



## UNRWA Protection Monitoring Report - Quarter 1 (Q1) 2022

*This report is the fifth of UNRWA's protection monitoring of the situation of Palestinian refugees.<sup>1</sup> It reflects qualitative data from focal points among UNRWA staff and local organisations in five Palestinian refugee camps (Beddawi in North Lebanon, Bourj Barajneh in Central Lebanon, Wavel in Beqaa, Ein El Hilweh in Saida and Rashidieh in Tyre) and their collective analysis of trends.<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise stated, findings are drawn from focal point surveys and interviews.*

### Summary

- The protection situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon in Q1 2022 continued to be heavily affected by the **ongoing socio-economic crisis, political instability, and financial strains**. As prices for food, medicine, fuel and rent rose, the **level of poverty among Palestinian refugees reached 86 percent**.<sup>3</sup>
- Economic distress has been mirrored by **social pressures**: tensions among Palestinian refugee groups persisted in much of the country. Demand for **cash assistance** continued to outstrip UNRWA's ability to provide, leading to continued friction between groups and individuals and against the agency.
- **Access to services** is becoming more of a challenge to many Palestinian refugees, with the cost of transportation an increasingly significant barrier to school attendance, and the cost of hospitalisation putting it out of the reach of many despite UNRWA's support.
- The quarter was marked by an **upsurge in the number of COVID cases** in January and February across Lebanon. This impacted movement, social connectedness and economic opportunities. The **winter was colder and longer** than previous years, particularly impacting Palestine refugees in the Beqaa and the North.

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<sup>1</sup> There are four groups of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon: 1. Palestine Refugees in Lebanon (PRL) who are descended from those who lived in Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict; 2. Those not registered with UNRWA who were displaced as a result of the 1967 and subsequent hostilities, and who are registered with the Lebanese Government (referred to as "Not-Registered" or NR by UNRWA); 3. Palestinian refugees who lack identity documents and are neither registered with UNRWA nor with the Lebanese authorities (referred to as "Non-IDs"); and 4. Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS), who have arrived in Lebanon since 2011 and who may or may not have regular status in Lebanon (referred to as PRS). For the purposes of this report the term Palestinian refugee is used for all Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, unless specified otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> As this report reflects the opinions of a limited group of people, however well-informed, these results are indicative only, but do highlight issues arising in these camps.

<sup>3</sup> UNRWA, Relief and Social Services Department, *Crisis monitoring report - high frequency survey results*, March 2022.

- **Violent incidents** within families and communities continued to be reported and, alongside a **reported rise in street crime and theft** in and around the camps, contributed to **feelings of insecurity**, especially among women and children.
- While Lebanon's economic crisis is impacting people across the country, **pre-existing vulnerabilities and restrictions on the rights of Palestinian refugees**, such as the **right to work, access to services and poor living conditions**, mean that they continue to be particularly impacted.

### Key needs highlighted

- Increased **cash assistance** to Palestine refugees to meet rising costs of basic goods and services.
- **Support for access to services**, notably assistance for transportation or service provision closer to communities.
- **Strengthened coordination of local actors** on child protection, gender-based violence and other protection needs in the camps.
- **Safe spaces for children to play** in the Palestine refugee camps.
- **Ongoing awareness raising with PRS on residency renewal, advocacy to GSO** on those turning 18 in Lebanon who are no longer on their family cards.
- Increased **hospitalization coverage**, as Palestinians do not have access to free hospital care and UNRWA covers only a percentage of costs.

### As Lebanon's crisis deepens, so do Palestinian refugees' poverty and frustrations

Poverty among Palestinian refugees is increasing, with an UNRWA survey finding that 86 percent were living below the poverty line in March 2022 compared to 73 percent in July 2021.<sup>4</sup> This is a result of rising prices and an end to government subsidies, with a growing proportion of household expenses being directed towards increasingly expensive fuel and electricity.

In March 2022, electricity and fuel accounted for 15 percent of household expenditure, compared to 6 percent in July 2021, while expenditure on food dropped from 45 percent to 39 percent over the same period, suggesting that households have reprioritised resources, cutting down on elements usually considered essential, such as food. With the rise in food prices, nearly 90 percent of those surveyed in March reported purchasing leftovers from the market, while two-thirds reported reducing the number of meals they had eaten in the seven days preceding the survey.<sup>5</sup> The price of a survival minimum expenditure food basket in Palestine refugee camps in March 2022 was a 400 percent increase on the October 2019 price.<sup>6</sup> 52 percent of households reported taking on debt in the three months prior to the survey in March 2022, compared to 47 per cent in July 2021.

Some Palestinian households, particularly in Tyre and Central Lebanon Area, reportedly cut their generator subscriptions, leaving them reliant on one or two hours' electricity a day from the national grid. Lack of electricity also left streets darker in camps, limiting safe movement after dark (reported as a particular issue for women and children), and made it more difficult for children to do homework. In the Beqaa, the particularly harsh winter, coupled with the usual annual jump in unemployment as agricultural work halted until spring, left families struggling to pay for the additional fuel needed for heating. In Beqaa and the North particularly, cold houses, a lack of heating and lack of adequate

<sup>4</sup> UNRWA, Relief and Social Services Department, *Crisis monitoring report - high frequency survey results*, March 2022.

<sup>5</sup> UNRWA, Relief and Social Services Department, *Crisis monitoring report - high frequency survey results*, March 2022.

<sup>6</sup> UNRWA, *Market Price Monitoring Tool*, 2022.

winter clothes were described as having a significant impact on people's health, particularly amongst groups such as older persons.

In a March 2022 multi-sectoral needs assessment by REACH, Palestinian refugees reported higher rates of psychological and physical distress stemming from Lebanon's overlapping crises than other population groups. Fifty percent of assessed households reported at least one adult member had been affected by such distress, compared to 45 percent among the Lebanese population and 34 percent among other refugee or migrant households.<sup>7</sup>

Focal points reported that Palestinian refugees continued to experience difficulties coping with the day-to-day living, with some also noting a sense of general hopelessness among community members. Parents remained anxious about providing basic necessities for their families, and some worried about the safety of their children in the insecure environments of the camps and surrounding areas. Difficulties accessing mental health services and the high cost of medication remained a gap particularly for those needing psychiatric intervention.

### High levels of violence and crime were reported, fuelling refugees' anxiety and feelings of insecurity

Violence continued to be a feature of life in many Palestinian refugee communities, impacting perceptions of safety and quality of life. The protection team is aware of 13 violent incidents in Q1 of 2022, including nine shootings, three grenade attacks and one stabbing. This was more than the 11 incidents recorded in Q1 2021 when stricter COVID-19 measures were in place, but fewer than the 16 of Q4 2021. Four were recorded in the North of Lebanon, and three each in Saida and Tyre, broadly following patterns in 2021. As in 2021, no incidents were recorded in the Beqaa, although focal points there noted the regular occurrence of violence in surrounding Lebanese communities severely impacted Palestinian refugees' sense of safety. Incidents of shooting include one outside an UNRWA school in Ein El Hilweh, and one inside a school in Rashidieh, both of which led to high levels of anxiety among parents and children and highlight the armed violence children are exposed in the camps.

Other incidents not captured in UNRWA's reporting - such as frequent shooting in the air in many camps - also contributed to residents' feelings of insecurity. In Rashidieh camp, for example, gunfire was said to occur nightly, and respondents in the southern camps also reported continued feelings of insecurity resulting from incidents of past quarters.

As poverty and desperation deepened, Palestinian refugee communities continued to report an increase in crime and drug use and trafficking. Thefts were widely reported, far more than in previous quarters, while reports continued of boys and young men, and, to a lesser extent, girls, being drawn into using drugs, and a smaller number into their sale. Drug use and dealing were reported to have increased significantly in Ein El Hilweh since the beginning of the year, where the issue had until then remained limited. Focal points in Central Lebanon Area and Tyre reported growing feelings of insecurity in the camps and those in Saida, Central Lebanon Area and the Beqaa reported that some residents did not feel safe outside the camps because of fear of rising crime in surrounding communities. Focal points in Tyre suggested that adolescent girls and young women, unable to afford transport, worried about sexual violence and harassment while walking to access education.

### Access to cash assistance remained a key need but demand outstripped UNRWA capacity, and discrepancies between communities contributed to tensions.

UNRWA announced plans to reduce cash assistance to Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS) during the quarter due to funding shortages, leading to PRS protests throughout the quarter, including a months-long sit-in outside UNRWA Beirut office's front gate. Focal points also linked the reduction in PRS cash

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<sup>7</sup> REACH, [Multi-sectoral needs assessment factsheet - Key Findings: Health](#), April 2022.

assistance to increased anxiety amongst the population about UNRWA's ability to go on providing services.

The wider Palestinian refugee community also repeatedly called on UNRWA and at times the international community<sup>8</sup> to provide further economic support for all Palestine refugees. UNRWA's installations were closed or its services disrupted due to protests by groups (on 74 occasions) and by individuals/families (on seven occasions).<sup>9</sup>

Tensions reportedly persisted between Palestine Refugees in Lebanon (PRL)<sup>10</sup> and PRS due to the different levels of cash assistance available to them (with continued negative perceptions of PRS as 'better off', as they are in regular receipt of cash dollars). However, some focal points also reported increases in solidarity between groups in the face of a deteriorating economic situation that was affecting everyone.

### Evictions remained rare but loomed larger as rents were raised or required in US dollars

Actual evictions remained rare, and UNRWA is only aware of two reported in Saida, and a similar number in Beirut, with seven reported in the North of Lebanon. However, confirmed reports of evictions have in the past been extremely rare within the Palestinian community, and threats of eviction were reported to be more common in all areas. Rents were said to have risen both inside and outside camps, with landlords increasing the rent or requiring payment in US dollars. Some Palestinian refugees were said to move "voluntarily" to cheaper accommodation rather than face eviction.

### Older persons and persons with a disability remained particularly impacted

The general shortage of medicine stocks in Lebanon and high prices for medication continued to have a particularly pronounced impact on those with special medical needs, including those with serious illnesses or conditions, and older people. Some focal points noted the particular challenges that children with disabilities faced in accessing transportation.

### GBV remained a key concern for women and girls amidst strained domestic settings

Women and girls were said to be suffering from ongoing high levels of violence in the home as the socio-economic crisis continued to heighten tensions within families while also forcing them to spend more time together in often crowded homes, with little hope for an improved situation. While focal points reported that the majority of violence against women and girls took place in domestic settings, harassment in the street and online also continued, particularly emphasised in Central Lebanon Area. According to focal points, reporting of sexual violence or exploitation against children continues to be rare due to children not knowing how to report it, fear of retaliation, taboos around mentioning it, and a lack of trust in the system.

### Economic strain drove dropouts and child labour, while child marriage and school transport were also concerns

The majority of focal points considered that children did not feel safe across the quarter.

Strained family incomes were said to continue to push families to send children - often boys - to work, sometimes withdrawing them from school to do so. According to focal points, child labour and school dropouts were the most common issues they saw in quarter one, with child labour a particularly prominent concern in the North, and dropouts the most evident in Saida.

In Saida in particular, focal points highlighted the impact of COVID-19-related one-week-in-person-one-week-home based school schedules on parents and children's commitment to school. The lack of

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<sup>8</sup> [Palestinian Refugees Portal](#), 22 March 2022.

<sup>9</sup> An additional 24 protests were reported during the period that did not directly impact access to services.

<sup>10</sup> See footnote 1

regular patterns, expectations and bedtimes, combined with financial pressures, were said to undermine some parents' ability to ensure their children's commitment to school. Children who lived further from schools also faced increasing difficulties in getting to school as transport prices rose significantly throughout the quarter.<sup>11</sup>

Reports of child marriage persisted as families continued to struggle economically, with Tyre focal points suggesting the practice was increasing in camps there. However, focal points suggested that cultural practices, including parents' lack of awareness about the negative impact, also contributed to this, as well as poverty, reflecting child marriage as a long-term phenomenon in the Palestinian refugee community.<sup>12</sup> Reports also continued of isolated instances of families pressuring children into worked for armed groups, which often pay in dollars, or criminal gangs.

### Obstacles to civil registration and residency remained for PRS and those without ID

Access to civil registration processes reportedly remained limited for PRS and non-IDs, and difficulties registering PRL children's births after more than a year, were highlighted in Central Lebanon Area.<sup>13</sup> Difficulties in receiving legal documents, the high cost of legal aid, and practical obstacles to accessing available services were also highlighted. Meanwhile, the time taken to issue civil documentation for PRL reportedly increased, with processing times of three to four weeks compared to one to two weeks previously. As among the Lebanese community, waiting times to obtain travel documents increased significantly.

Focal points highlighted that lack of residency continued to be a problem for the increasing number of PRS who entered Lebanon irregularly, as well as those who entered regularly but faced other practical obstacles to obtaining residency. In addition, those who did hold residency were reportedly often finding themselves unable to renew it due to associated costs and the irregular opening hours of the GSO offices. Some PRS in Saida were said to be afraid of approaching GSO to renew their papers after hearing of cases of people issued with departure orders while doing so.

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<sup>11</sup> UNRWA provided financial support for children living far from schools during the quarter, but this was attendance-based and therefore retroactive, meaning that many parents struggled to find the money at the necessary time.

<sup>12</sup> See for example UNICEF Lebanon. (2016) Child Protection Baseline Survey 2016 - key findings presentation and draft results paper, where 12 percent of PRL were reported to have been married before the age of 18, and Nabaa 2021, The impact of Covid-19 and the economic crisis on child rights in Lebanon, where 12 percent of PRL (and 25 percent of PRS) were reported to have been married before the age of 18.

<sup>13</sup> While registration of births after the child's first year is in theory possible for PRL, as for Lebanese, in practice this requires a waiver from the Department of Political and Affairs and Refugees. UNRWA understands that very few waivers have been granted in recent years and this is a significant problem. A waiver is in place for late registration for Syrian refugees and PRS.