Syrian government. Owing to this, he had no other choice than to enter Lebanon illegally.

Mohamed now lives with his wife and his sister in law in a small, single room. Mohamed witnessed a lot of human rights violations and atrocities in Syria. These included: random shootings and bombardments; the Free Syrian Army entering the camp; witnessing many dead and wounded people lying on the streets; and the raping of girls and women.

Mohamed said: “My cause is the Palestinian cause, if I have to take a side. I will neither stand with the Free Syrian Army nor the Regime. Because of this both sides consider us [Palestinians] as betrayers. I think our [Palestinians in Syria] situation will be hard in both cases; whether the regime falls or if it remains.”

Mohamed left his family in Syria, but he is thinking of going back to visit them even though he knows that by doing so, he will risk his life. He wants to return for a visit in order to make sure that his elderly parents, who are still there, are ok. His parents are refusing to leave their home in Syria, because they fear being homeless.
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Mohamed’s wife was pregnant but after arriving in Lebanon she had an abortion in Haifa Hospital. While in Haifa Hospital she received medical tests which she had to pay for. Now she is receiving treatment from another doctor who refuses to accept the medical tests that she had in Haifa Hospital because he considers them unprofessional and unreliable. Owing to this, Mohamad’s wife had to go for more tests, which resulted in additional expenses.

Analysing Results

Interviews conducted by the PHRO team revealed that Palestinian Refugees who have fled Syria are greatly dependent on the assistance they are receiving from host families and friends. Active bodies inside the camps and gathering such as: the popular committees, political parties and civil society organizations are supporting families with registering. Some, mainly political groups started to provide emergency assistance, yet there is no organized emergency support to these families especially for food and clothing. Organizations have started to prepare emergency proposals, but it will take time to implement these proposals. As for UNRWA, so far they have allowed Palestinian Refugees to access their clinics within the camps for medical care, but they are still not eligible for hospitalization. Palestinian Refugees who fled Syria are not required to register with UNRWA. However, as of yet, UNRWA has not started implementing an emergency plan to support them or the Palestinian families that are hosting them. UNHCR, however, does not register them because they do not fall under its mandate.

Palestinian Refugees from Syria are particularly vulnerable, especially with regards to their need for surrogate protection and emergency assistance. Children, pregnant women, people with disabilities and those in need of special care such as individuals with chronic diseases of lifestyle (eg. Individuals with diabetes and high blood pressure) are the most vulnerable amongst these families.

There is still a significant lack of knowledge regarding the current situation of Palestinian Refugees from Syria, residing in Lebanon. As such information is vital for stakeholders, a small, yet representative study was conducted amongst Palestinian Refugees who had fled from Syria to Lebanon in order to better understand their situations (legal, economic, social, living...). The data from this research is to be used to inform the actions which local and international stakeholders take to meet their responsibilities to provide for the refugees’ short, medium and long term needs.

Chance to Go Back to Syria for a Quick Visit

13.02% of the families interviewed mentioned that they had had one chance to go back to Syria to check upon their houses, relatives and neighbours. However, 85.42% mentioned that they did not have the chance, or more precisely, they did not think about it, because they were afraid to go back and get stuck there, or have something bad happen to them there. 1.56% of the families interviewed did not respond to this question.

47 Article 1 (d) of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees.
Fears

Palestinian Refugees fleeing from Syria to Lebanon indicated that the questions regarding their fears were the most difficult to answer. 78.13% of the families interviewed mentioned that they are afraid of not returning to Syria, while 10.94% said they are afraid to go back. 40.62% are afraid of receiving or experiencing threats if they go back. 79.69% are afraid that the conflict will be prolonged and 33.34% are afraid the conflict will spill over into Lebanon. 63.54% are afraid about losing their relatives in Syria. 28.65% are afraid about homelessness and 22.40% are worried that their children will fail at school. 5.73% are afraid of the future impact that the culture in Lebanon will have on their family members, particularly on their women.

After conducting the questionnaires we asked the interviewees if he/she would like to make any additions or changes to the questionnaire. Most of them (if not all of them), were upset that they had been displaced again and they had lost hope that they would ever go back to Syria. Furthermore, many said that they did not feel safe living in a place like Lebanon. They are very afraid about their children’s future (they lost an academic year, and it is hard for them to adapt to the new curriculum). They expressed their opinion regarding Palestinian Refugees living in Lebanon by saying “Now we know why the Palestinian in Lebanon is the most demand for their right to [go] back to Palestine”.

At the end, the interviewees demanded that the Palestinian ambassador to Lebanon should investigate their miserable situation because he is refusing to interview them at the embassy.

Refugees Expectations

The conflict in Syria has lasted for over two years. This has confounded the expectations of many observers who expected Bashar al-Assad’s regime to collapse well before the end of 2011. There are now ominous signs that the war is becoming entrenched, in a situation where the powerful external allies of government and rebels cannot allow their chosen side to fail.

Many of the families interviewed expected that the war would not end anytime soon. They felt the situation is going to get worse and they also expressed their fear that their situation would turn out the same as the Palestinians who fled Iraq. Many felt that the Palestinians will not be represented in Syria in the future by either the Regime or opposition. While the Regime remains, they feel that they will not be allowed to return to Syria and if it collapses, they feel that the Free Syrian Army will view them as betrayers because they did not fight with them.
Recommendations

1. Develop better joint mechanisms that enable UNRWA to benefit from UNHCR’s capacities especially, the emergency, funds as UNHCR has quicker responses to refugee crisis situations. Such mechanisms could include the allocation of funds and inclusion of UNRWA whenever it is possible, within the process of funds seeking measures taken by UNHCR within the field of UNRWA’s operation. The purpose behind this would be to target Palestinian Refugees from Syria who have fled to Lebanon. The joint mechanisms would better the protection mechanisms and relief related to this refugee population.

2. Gather relevant, accurate statistics regarding the number of Palestinian Refugees who have fled from Syria to Lebanon. This process should be relatively straightforward as Palestinian Refugees from Syria, generally live in specific settings in Lebanon (Camps and Gatherings). Accurate statistics are important as they reduce political exploitation of statistics.

3. Work on developing a new support mechanism in response to the Lebanese General Security order to simplify the process of gaining residency status for PSR, making the process the same as the process for Syrian Refugees. As this residency status is temporary, if the Syrian conflict continues indefinitely then these PSR may face legal repercussions concerning their temporary residency status. This would be a particular risk if any significant political changes occurred in Lebanon which resulted in changes to previous legal procedures taken by the Lebanese General Security.

4. Creating a new mechanism to coordinate emergency aid to PSR. This mechanism could ensure that there is coordination and networking between Palestinian organizations, UNRWA, civil society organizations and international institutions providing aid to PSR. This would prevent disparities in distribution of aid, such as providing refugees with aid ‘once of’.

5. PSR are afraid of being in Lebanon long term. This is a rationale fear, which adds weight to the importance of providing adequate and possibly long term, legal support and welfare for PSR. It is also recommend that pressure mechanisms be developed to ensure that the Lebanese government does not apply harmful measures against PSR.

6. There is a great risk that the PSR will be harassed when they return to Syria, this would be the likely outcome whether the Regime is overthrown or remains (They could face persecution from the opposition or the Regime). This risk highlights the need for forming advocacy and support systems to defend PSR rights once they return to Syria.
Palestinian Refugees Fleeing Syria to Lebanon
PHRO Conducted Research 2012; Published - March - 2013

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