



## UNRWA Protection Monitoring Report - Quarter 3 (Q3) 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

- **Deepening poverty** among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, 93 percent of whom were below the poverty line as of September 2022, continues to be a **key driver of protection risks**.
- Worsening economic conditions continue to put added pressure on household budgets, **reducing the affordability of essential services**, while the quality and coverage of some service provision has deteriorated as a result of Lebanon's deepening financial crisis. This includes the **rising costs of hospitalisation as well as the non-availability of certain medications** through the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), both of which reduce the ability of Palestinian refugees to access both the medicines and healthcare services they require, particularly impacting those with chronic healthcare needs.
- Lebanon's financial crisis has also conditioned increased demand for enrolment places in public schools among Lebanese students whose parents are no longer able to pay for private education. Among Palestinian refugees, there has been **increased demand on enrolments in UNRWA schools**, with many students unable to find places at Lebanese public schools. This is straining capacity in some UNRWA schools. Deteriorating economic conditions also mean that **more households are turning to other UNRWA services**, which are in turn under increasing pressure, particularly given shortfalls in the agency's budget.

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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.

- Transport costs for school students have also become a major worry for many households as UNRWA schools resumed full-time in-person classes after ongoing school schedule interruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some UNRWA schools are reporting that **higher transport costs are creating barriers to school attendance** for some students. This trend is anticipated to rise.
- Key government departments including the Department for Political Affairs and Refugees (DPAR) have been regularly closed, **complicating civil registration**, which is critical to maintaining legal status and, for PRL, is needed for access to UNRWA services. It has been reported that people are increasingly turning to brokers to facilitate access to these and other Government services; this option is unaffordable for many Palestinian refugees.
- Feelings of **insecurity among Palestinian refugees intensified** as petty theft has increased in the camps, including muggings, coupled with ongoing sporadic violent incidents usually involving inter-personal disputes. These trends have contributed to Multi-Sector Needs Analysis (MSNA) and Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) results that show that PRL reported the highest rate of fear of being robbed out of any population group.<sup>3</sup>
- The number of Palestinians attempting to emigrate from Lebanon through **irregular boat movements increased sharply** over the quarter. A reflection of growing desperation, irregular boat movements continue to lead to the tragic loss of life. This includes the recent sinking of a boat off the coast of Syria in late September in which at least 94 individuals died. 13 Palestinian refugees are known to be amongst the dead and nine remain missing, with many of those residents of Nahr-El-Bared camp. This incident has had a profound impact on a close-knit community. Refugees report that dire socio-economic conditions and a lack of hope about a future in Lebanon are largely driving attempts to emigrate.

### Economic situation

The deteriorating socio-economic situation in Lebanon, including inflation and rising prices for basic goods and services, continues to be a key determinant of the protection situation among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. An UNRWA survey showed that 93 per cent of Palestinian refugees were living below the poverty line as of September 2022, compared to 86 per cent in March 2022, and 73 per cent in July 2021.<sup>4</sup>

Capacity to pay for food, shelter, transportation, electricity and other basic services is declining. Debt levels remain high, with 51% of Palestinian refugees reporting taking on debt in the last three months.<sup>5</sup> In the Beqaa at least, much of this debt is reported to be in the form of buying on credit from supermarkets; very few are borrowing cash as most lenders are no longer willing to lend. A UNDP household survey among inhabitants of Palestinian gatherings outside camps (largely comprising PRL and PRS, but also some Syrians and Lebanese) found that pre-existing vulnerabilities have been exacerbated by the current economic crisis to the extent that the situation in such gatherings is a humanitarian emergency. Where households in these gatherings earned enough income on average to cover 84 percent of their monthly expenditure in 2017, in light of inflation and a decline in wages, income now covers only 64 percent of expenditure.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> MSNA (Multi-Sector Needs Analysis) is conducted by REACH; VASyR (Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon) is conducted by UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP. Draft 2022 findings.

<sup>4</sup> UNRWA, *Crisis Monitoring Report - High Frequency Survey Results*, September 2022, March 2022 and July 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> UNDP, *Assessing Vulnerabilities in Palestinian Gatherings in Lebanon - Results of the 2022 Household Survey*, October 2022 at [link](#).

Most of the protection issues discussed in this report stem from the increasingly strained financial circumstances of Palestinian refugee households and resulting coping mechanisms.

### Healthcare costs are a key concern for many

The prohibitive cost of medicine and medical care and the inability to obtain some medications for chronic diseases including cancer and blood diseases in Lebanon, is an increasingly significant issue among Palestinian refugees. Shrinking incomes and purchasing power, which are exacerbating pre-existing economic deprivation, have seen many struggle to cover hospitalisation costs that fall outside UNRWA's policy.<sup>7</sup> The cost of hospitalisation has increased as hospitals now often price consumables, equipment, prosthetic devices and medicines in US dollars. In addition, in some cases hospitals have been unable to guarantee quality of care as, for example, generators are not always available; UNRWA has increasingly struggled to secure favourable contracts in locations close to where Palestinian refugees live.

While UNRWA provides free medication in its clinics, not all types are always available. Certain types of cancer medication, for example, are no longer available through the Ministry of Public Health but may be found on the black market. Focal points in the North reported that some individuals have been unable to afford medication not covered by UNRWA and have therefore stopped taking their regular medications. Further illustrating growing challenges in accessing healthcare, UNDP found that, among inhabitants of Palestinian gatherings outside camps, 59 percent of surveyed households reported being unable to secure needed medications in the past three months, while 52 percent had been unable to access needed health services.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, strain on the Lebanese health system has had indirect impacts on UNRWA's health services. UNRWA clinics in the Beqaa and CLA report increases in patient numbers, as those Palestinians who would previously have sought private care look to cut costs by using UNRWA services.

### Class formation issues affect back-to-school period

As UNRWA schools started back on 15 September, pressures affecting the wider Lebanese education system had spill-over effects on UNRWA schools. With fewer places available for Palestinian students in Lebanese public schools and private schools increasingly out of reach for those Palestinian families previously able to afford them, the numbers of new students enrolling in some UNRWA schools increased. This has increased the size of classes, with up to a hundred students more in this academic year than the previous one across age groups in some schools. This has led to larger class sizes in many cases, overcrowded playgrounds, and reduced capacity of teachers to support children's wellbeing and inclusion in school.

### Some students struggle to enrol in school

PRS who entered Lebanon irregularly, particularly after April 2019, continue to face restrictions in many areas in registering with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), despite UNRWA registering them at the school level. While there are a few documented cases per school at most, this remains a considerable barrier to accessing education for affected students.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, some students who passed their official grade 12 exams but have not been able to

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<sup>7</sup> UNRWA covers 60 to 90 percent of hospitalisation costs for most Palestinian refugees depending on the urgency of the treatment.

<sup>8</sup> UNDP, *Assessing Vulnerabilities in Palestinian Gatherings in Lebanon - Results of the 2022 Household Survey*, October 2022 at [link](#).

<sup>9</sup> UNRWA is aware of a larger number of PRS children of school age who have arrived in Lebanon since 2016, when entry requirements became even tighter than in previous years. However, only a small number of these are being flagged as having problems with enrolment, suggesting either inconsistencies between areas, or that significant numbers of PRS may not be registering in schools at all.

obtain a certificate due to their lack of residency are reportedly facing challenges in registering for tertiary education.

In addition, while UNRWA is facing a higher number of Palestinian refugee students in UNRWA schools this year, the agency is unable to provide education for all children living within camps, 26 percent of whom were Syrian in 2017, including 58 percent of the population of Shatila and 48 percent of Bourj Barajneh. These figures are likely to have increased (see below). Anecdotal reports from UNRWA staff and focal points indicate that there are high number of school-aged children living in the camps who are not attending school, many of whom are not Palestinian.

### Transportation costs are a growing barrier for students

Even as the number of students registered in UNRWA schools has grown, rising transportation costs are an increasing barrier to school attendance for students in areas where distances between communities and schools are large. In several schools, staff were already reporting transport costs were impacting the attendance of enrolled students by the end of September and expressing concerns that more students will be affected as the term progresses and winter weather sets in. While transport fees have been increasing for two years, during the 2021 - 2022 school year, schools operated on a one-week-in-person, one-week-at-home for most students due to Covid-19 precautions. While transport was a major factor behind drop-outs during the year, the full implications will only be felt during the 2022 - 2023 year.

Significant numbers of students are understood to be affected in the Beqaa, Saida, the North, and Tyre in particular, although even in Beirut students often have to cover considerable distances to reach their nearest UNRWA school. This particularly impacts secondary students as UNRWA only operates nine secondary schools across Lebanon. Walking several kilometres is not an option for most students as roads are unsafe - both due to high-speed traffic, potholes/ gaps in the pavement and in some cases the risk of (sexual) harassment and theft on the way to school - something particularly prevalent in the Beirut area, where students have to pass through areas outside the camps that suffer from significant criminality.

These trends are borne out by a recent UNDP survey in Palestinian gatherings, which found significant increases between 2017 and 2022 in rates of children in Palestinian gatherings enrolled in but not attending schools, with higher rates of non-attendance as children grow older. Between 2017 and 2022, non-attendance has increased from 0.1 percent among 6-12 year olds to 3 percent, from 0.2 percent among 13-15 year olds to 15 percent, and from 0.2 percent among 16-18 year olds to 41 percent. This report mainly attributed this to the rising cost of transportation, alongside the on-again-off-again schedules of UNRWA and Lebanese public schools.<sup>10</sup>

### Telecommunications costs are presenting challenges but families are largely managing to maintain some connectivity

Despite rising telecommunications prices, many Palestinian refugees are prioritising retaining their phone lines and internet connections, or at minimum maintaining WhatsApp accounts. In some cases, families are cutting costs by sharing a phone or wi-fi connections. Nevertheless, increased prices and the challenge of keeping phones charged in light of minimal electricity provision are said to have negatively impacted some Palestinian refugees' ability to maintain contact with service providers or other assisting agencies, particularly in Beqaa and the North. This appears to be particularly impacting older persons and more vulnerable households, for example female-headed households, who are more likely to struggle to gain sufficient income to access enough electricity to charge phones (and lamps for the dark).

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

### Eviction threats reportedly rise, but no apparent increase in actual evictions

Reports of landlords raising rents and threatening evictions continued in Beqaa, the North and Tyre. However, no actual evictions among Palestinian refugees were reported, except for in Tyre. As observed in previous quarters, in some cases where eviction is threatened, Palestinian refugee families are choosing to move voluntarily to cheaper accommodation, including sharing accommodation with others. Across a longer timeframe, the economic crisis has had a clear impact on the number of eviction threats against Palestinian tenants, with 16 percent of tenants in Palestinian gatherings reporting receiving eviction threats, compared to 9 percent in 2017.<sup>11</sup>

As per previous quarters, evictions among the Palestinian community in the camps generally target PRS whose tenure is less secure than that of PRL. Focal points and UNRWA staff report that people are moving into shared accommodation, and that in several cases those moving into the camps are Syrian refugees (for example in Beddawi and Nahr el-Bared camps). This may reflect increasing pressure from community tensions between Lebanese and Syrian refugees in the North in particular, and the fact that, inside the camps, people are less at risk of being stopped for not having residency or having entered Lebanon irregularly.

### Child labour levels appear to remain consistent

In most areas, a low level of child labour appeared to continue. Since children were not at school for most of this quarter due to the summer break, it is unclear to what extent child labour is linked to school drop-out or is merely a summer activity before school returns. This should become clearer in Q4. Children who are not living with their primary carer were said to be most impacted. In North Lebanon, focal points reported that child labour increased over the quarter, with older children (above grade nine) particularly affected as families look for an additional income source amid the economic crisis. In the north, people pointed to the normalisation of children working instead of attending school, and identified a need for catch-up or literacy classes that these children can access outside work, as well as outreach services and drop-in spaces for working children or children out of school.

### Child marriage appears to have levelled off this quarter as families can't afford the costs associated with marriage

Reports of child marriage have remained steady at a low level. In the Beqaa, focal points suggested that lack of disposable income was leading to fewer marriages of any kind taking place, including those few child marriages that had been occurring.

### More engagement with Palestinian political parties for cash

Continued pressures on household finances mean that employment with Palestinian political parties remains an attractive source of income. In the North, focal points reported people receiving much-needed USD income through some political parties. In the North, Saida and Tyre areas, reports continued of adolescents engaging with different factions, including carrying weapons, from the age of 16. There were anecdotal reports of adolescents involved in military training in some areas. While some political parties also distribute occasional cash assistance to some families, focal points indicated that this is sporadic and not a reliable form of income.<sup>12</sup>

### Gender-based violence (GBV) cases remain high

Cases of domestic violence and divorce remain high as Palestinian refugees slide deeper into poverty and families struggle to make ends meet. Limited case data available to UNRWA appears to indicate an increase in family separations, linked to the economic situation, with women often struggling to establish single parent households with their children. At the same time, shelters for

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> UNRWA's cash assistance to vulnerable Palestinian refugees in Lebanon families is also provided on an ad-hoc basis when there is sufficient budget to do so.

victims of GBV are experiencing strains on capacity - a particularly acute concern in light of victims' limited access to justice and safety. The number of referrals to such shelters reached a peak in mid-August.

### Crime rising in camps

Reports of violent incidents of which UNRWA is aware remained at the same level as in Q2 (10 incidents each quarter), four of which were shooting incidents in Ein el Hilweh, the largest Palestinian refugee camp. In Beqaa, armed clashes in areas surrounding camps subsided in the past quarter but increasing reports of thefts in and around Baalbek have contributed to feelings of insecurity. This includes thefts of solar panel lamps from Wavel camp, as well as wifi-routers and even fuel from inside cars. Residents report a similar sense of insecurity in the Beirut camps where thefts of items such as man-hole covers, trashcans and motorcycles, as well as muggings of individuals for their money were widely reported. In some UNRWA schools, manhole covers and taps were among items stolen. According to the 2022 MSNA/VASYR results, PRL women report greater fear of being robbed than any other group - with 30 percent of PRL women in particular expressing such a fear, compared to 20 percent of Lebanese women and 11 percent of Syrian women.<sup>13</sup>

### Protests at UNRWA installations continue to impact access to services

Grievances over access to UNRWA services that target on a vulnerability basis, such as cash, shelter, cash for work, and hospitalisation support, continued to impact access to services as individuals or groups forced the temporary closure of UNRWA installations on 16 occasions (compared to 21 in Q2) while a further 11 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.

### Access to civil documentation and registration with government departments remains difficult, with some resorting to paying brokers to gain access

Palestinian refugees in the Beirut area have reported an increasing reliance on the use of Lebanese brokers to facilitate access to government processes such as the issuing of passports and the registration of vehicles. The easing of the public sector strike has reportedly had limited impact because the back-log of cases in government departments means waiting times are still large. Many Palestinian refugees cannot afford to use brokers and do not have any contacts in government departments, and so must wait long periods to access such governmental services.

PRS, who must apply for and maintain legal residency in Lebanon, are particularly affected. 62 percent of individuals that UNRWA provided with legal counselling in quarter three were PRS, with the three most common topics of enquiry being birth registration, other civil registration, and legal stay issues.<sup>14</sup>

Whereas previously Palestinian refugees in Lebanon could record births and marriages with the Department of Political Affairs and Refugees (DPAR) within a few weeks, this is now increasingly difficult. This is highly problematic as, if a birth is not registered within the first year, the child will struggle to obtain registration. Although the law allows for late registration through a judicial process, in recent years UNRWA is aware of very few cases that have then been accepted by DPAR, leading to children being without residency or identity documents. Consequently, affected children

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<sup>13</sup> MSNA/VASYR 2022.

<sup>14</sup> UNRWA Protection legal unit data (internal).



will struggle to access health care and education in the longer term, since access to UNRWA services is linked to registration with DPAR.

### Access to justice is even more difficult than previously

Although most Palestinian refugees avoid the Lebanese judicial system, the strike of Lebanese judges since 17 August has nevertheless had an impact on them. Palestinians still need to engage with Lebanese courts on a range of civil matters, including labour disputes, execution of decisions by religious courts, and rent issues. The strike means that judges are not receiving or transferring complaints from internal security forces or issuing protection orders, and previously finalised judicial rulings in cases of family violence are not being applied. While some criminal cases are continuing amid the judges' strike, access to the criminal justice system has also narrowed for all population groups. The few judges/prosecutors who are working face administrative problems due to the absence of electricity, fuel, internet, and basic supplies like paper.

### Difficult socio-economic conditions contribute to mental health and psychosocial complaints

The multiple compounded crises facing the Palestinian refugee population continue to contribute to mental health and psychosocial complaints. In all areas of the country, focal points identified the three major complaints experienced by Palestinian refugees as difficulty in coping with the demands of daily life; fear, worry and anxiety; and feelings of hopelessness. While these issues were reported to affect most sub-groups in the Palestinian population, in the Beqaa, PRS were said to be particularly affected (with 32 percent of focal points stating this), potentially reflecting the particular legal situation of PRS compared to other Palestinian refugees and their proportionally high number in that area.

### Large increase in Palestinians joining irregular boat movements to third countries

Palestinian refugees are increasingly among the rising number of people seeking passage to Europe through irregular boat voyages as they see no future and hope for a better life in Lebanon. This is a result of the compounded long-term structural vulnerabilities of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (such as restrictions on the right to own property and access dignified work, and discrimination), a sense of hopelessness about any just resolution to their displacement, concern about UNRWA's ability to provide basic services, and the impact of the economic crisis in Lebanon.

In previous years only a very small number of Palestine refugees were known to have attempted boat crossings to Europe, with more Palestinian refugees leaving the country regularly through the airport - an option that continues to be popular for many, particularly youth from the Beqaa. With several Palestinians making successful boat crossings between April and June 2022, which were widely shared on social media, numbers of Palestinian refugees on the boats (both PRL and PRS) have increased significantly. UNRWA is aware of 16 boats departing with Palestinian refugees on board between July and September 2022.

Those departing are no longer only young men; a growing number of families are also travelling, particularly from Beddawi and Nahr el-Bared camps in the north, with a few from Shatila in Beirut and Rashidieh in Tyre. On 21-22 September, 13 Palestinian refugees from Lebanon drowned in the boat that sunk off Tartous in Syria, with 9 still missing. Of these 18 were male (8 boys) and 6 were female (3 girls). The youngest child was 2 years old. Two men survived. 21 of the missing or dead are from Nahr el-Bared. The impact of this on a relatively tight-knit community has been devastating.

In addition, community members report that people are paying \$6,000-10,000 or more for the crossing, depending on how many people are going. Families have sold all their assets in order to raise the funds and many have borrowed significantly. Where people have drowned or been returned, families have then immediately been asked to pay the debt (with threats when they cannot), pushing surviving families into a greater cycle of despair and poverty.