



## UNRWA Protection Monitoring Report – Quarter 2 (Q2) 2022

*This report on the situation of Palestinian refugees<sup>1</sup> is largely drawn from qualitative data from focal points among UNRWA staff and local organisations in five Palestinian refugee camps – Beddawi in North Lebanon Area (NLA), Bourj Barajneh in Central Lebanon Area (CLA), 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

- **Access to basic goods and services** was further restricted as prices rose. **Electricity and internet** were increasingly out of reach for many, with Palestinian refugee families sharing subscriptions or cancelling services altogether. **Rising rent** caused some families to voluntarily move rather than face eviction. The ability to **travel within the country, to eat a nutritious diet, and to access clean drinking water** also suffered as prices for transport, food and water outpaced incomes.
- To survive, families **increasingly relied on cash transfers** from UN agencies including UNRWA, NGOs, relatives abroad, and Palestinian political factions.
- **Violent crime** within Palestinian refugee camps remained steady from last quarter, but high levels of theft and robbery, as well as violence in areas surrounding camps in Beirut, Beqaa and the North, left many Palestinian refugees continuing to be afraid for their safety and limiting their movements as a result.
- Palestinians expressed concerns at **anti-refugee rhetoric** from prominent Lebanese figures primarily targeting Syrian refugees, although at the end of the quarter this remained largely rhetorical. High levels of pre-existing discrimination persisted.

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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. 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. However, they do highlight issues arising in these camps.

- The number of Palestinian refugees **seeking irregular channels to a future in a third country** appeared to rise significantly, with UNRWA aware of a number of Palestinian refugees successfully reaching Europe by boat.
- Following a statement against the legalization of homosexuality and civil marriage by the Lebanese Mufti, there was **significant backlash from Palestinian religious leaders against NGO activities-promoting gender equality, alongside accusations that some activities also promoted homosexuality**. Women's leaders reported targeting and repression during this period, although subsequently their activities were able to continue.
- The **difficulty in maintaining confidentiality** and **obtaining access to justice** for GBV cases continued to be highlighted, particularly in the camps.
- **Child labour** remained a small but growing phenomenon as the economic crisis continued to hit household incomes. While, in some areas, **child marriage** was reported to continue, in others, it reportedly was less common this quarter as families have sought to avoid the costs associated with all marriages.
- As for other groups of the population, closure of government offices due to the public sector strike hampered Palestinian refugees' ability to **register life events and access civil documentation**, while also hindering the ability of PRS to **obtain or renew residency**.

#### Key needs highlighted

- **Increased financial/material support for access to basic goods and services** including food, water, electricity, transportation and internet. This is particularly important for **access to education** in the coming scholastic year.
- **More effective coordination** between agencies and organisations on programming and advocacy **addressing the rising cost of living** for Palestinian refugees and the **needs of vulnerable population groups**.
- Creation of **safe spaces** in Palestinian refugee camps for women and children in particular.
- Ongoing awareness raising with PRS on **residency renewal**, and advocacy with the GSO on those PRS turning 18 in Lebanon who are no longer on their family cards; access to regular legal status for those who have arrived in Lebanon since 2016.
- Strengthened cross-agency coordination on **advocacy** with authorities and business owners in Palestinian refugee communities to highlight the **negative impact of harmful work and the worst forms of child labour**.

#### The economic situation continues to be a central concern, impacting access to basic goods and services

Accessing basic goods and services in light of rising prices remains a core concern for Palestinian refugees, as it is for other refugees and Lebanese. The protracted economic crisis and rise in the price of petrol as a result of the war in Ukraine are increasingly affecting even those receiving incomes in US dollars who had previously been relatively insulated from the economic downturn.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The price of gasoline increased by 90 percent between March and June 2022 (World Food Programme, Food Security and Markets Situation Analysis, 14 June 2022).

The price of electricity and internet is prompting many Palestinian refugee families to share generator and internet subscriptions or stop paying for them entirely.

As in previous months, the rising cost of fuel and transportation inhibited movement for some Palestinian refugees; some in Beddawi camp were said to be regularly walking the 5-6 kilometres to central Tripoli to save on travel costs. People were reportedly otherwise limiting their transport to essential tasks only, which exacerbated challenges in accessing services and employment.<sup>4</sup>

As throughout Lebanon, food security among Palestinian refugees has been hit by rising prices. The increased cost of meat and fruit means families are eating less and less-varied food, while many families are skipping meals or reducing portion sizes.<sup>5</sup> Those families who can afford only a small amount of electricity – or none at all – are unable to refrigerate food, leading to reduced access to fresh and nutritious meals. Periodic bread shortages across Lebanon are further restricting people's diets.

In some areas, people were reportedly taking on debt to cover essential costs. 91 percent of PRS surveyed reported borrowing money in the 30 days prior to the survey.<sup>6</sup> In the Beqaa, however, focal points suggested that lenders are becoming less willing to lend to Palestinian refugees for fear they will not be able to recover the loans.

### **Palestinian refugees raise concerns about children's educational achievement**

Brevet exams were sat in May and June. 79 percent of children across the country, passed the exam. This includes private schools (where results are likely to have been higher), public schools and UNRWA schools. 48.5 percent of students in UNRWA schools passed, with significant gender differences observed: 57.4 percent of girls passed the exam compared to only 37.8 percent of boys.

While the overall results were broadly in line with those from 2019, the multiplicity of factors that have affected children's access to education over the past years are likely to have played a role in the relatively low scores, and have consistently been highlighted through protection monitoring. These have included the stress on households, particularly women, of supporting online learning, difficulty in accessing devices, restricted access to electricity, the impact of one-week-on and one-week-off school schedules, children working when not in school, the high cost of transport, parents' increasing despair and the exhaustion of their capacity to support their children's access to school, and children's psychosocial wellbeing in these circumstances.

Fears about the impact of transport costs on access to education were highlighted by many school principals, particularly as Palestinian children living outside the camps or at a distance from UNRWA schools are increasingly unable to access Lebanese public schools, leaving them obliged to travel to UNRWA schools.<sup>7</sup> As children prepare to return to school full-time for the first time since the 2018 – 2019 school year, transport costs risk being a significant barrier to education.

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<sup>4</sup> Similar trends have been observed in the wider refugee population in Lebanon, in which nearly a third of refugee households reported being unable to reach essential services in the last 30 days because of transportation costs (UNHCR Protection Monitoring, Q2 2022).

<sup>5</sup> This finding is consistent with UNHCR's Q2 2022 protection monitoring, which found that 95 percent of surveyed refugee households had reduced their spending on food.

<sup>6</sup> Post-distribution monitoring of cash support to PRS, July 2022.

<sup>7</sup> While in principle all children in Lebanon have the same access to education, in practice public schools only accept foreign students (including Palestinians) once they have given places to Lebanese.

### **Remittances and third-party assistance (including from political factions) were a key lifeline for many families**

Many Palestinian refugee families are increasingly relying on remittances from family members to cover basic costs. In the Beqaa – and likely other areas – it is predominantly PRL who are able to draw income from relatives abroad, with PRS having less well-established connections. In addition, many Palestinian refugees depend heavily on cash assistance from humanitarian organisations, including UNRWA, UNICEF, and local and international NGOs, with focal points noting the prevalence of this in north and central areas in particular.

Palestinian refugees in north and central areas and Saida are reportedly becoming increasingly reliant on cash from Palestinian political factions. Refugees – particularly young people, including university graduates – were said to be employed by factions in a range of functions, from camp security to administrative and clerical work, in return for payment in US dollars. In many cases, this is the only employment opportunity available. In Ein El Hilweh, where most factions have a very strong presence, focal points suggested that remittances and income from political factions or other groups have been somewhat able to shield the community from the worst impacts of the crisis.

### **Questions raised about water quality in some areas despite price rises**

The price of water rose along with other basic goods. In some areas there were reports of illnesses which people attributed to poor water quality. In central Lebanon area, where focal points reported that tap water is salty and unfit for drinking, sicknesses from drinking from taps – due to bottled water being too expensive – remained a concern. In north Lebanon where, along with the Beqaa, there were multiple cases of Hepatitis A in Q2, there were also reports of people becoming ill from drinking tap water. Although the UNRWA clinic has not identified patients with such infections, community members in Beddawi feared that Hepatitis was present in the camp, increasing anxiety.

### **PRS remained particularly affected by the economic crisis**

With over half of all PRS thought to be without residency and therefore restricted in their ability to move and obtain jobs, the difficulties described above have had a particularly profound effect on PRS families. Eighty-six percent of PRS relied on UNRWA cash assistance as their main source of income in Q1 of 2022 and they are increasingly struggling to cover basic needs despite this assistance. In Beqaa, focal points reported cases of more than one PRS family forced to share a house, while nine out of ten PRS reported relying on borrowing money in previous month.<sup>8</sup>

### **Personal safety remained a key concern amid consistently high levels of crime and violence**

The dire economic situation contributed to an uptick in reported levels of crime in the camp, particularly theft and robbery. These crimes have created an atmosphere of insecurity inside camps that inhibits the movement of some Palestinian refugees especially in central Lebanon and Tyre areas. At the same time, violent incidents in Palestinian refugee communities remained relatively steady from quarter one (10 incidents, compared to 13 in quarter one), and down from a high of 34 incidents in quarter three of 2021. In both Tyre and Beqaa, focal points noted that violent incidents were relatively rare in camps there in Q2 of 2022.

However, some Palestinian refugees were also feeling increasingly unsafe in the areas surrounding the camps. In central Lebanon, robbery of Palestinians in the vicinity of camps was reported,

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<sup>8</sup> Post-distribution monitoring of cash support to PRS, July 2022.

including one incident where a PRL man was ambushed and robbed on salary day, leaving him hospitalised. In addition, clashes between non-Palestinian individuals (often family-based) were reportedly frequent in Beqaa and the north, adding to refugees' general anxieties about moving outside the camps.

Focal points continued to emphasise women and children's feelings of unsafety, which have remained high. Their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse has been exacerbated by the economic situation, which in some cases was said to have led female family members to stay at home and children to spend more time on the street and/or at places of work. This is particularly critical for female-headed households, in a context where single, divorced or widowed women are particularly vulnerable to all forms of gender-based violence.

Several violent incidents were also reported in and around shops selling in-demand goods, particularly bakeries and petrol stations, as disputes over access to these commodities escalated. While such confrontations were not limited to Palestinian refugees, Palestinians in Tyre noted that some disputes contained discriminatory overtones, with some bakery owners reportedly demanding identity documents from customers and only selling to Lebanese nationals. This may be due to perceptions in the area that Syrians in Lebanon are re-selling bread on the black-market or in Syria, and that Syrian families generally consume more bread than Lebanese. These reports are consistent with UNHCR's protection monitoring findings for Q2.

### **Many are worried about Lebanese leaders' anti-refugee rhetoric; impacts are yet to be seen, but some discrimination is evident**

Q2 saw public statements of anti-refugee sentiment by several prominent Lebanese figures. While these remarks were mainly directed at Syrian refugees, the Maronite Patriarch called for the deportation and resettlement of Palestinian refugees alongside Syrians. Some Palestinian refugees expressed their concern at such rhetoric, but UNRWA interlocutors noted it was tied to long-standing social discrimination against Palestinians in Lebanon, rather than being a new phenomenon. GSO data does indicate a slightly higher number of PRS detained in Q2 compared to Q1; while this does not directly correlate to the number of PRS deported or receiving departure orders, it may bear some relation. UNRWA is aware a very small number of PRS being deported in Q2, which nonetheless is an increase on the previous two years.

### **Freedom of movement still a problem for those without documentation**

Freedom of movement remains a concern for many Palestinian refugees, especially PRS and non-IDs who often lack residency and official documentation. Many are apprehensive about being stopped at checkpoints and given departure orders due to lack of legal status; accordingly, they limit their own movements. This issue is particularly pronounced for those living in camps in the south, where residents must pass through Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) checkpoints to enter or exit the camps. UNRWA is noting a significant increase in PRS entering Lebanon and residing outside the camps, which may be linked to fears of passing through such check points.

On the other hand, reports continued that the financial crisis was limiting the LAF's engagement around some Palestinian camps and lessening the authorities' ability to keep people under arrest. Some people in Tyre reported that movement in and out of the camp had become easier.

## **Rents continue to rise and the threat of eviction remains – PRS particularly impacted**

Focal points in Tyre, northern Lebanon and Beqaa areas noted that reports of eviction and/or threats of eviction increased in Q2. However, exact figures are unavailable as many Palestinian refugees are reportedly moving to cheaper accommodation voluntarily when landlords tell them their rent will be increased or required in US dollars, or that they will soon be evicted. This means that many cases go unreported.

Focal points in Tyre and the north report that some of those facing eviction have moved in with relatives as a temporary solution, leading to crowded living conditions. In the Beqaa, some are reportedly trying to move into cheaper accommodation inside the area's only camp, Wavel, although there is very little housing available. PRS are considered to be more vulnerable to eviction threats than PRL, who, in light of their long-standing presence in Lebanon, often hold more secure tenure over their property. Popular Committees in the camps were previously said to have interceded and negotiated in cases of threatened eviction, but are now reported to be less willing to do so.

Rent increases outside the camps appear to be impacting the make-up of some of the camps – a demography that may also be impacted by rhetoric against Syrian refugees. While there have long been a significant number of Syrian refugees living in Beirut's camps, more are said to be looking for shelter there, and camps such as Beddawi are reported to have an increasing number of Syrians amongst their population. On the other hand, some migrants in particular are said to be struggling to afford the rent in the camps and are at risk of eviction as rents increase.

## **Community protests against UNRWA, largely linked to UNRWA's lack of resources in face of the socio-economic crisis, on occasion turned violent.**

While forced closures of UNRWA installations were lower than in Q1,<sup>9</sup> these continued, particularly after Ramadan. Most were in some way linked to the socio-economic situation in Lebanon. These protests centred on issues such as access to UNRWA's social safety net scheme and cash for work programmes, demand for support beyond what is available under UNRWA's health policy in the face of mounting health bills, demand for medication, and inclusion in shelter rehabilitation projects. Some protests also called on donors to ensure funding and political support for the Agency. On fourteen occasions an individual closed a service due to their specific concerns, impacting the functioning of that service, and on several occasions staff were threatened or injured by beneficiaries, with four such incidents in Q2 compared to only one in Q1.

## **Large uptick in interest in onward movement**

Onward movement by regular or irregular means continued to be a key hope for many Palestinians, particularly youth. While previously only a very small number of Palestinian refugees are known to have attempted to reach Europe by boat, this significantly increased during Q2. Six Palestinians from one PRL family in Beddawi were aboard the boat that capsized off Tripoli on 23 April, of whom four remain missing, and at least three boats with a significant number of Palestinian refugees (largely young men) from the northern area successfully reached Italy in June. Young men on these boats shared pictures and updates regularly on social media and their safe arrival was said to be encouraging other Palestinian refugees to attempt the crossing. Although many of those making the

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<sup>9</sup> Forced closures were particularly high in Q1 due to an announcement in December 2021 that regular cash support to PRS would be reduced.

crossing from the north appear to be PRL, in Tyre focal points reported that more PRS are also seeking to move on to a third country rather than back to Syria.

### **There has been some pushback by communities on gender/LGBTQI-centred initiatives**

Amid an anti-LGBTQI crackdown by the Lebanese government and statements by national religious figures in June condemning what they termed the promotion of homosexuality, communities in some Palestinian refugee camps rejected specific NGO activities that they considered breached communal norms on homosexuality and gender relations. Some activities on gender equality in the north were cancelled and in Tyre some sheikhs advised children not to participate in certain NGO activities on the basis of their promotion of gender equality. Women working to promote gender equality reported being targeted and further excluded from discussions among community leaders during this time. Furthermore, there was protest from some community members in Ein el Hilweh camp and debate in Beirut camps over plans to include women as sanitation workers under UNRWA's cash-for-work programme.

However, focal points reported a gap between views at a family or community level on the one hand and those expressed on public platforms on the other. Focal points indicated there was in fact a broad openness in the camp to women engaging in a wide range of different types of work including as sanitation workers – which was said to be safer for women than some other types of work.

In these debates, concerns related to activities that were seen to promote homosexuality led to some conflation between homosexuality and the broader issues of gender equality and challenges to existing gender norms. The debates also indicated the difficult environment that women face in realising their rights: whilst at the household and social level there may be wide acceptance, in the public, religious and political spheres, when the community is under pressure, progress on women's rights is precarious.

### **Mental health continues to suffer under current financial strain**

Palestinian communities reportedly continued to suffer high levels of mental health and psychosocial complaints as incomes and opportunities dwindled and pathways out of burgeoning poverty appeared increasingly slim. Very few focal points described Palestinian refugees' mental health as "good", noting widespread difficulties in coping with day-to-day demands in increasingly challenging conditions, and the prevalence of anxiety, fear and feelings of hopelessness.

While UNRWA interlocutors in most areas described such problems as affecting all groups of Palestinian refugees equally, some in the Beqaa noted the particular impact on PRS who face more discrimination from the Lebanese government and resulting economic difficulties.

### **Financial strains contributed to a rise in child labour and a potential drop in child marriage**

Focal points in Tyre, Beqaa and the north reported that the prevalence of child labour was increasing as the summer school holidays began, and in response to the economic situation.<sup>10</sup> Focal points in north and central areas noted that child labour was more common among Syrian refugees than Palestinians, but that some PRL and PRS have been involved.

Common activities for child workers include collecting garbage and plastic, working in supermarkets, gas-stations, and bakeries, or as mechanics and delivery-boys. Some were also said to be involved

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<sup>10</sup> This mirrors trends in the broader refugee population that UNHCR identified in its Q2 2022 protection monitoring.



in organised criminal activity such as theft of public utility equipment like man-hole covers and the delivery of drugs. Children engaged in child labour include school drop-outs as well as some who work after school or during holidays. Focal points in Saida noted that the growing financial and psychosocial pressures on families, which are often manifested in increased child labour, are having effects on children's performance at school and thus their future prospects.

Child marriage was also mentioned as an ongoing concern in most areas though some focal points described it as more wide-spread amongst Syrian than Palestinian refugees.<sup>11</sup> Among Palestinians, it is said to be more prevalent among PRS than PRL, except in Ein el Hilweh camp in Saida where both PRL and PRS were reported to be involved. Focal points in central Lebanon and Tyre areas speculated that rates of child marriage may be dropping due to families allocating scarce savings to basic needs rather than the costs associated with marriage.

### **Government office closures were a barrier to accessing documentation, residency, and civil registration**

The closure of government offices as a result of the ongoing public sector strike impacted the ability of both Palestinians and Lebanese to register civil events and obtain civil documentation, driving licences and passports in Q2. Palestinian refugees reported their frustration at the unpredictability of government service provision after paying for transport only to find offices unexpectedly closed.

In addition, office closures hampered PRS in obtaining or renewing residency, thus exacerbating the challenges they face in moving freely, particularly outside the camps. In the Beirut area, focal points reported that the GSO are also repeatedly delaying PRS residency renewals, impacting freedom of movement and ability to register marriages.

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<sup>11</sup> According to 2021 research by Nabaa, 12.5 percent of PRL women marry under the age of 18, compared to 25 percent of PRS.