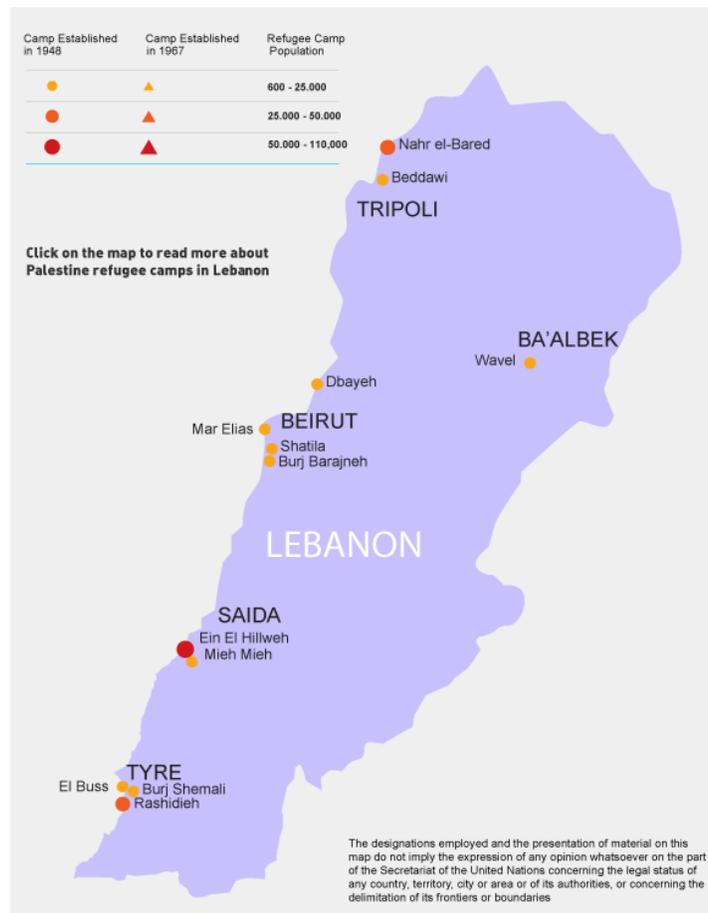


UNRWA Protection Monitoring Report - Quarter 4, 2022

This report on the situation of Palestinian refugees¹ is drawn from qualitative data gathered on key indicators in regular focus group discussions among focal points in five Palestinian refugee camps: Beddawi in North Lebanon Area (NLA), Bourj el Barajneh in Central Lebanon Area (CLA), Wavel in Beqaa, Ein el Hilweh in Saïda and Rashidieh in Tyre. Focal points are staff of UNRWA and local organisations, selected on the basis of their knowledge of and ongoing exposure to protection trends and dynamics in their communities. This report summarises protection trends across 2022, as well as highlighting new developments between October and November 2022.

SUMMARY

- In 2022, deepening poverty and the reduction of services provided by the Lebanese state placed increasing limitations on many Palestinian refugees' access to livelihoods, healthcare and education.
- Economic hardship manifested in a range of social problems including family breakdown, serious child protection issues, and mental health and psychosocial issues.
- Violent incidents remained at high levels, alongside growing petty crime and reduced feelings of safety in some camps and surrounding areas.
- PRS in particular experienced restrictions on mobility and access to services due to barriers to obtaining identity documents and renewing residency. Reports of anxiety among PRS grew, especially in the Beqaa, as rhetoric around the return of Syrian refugees sharpened.



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 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.



FINDINGS

Socio-economic conditions remained the core driver of many protection risks

Throughout 2022, the major impediment to Palestinian refugees' ability to exercise their rights and access essential services was the worsening socio-economic situation in Lebanon. By September 2022, **93 percent of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were living below the poverty line**, up from 86 percent in March.²

Access to healthcare remained a particular concern. Despite UNRWA covering up to 90 per cent of secondary hospitalisation costs, the declining value of the Lebanese lira left most families struggling to afford their portion. Moreover, with the daily decline in the currency's value, some beneficiaries reported being charged additional fees by hospitals, putting healthcare further out of their reach. UNRWA's own health facilities have experienced increased demand as some Palestinian refugees who previously sought healthcare through private clinics could no longer afford care or medicines and turned to UNRWA for support. In 2022, UNRWA clinics undertook 884,246 primary healthcare consultations, compared to 584,919 in 2021, a 51 percent increase.³ The number of people receiving mental health care and psychosocial support at UNRWA health centres also rose from 653 in 2021 to 1,930 in 2022, reflecting increased demand for these services.⁴

In addition, many **medications** that are not covered or are only partially covered by UNRWA - if they are available in Lebanon at all - are too expensive for most. Access to cancer treatment was a major concern throughout the year for Palestinian refugees as some drugs were not readily available in Lebanon. Frustration from community members at not being able to access care led to healthcare centres and UNRWA area offices being occupied or shut down on eight occasions, usually by individuals seeking more assistance with healthcare.

The economic situation has also impacted **access to education**, with the cost of transport to school a key obstacle for some families throughout 2022. In the 2021/22 school year, 16 percent of interviewed students who dropped out during the school year cited lack of transport as the primary reason.⁵ Due to challenges for Palestinian refugees in accessing the Lebanese public school system and the high cost of the private system, many travel significant distances to access the nearest UNRWA school.⁶ This is particularly an issue in the Beqaa, the Wadi Zeini area (Saida) and Beirut. It has a pronounced effect on secondary school students, as UNRWA only runs nine secondary schools across the country.

Moreover, at the beginning of the school year, class formation took more time than usual. This was because families were no longer able to afford private schools, or, in a small number of

² UNRWA RSS, *Crisis Monitoring Report - High Frequency Survey Results*, September 2022 at [link](#).

³ However, 2021 numbers may have been negatively affected by COVID-19 precautions impacting foot traffic at primary health centres.

⁴ As above, 2021 numbers may have been affected by COVID-19 precautions.

⁵ UNRWA Back to School outreach team data, 2021-22.

⁶ UNRWA was able to mitigate some harm through subsidising the transport costs of 7,697 students in the 2021/22 school year (out of a roll of 39,129) and for 12,822 students in November and December 2022. However, even under the subsidy scheme, many families who needed financial support were not eligible for coverage, while some of those receiving subsidies still struggled to afford transport as fuel prices rose.



cases, were asked to leave public schools as Lebanese students increasingly moved from the private to the public system.

Another obstacle to educational access was some families' need for **the additional income their children could obtain through working**. This, alongside transportation costs and other factors, contributed to substantial absenteeism in UNRWA schools in 2022, with many students who were attending UNRWA schools in October 2022 not sitting exams in January 2023.

An additional barrier to educational access continued to be experienced by PRS children without legal residency and/or civil documentation such as certificates of full birth registration. While UNRWA still registers students without such documents, these students' records with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) often remain "unjustified" unless they are able to obtain these documents. Many PRS are unable to do so, and face problems in sitting official exams and/or receiving educational certificates upon graduation.

Lebanon's economic deterioration has also left Palestinian refugee families - like many others across the country - **increasingly unable to afford a range of goods and services including electricity, internet, phone connections and shelter**. Some families are cutting or sharing generator subscriptions, phones, and internet connections. A reduction in access to phone services and the electricity needed to charge phones has posed problems for UNRWA's ability to contact beneficiaries.

Increased protests at UNRWA installations reflected growing frustrations while impacting access to services

Grievances over access to UNRWA services that target on a vulnerability basis, such as shelter or cash for work, as well as demands for increased hospitalisation support and concerns about school class sizes, impacted access to services as individuals or groups forced the **temporary closure of UNRWA installations** on 58 occasions in Q4 (compared to 16 in Q3). A further 13 protests or sit-ins hindered access but did not close installations. In the face of the economic crisis, Palestinian refugees continue to look to UNRWA for more support, particularly for these services, but the Agency's restricted resources limit its ability to provide higher levels of support. Beyond restricting beneficiaries' access to services, such protests are impacting frontline staff's feelings of safety in the workplace, with many staff reporting almost daily threats from community members.

Families came under strain as economic conditions undermined finances

The deteriorating economic situation in Lebanon contributed to a number of **overlapping social issues in Palestinian refugee families**, which disproportionately threatened the rights and safety of women and children. Focal points stated that financial strains within families were leading to greater tension between couples, and rates of separation among Palestinian refugees reportedly rose in Q4 in the North. At the same time, prolonged closures in the Lebanese court system and strikes by judges caused divorce cases and the enforcement of religious courts' decisions in family matters to stall. Research into children's safety in the camps between March and June 2022 indicated that children from separated families were among the most vulnerable to other protection risks.

Shelter became precarious for some families as rents rose

Across 2022, Palestinian refugees regularly reported **threats of eviction** as they struggled to afford rent. PRS were reportedly particularly at risk of such threats as they generally have less secure tenure in Lebanon than the more established PRL population. While the number of actual

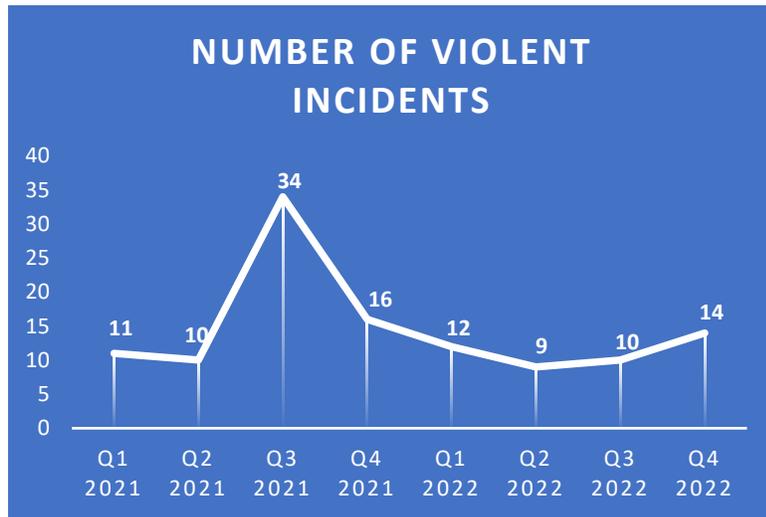


evictions documented remained low, anecdotal reports of threatened eviction and people otherwise facing homelessness rose compared to 2022. Even where families move voluntarily to avoid eviction, issues of child safety and family wellbeing can arise as they move into overcrowded premises with extended families or others.

Violence remained steady and, combined with ongoing petty crime, raised perceptions of unsafety

UNRWA recorded 45 serious violent incidents in Palestinian camps and gatherings in 2022. This was down from the 71 recorded in 2021, although that number was boosted by an abnormal level of violence in Q3 2021.

Q4 of 2022 saw a slightly higher number of incidents (14 incidents) than Q3 (10 incidents).⁷



Across 2022, 38 incidents involving the use of

firearms or explosives were recorded (compared with 59 in 2021); the majority were related to personal disputes but some stemmed from inter-factional rivalry and disputes between criminal gangs. These incidents resulted in seven fatalities and 30 injuries. As in 2021, the violence was concentrated in a handful of camps: 13 incidents occurred in Ein el Hilweh camp in Saida and 11 in Beddawi camp in Tripoli (which were also the two camps recording the highest numbers of incidents in 2021); five incidents occurred in Rashidieh camp in Tyre; four in Burj el-Barajneh camp in Beirut; and two in each of Burj Shemali camp in Tyre and Shatila camp in Beirut. No incidents involving firearms or explosives were recorded in other camps.

Community interlocutors report that, alongside these violent incidents, Palestinian refugee camps and gathering are experiencing an elevated level of petty crime driven at least in part by deteriorating economic conditions. Robbery of people in the streets, as well as persistent theft of items such as power cables, solar panels, gas bottles, wi-fi routers, and vehicles has led to widespread anxiety among Palestinian refugees. The sale and use of drugs, and the resulting sense of community insecurity, was also mentioned as a particular community concern in and around camps in Beirut. As a result of crime levels, focal points reported that camp residents were worried about their personal safety after dark both in and around camps in the North, Beirut, and Saida, while they particularly worried about violence and insecurity in non-camp areas in the Beqaa, which saw frequent episodes of armed violence in 2022.

The ubiquity of violence and the systemic barriers placed on Palestinian refugees' exercise of their rights were further highlighted in a large-scale Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) raid in Nahr el-Bared camp near Tripoli in Q4. On 25 October 2022, the LAF launched an operation to arrest individuals wanted on criminal charges. The raid involved armoured vehicles, military aircraft and a naval vessel, which many camp residents saw as disproportionate to the objective. UNRWA is

⁷ These figures exclude violence in and around schools, discussed in more detail in the section below.



aware of reports of school children encountering LAF while on their way to school – a potentially traumatizing experience – while one woman was reportedly injured and required leg surgery as a result of being hit by live ammunition. Checkpoint closures on the day of the raid inhibited freedom of movement, including for some Palestinian refugee children who were unable to leave the camp to attend schools.

The beginning of the 2022/23 school year saw child protection concerns rise in schools

The beginning of the school year in September saw students returning to UNRWA schools on a full-time, in-person basis for the first time in almost three years.⁸ In the weeks that followed, UNRWA schools reported **significant levels of bullying and violence between students** as some students struggled to cope with the return to school after three years of online or blended learning, increased anxiety in the home, and decreased capacity of parents to support students in school. In addition, some schools experienced increased student numbers that teachers found difficult to control.

Of particular concern were **a number of violent incidents, largely fights involving students, but sometimes involving parents or others, in and around schools**. In 2022, UNRWA started systematically recording violence in schools as a distinct category, recording 12 significant incidents across the year. Ten of these came since the beginning of the new year school year in September 2022. Nine incidents involved serious violence between students and three involved violence or threats of violence by parents or community members against school staff. Boys' schools and secondary schools were mostly likely to be affected, although one co-ed elementary school in Bourj Shemali has recorded multiple incidents as well. UNRWA staff also noted a high level of lower-level violence and bullying that is often not formally reported but nonetheless impacts student and staff safety in UNRWA schools.

Children and caregivers have also cited children's **safety on the way to school** as a major and rising concern, particularly where children must pass through high-crime areas such as in Shatila and Burj el-Barajneh in Beirut. An increase in potential sexual exploitation was also reported, with unauthorised people trying to enter schools or loitering outside.

More broadly, economic deterioration in 2022 was accompanied by a wide range of protection threats affecting children

In 2022, UNRWA and partners undertook an assessment of **child safety in Palestinian refugee communities**. Key risks to children's wellbeing identified by children, caregivers, and sector professionals included widespread sexual abuse and harassment; the proliferation of violence both in the streets and in households; drug abuse and dealing; and the multiple effects of the socio-economic crisis on mental health and aspirations for the future. At the same time, limits on access to justice in the camps - where local systems of dispute resolution are generally preferred and those with links to camp authorities are perceived as often unaccountable - mean that many child protection threats go unaddressed.

Women's rights faced community pushback

On two occasions during the year, some community members came together to **push back on women's rights**, including on two occasions issuing statements that they rejected in its entirety

⁸ Protests and closures in 2019, as well as the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020, caused major disruptions in student attendance. In the 2021/22 academic year, students attended school on rotational basis to limit COVID-19 risks.



the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In June, this followed a statement by the Grand Mufti rejecting homosexuality; in November, the push-back was specifically a reaction to campaigns during the 16 days of activism. While this rhetoric had a significant impact on women's rights organisations and local organisations promoting these rights, reports in the community indicate that to date it has not significantly translated into restrictions on women's rights at the household or community level. However, the ongoing economic crisis appears to be creating conditions for more conservative perspectives on gender rights to dominate public discourse, particularly on social media.

Anecdotal reports from the child safety assessment, focal points and school principals indicate that family separation continues to increase. Children whose parents have separated were reported to be particularly vulnerable to a range of risks, including sexual violence and drugs, as well as child labour. UNRWA social workers also reported a rise in GBV cases over the year, although this was likely also influenced by increasing community awareness of these services following a programmatic change.

For the first time in many years, government closures meant that it was difficult for PRL to register births and marriages, potentially impacting access to services.

While PRS have long struggled to fully register marriages and births due to the multi-layered system and expense involved, in 2022, **PRL also reported delays and struggles**. This was largely linked to the closure of government offices, with reports from several areas indicating that people are paying additional amounts to ensure that their files are rapidly dealt with. Lack of birth registration means that some Palestinian refugees cannot register with the Lebanese government, in turn impacting access for PRL to some UNRWA services. Additionally, if a baby is not registered in the first year after his/ her birth, there are extremely limited options to do so later.⁹ At the same time, the high cost of transport also impacted Palestinian refugees' ability to obtain documents, particularly in areas like the Beqaa and where offices were closed and people required to come back again.

PRS continue to face specific difficulties linked to their legal status in Lebanon.

As discussed above, **lack of identity documents** continued to have an impact on PRS children's ability to register with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) in some areas. Despite the annual governmental waiver enabling students without residency to sit official exams, they remain unable to obtain certificates unless they regularise their residency status. Regularisation is not possible for many and therefore this requirement reportedly deters some PRS students from continuing their studies.

Maintaining legal residency for children turning 15 continues to be a struggle as, like Syrian refugees, PRS are required to obtain their own identity documents at this age. The choice between the high cost of using brokers and the costs and risks involved in travelling to Syria personally, as well as the high costs of a Syrian passport only able to be obtained by approaching Syrian authorities, mean that acquiring identity cards and maintaining residency is complex for many. As of April 2021, 75 per cent of PRS families who had had children while in Lebanon indicated that their children's births were not fully registered (registration is required in order to obtain identity documents and residency).¹⁰

⁹ While a mechanism for late registration of births exists, in practice, registration through this procedure is extremely difficult.

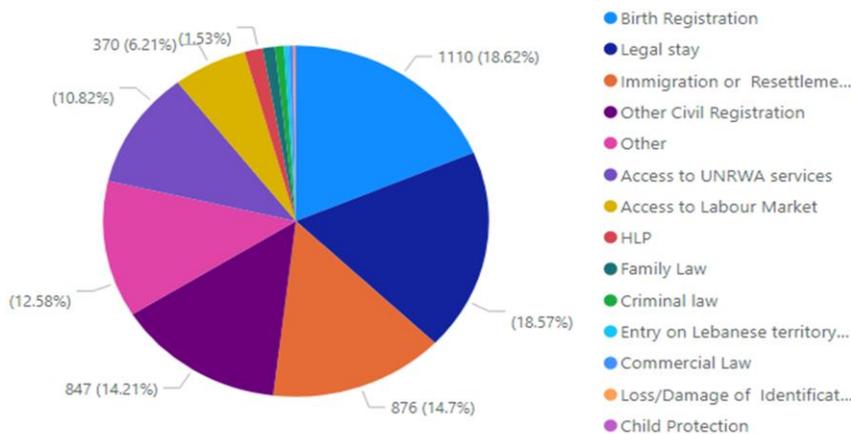
¹⁰ UNRWA, PRS return intentions survey, April 2021 (data not public).



Lack of residency was repeatedly raised by PRS as a major issue affecting them. For many, this is due to their entering the country irregularly after January 2014, after which date they have only been able to enter regularly in an extremely limited number of circumstances. Renewing residency was also a major concern for those PRS who were eligible for it. While the most recent figures for residency among PRS date from April 2021 and indicate that 51 per cent did not have residency, this is likely to have risen as transport and other associated costs have increased and government offices have often been shut.¹¹

PRS also expressed high levels of concern about **statements in the media about the return of refugees to Syria** - although as far as UNRWA is aware numbers deported remained low. While there was a slight increase in returns compared to previous years, people linked this to their desire to join families or to seek livelihood opportunities in Syria rather than Lebanon. This is despite ongoing security concerns and the dire economic situation in Syria, which were the main reasons given for PRS arriving from Syria to Lebanon in 2022. While this number decreased significantly after UNRWA stopped recording new arrivals for regular cash payments in August 2022, a small number continued to arrive, highlighting their security concerns in Syria and the lack of livelihoods.

Counselling Type



The topics on which Palestinian refugees approached UNRWA for legal counselling in 2022 indicates the centrality of civil registration and residency issues to this group, 60 percent of whom were PRS.

Palestinians increasingly looking abroad as options in Lebanon decline

The socio-economic situation and resulting protection concerns discussed above have led to an increasing number of Palestinian refugees seeking a better future outside Lebanon. While UNRWA was only aware of one attempt by Palestinian refugees in Q4 to **leave Lebanon irregularly by boat**, the number of attempts across the whole of 2022 was much higher than in previous years. UNRWA is aware of at least 20 separate boat departures since June in which Palestinian refugee attempted to leave Lebanon. UNHCR records indicate that around 450 passengers on irregular boat departures in 2022 (10 percent of total passengers) were Palestinian refugees, compared to

¹¹ Residency rates amongst PRS have for a long time been higher than among Syrian refugees. This may be due to the more precarious legal status of Palestinian refugees in the region, and also potentially linked to the fact that 45 per cent of Palestinian refugees live in camps.



only 10 individuals in 2021 (0.6 percent of the total).¹² In addition, more PRS returned to Syria in 2022 than in 2021, part of which at least can be attributed to the increasingly dire socio-economic situation in Lebanon.

¹² UNHCR monitoring of irregular boat movements from Lebanon.