

Protection Monitoring Report – Quarter Four 2021

This report is the fourth of UNRWA's protection monitoring of the situation of Palestinian refugees.¹ It reflects qualitative data from focal points from UNRWA staff and local organisations in five Palestine Refugee Camps (Beddawi, Bourj Barajneh, Wavel, Ein El Hilweh and Rashidieh) and their collective analysis of these trends.²

Key Issues

- Between October and December 2021 the economic situation in Lebanon continued to worsen for most as subsidies on products including fuel, medicine and many basic food items were removed, and the Lebanese currency was further devalued. On 4 October seven people were killed and more than 30 injured during armed clashes in the Tayouneh neighbourhood of central Beirut between supporters of different Lebanese political groups which, while they did not directly affect the Palestinian refugee community, added to anxiety of people across Lebanon.
- The socio-economic situation in Lebanon remained the primary threat to people's sense of safety, with the end of subsidies, rise in prices and struggle to access fuel for heating, transport and electricity. Ongoing anxiety over the socio-economic situation meant that although there was a decrease in violent incidents over the quarter, the impact on Palestinian refugees' sense of safety was only moderate as people struggled to provide for the basic needs of their families and levels of anger, hopelessness and anxiety remained.
- The number of violent incidents³ directly affecting Palestinian refugees decreased from a peak of 34 during quarter three to 16 in quarter four, with incidents recorded in all areas more regularly than during the first half of the year (11 in quarter one and 10 in quarter two), apart from in the Beqaa where no incidents were reported all year. The situation in Bourj Shemali in particular became increasingly tense following an explosion on 10 December and related shooting between Palestinian factions on 12 December.
- Focal points indicated that social tensions have become more widespread over the last months of the year and were more present in the family sphere, reflecting extremely high levels of stress. Tensions between Palestine Refugees from Lebanon (PRL) and Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS) were reported to be particularly high during October and November as PRS continued to receive cash assistance from UNRWA while most PRL did not. This changed in December when UNRWA announced a change in emergency cash assistance that negatively impacted most PRS families and in some areas led to more solidarity between the two groups.
- New protection threats emerged, including kidnappings for ransom in Central Lebanon Area (CLA) (three incidents), and an increase in threats of eviction inside and outside the camps, with landlords in some areas said to be increasing rent.

¹ 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 2013 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.

² 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.

³ In quarter four 2022 these included shootings, murders, stabbings, shooting in the air (not for celebrations), grenades, explosions, kidnappings and armed clashes. These are not comprehensive but incidents that UNRWA's protection team is aware of, reported through UNRWA staff, security channels or on (social) media in the camp. All incidents recorded were verified. The figure does not include violence within the household, gender-based violence or violence against children.

- Children were said to be less exposed to violence due to returning to school, however, due to a rise in reported food insecurity and neglect, protection concerns were as high as during quarter three. The cost of transportation impacted both PRL and PRS children's return to school in some areas, particularly in Tyre and the Beqaa, and the impact of two years online learning and the recently introduced blended modality (one week in school/ one week online) was said to disturb children's settling back into regular education.
- Issues raised by PRS during this period included in particular access to education related to registration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and anxiety over residency, as well as difficulties registering for UNRWA's assistance for those who entered the country irregularly.
- On 25 November the Minister of Labour announced a new circular No.1/96, which potentially opened the door to Palestinian refugees' participation in more professions. Although the circular contained very few new provisions for Palestinians' right to work in Lebanon, there was significant backlash to it in some sections of Lebanese society.⁴ Some PRS reported an increase in exploitation in the workplace, including non-payment for completed work.
- Throughout the quarter people reported that both PRL and PRS continued to move onward to third countries, including a few reports of people going to Belarus. Media reports indicated that an increased number of Palestinian refugees left Beirut through regular means in 2021.⁵ The number of refugees requesting information or assistance from UNRWA for onward movement doubled during 2021.
- During November and December UNRWA experienced significant funding difficulties, leading to concern about UNRWA's ability to provide services within the community and protests and sit-ins which impacted some UNRWA installations, including schools.⁶

1. Safety and protection among Palestinian refugees

Throughout 2021 Palestinian refugees' reported sense of safety reflected dynamics within Lebanon. These included lockdowns in the early part of the year and the slow easing of restrictions, the Gaza conflict, fuel, electricity and medicine shortages and the lack of political stability. This dynamic continued in the final quarter when most subsidies were removed, prices continued to rise sharply, there was a small number of significant violent incidents, and people continued to feel unsafe.

A. Socio-economic situation

Throughout 2021 the socio-economic context was consistently emphasised as the main driver of people's sense of safety as the Lebanese pound reached a record high,⁷ inflation soared and many subsidies were ended. A Multi Sectoral Needs Assessment indicated that at the end of 2021, 21 per cent of Palestinian households were experiencing moderate or severe hunger due to lack of food.⁸

Difficulty accessing electricity and fuel was described as impacting livelihoods and living standards as well as creating anxiety and frustration. Between October and December, the Lebanese state continued to provide only a few hours each day in most parts of the country, with one to three hours reported in most camps. Generator usage also declined significantly as families cut their subscriptions due to cost, in effect meaning that an increasing number of families no longer have electricity for

⁴ On 3 February 2022 the State Shura Council issued ruling No.93, which stopped implementation of the circular following a legal challenge from the head of the Maronite league.

⁵ [Economic crisis drives more Palestinians from Lebanon \(theenationalnews.com\)](http://Economic%20crisis%20drives%20more%20Palestinians%20from%20Lebanon%20(theenationalnews.com))

⁶ 39 protests or sit-ins in quarter four compared to 25 in the third quarter, 15 in the second and 10 in the first.

⁷ At the end of December and the beginning of January, the pound was trading at 30,000 to 1 US dollar on the black market. <https://today.lorienteljour.com/article/1286572/a-new-year-and-a-new-record-low-for-the-lira-as-it-plummets-past-ll30000-to-the-dollar.html>

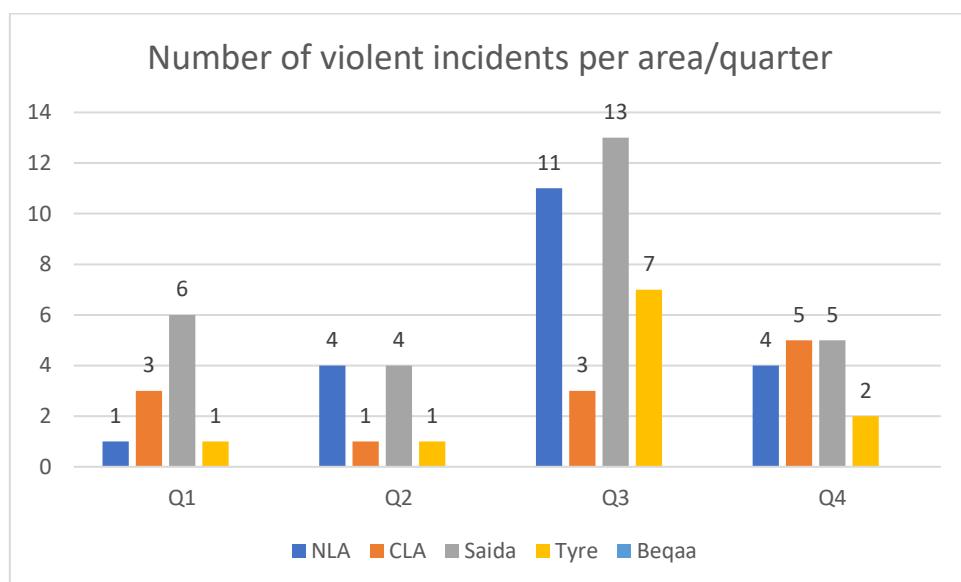
⁸ In January 2022, the NGO Reach published a Multi Sectoral Needs Assessment conducted from October to December 2021 across Lebanon. It also found that 46% of Palestinian households had had no food of any kind at home because of lack of resources in the 30 days prior to data collection.

much of the day. In Bourj Shemali and Rashidieh, as gas prices rose, people were said to be cooking on fires. With the end of government subsidies, transport was said to be too expensive for most Palestinian refugees who continue to be paid in Lebanese pounds,⁹ making accessing livelihoods and services more difficult, particularly in areas like the Beqaa. In Ein El Hilweh, the lack of drinking water was also said to contribute to tensions. The onset of a particularly cold winter in the Beqaa was an additional challenge as families struggled to afford heating, increasing levels of anxiety.

In general, although focal points reported that all groups were vulnerable to threats linked to the economic crisis, they highlighted the difficulties women face with high prices, no job opportunities, depression, and family violence. One reason given for this was that women are often responsible for the financial management of the household.¹⁰

B. Incidents of violence

In 2021, Ein El Hilweh in Saida and Beddawi in NLA, experienced the highest number of incidents of violence (28 and 20 respectively out of 71 recorded). No incidents involving Palestinian refugees were recorded in the Beqaa.



The security context across Lebanon and in the Palestinian refugee camps remained tense during the quarter. On 14 October, seven people were killed and more than 30 wounded during fighting between Lebanese armed groups in Tayounah.¹¹ While this did not directly impact the Palestinian community, it exacerbated safety concerns among all population groups in Lebanon.

The protection team recorded 16 incidents of violence involving Palestinian refugees between October and December (five in October, five in November and six in December), less than half of the 34 incidents recorded during the third quarter. Five incidents were reported in Saida, largely shootings, four in CLA, of which three were kidnappings, four shootings in North Lebanon Area (NLA), and two in Tyre.

⁹ According to Al Jazeera, a tank of fuel is now worth as much as the monthly minimum wage.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/13/cash-strapped-lebanese-drivers-block-roads-in-day-of-rage> January 2022, Al Jazeera

¹⁰ It should be noted that female focal points outnumber male and that this may be reflected in this analysis.

¹¹ Deadly clashes erupt over Judge investigation Beirut blast, France 24 <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20211014-live-at-least-one-dead-in-shooting-at-protest-against-beirut-blast-judge>

On 10 December an explosion in Bourj Shemali killed one person, highlighting the physical dangers present on a daily basis within Palestine refugee camps.¹² Following this, at the funeral, fighting between Palestinian factions reportedly killed 3 people and wounded six. While Ein El Hilweh remained largely calm following fighting between factions on 18 September that impacted UNRWA schools, the discovery of the body of a murdered man associated with one of the factions outside a school on 6 November led to concerns about potential further clashes, with families taking their children out of school, some of whom have not returned. Two people were killed and two injured during two incidents in Nahr-el-Bared camp on the 1 and 3 October: the camp is in principle a no-weapons area, with entrances controlled and security provided by the Lebanese Armed Forces. Shootings in the camp have been extremely rare until this point.

C. Perceptions of safety

Reported perceptions of safety differed from area to area, despite a general improvement since September. In most areas people were reported to feel insecure due to both the economic context and worry about potential violent incidents – with focal points in the North for example reporting that the significant decrease in incidents was due to Palestinian security forces efforts on preventing any escalation, rather than because the issues were no longer there. The sense of insecurity was reported as particularly high in Tyre and CLA, with feelings of safety worsening in Tyre and Saida areas during the quarter, likely following events in Bourj Shemali in December. In NLA focal points also explained that crimes were no longer being investigated due to the lack of resources of the Lebanese government, which is contributing to a lack of accountability that leaves people afraid to move freely, feeling anxious, and in some cases is allegedly decreasing barriers to criminality. The example of a drug dealer released four days after his arrest was given by focal points. Generally, focal points indicated that all groups were likely to feel unsafe, compared to the beginning of the year when they singled out specific groups such as PRS and Non-IDs.

Increasing poverty and desperation appear to have led to negative coping mechanisms such theft, which was particularly reported in CLA. UNRWA also saw an increase in theft from its installations, particularly targeting electricity, diesel and water infrastructure. Three kidnappings were reported during quarter four for the first time in the year, all occurring in CLA, two of which were linked to false promises of support for onward movement. UNRWA is also aware of hostage taking in CLA during quarter three on at least one occasion – a PRS woman returning from Syria.

Despite issues within camps, people were still said to feel less secure outside than inside them. Focal points in CLA explained this as due to the increase in theft in the streets outside the camps due to the high cost of living. In addition, PRS without residency – and thus risking arrest – felt notably safer within the camps.

D. UNRWA's assistance

During quarter four, as the population turned to UNRWA for increased assistance to face the socio-economic situation, particularly in terms of cash assistance, the Agency faced significant funding issues.¹³ Austerity measures, including the delay in paying staff salaries, were met with anger and frustration from people within the community, with social media posts relaying fears that these were a prelude to stopping all UNRWA services and the abandonment of Palestinian refugees by the international community. In all areas focal points pointed to this fuelling people's feelings of anxiety.

¹² The cause of the explosion has been reported as oxygen cylinders for COVID-19 treatment catching fire, or a weapons storage. <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1284460/geagea-calls-for-official-version-of-events-surrounding-burj-al-chemali-explosion.html>. Either way, it indicates how unsafe the camps can be.

¹³ See for example <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/unrwa-commissioner-general-calls-support-prevent-collapse-agency-advisory>

In December UNRWA announced a change in monthly cash assistance to PRS which for households of one or two people – which at the end of the year made up 43 percent of PRS households - in particular has significantly cut their monthly income. As 93 percent of PRS reported relying on UNRWA cash assistance for their livelihoods in March 2020 before COVID-19-related lockdowns,¹⁴ this is likely to have a significant impact on the well-being and protection of large numbers of this community. Focal points explained how this announcement was seen as particularly shocking at a time when the community expected more assistance, and some felt it was part of a wider political agenda to push PRS back to Syria.

As the Palestinian refugee community reacted to these measures, access to services was impacted with 144 installations (including schools) fully or partially closed across 18 days during the quarter as a result of sit-ins and protests against the Agency – the highest of any quarter in 2021 and significantly higher than in previous years.¹⁵ Tyre area was particularly impacted with 80 incidents, including those linked to protests in October and November about transport assistance for students in Bourj Shemali to access school (there is no secondary school in Bourj Shemali, with many students needing to travel to Rashidieh camp).

In the last quarter of 2021, staff in 18 UNRWA installations reported incidents of violence, threats of violence, or harassment against staff. This was a significantly higher number than during 2020, where staff from two installations reported such incidents.

E. Social tensions

Social tensions were reported as becoming widespread between individuals within population groups during the fourth quarter, reflecting high levels of stress and fear and building on dynamics noted in quarter three. Whereas tensions with Lebanese communities were more mentioned in the beginning of the year, towards the end of the year focal points were more likely to highlight tensions within the Palestinian community.

Focal points indicated that UNRWA's cash assistance was a contributing factor to tensions between PRL and PRS in October and November, given the dire economic situation and minimal cash assistance to PRL – for example, in the Beqaa focal points highlighted the difference between monthly and blanket assistance to PRS but quarterly payments of a smaller amount to a limited number of particularly vulnerable PRL under UNRWA's Social Safety Net Programme (SSNP). Reactions to the reduction in cash assistance to PRS differed across areas: focal points in NLA described a loss of sympathy between PRL and PRS, while in CLA more solidarity between these groups was reported due to each being impacted at a similar level by the economic crisis. Interpersonal tension was said to risk leading rapidly to interpersonal violence, as during quarter three, with focal points in Saida for example describing issues such as water, reserving parking places, or noise as potentially triggering disputes.

F. Mental Health

Focal points mentioned anger, depression, anxiety, fear and hopelessness, as well as difficulties coping with daily demands. Whereas in the first two quarters focal points had mentioned specific vulnerabilities for PRS, Non-IDs or youth, in the fourth quarter an overwhelming majority of focal points considered all groups were impacted. In Tyre, focal points indicated that, although mental health needs were higher than in previous months, people prioritised food and basic needs rather than money for transport or time to access mental health services or time. On the other hand, in NLA focal points reported an increase in people seeking support for mental health from NGOs.

G. Evictions

¹⁴ UNRWA, socio-economic survey, 2020

¹⁵ In total, in 2020, UNRWA installations were fully or partially closed by protests or sit-ins on 47 occasions.

Since the beginning of the economic crisis, UNRWA has not recorded a notable increase in evictions or threats of evictions facing the Palestinian community. While UNRWA may not have the full picture, it is also likely to be linked to people finding solutions inside the camps and support networks operating within the community, as well as the lower rents within the camps. For instance, with rents increasing within the Baalbek area, focal points have reported that households have been attempting to move to the already overcrowded camp and in NLA, focal points explained that two cases of eviction threats to families were resolved with the intervention of the popular committee. However, during the last quarter focal points reported an increase in the number of evictions and threats of evictions in and outside camps, with focal points in Tyre and CLA reporting for the first time that evictions are happening. Some focal points in CLA in particular pointed to this as an increasing trend with some landlords said to be asking for rent in dollars, while in Tyre PRS reported that rents were doubled during the quarter.

H. Specific vulnerabilities

During the quarter, focal points highlighted that older persons were particularly impacted by the inability to purchase medicine, while persons with disabilities suffered from the reduced funding for non-governmental organisations and UNRWA's own budget constraints. Focal points in Tyre explained this as the diversion of funding to COVID-19 related assistance and cash programmes as a result of the economic crisis, leaving people with specific needs often without support and at risk of further marginalisation.¹⁶ In NLA, focal points reported that, in certain cases, monthly medical examinations had switched to being paid in dollars, leading to families not affording medical check-up and health conditions worsening.

UNRWA's health services however have continued without interruption during this period, providing persons with essential medical care which otherwise they would not have access to – and have seen a significant increase in demand as medical care costs have risen among other providers. UNRWA's Relief and Social Services' specialized services remain limited as funding continues to fall short of the community's needs especially since Lebanon's financial crisis has made the cost of imported assistive devices more expensive.

2. Violence against women and girls

Focal points noted a slight improvement in feelings of safety for women in the fourth quarter. Overall, women and girls were said to have felt safer in the first two quarters compared to the second part of the year, and most unsafe between August and October. As during the rest of the year, the three key concerns in the fourth quarter were street verbal harassment, online sexual harassment and intimate partner violence. Street verbal harassment was the largest concern in quarter four in CLA, whereas intimate partner violence was the largest concern in Beqaa, Tyre, NLA and Saida. Lack of electricity was said to have led to a slight decrease in online harassment compared to the beginning of the year when electricity was more regular and lockdowns forced more people on line. Focal points highlighted the vulnerability of all female groups of the population to these threats.

In December, more focal points mentioned people were worried about family members being sexually exploited in accessing humanitarian assistance and jobs than in October or November. In NLA, focal points reported that women and children were losing trust in the ability of NGOs and institutions such as UNRWA to respond adequately to cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, maintain confidentiality and provide safe spaces to survivors.

3. Child protection

A large majority of focal points considered children felt either not safe at all or faced some safety concerns, with children's feelings of safety said to be similar to during quarter three. They attributed this to the economic situation and parents' focus on survival. However, the return to school was said

¹⁶ The diversion of funds to respond to covid-19 was reported by organisations in December 2020.

to have a positive impact generally, leading to children spending less time on the streets and being less engaged in child labour.

However, while the return to school was reported to have a positive impact on children's protection, the economic situation and COVID-19 related regulations have continued to complicate it. The cost of transport to get to school was said to be difficult for parents to meet, particularly in places such as the Beqaa, and in Bourj Shemali children missed school on several occasions as families sought assistance from UNRWA with transport. In Ein El Hilweh, focal points reported that children were neglected by their families as families are exhausted by the struggle of balancing access to electricity, food or medicine, and that parents have lost the habit of supporting children to get to school on time during the almost two years of online schooling. Focal points in several areas pointed to the impact that one week on/ one week off schooling, required by COVID-19 regulations, has on children's (particularly younger ones) progress. Lack of food was also noticed in schools with teachers in Ein El Helweh reporting that children no longer brought breakfast in school and focal points in NLA reporting that many children did not eat it before school as previously.

A number of PRS students, particularly those who had recently arrived in Lebanon or entered the country irregularly, struggled to be registered with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) during quarter four due to their legal status. In Ein El Hilweh, some parents kept their children out of school following the discovery of the body of a man belonging to one of the factions involved in shootings in UNRWA schools during September outside the school in November. Some have not returned their children to that school.

Despite the return to school, the most frequently reported child protection concerns continued to be child labour, violence against children and street-connected children. Most focal points considered all groups were equally affected. Focal points in Tyre highlighted the impact of the Bourj Shemali explosion and subsequent shootings on children's mental health and wellbeing, and in Ein El Hllweh they described the lasting effects on children of the September shootings and the murder outside the school.

The number of focal points reporting that they were aware of children being physically harmed was similar in quarter four to quarter three, with 11 reporting that they were aware of children being injured as a result of violence and four reporting being aware of child victims of sexual abuse. Almost half focal points had heard of substance use or dealing among children at least once in the last month, and while generally focal points reported that children were working less, in Tyre they reported that children were increasingly involved in exchanging money and in the Beqaa that families were sending children to work to support them financially. Boys in the north were singled out as being less safe than girls because girls do not often leave the camps, whereas boys are unsafe when doing so. Focal points in Tyre indicated that there had been an increase in child sexual harassment in camps during the quarter and that too often perpetrators are well-connected, undermining accountability mechanisms.

The economic situation, combined with ongoing COVID-19 related restrictions, continued to impact children's wellbeing. Focal points explained children had no toys, could no longer play games such as football and expressed worry they were not having a typical childhood. In NLA, focal points described the example of a student wrapping his shoes with nylon bags to prevent the rain from reaching his feet as illustrative of the struggles families are facing. A nation-wide survey on nutrition found that four percent of Palestinian refugee children suffered from wasting the most immediate, visible and life-threatening form of malnutrition where children become too thin and their immune systems are

weak – compared to 1.8 percent of Lebanese and 2.4 per cent of Syrians.¹⁷ Across areas, food insecurity was a rising concern for children, reported to contribute to feelings of unsafety among children in CLA and progressively emphasised in areas such as Saida.

More than in other areas, focal points in CLA and NLA felt that children did not report incidents that affected them. While children were said to be most likely to turn to family members, UNRWA staff and NGOs, low reporting was attributed to potential stigma, the lack of trust in the system and no clear directions on how to do so.

Civil registration and residency

According to focal points, the three main issues people face in accessing civil registration remained largely the same through the year: the cost of the process, the lack of required documents, and some refugees' lack of residency. Lacking the required documents was particularly reported Tyre. The two main groups who find it most difficult to access civil registration were PRS and Non-ID. Non-IDs were especially mentioned in Saida while PRS were mentioned more in Beqaa. In CLA focal points linked the lack of legal residency to not be able to move freely in the camps. In Saida focal points noted it was taking more time than before to issue new passports or civil reports for PRL.

Onward movement

Throughout the quarter focal points reported that an increased number PRL and PRS were seeking to move to third countries although the cost continued to be prohibitive. The number of PRS and PRL requesting information or assistance from UNRWA for onward movement doubled during 2021. A small number of focal points reported knowing of people who had sought entry to Europe through Belarus, while media reports indicated that more Palestinian refugees left Beirut through regular means and did not return in 2021 than the previous year.¹⁸ In Beqaa focal points noted that there had been an increase in restrictions for youth leaving the country and that winter had led to less onward movement during the fourth quarter.

Key needs identified by focal points

- Regular and sufficient cash payments for the majority of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.
- Guarantees that UNRWA can continue to cover transport costs of children who would otherwise struggle to access school.
- Increased psychosocial support in schools following violent incidents in the community, particularly where these impact children in schools.
- Increase safe spaces available to children for recreational activities.

¹⁷ The Lebanon Anthropometric Nutrition Survey, Ministry of Public Health and nutrition sector, published February 2022. The survey also found that ten per cent of Palestinians suffered were under the average height for their age (stunting), compared to seven percent of Lebanese and 25 percent of Syrians.

¹⁸ [Economic crisis drives more Palestinians from Lebanon \(thenationalnews.com\)](http://thenationalnews.com)