



# Palestinian Refugees from Syria

in Lebanon

# ANERA

Improving Lives in the Middle East

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## A VULNERABLE COMMUNITY

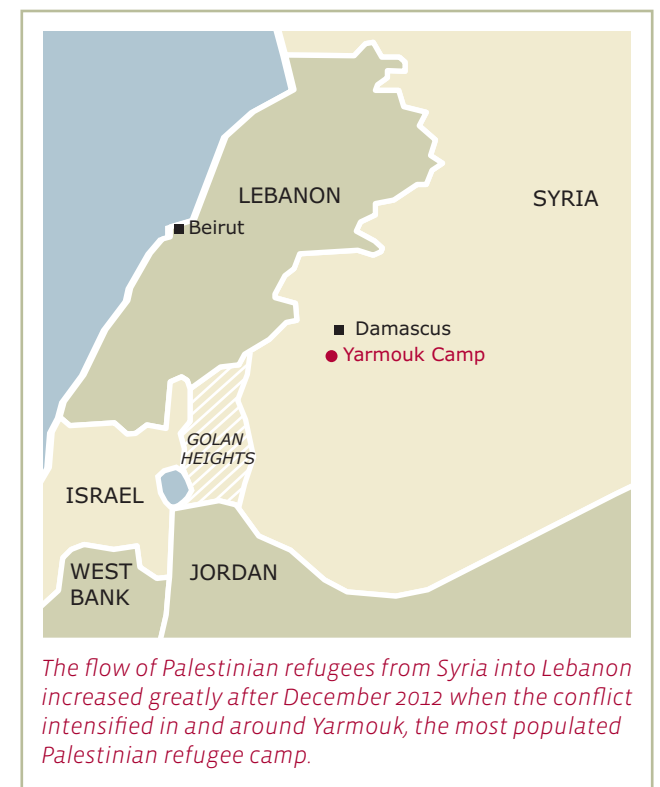
Following their expulsion from Palestine in 1948, many Palestinian intellectuals, businessmen, and craftspeople fled to Syria and established themselves as an integral part of Syrian society. Today that life has been broken and many Palestinian refugees from Syria have joined the ranks of Lebanon's Palestinian refugees, who some call the "forgotten people."

Living in dark, cramped rooms without heat, these refugees have no respite from the fresh memories of the Syrian war and the gnawing pain of hunger and cold. Having built a vibrant society in Syria, they have been forced to flee to unknown places where their future is uncertain. Their plight echoes the forced exile from Palestine that they, their parents or grandparents endured decades before.

**85% of Palestinian refugees living in Yarmouk camp have fled the fighting in Damascus.<sup>1</sup>** Seeking shelter and aid in Turkey and Iraq meant tackling bureaucratic red tape. Jordan has been reluctant to let more than a few thousand Palestinian refugees gather in a camp along the border.<sup>2</sup> **Approximately 37,000<sup>3</sup> refugees are seeking whatever shelter and protection they can get in Lebanon's camps, where conditions are dire.**

Living in the crowded and impoverished Palestinian camps in Lebanon, Palestinian refugees from Syria are finding very few legal protections and employment possibilities. **There has been much less international attention focused on this vulnerable sub-population than on the general Syrian refugee population.** The United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) is struggling to meet their needs but remains under-funded and ill-prepared to deal with the large influx of refugees into the camps.

**Living sometimes 20 or more people to a room,** the newly arrived refugees worry most about paying rent and providing meals for their families. Nearly all of them have experienced trauma in the form of death in the family, physical violence, kidnapping, and home destruction. They wonder how much longer they must bear the indignity of exile and statelessness.



*The flow of Palestinian refugees from Syria into Lebanon increased greatly after December 2012 when the conflict intensified in and around Yarmouk, the most populated Palestinian refugee camp.*

**“For \$10 in Syria, I could feed my family of eight for the whole day. In Lebanon it is barely enough for one meal.”**

*A refugee in Nahr El Bared camp*

*A typical alleyway in Lebanon's Palestinian camps. This one is in Shatila.*



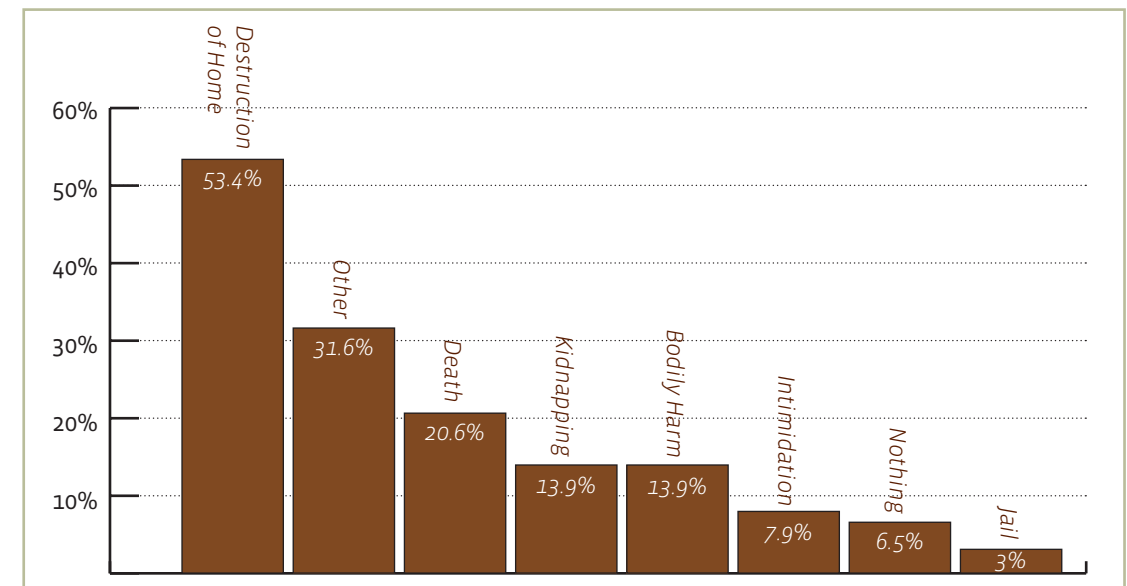
## LIFE IN SYRIA BEFORE THE FIGHTING

Before the outbreak of fighting, Syria was generally seen as providing the best conditions for Palestinian refugees among the countries in the Middle East.<sup>4</sup>

Nearly 500,000 Palestinians were living within the state's borders. A 1957 law allows Palestinians living in Syria the same duties and responsibilities as Syrian citizens apart from nationality and voting rights. Palestinians have the right to work and own businesses, and are granted universal access to education and health care. Access to these sectors contributed to the stability and prosperity of Palestinians in Syria, as evidenced by the fact that a high percentage of them had the financial means to move out of refugee camps and reside elsewhere in the country.<sup>5</sup>

With the onset of Syria's civil war, work opportunities decreased. Many refugees fleeing to Lebanon had already depleted much of their savings while still in Syria.

Many are startled by the sharp contrast in living standards from what they had enjoyed in Syria. They also have been surprised to discover that their Palestinian identity has become the most influential factor in determining access to proper safety, shelter and work.



Traumatic Experiences Palestinian Refugees Experienced During Syria's Civil War

### Meet the Kheir family

"We spent eight years building our house in Syria. We lived well there, but in the last two years everything changed," Ahmed laments. The scariest moment, he says, was hearing mortars raining on their area and not knowing where they would land. They fled for their lives to a nearby neighborhood. He went by their house to salvage some of their belongings, but everything was destroyed. When mortars started landing in their new neighborhood, they had to run again.

"We left with the clothes on our backs," Ahmed says, repeating the most common refrain heard among the Syrian refugees. The family left Syria on January 14, only days after his wife Dima gave birth through a C-section. "I went to the hospital three times before that and I didn't have the baby. I was so anxious from the shelling," Dima says.

Baby Moataz is their only son, but Ahmed feels no optimism for him. "On the contrary, my girls brought us luck. When Malak was born we bought our first car. And when Rosol was born we had enough money to finish building our house. They had a peaceful childhood," Ahmed says.

**"Moataz was born during war. He has no future."**

“ Yesterday I sold one of our blankets to buy diapers for the baby. ”



### Meet the Oneissi family

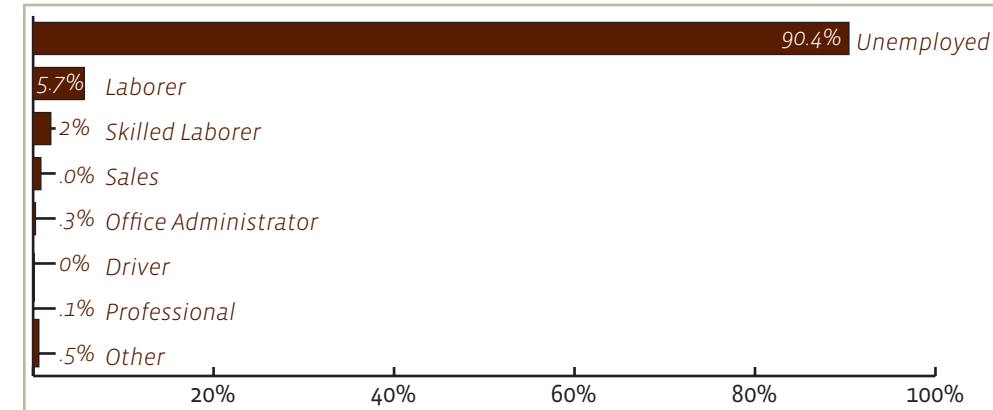
Mohammad and Alaa are living with their three young children in the Burj El Shemali camp in southern Lebanon. They fled from the Yarmouk camp in Syria in February. Mohammad's mother was sick when they arrived and died in Lebanon. Her hospital bills came to \$4,700, They still owe \$1,700, but they have no more money and have no electricity, running water or gas for cooking.

Mohammad spends his days searching for work, patching up holes and worrying that the snakes and insects infesting their shelter will bite his baby girl.

## CONDITIONS IN LEBANON

ANERA and the National Institute of Social Care and Vocational Training (NISCVT) conducted research and published a report in March 2013 that reveals a host of unmet basic needs among Palestinian refugees from Syria. They don't have enough food. Diapers are too expensive. Their meager shelters are falling apart. In winter, they suffer from the cold.

The huge influx of refugees is also having a devastating effect on the housing, financial, and psychological capacities of the camps, where resources were already strained.



Employment in Lebanon Among Palestinian Men from Syria

### Livelihood

**Palestinian refugees from Syria are finding that their money is not worth as much**, since the exchange rate for Syrian pounds has plummeted and the cost of living in Lebanon is much higher than Syria. This problem is made worse by the lack of work opportunities open to them in Lebanon.

**Palestinians from Syria do not have the right to employment in Lebanon** as Syrian citizens do, nor do they have the decades-old experience of being migrant laborers in Lebanon like many Syrian citizens do. The result is they lack any economic lifeline in this crisis.

Unemployment is widespread among Palestinian families from Syria, regardless of age, gender, educational level, or previous employment status. More than 90% of the refugee families from Syria lack an income. **They have to rely on the generosity of other poor refugees to sustain them.**

**90%** of families lack an income

Although not widely reported, child labor exists and families may resort to it as a means of survival in light of prolonged displacement and exhaustion of their financial sources.

### Food

Hunger is a major issue for these families. Food is simply too expensive for most. **Two-thirds of all families are not able to provide three meals a day.**

Almost all families receive food aid from various sources, including host families and local and international organizations.



External doors made of cloth



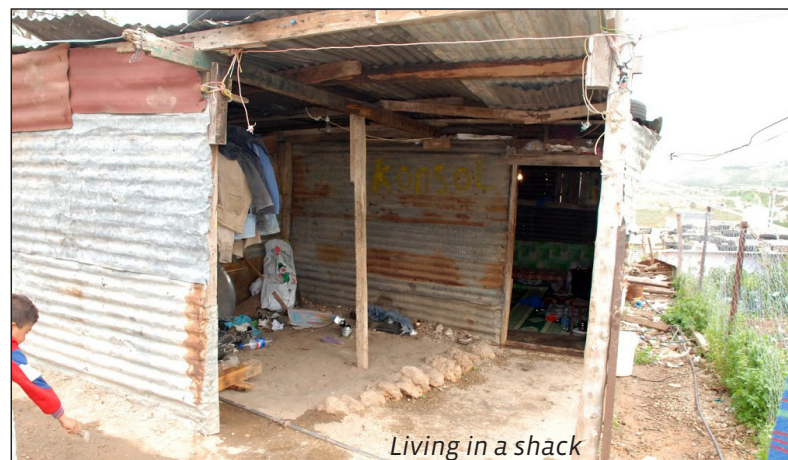
Living in a garage



Kitchen area



Shared toilets

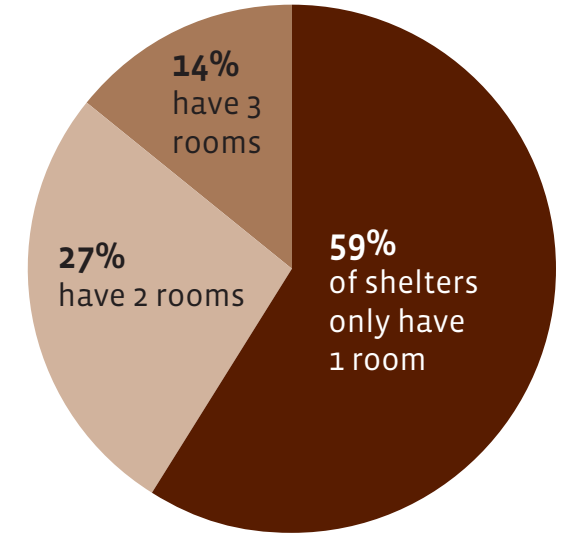


Living in a shack

### Housing

ANERA's January 2013 survey shows that 74% of households interviewed are crowded with more than 10 people. To make things worse, almost **60% of all households are crammed into one room**. Many families live without electricity, running water or proper heating. Large numbers of people share toilets and many have to leave their shelters to use facilities, raising the likelihood of illness.

Despite the terrible conditions, rents average between \$150-\$300/month. **Families live in constant fear of losing their shelter because they cannot afford to keep paying.**



**1/3 of Palestinian families from Syria live in unsafe and dilapidated shelters** – garages, buildings with no doors or windows, schools, shacks, shops, etc.

### Health Care

UNRWA is the main health care provider in Lebanon for Palestinians. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society, local organizations and private clinics are also extending their services to the refugees from Syria. These health care providers are overwhelmed by the dramatic increase in the number of patients without a proportionate increase in their organizational and financial capacities. This means that families are forced to pay out of their own pockets (when they can afford it) or, in some cases, refrain altogether from seeking care for their acute and chronic conditions.

Illnesses Among Palestinian Children from Syria in Lebanon\*

Flu	39%
Diarrhea	18%
Fever	9%
Cough	8%
Asthma	5%

\* January-February 2013

### Education

Many Palestinian children from Syria have witnessed horrible violence. Going back to school means a return to normal life for these children, but many resist enrollment efforts in Lebanon.

**74% of families have at least one child who is not attending school**

Curriculum differences and limited school capacity are the main reasons for non-enrollment. Integration into the Lebanese curriculum is difficult for most refugee children from Syria. Math and science courses are taught in Arabic in Syria, but in Lebanon the courses are taught in English or French at UNRWA schools.



For years ANERA has been delivering donated medicines and other supplies to all of Lebanon's refugee camps. Through our well-established network of local partners, ANERA is getting the following items into the hands of Palestinian refugees from Syria:

- 25,000 quilts and 1,200 baby blankets
- 28,000 hygiene kits
- 12,000 school kits
- 2,800 baby care kits
- 4,000 vouchers, valued at \$23 each, for clothes and food

We also are delivering medicines and health care supplies, worth tens of thousands of dollars, to charitable hospitals and clinics so families don't have to choose between buying food or the medicines they need and health care staff have supplies available to treat their influx of new patients.

## MEETING THE CHALLENGES

UNRWA bears most of the burden of caring for Palestinian refugee families in Lebanon's camps, but budget cuts and other constraints make it impossible for them to meet all of their needs. International foundations, institutions, non-profits and local community-based organizations are joining together to help bridge the gap during this crisis, providing:

- ◆ small-scale renovations of host family homes and distributions of food and non-food items to host families so they can continue sheltering Palestinian refugees from Syria.
- ◆ basic items like food, blankets, and clothing, with a special priority for newly-arrived Palestinian refugees from Syria.
- ◆ cash-for-rent support and income generation initiatives that are critical to reducing these families' financial insecurity.
- ◆ additional support to UNRWA as the main health provider for Palestinians in Lebanon so it can expand its capacity and coverage.
- ◆ additional emphasis on remedial and informal education, so that refugee children from Syria can continue their schooling while in Lebanon.

Palestinian refugees from Syria are an especially vulnerable sub-population of the Syrian conflict. The effects of statelessness multiply the horrors for Palestinians with each new war and subsequent displacement. With so much destruction at home, they fear their displacement could become permanent. The international response to the Syrian conflict must also prioritize a political solution for Palestinian refugees so there is a sustainable and more prosperous future for all.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Anne Irfan, "Palestinians Fleeing Syria Face Grim Future in Lebanon," The Electronic Intifada, 15 March 2013, <http://electronicintifada.net/content/palestinians-fleeing-syria-face-grim-future-lebanon/12279> (accessed 20 March 2013).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 UNRWA's Response and Services to Palestine Refugees from Syria; Bi-weekly Briefing: 2 April 2013 | issue 13
- 4 Anne Irfan, "Palestinians Fleeing Syria Face Grim Future in Lebanon," The Electronic Intifada, 15 March 2013, <http://electronicintifada.net/content/palestinians-fleeing-syria-face-grim-future-lebanon/12279> (accessed 20 March 2013).
- 5 Sherifa Shafie, "FMO Research Guide: Palestinian Refugees in Syria," Forced Migration Online, <http://www.forcedmigration.org/guides/fm0017/fm0017.pdf> (accessed 20 March 2013).

### SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Unless otherwise indicated, the statistics in this on-the-ground report come from ANERA's survey of refugees from Syria in Lebanon, published by the Beirut office in March 2013.

[anera.org/needsassessment](http://anera.org/needsassessment)



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## **ABOUT ANERA'S ON-THE-GROUND SERIES**

The ANERA on-the-ground series is designed to add a humanitarian voice to the story of life in the Middle East. With data from ANERA's professional staff, people who live and work in the communities they serve, and with over 40 years of experience in the region, ANERA has a unique opportunity to build a fuller understanding of what life is like for families struggling to survive within an atmosphere of severe political strife and daily turmoil.