



Palestinian Human Rights Organization PHRO

Research on Palestinian Refugees Fleeing Syria to Lebanon

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About PHRO

The Palestinian Human Rights Organization (**PHRO**) is an independent, non-governmental, non-partisan and non-profit Human Rights NGO which was formed by a private initiative. Established in 1997 and based in Mar Elias Refugee Camp, in Beirut, it is recognized in Lebanon under registration no. 36/AD. **PHRO** is devoted to the promotion, protection and defense of the Human rights of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon and the wider **MENA** region.

PHRO feels the need to be responsive to the dynamic changes within the **MENA** region as a result of the ongoing “Arab Spring”. In this specific context, **PHRO** advocates that vulnerable populations should be granted particular attention from local, national and international stakeholders. Palestinian Refugees living in the countries involved in the “Arab Spring” are especially vulnerable owing to the protection gap they are facing and the changing political scenes within these countries. Thus, **PHRO** decided to extend its mandate to cover other countries in the **MENA** region in addition to Lebanon.

PHRO is an active member of the following coalitions: the International Federation for Human Rights (**FIDH**), the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (**EMHRN**) and the Arab Organization for Human Rights (**AOHR**). **PHRO**'s working standards are presumed from the International Human Rights Norms, the Arab League Pacts, the Barcelona Process, the Association Agreement (AA) between the EU and the Palestinian Refugees hosting countries and its related Action plan, and on **UN Mechanism & Resolution especially 194** which calls for

Executive Summary

This research was conducted amongst **Palestinian Refugee** families who fled from **Syria** to **Lebanon**. The research was conducted based on a human rights perspective. It investigates and addresses the status of **Palestinian Refugees** who fled from **Syria** to **Lebanon** during 2012 and the beginning of 2013. The focus is on the political, social, economic and human rights issues facing these refugees. The research aimed to:

- Collect data concerning **Palestinian Refugees** who fled from **Syria** to **Lebanon**, through meeting with 20% of the families who arrived in **Lebanon** up until October 2012.
- Provide an overview of the Human Rights situation in **Syria** from the perspective of **Palestinian Syrian Refugees**.
- Describe the situation of **Palestinian Refugees** from **Syria** who fled to **Lebanon**.
- Analyze and present the experiences of **Palestinian Refugees** from **Syria** with regards to the **Syrian** conflict and their exile in **Lebanon**.
- Raise awareness on **Palestinian Refugees'** plight as a result of the **Syrian** conflict.
- Identify critical areas that **Palestinian Refugees** need support for in the short, medium and long term. Critical areas include: legal (such as permits); economic (such as financial assistance to cover food and other daily needs); social (such as housing) and educational (such as schooling...etc).

The first chapter outlines the **Palestinian Refugee's** situation in **Syria**. It addresses their experiences before they left **Syria** for **Lebanon**, and analyses the current situation of **Palestinian Refugees** who are still there. Furthermore, it highlights the legal status of these **Refugees** during the **Syrian** crisis.

The second chapter addresses the different standpoints taken by Palestinians regarding the **Syrian** crisis. This section discusses the attitude of **Palestinian Refugees** towards what is happening in **Syria** and the reasons why they took sides in this conflict. The **Palestinian Factions** attitudes toward the **Syrian** crisis are also addressed.

The third chapter highlights the field research undertaken by **PHRO**. During November and December 2012, **PHRO** interviewed 192 representatives from **Palestinian Syrian** families, living throughout **Lebanon**. This questionnaire addressed four major areas: the current situation (legal and living); the violations that the families had witnessed in **Syria**; their experiences while fleeing from **Syria** to **Palestinian Camps** or gatherings in **Lebanon**; and finally their future perspectives and expectations. This chapter provides the key findings from the data collected from the questionnaire.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Since the end of 2010 the **MENA** region has experienced a wave of popular movements. It is currently the scene of deep changes and instability. At such a time, mass human rights violations are likely to be on the increase. In this specific context, vulnerable populations should be granted particular attention from local, national and international stakeholders. Established in all the countries involved in the **Arab Spring**, **Palestinian Refugees** are especially vulnerable due to the protection gap they face and the political abuse they are/might be subjected to.

Defending **Palestinian Refugees'** rights since 1997, the **Palestinian Human Rights Organization (PHRO)** has conducted, with the support of **the German Embassy in Beirut**, a small representative research on **Palestinian Refugees** who fled from **Syria** to **Lebanon**. The broad intention of this research is to highlight the situation of these refugees from a human rights perspective.

The situation of Palestinian Refugees in Syria

A. Background:

Owing to attacks and forced displacements over the last century, thousands of **Palestinians** were forced to seek refuge in **Syria**. These mass movements of **Palestinian Refugees** to **Syria** occurred primarily in **1948, 1967, 1970** and **1982**. In **Syria** there are **510,444¹ Palestinian Refugees**. Of these, **30.1%** of them (i.e. **154,123**) are living in the nine existing camps, while the rest live in gatherings, or in villages and cities. The **Syrian** law grants **Palestinians** living in **Syria** the same rights and responsibilities as **Syrian** citizens. However, they are not entitled to the right of nationalization nor to political rights². Both **Hafez Al Assad** and his son **Bashar Al Assad**, leaders of the regime, have used the **Palestinian Cause** for decades as a political tool to strengthen the regime's power. The regime has exploited the **Palestinian** resistance and **Palestinian** parties whose current presence in **Syria** is dependent on condition of their loyalty and *de facto* dependence on the **Syrian** authorities. Thus, some **Palestinian factions**, mainly the **Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestinian – General Command (PFLP-GC)**, are now acting as an extension of the **Syrian** regime inside **Palestinian camps**³.

Since spring of 2011, demonstrations against the **Syrian** regime spread throughout the country. The **Syrian** regime used the **Palestinian Refugees'** legitimate claim to **'Right of Return'** to divert

¹ **UNRWA 'UNRWA In Figures as of 1 January 2012'** (January 2012) Communications Office, **UNRWA** Headquarters, **Gaza**; available at <http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/20120317152850.pdf>

² **'Palestinian refugees in Syria' Forced Migration Online** ; available at: <http://www.forcedmigration.org/research-resources/expert-guides/palestinian-refugees-in-syria/palestinian-refugees-in-syria>

³ **Magda Sandal** 'the **Syrian Revolution** and the **Palestinian Refugees** in **Syria**: Realities and Risks' (May 2012) **Al Jazeera Centre for Studies**.

the **Palestinians** focus from the country's internal crisis. They hereby sought to weaken the opposition's movements. At the **Al Nakba** and **Al Naksa** commemorations on May 15 and June 5, 2011, the regime and its extensions within **Palestinian camps**, prompted **Palestinian** youth to march to the **Israeli** occupied **Golan Heights**. These border marches could have potentially been organized for decades. However, the regime suddenly encouraged the **Palestinian** youth to march at the cease fire line during this critical time. As a result of these marches, **Palestinian** youth met with **Israeli** gunfire. These incidents resulted in the wounding of hundreds, and the death of four **Palestinians** on May 15, and the death of 32 on June 5. The blood spilled on the anniversary of **Al Naksa**, triggered outrage amongst the inhabitants of the **Palestinian camps**. The camp inhabitants felt that the **Syrian** regime had abused them and was responsible for the massacre of their children. On June 6, 2011, as the bodies were buried in the new **Martyrs Cemetery** in **Yarmouk camp**, the mourning crowd protested against the regime and its **Palestinians** proxy, particularly the **PFLP-GC**. The **PFLP-GC** members responded by shooting protesters. The fighting lasted for several hours and resulted in **40 Palestinians** being wounded and **14** being killed⁴. In August 2011, the regime forces launched a massive attack on **Latakia** and shelled the **Ramel Gathering**. This incident endangered the lives of more than **5,000 Palestinian Refugees** and resulted in them being forced to flee **Syria**.

These events were strategic in affecting the positions held by **Palestinians** in the conflict. Though the majority tries not to interfere, as the conflict has unfolded, more and more **Palestinians** have sided with the revolution while pro-government **Palestinian** parties are showing more than ever their loyalty to the regime. Thus, the situation in **Palestinian camps** has become increasingly tense.

B. Analysis of the current situation

According to the **Syrian Observatory for Human Rights**, on 23 July, 2012, the death toll in Syria had risen to over **19,000**⁵. **Ban Ki Moon** repeatedly warned about the risk of "a full-scale civil war with catastrophic effects within **Syria** and across the region"⁶ and on the 16 July, 2012 the **International Committee of the Red Cross** finally declared that there was a civil war in **Syria**⁷. This change in status means that international humanitarian law now applies throughout the country and all sides are required to respect the **Geneva Conventions**.

As intense fighting continues to rage between **Syrian** forces and rebels, the number of people fleeing their homes in **Syria** is dramatically increasing. According to **UNHCR** spokesperson **Melissa Fleming**, it is "estimated that 1 million people may have been forced to flee inside the country since the conflict began". By the "18 July, **120,000 Syrian refugees** sought protection in **Jordan**,

⁴ 'Report: 14 **Palestinians** killed in **Syria** camp' (6 June 2011) **Maan News Agency**; available at <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=394412>

⁵ **Syrian Observatory for Human Rights**; available at <http://www.syriaahr.com>

⁶ **Ban Ki- Moon** 'Briefing at informal meeting of the General assembly' (9 May 2012); available at http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocus/sqspeeches/search_full.asp?statID=1537

⁷ **AFP 'Syria** in a state of civil war: Red Cross' (16 July 2012); available at <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/AleqM5jYS-31wTcNcpQjZ0mnKtuSWCh4Aw?docId=NNG.0c9a2761cc8aca6cebffc91d16f6db90.121>

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Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey". However, the governments of these countries are estimating that these numbers are in fact, far higher⁸.

In this complex and unstable situation, **Palestinian Refugees** are in a vulnerable position. Accused by both the opposition and the regime of supporting the other side, **Palestinians** have gradually been caught up in the conflict and are now threatened through targeted attacks. Since spring 2012, there has been an increase in support for the opposition amongst the **Palestinian** community in **Syria**. According to **Al Jazeera Reports**⁹ and **Maan News Agency**, during the month of March 2012, **Syrian** security forces orchestrated an arrest campaign in the camps and "threatened to raid the **Yarmouk Refugee Camp** due to **Fatah's** alleged support of demonstrations against **Syrian** leader **Bashar Assad**"¹⁰. In March 2012 a **Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA)** vehicle exploded in **Yarmouk Camp**. The purpose of this attack was to target the personnel of the **PLA** (which is now integrated under **Syrian** military command). After the murder of six officers¹¹ in the past few months, **15** soldiers of the **PLA** were kidnapped and found dead on 11 July 2012. Following this event, at least four **Palestinians** were killed by **Syrian** forces in **Yarmouk Camp** during a protest held against the killing of their counterparts¹².

These recent clashes marked a clear escalation in conflict in **Yarmouk Camp**, where regular protests have been held since February 2012 in solidarity with the besieged **Syrian** cities¹³. Owing to a growing sympathy towards the uprising amongst **Palestinian Refugees** in **Syria**, a number have joined the anti-regime movement and a number of **Palestinian** youth activists are now members of the **Free Syrian Army**¹⁴. Sheltering thousands of displaced **Syrians** within their camps, **Palestinian Refugees** have organized themselves into civil and medical teams to house displaced individuals and to treat those who are injured¹⁵.

The growing involvement of **Palestinians** alongside **Syrian** rebels stands in stark contrast with the active support of some **Palestinian factions** for the regime. As **Palestinian** neutrality is eroding

⁸ Sybella Wilkes 'UNHCR gravely concerned about dramatic escalation of **Syria** exodus' (20 July 2012) **UNHCR**; available at <http://www.unhcr.org/50094bdc6.html>

⁹ **Magda Qandil** 'The **Syrian** Reevaluation and the **Palestinian Refugees in Syria**: Realities and risks' (May 2012) **Al Jazeera Centre for Studies**; available at: <http://studies.aljazeera.net/ResourceGallery/media/Documents/2012/5/2/201252132022536734The%20Syrian%20Revolution%20and%20Palestinian%20Refugees%20in%20Syria.pdf>

¹⁰ **Syrian** security forces 'warn **Palestinian** camp' (15 March 2012) **Maan News Agency**; available at: <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=468354>

¹¹ 'Palestinians in **Syria** drawn into violence' (1 July 2012) **New York Times**; available at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/01/world/middleeast/palestinians-syria-drawn-into-theviolence.html?_r=2&pagewanted=all

¹² '4 **Palestinian** shot dead at protest in **Syria**' (14 July 2012) **Maan News Agency**; available at <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=504181>

¹³ **Budour Hassan** 'Analysis: the myth of **Palestinian** neutrality in **Syria**' (23 July 2012) **Maan News Agency**, available at <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=506310>

¹⁴ 'Palestinians join **Syria** revolt: activists, **FSA**' (18 July 2012) **The Daily Star**; available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Jul-18/181033-palestinians-join-syria-revolt-activists-fsa.ashx#axzz21QRrYhCV>

¹⁵ 'Palestinian camp shelters 2,000 displaced **Syrians**' (17 July 2012) **Maan News Agency**; available at <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=505522>

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and positions are diverging, the risk of violence against **Palestinian Refugees** is rapidly increasing. Besides targeted repression, **Palestinian Refugees** are also threatened by the indiscriminate violence against civilians in **Syria**. As of the 28th March 2013¹⁶ the total number of **Palestinian Refugees** who have died in **Syria** was 1 130¹⁷.

Like **Syrian** citizens, some **Palestinian Refugees** have tried to flee the violence and seek refuge in other countries. The majority have sought asylum in **Jordan**, **Lebanon** and **Turkey**. It is difficult to gain accurate statistics concerning the number of **Palestinian Refugees** who have fled **Syria** as they are especially difficult to register in asylum states, because they fall under the scope of different registration. Furthermore, some **Palestinian Refugees** from **Syria** lack **IDs**.

Palestinian Refugees from **Syria** are frequently victims of discrimination by asylum states. This is particularly the case with Jordan who has refused to allow any more **Palestinian Refugees** to cross their borders. The **Jordanian** authorities "have forcibly returned some newly arriving **Palestinian** from **Syria** [and] threatened others with deportation". Furthermore, since April 2012, **Jordanian authorities** "have arbitrarily detained **Palestinians** fleeing **Syria** in a refugee holding centre without any options for release other than return to **Syria**"¹⁸. The actions of the **Jordanian** state in relation to **Syrian Palestinian Refugees** are in direct violation of a core principle of international refugee law, that of non-refoulement.

Assuming that **Syria** is slipping into a situation of generalized violence, there is a high probability that over the next few weeks and months, there could be a significant increase in the number of **Palestinian Refugees** attempting to flee the country. In this case, as highlighted by a **Human Rights Watch** report, the risk of a repeat of the **Iraqi** scenario is extremely high¹⁹. Besides cases of forced return and detention, **Syrian Palestinians** who manage to leave then face a 'protection gap'. This protection gap results in these refugees being particularly vulnerable to human rights

¹⁶ 'Bomb attack targets **Yarmouk refugee camp** in **Syrian** capital'(6 February 2013) *PressTV* ; available at <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/06/287649/bomb-attack-hits-yarmouk-camp-in-syria/>; also see Allison Deger and Tareq Alsamman 'Syrian crisis moves into the camps: 20 Palestinians killed in Damascus refugee camp' (4 August 2012); available at <http://mondoweiss.net/2012/08/syrian-crisis-moves-into-the-camps-is-al-assad-targeting-palestinian-refugees.html>; also see **Adnan Abu Amer** 'Will Jordan allow Syria's Palestinian Refugees to resettle?' (28 March 2013) *Al Monitor*, available at <http://www.almonitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/palestine-refugee-resettlement.html>

¹⁷ 'Bomb attack targets Yarmouk refugee camp in Syrian capital'(6 February 2013) *Press TV* ; available at <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/02/06/287649/bomb-attack-hits-yarmouk-camp-in-syria/>; also see Allison Deger and Tareq Alsamman 'Syrian crisis moves into the camps: 20 Palestinians killed in Damascus refugee camp' (4 August 2012); available at <http://mondoweiss.net/2012/08/syrian-crisis-moves-into-the-camps-is-al-assad-targeting-palestinian-refugees.html>

¹⁸ '**Jordan: Bias** at the **Syrian** Border - **Palestinians** Face Detention, Threat of Forced Return' (4 July 2012) *Human Rights Watch*, available at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/07/04/jordan-bias-syrian-border>

¹⁹ A number of **Palestinian Refugee** families who fled **Iraq**, after the **US** invaded the country, were denied entrance to **Syria** and **Jordan**. As a result they have been forced to live in the desert in dire conditions and without the surrogate protection of a host state (**Rafeef Ziadah** '**Palestinian Refugees of Iraq**' (11 March 2011); available at <http://electronicintifada.net/content/palestinian-refugees-iraq/6801>)

violations²⁰. Thus, **Syrian Palestinians** seeking protection in other countries should receive special attention due to the particularly vulnerable position they are in.

In addition to these fears, the fall of the regime could also lead to a critical situation for **Palestinians** in **Syria**. As previously mentioned, **Syrian Palestinians** have been perceived as privileged by the regime, while some **Palestinian factions** and parties are clearly subordinate to the regime. Given these perceptions, the risk of harassment, forced displacement and targeted attacks against **Syrian Palestinians** by regime opponents must be taken into serious consideration. Once again it is important to remember what occurred in **Iraq** where numerous acts of violence were carried out against **Palestinian Refugees** in the aftermath of the fall of **Saddam Hussein**.

In the long term, the current change in **Syria** might also lead to a reshaping of the **Syrian-Israeli** relationship. **Syrian Palestinians** could be affected positively or negatively by this and thus they should be given particular attention with regard to this.

C. The legal status of Palestinian Refugees living in Syria during the current crisis

Following the development of events in **Syria**, **Filippo Grande**, the **Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)**, expressed his concern regarding the vulnerable situation of more than **500 000 Palestinian Refugees** in **Syria**, who are suffering the repercussions of the conflict. Given the escalation of the conflict and its transformation into an internal armed conflict (non-international), the legal status of the **Syrian Palestinians** lies in Common Article 3 of the **Fourth Geneva Convention** of 1949, which states:

In the case of armed conflict not of an international character occurring in the territory of one of the High Contracting Parties, each Party to the conflict shall be bound to apply, as a minimum, the following provision:

“Persons taking no active part in the hostilities shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or any other similar criteria”.

Furthermore, the Protocol Additional to the **Geneva Conventions** of 12 August 1949, and relating to the **Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II)** of 1977 is relevant to the status of **Syrian Palestinian Refugees**. This Protocol complements the provisions contained in **Common Article 3** of the **Fourth Geneva Convention** regarding the general protection of persons who are civilians. It calls for the special protection of refugees and stateless persons, as civilians. The articles of this protocol also include safeguards for the adequate protection against any attack on the lives and dignity of refugees and stateless persons, as outlined in **Common Article 3. Article 13 of Additional Protocol II** provides **Palestinian Refugees** with the following **protection entitlements**:

²⁰ **Magda Qandil** ‘The Syrian Revolution and the **Palestinian Refugees** in **Syria**: Realities and risks’ (May 2012) *Al Jazeera Centre for Studies*.

Art 13. Protection of the civilian population

1. The civilian population and individual civilians shall enjoy general protection against the dangers arising from military operations. To give effect to this protection, the following rules shall be observed in all circumstances.
2. The civilian population as such, as well as individual civilians, shall not be the object of attack. Acts or threats of violence the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population are prohibited.
3. Civilians shall enjoy the protection afforded by this part, unless and for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities.

Article 54 (1) of Additional Protocol I states:

1. Starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited.
2. It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as food-stuffs, agricultural areas for the production of food-stuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works, for the specific purpose of denying them for their sustenance value to the civilian population or to the adverse Party, whatever the motive, whether in order to starve out civilians, to cause them to move away, or for any other motive.

Article 17 of Additional Protocol II states:

1. The displacement of the civilian population shall not be ordered for reasons related to the conflict unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand. Should such displacements have to be carried out, all possible measures shall be taken in order that the civilian population may be received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition.
2. Civilians shall not be compelled to leave their own territory for reasons connected with the conflict.

Furthermore, **Article 73 of Additional Protocol I** refers specifically to Refugees and Stateless people. It states:

Persons who, before the beginning of hostilities, were considered as stateless persons or refugees under the relevant international instruments accepted by the Parties concerned or under the national legislation of the State of refuge or State of residence shall be protected persons within the meaning of Parts I and III of the Fourth Convention, in all circumstances and without any adverse distinction.

Article 4 (2) of Additional Protocol II states

The parties to the conflict are prohibited from:

- (a) violence to the life, health and physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular murder as well as cruel treatment such as torture, mutilation or any form of corporal punishment;
- (b) collective punishments;
- (c) taking of hostages;
- (d) acts of terrorism;
- (e) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, rape, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault;
- (f) slavery and the slave trade in all their forms;
- (g) pillage;
- (h) threats to commit any of the foregoing acts.

Article 4 (3) of Additional Protocol II states

Children shall be provided with the care and aid they require, and in particular:

- (a) they shall receive an education, including religious and moral education, in keeping with the wishes of their parents, or in the absence of parents, of those responsible for their care;
- (b) all appropriate steps shall be taken to facilitate the reunion of families temporarily separated;

D. The Protection Gap

The instability and violence in **Syria** places marginalized populations at particular risk. **Syrian Palestinian Refugees** are a particularly vulnerable and marginalised population. These refugees sought refuge in **MENA** countries after they were expelled from their land during the 1947 – 48 events following the creation of the State of **Israel**. This massive population displacement compelled the **United Nations** to create a specific agency to provide for their relief needs.

Established in 1948 to provide protection and promote a durable solution for **Palestine Refugees**, the **United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP)** failed in its mission. In 1949 the **UN General Assembly** adopted **Resolution 302 (IV)**. This resolution established **UNRWA** who's mandate is to provide relief and human development services to **Palestine Refugees** and persons displaced by the 1967 hostilities. Its mandate covers five fields of operation: **Jordan, Lebanon, Syria the West Bank and Gaza**²¹. According to **UNRWA**, **Palestinian Refugees** are defined as "people whose normal place of residence was **Palestine** between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict". Article 1D of the 1951 **Convention relating to the Status of Refugees** states:

²¹ UNRWA 'Frequently Asked Questions'; available at: <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=87>

This Convention shall not apply to persons who are at present receiving from organs or agencies of the United Nations other than the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees protection or assistance²².

This article indicates that **Palestinian Refugees** receiving assistance from **UNRWA** do not fall under the scope of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Thus the **UNHCR**, the institution monitoring the implementation of the 1951 Convention, does not consider the **Palestinian Refugees** receiving assistance from **UNRWA** as falling under their mandate.

The Palestinians Refugees who fall under **UNRWA**'s mandate are only entitled to receive humanitarian relief. **UNRWA** does not offer them basic protection of their human rights that refugees falling under the 1951 Convention are entitled too. As a result **Palestinian Refugees** face a "protection gap". Thus, **Palestinian Refugees** are less protected under international law than any of their counterparts in the world. Considering the current changes in the **MENA** region, this vulnerability must be highlighted. History has taught us about the risks that **Palestinian Refugees** are exposed to as a result of this protection gap.

²² UNRWA 'Palestinian Refugees'; available at: <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=86>

Chapter 2

The Palestinian Positions toward the Syrian Crisis

The Attitude of Palestinian Refugees towards the Syrian Crisis

Since the beginning of the protests in **Syria**, the **Palestinians** in **Syria** have sought to apply the principle of neutrality, by disassociating themselves from all parties to the conflict. This **Palestinian** position is due to a combination of factors including demographic, political and historical reasons:

First, the **Palestinian Refugees** do not constitute huge manpower in **Syria**. Of the **Palestinian Refugees** in **Syria**, 487,000 live in nine official camps and three unofficial gatherings. They constitute 3% of the population of **Syria**;

Secondly, owing to their status as refugees they do not hold **Syrian** citizenship;

Thirdly, **Palestinian Refugees** have been non-involved in **Syrian** political life, staying on the political side-lines for the past 64 years;

Fourthly, this position was influenced by the historic, tragic experiences of **Palestinian Refugees** in **Jordan**, **Lebanon**, **Iraq** and **Kuwait**; and

Finally, this position was initially chosen owing to the absence of national reference as a result of the division taking place in their national movement.

The position which **Palestinian Refugees** have been characterised to hold since the beginning of the protests is very complicated. Each party to the conflict claims **Palestinian Refugees** support the opposing party. The opposition accuses them of supporting the regime, while regime forces say they support the opposition. The **Syrian** regime tried to drag the **Palestinians** into the conflict under the directions of **Vice President Bothayna Shaaban**. After ten days of protests, at a press conference on 26 March 2011, the **Vice President Bothayna Shaaban** blamed the **Palestinians** from **Ramle Camp** in **Latakia** for igniting a fire of sedition²³. Following this in August 2011 the **Bawarjh** war occurred, where the **Syrian** regime bombed Camp Sand south of **Latakia**. This bombing was part of the regime's campaign to forcibly displace refugees living in these areas. Following the siege of the camp, the camp was shelled. Those who were displaced from this camp sought refuge in **Yarmouk Camp** in Syria as well as in **Jordan**.

In turn, the **Syrian Regime** accused the **Syrian** opposition for being spies for the **Zionist** project in **Syria**. However, the **Syrian** opposition denied this accusation and emphasised that the **Palestinian** case will be a priority on their political agenda after the fall of the regime. At the same time the

²³ Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, Issue No. 5531, pg. 14 'Damascus accuses Palestinians for what happened in Latakia' (27 March 2011); available at <http://www.alhayat-j.com/pdf/2011/3/27/page1.pdf>

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Regime accused the opposition of persecuting the **Palestinians**, and abusing the Palestinian case to serve their own interests.

UNRWA called on its **Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi**, to dialogue with the conflicting parties regarding their obligations to protect civilians and refugees. He further called on parties to respect the neutrality of **Palestinian Refugees** and he warned them against any attempts to directly involve **Palestinian Refugees** in the conflict. The relationship between the **Palestinians** and the **Syrian** revolution changed on the 6th of June 2011. On this day, there was a funeral march to commemorate the anniversary of the **Al Naksa** day. However, this day of commemoration turned into a day of demonstration against the Regime and the **Palestinian factions** (those who were particularly in support of the **Syrian** regime). After going to the **PFLP** headquarters in the **Yarmouk Refugee Camp** in **Damascus**, the **PFLP General Command** fired on peaceful pro-opposition protestors in the camp. A number of Palestinians were killed and others were wounded in this incident.²⁴

The Attitude of Palestinian Factions towards the Syrian Crisis

Since the beginning of the crisis in **Syria** the **Palestinian Factions** and forces have needed to take a neutral stance towards the crisis. However, there was no national consensus between **Palestinian forces** and factions regarding more specific steps which could be taken towards addressing developments that have taken place on the ground, including exposure in the **Palestinian Camps** and **Palestinian** communities to violence and danger. As a result, different **Palestinian** factions hold different positions with regard to the conflict. The various positions held by these parties and factions are listed below:

First: This position calls for the protection of camps and gatherings of **Palestinian Refugees** through forming popular committees. These committees would be armed with the task of protecting the **Palestinian** areas and preventing the entry of "insurgents" or members of the "**Free Syrian Army**" into these areas. This would prevent clashes between those forces and **Syrian** troops inside the camps. The factions which have supported this approach include: the Popular Front for the **Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC)**, **Saeka** and **Fatah al-Intifada**.

Second: This position calls for the formation of a popular committee which consists of both factional and future forces. The popular committee would be responsible for social, humanitarian and purely national issues. However, they believe that this should be done without arming the **Palestinian** communities, as arming them could result in the "militarization" or "mobilization" of these communities. The parties which have advocated for this position include: **PLO** factions, **Fatah**, the **Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine** and the **Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)**.

²⁴ **Ali Abunimah** 'Mass shooting reported in **Yarmouk Palestinian Refugee camp in Syria** - video' (6 June 2011) *The Electronic Intifada*; available at <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/mass-shooting-reported-yarmouk-palestinian-refugee-camp-syria-video>

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Third: The third position is purely focused on a social, humanitarian perspective and on relief work. This position is commonly held by members and supporters of **Hamas** and **Islamic Jihad**.

The **PFLP-GC** stands in favour of the **Syrian** regime as identified by its secretary general and spokesman²⁵. In addition the faction **Fatah al-Intifada** also supports the **Syrian Regime**. The official position of the **Hamas** movement changed when **Deputy Chairman** of the **Hamas Political Bureau, Moussa Abu Marzouk**, rejected "**Hamas**" getting involved in resolving the security situation in **Syria**. He called for his followers to respect the will of the **Syrian** people and called for the transfer of **Hamas** offices from **Damascus to Doha**²⁶. This has resulted in the closure of **Syrian Hamas** offices in **Damascus**²⁷. **Hamas** has also accused the **Syrian** regime of committing atrocities against the **Palestinian Refugees** in the **Yarmouk Refugee camp**²⁸.

²⁵ Middle East Online '**Syrian** Air Strike - Ahmed Jibril Divided' (17 December 2012); available at <http://www.middle-east-online.com/?id=145531>

²⁶ Al Safair Newspaper Issue 12120 (27 February 2012)

²⁷ Al Jazeera 'Closure of the Hamas Office in Syria' (5 November 2012); available at <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/pages/32acf81c-06e5-4a02-b53a-c65d893cad11>

²⁸ Sky News 'The denouncing of the Yarmouk Massacre by the Palestinian Refugees' (3 August 2012)

Chapter 3

Palestinian Refugees who have fled Syria

According to information collected by PHRO up until the 30 July, 2012, there are approximately 758 **Palestinian refugee** families who have fled from **Syria to Lebanon**²⁹. They have settled within the 12 **Palestinian Camps**, the **Palestinian** gatherings, and villages and their surrounding areas. The majority of these **Palestinian** families are staying with relatives and friends. However, there are also a large number who have had to resort to “staying in public spaces in the camps.”³⁰

The number of the **Palestinian Refugees fleeing Syria (PSR)** is constantly increasing as the conflict in **Syria** continues. As a result it is difficult to gain accurate statistics on the exact number of **PSR** in **Lebanon** at any given time. However, according to **UNERA** on 28 March 2013 there were **30,000**³¹ **PSR** in **Lebanon**. According to a briefing issued by **UNRWA** on the 2 April 2013, they estimated the number of **PSR** in **Lebanon** to be around **37 000**³². However, the number could be higher as not all **Palestinian Refugees** from **Syria** are registered with **UNRWA**.

²⁹ **The American near East Refugee Aid (ANERA)**, in coordination with **The National Institution of Social Care and Vocational Training** released the outcomes of the research it had conducted, in a conference that they held in **Rotan Hotel, Beirut**. Attendees at the conference included: **Ashraf Dabour (the Palestinian Ambassador to Lebanon)**, **Robert Heat (Deputy Director of UNRWA)**; **ANERA** members and other **Palestinian** civil society organizations. The research discussed the situation of **Palestinian Refugees** fleeing from **Syria (PSR)** to **Lebanon**. **Marten Batesh**, of **ANERA**, opened the conference with a speech regarding **PSR**. He indicated that there were currently **25 000 PSR** in **Lebanon**. Following this **Samar Al Yasser, Country Director of ANERA in Lebanon**, took the floor. She indicated that the number of **PSR** is in fact **30,000**. She described how these refugees are in great need of warm, blankets, clothes, water and sanitation. The greatest immediate burden that most of these refugees are facing is the need for food; however, one of the most neglected areas of aid for **PSR** is that of legal aid. [National News Agency ‘Council of Ministers held at the Grand Serail’ (19 December 2012); available at <http://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/10215/>]

After a session was conducted with the council of ministries, the minister of state, **Marwan Khayer Al Deen**, mentioned that the **PSR** subject needed to be discussed in order to better organize it. He then stated “our constitution stated the right to return for the **Palestinian Refugees**, and the recent reports stated that there is about 20 to 30 thousands **Palestinian refugees** fleeing **Syria to Lebanon**, this number could be exaggerated, because the **General Security** told that in the previous 48 hours **2000 Palestinian Refugees** inter [entered in] to **Lebanon**, whatever the number is, this subject has to be treated, because we can’t deal with the subject of **Palestinian refugees in Lebanon**, so how rather for those coming from **Syria?**” [National News Agency ‘Council of Ministers held at the Grand Serail’ (19 December 2012); available at <http://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/10215/>]

³⁰ **Fouad Othman**, Social Affairs Representative for the **Palestinian Popular Committee** in Sidon’s Refugee Camps, to the **Daily Star**; available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Aug/07/183678-palestinian-refugees-in-syria-flee-strife.ashx#zz22qOMXwud>

³¹ [National News Agency ‘Council of Ministers held at the Grand Serail’ (19 December 2012); available at <http://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/10215/>]

³² **UNRWA ‘UNRWA’s response and services to Palestine refugees from Syria’ (2 April 2013) UNRWA Bi-Weekly Briefing (13).**

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PSR entering **Lebanon** are required to pay **LL 25,000** to receive a stamp to stay in **Lebanon**. This fee is preventing a number of **PRS** from crossing the border. With this stamp they are permitted a one-week stay in the country, during which time they have to go the nearest **General Security Office** to register i.e. provide information on where they are living and obtain a one-week permit which allowed them to move freely in **Lebanon**. Previously, this permit had to be renewed continuously. **Palestinians** had to pay **LL 50,000** for a one-month extension of their visa. If a **PSR** failed to renew their visa they would be subject to a fine that amounted to approximately 34 US Dollars for the first non-renewed month. At that time, if a **Palestinian Refugee** failed to renew their permit for two months he/she would likely be subjected to the following; ***a fine that amounts to approximately 134 USD; detention for 3 to 10 days; followed by deportation to Syria.*** Not all **Palestinian Refugees** that arrived from **Syria** were aware of this **General Security Administrative Measure**.

Some **PSR** who became aware of this measure preferred to go back to **Syria**, despite the dangerous situation there, because they could not afford the expense of these permits especially if their temporary refuge in **Lebanon** needs to be prolonged. It is noteworthy to mention that **Syrian Refugees** were not subject to this administrative measure. **Palestinian Refugees**, who failed to visit the **General Security** after one week, were often too fearful to visit the **General Security** because of the severity of the repercussions.

However, a high-ranking **General Security** official said in reality security bodies were not actively arresting or expelling **Palestinians** who failed to renew their visas. Furthermore, in mid-September the **General Security** temporarily suspended the LL 50, 000 fines, which **Palestinians** returning to **Syria** after overstaying their visas were required to pay³³. **PSR** now staying in **Lebanon** are able to receive a three month visa extension at no cost³⁴.

On the 21 February 2013 the General Security issued a statement which stated:

*"If a **Palestinian Refugee** from **Syria** exceeds his/her stay in **Lebanon** by more than 15 days, then he/she must convert his/her transit status to a three month residency status, free of charge. They are permitted to enjoy this measure because of their current circumstances. Those who entered **Lebanon** and violated the residency system can regularize their status upon departure without paying additional charges (on condition that they regularise their status no later than one year from the date of their entry into **Lebanon**). **The General Security** also demands that **Palestinian Refugees** from **Syria**, inform the **General Security Centres** in **Lebanon**, concerning their whereabouts, in order to regularize their status in this regard"*³⁵.

The General Security also decided to equalize the status of **PSR** with that of **Syrian Refugees**, after coming under great pressure from the **Palestinian factions, Palestinian and Lebanese**

³³ The **Daily Star, Lebanon News**; available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2013/Jan-04/200834-palestinian-refugees-from-syria-hit-with-visa-fees.ashx#ixzz2PTpQzg00>

³⁴ **UNRWA 'UNRWA's response and services to Palestine refugees from Syria'** (2 April 2013) *UNRWA Bi-Weekly Briefing (13)*.

³⁵ Al Safair Newspaper Issue 12120 (27 February 2012).

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Human Rights NGOs and other International Organizations. This decision was publicised in an announcement on the 8 March 2013, which was titled “**Extending the stay for the PSR**”.

“Further [with regard] to its previous statements, the **General Security** announces that the **PSR in Lebanon** can extend their stay in **Lebanon** till 3 months for free as for the **Syrian Refugees**”³⁶.

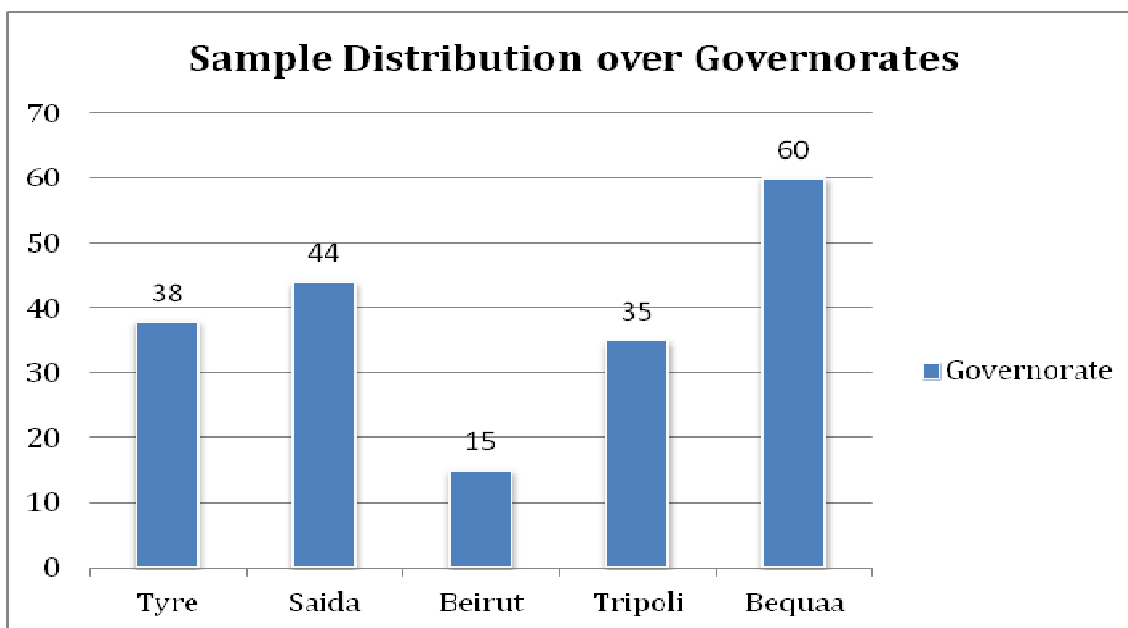
Furthermore, on the 28 March 2013, the General Security announced:

“Further to the previous statement, the **General Security** informs the **PSR** that are in **Lebanon** for more than 3 months, [that they] are now able [to] settle their situation when they progress [with] their documents to borders until the 20 April 2013”³⁷.

Field Research

A. Research Tools/Preparing for the Questionnaire:

The number of **Palestinian** families fleeing from **Syria** to **Lebanon** reached **2174** by the time³⁸ this field research had commenced. During November and **December** 2012, **PHRO** interviewed **192** family representatives throughout **Lebanon**. The distribution of these families throughout **Lebanon** was **38** in **Tyre**, **44** in **Saida**, **15** in **Beirut**, **35** in **Tripoli (North Lebanon)** and **60** in **Bequaa**, as illustrated in the graph below:



³⁶ **General Directorate of General Security** ‘Announcements and News’ (8 March 2013); available at http://www.general-security.gov.lb/news_det.aspx?d=27

³⁷ **General Directorate of General Security** ‘Announcements and News’ (28 March 2013); available at: http://www.general-security.gov.lb/news_det.aspx?d=36

³⁸ According to information collected by **PHRO** (October 30th, 2012) from Camps’ Popular Committees, and **UNRWA** area offices (when **PHRO** received acceptance for having funds for the research).

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Each Governorate sample was sub-distributed over the localities (camps, gatherings and neighbourhoods) so as to ensure that the sample was representative.

PHRO developed a seven pages questionnaire. This questionnaire was the primary tool used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into four sections:

- Section 1: Personal Data
- Section 2: Data on the situation before fleeing **Syria**
- Section 3: Data on the situation while fleeing **Syria**
- Section 4: Data on the situation since arriving in **Lebanon** and future expectations

PHRO conducted a training workshop at its premises for its team, who were conducting the family interviews. The purpose of the training workshop was to introduce the team to the objectives of the research and to familiarize them with the questionnaire structure. In addition, the aim of the training was to receive feedback from the team. This feedback would be considered when drawing up the final layout of the questionnaire. This questionnaire was tested in the field on 5 families. Notes collected during the workshop and the testing phase, were accordingly integrated into the final version of the questionnaire. The final questionnaire was composed of 35 questions.

Collected data was entered into an electronic data base. Data entered was checked by a second officer. Analysis of data was conducted by a third officer directly after the data collection and data entry phases were completed.

B. Results and Major Findings:

The research targeted **192** families. Interviews were conducted with adults. Of these adults: **85.41%** were married; **4.17%** were single; **3.64%** were divorced and **6.78%** were widowed. It is noteworthy to mention that **43.75%** of the interviewees were males compared to **56.25%** who were females.

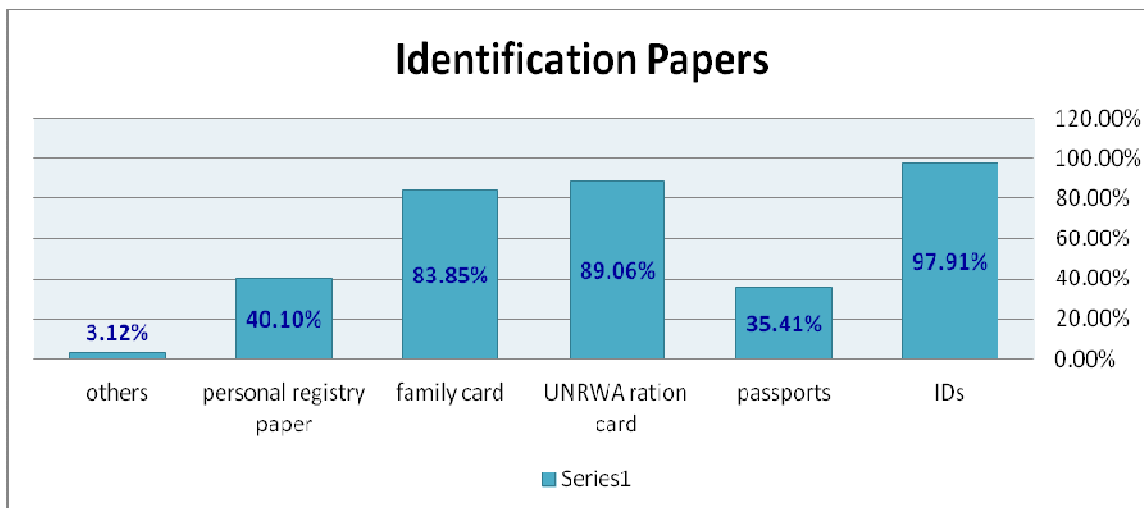
Family sizes ranged from between **1** to **13** members. The average family size was **6**. The age range of family members varied a lot. However, it was noted that more families had children between the ages of **0 – 9** years or adolescents between the ages of **10 – 18** years, than youth between **19 – 29** years, adults or elderly persons.

75.52% of the families indicated that they owned houses/apartments in **Syria**, while **11.98%** only rent houses/apartments there. **5.20%** said that they neither owned, nor were renting a place in **Syria**, but were living with parents or relatives' there. **7.30%** of interviewees did not respond to this question.

C. Presence of Identification Papers:

It is significant to mention that no one out of the **192** families interviewed, carried all the necessary identification papers. There was a greater number of Personal IDs, **UNRWA** Ration Registration Cards and Authorities' Family Cards brought compared to Passports and Personal Registry Papers. **97.91%** of the families brought their Ids; **89.06%** brought their **UNRWA** Ration Registration Cards and **83.85%** carried their Family Cards. In comparison, only **40.10%** carried

their Personal Registry Papers; **35.41%** carried their passports; and **3.12%** brought other proof of identity documents.



D. Arrival in Lebanon and Area of Residency:

All the families interviewed indicated that they arrived in **Lebanon** between February and December 2012. Of these families, **23.31%** had lived in more than one area since their arrival while **78.13%** were still residing in their first place of residency. **1.56%** did not respond to this question.

It is significant to mention that **63%** of the interviewed families left **Syria** directly, while **37%** were internally displaced in **Syria** before heading to **Lebanon**.

84.90% mentioned that they had witnessed violations in their area of residency, whereas **14.06%** said that they had not and **1.04%** did not respond to this inquiry.

E. Reasons for Fleeing Syria:

There were a number of reasons behind families' decision to flee **Syria**. The most common reason was the security situation (**93.75%**). The second most common reason was the siege of the area where the interviewed families were residing (**66.67%**). The third most common reason was fear of family members getting hurt (**66.15%**), and the fourth most common reason was leaving due to deteriorating economic conditions (**65.63%**).

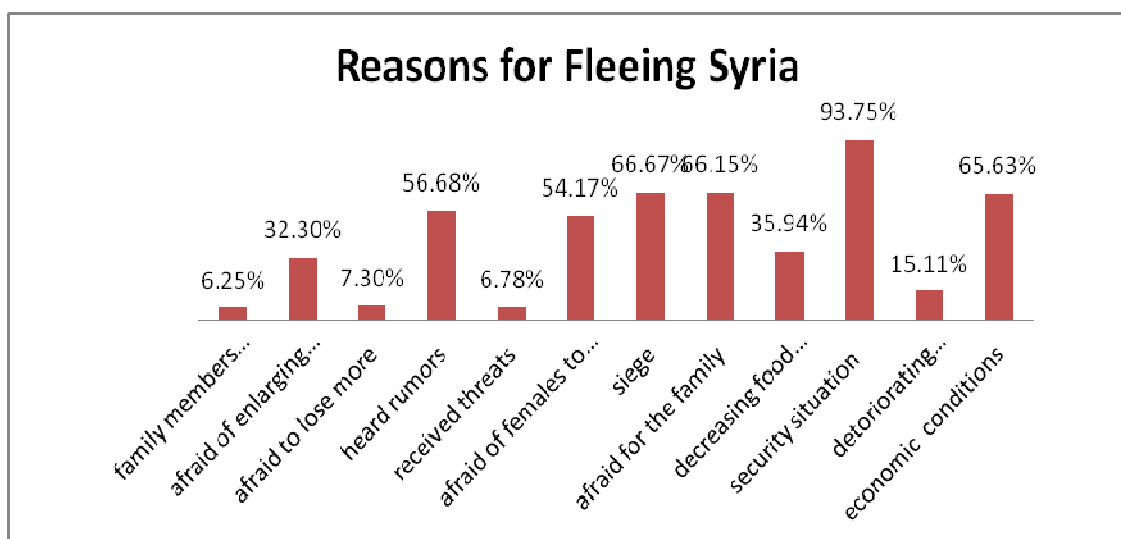
Further reasons were:

- **56.78%** heard rumours that frightened them;
- **54.17%** were afraid that the females in their family would be raped;

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- **35.94%** mentioned that food supplies were decreasing in nearby markets or they did not have access to food supplies;
- **32.30%** said that they were worried because the conflict was escalating and they were afraid they would not be able to escape if they stayed longer;
- **15.11%** left due to deteriorating health conditions (including depression and anxiety);
- **7.30%** lost family member(s) and fled to avoid losing more;
- **6.78%** left due to threats they received;
- And **6.25%** left because they had had family members who were kidnapped.



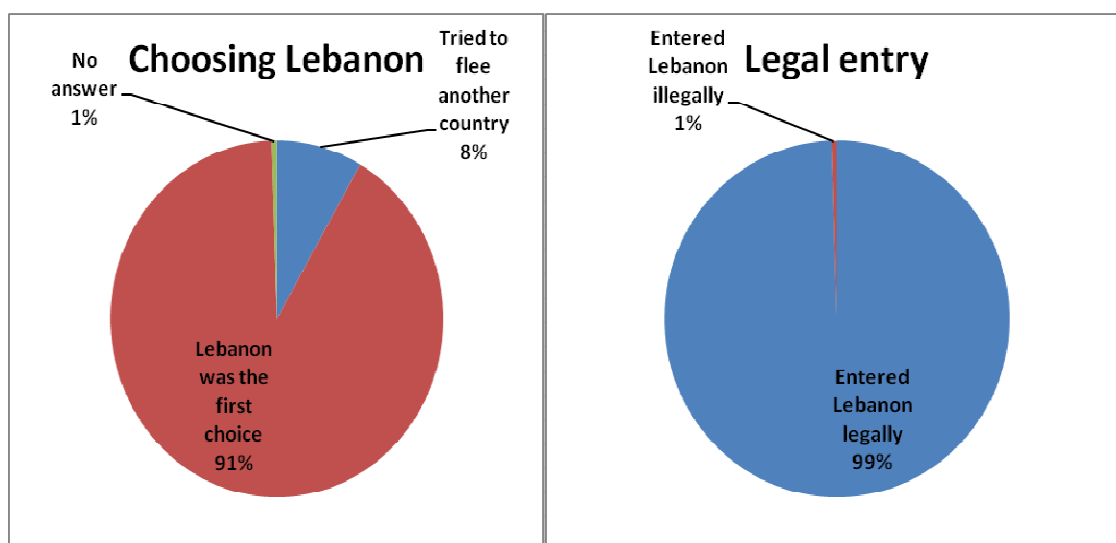
It is essential to mention that for **99.48%** of the families interviewed, there were necessary administrative obligations that needed to be completed in order for them to leave **Syria**. Only **0.52%** mentioned that they did not have to adhere to these obligations. This administrative process required a visit to the **Directorate of Palestinian Refugees Affairs** at **Ain Kersh** in **Damascus** to apply for an exit permit. Notably this measure only applies to **Palestinians**. **Palestinians** can not cross the **Syrian** Boarder without an exit permit. If they reached the border without such a permit, they will either be forced to return and apply for one, or they will not be allowed to leave at all.

F. Fleeing Syria and Entry into Lebanon:

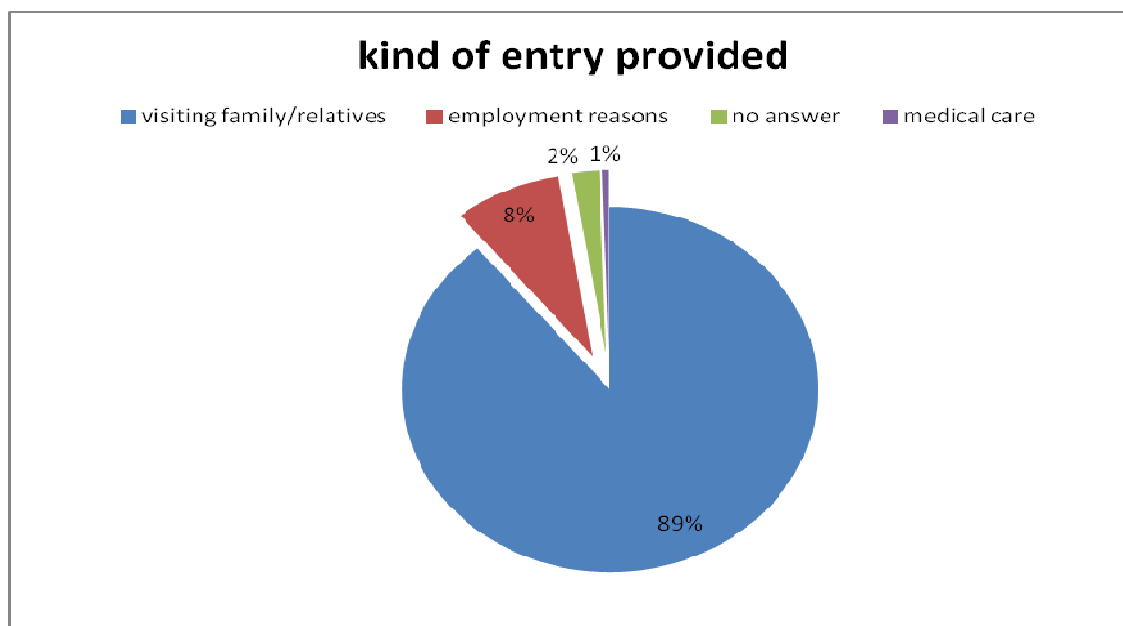
8.34% of interviewees mentioned that they had tried, unsuccessfully to flee to another country before **Lebanon**. However, the majority (**91.14%**) indicated that **Lebanon** was their first choice of asylum state. **0.52%** of the participants did not answer this inquiry. Furthermore, **99.48%** of participants mentioned that they entered into **Lebanon** legally and **0.52%** mentioned entering "illegally".

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89.06% of those who entered legally mentioned that the reason for entry which they had provided at the **Lebanese – Syrian** border, was visiting family or relatives. **8.34%** gave other reasons such as escaping the conflict or entering for employment reasons, **2.08%** did not respond to this inquiry, **0.52%** mentioned that they had entered for medical care, and one indicated that his residency in **Syria** had reached its end and so he had to leave. It is significant to mention that all interviewed families, thus **100%**, said that while on the borders, they were not provided any information about where to go in **Lebanon**. Regarding the treatment they had received at **Lebanese Customs**: **81.25%** mentioned that the treatment ranged from normal to good; **13.55%** did not respond to this question, and **5.20%** described it as not being good.



G. Violations Witnessed or Obstacles Experienced while fleeing:

While **73.96%** of the families interviewed indicated that they had not witnessed, or experienced any obstacles or violations while fleeing **Syria** (i.e. from their area of residency until reaching the **Lebanese-Syrian** border), **26.04%** said that they had. Types of obstacles and violations included:

- Being stopped multiple times at military checkpoints;
- Strict inspections by soldiers without respecting gender differences. These inspection measures were particularly humiliating for the women;
- Killings and murder threats;
- Arrests of family members, and prolonged inspections and questioning;
- Insults and shots fired on their cars (by veiled persons);
- Transportation was intermittent and very expensive;
- Being forced to pay bribes in order that their belongings would not be burned and they would not be forced to return to Syria.

H. Reasons for choosing Lebanon as an Asylum Destination:

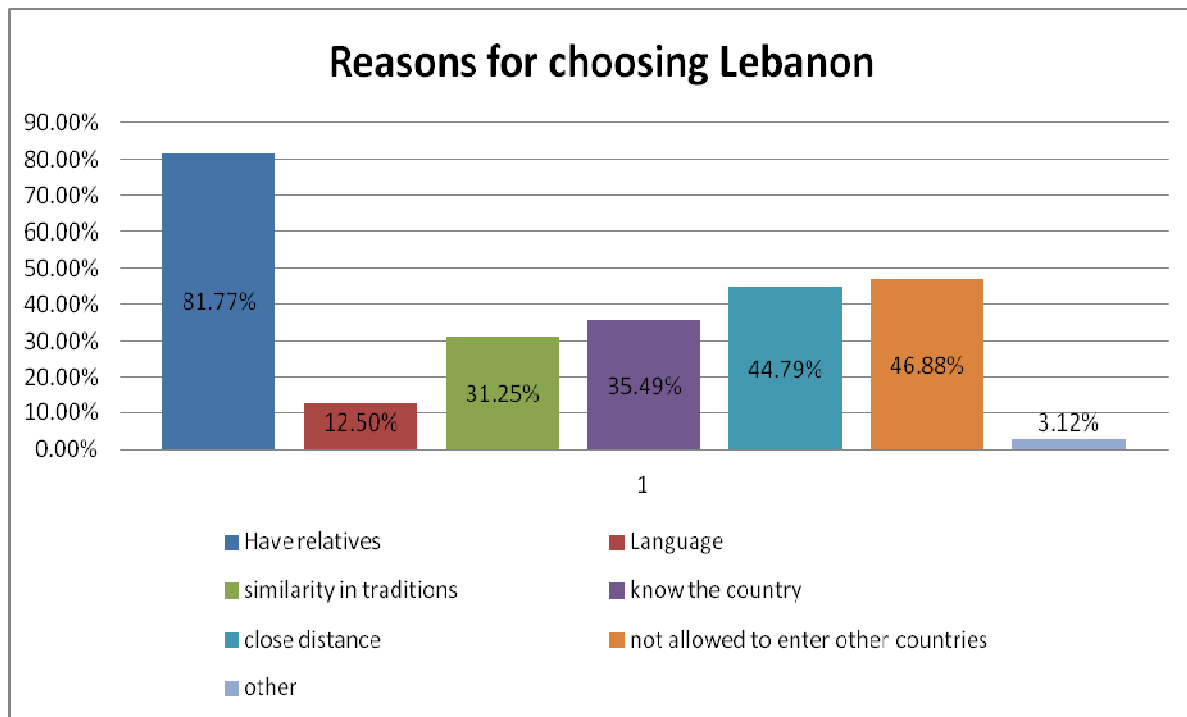
Several reasons emerged as to why **Palestinian Refugees** fleeing **Syria** chose **Lebanon** as an asylum destination. The results revealed the following:

- **81.77%** have relatives residing in **Lebanon**;
- **46.88%** mentioned that they were not allowed entry into another country³⁹ (this was particularly the case with **Jordan**);
- **44.79%** chose **Lebanon** because it was not too far to travel to;
- **35.94%** said that they are acquainted with **Lebanon**;
- **31.25%** chose to seek asylum in **Lebanon** because of the similarity in customs and traditions between **Syria** and **Lebanon**;
- **12.5%** chose **Lebanon** for language reasons;
- And **3.12 %** mentioned other reasons such as: a) relatives who left before them chose Lebanon so they followed them and b) the flexibility of moving within the country (they knew they would not be forced to stay in camps along the borders).

³⁹It is noteworthy to mention that **Palestinian Refugees** in **Jordan** mentioned that if they were allowed entry into the country, they would have to stay at **Zaatari Camp**. In **Turkey** **Palestinian Refugees** are only allowed entries into camps established on the borders.

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I. Moving within Lebanon:

While **6.77%** of the interviewed families indicated that they experienced difficulties in moving freely in **Lebanon**, **93.23%** said that they did not experience such difficulties. Families who responded positively mentioned that this was not the case⁴⁰ during May to August 2012. Amongst the families interviewed who experienced difficulties in freedom of movement in **Lebanon**, reasons for difficulties included:

- **53.84%** were afraid of being arrested.
- **23.08%** did not know, or were not familiar with the country.
- **7.70%** did not possess identification papers.

⁴⁰ Before August 2012 **Palestinian refugees** coming from **Syria** used to get their passports stamped at the borders by the **Lebanese General Security**. With this stamp they were allowed a one-week entry during which they had to go to the nearest **General Security** Office to register i.e. provide information on where they are living and obtain a one-week permission that allows them to move freely in **Lebanon**. This permission had to be renewed continuously; otherwise the holder of the permit would be subjected to a fine that amounts to approximately 34 US Dollars for the first non-renewed month. Should **Palestinian Refugees** skip another month without renewing this permit, he/she might be subjected to a fine that amounts to approximately 134 USD; detention for 3 to 10 days; followed by a transfer to **Syria**. In August 2012 these entry and residence requirements changed, **Palestinian refugees** entering **Lebanon** are still getting their passports stamped at the borders by the **Lebanese General Security**, but the latter adopted a policy of "turning a blind eye". As a result, registration of their entry takes place at the borders only in addition to keeping coordination with **Palestinian Political Parties** who are "governing" the camps and these Political Parties representatives through the Popular Committees who have the main registry of families within the camps and gatherings.

J. Assistance Received in Lebanon:

76.56% of the families interviewed mentioned that they had received several types of assistance since they had arrived in **Lebanon**. However, **23.44%** mentioned that as of yet no one had supported them. The types of assistance received included:

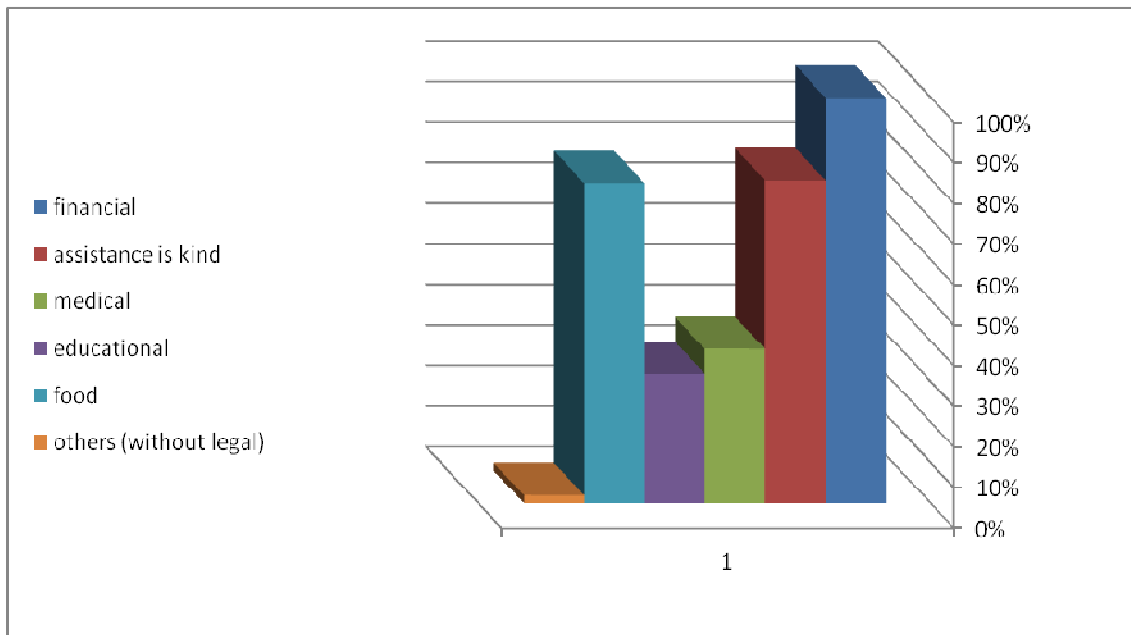
- **100%** received financial assistance (in Ramadan mainly, and the majority received it only once-off);
- **79.60%** received 'assistance in kind' such as clothes, kitchen appliances and blankets;
- **78.91%** received food;
- **38.09%** received medical assistance (mainly from **UNRWA** clinics, medication and hospitalization was also covered by **Qatar Red Crescent**);
- **31.97%** received educational assistance (mainly at **UNRWA** schools and stationary from NGOs);
- and **2.04%** received other forms of assistance (this does not include legal assistance).

94.27% said that the assistance they received met their needs. However, the constant challenge is how to sustain the provision of such assistance. This is particularly a challenge owing to the continued deterioration of the situation in **Syria**, and the resulting increase in flow⁴¹ of refugees to Lebanon. **5.21%** said that their needs were not met at all and **0.52%** did not respond to this question.

It is significant to mention that **the main and most essential assistance requested is financial assistance. This is primarily required to cover the costs of renting accommodation.** All families who were interviewed, indicated that accommodation became a pressing need, especially for the families that were hosting them. They also indicated that **financial assistance for hosting families is essential to cover needs and supplies for the families' members** who are living together. This is particularly important considering the economic situation of **Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon**, many of whom are unemployed and living in poverty. **It is also significant to mention that most families said that if they have, excess food, they would accept more, because they would be able to sell the excess for extra money!**

⁴¹Interviewed families mentioned that when visiting Centres providing assistance to **Palestinian refugees** from Syria, they receive answers such as, we've supported you once and we have to support new refugees.

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K. Jobs:

24.48% of the families interviewed, mentioned that at least one family member had found a job. However, most were being underpaid and often the work was intermittent. The majority (i.e. **75.52%** of the interviewed families) did not have any family member working.

It is important to mention that **Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon** are already facing restrictions in the job market due to restrictive policies. **Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon** do not enjoy the right to work in as many as **20** professions. As Palestinian Refugees are not 'formally citizens of another state they are not able to claim the same rights as other foreigners living and working in **Lebanon**'.⁴²

L. Education:

42.70% of the families interviewed indicated that they had registered their children to continue their education at schools or universities in Lebanon. However, **57.30%** of families had not registered their children for continued education. The reasons for not enrolling children in the scholastic year of 2012-2013 were:

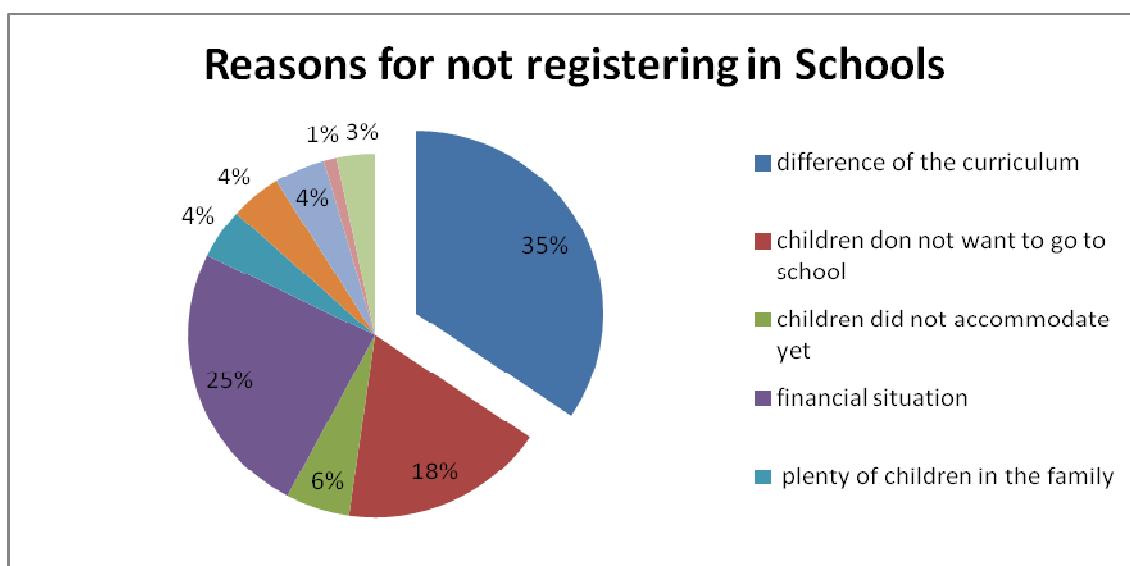
- **28.18%** because of the difference in curriculum;

⁴² UNRWA 'Lebanon', available at: <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=65>

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- **20%** because of their financial situation (insufficient funds to pay their children's allowances or educational needs);
- **14.54%** of the children did not want to go to school;
- **4.54%** of the children had not been accommodated yet;
- **3.63%** because there were so many children in the family;
- **3.63%** because of discontinuity as a result of constantly moving from place to place;
- **3.63%** had difficulties with transportation;
- **2.72%** because there were no schools available for children with disabilities;
- And **0.91%** did not respond to this question.



M. Significant incidents such as Births, Deaths, and Marriage while in Lebanon:

1.56% of the families interviewed mentioned that they had had children since arriving in **Lebanon**. Of this **1.56%**, **0.52%** were married **4.17%** of those interviewed had had abortions. **It is important to consider whether these abortions were definitely intended, or were chosen as a last resort owing to the economic, housing and other difficulties faced by these refugees.** There has also been an increase in the number of abortions performed in **Syria** since the start of the conflict, owing to the precarious financial situation many pregnant mothers face⁴³. New births are given a

⁴³ AFP/ The National "abandoned newborn is **Syrian** family's 'Gift from God'" (4 April 2013) *Now News Lebanon*; available at <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/nowsyriainthepress/abandoned-newborn-is-syrian-family-gift-from-god>

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certificate from the hospital, yet are not registered in the official directorates. Marriages can only take place religiously, but cannot be registered in courts. This indicates the essential need for legal aid counselling and assistance for Palestinian Refugees fleeing **Syria**, in order to limit possible legal obstacles in the future.

N. Violations or Harassments experienced in Lebanon:

6.25% of the interviewed families mentioned that they experienced harassments or were subject to violations since arriving in **Lebanon**. **93.75%** negatively responded to this question, which is a good indicator about the hospitality and care they are receiving within the Palestinian community in **Lebanon**. Families who mentioned that they experienced harassments or were subjected to violations identified the following types of violations/harassments:

- Family member(s) managed to find a job, but did not receive any payment in return. Owing to the fact that they were not working “legally” they could not complain about this treatment;
- Abuse at work (long working hours and being under paid);
- Unequal distribution of Aid and favoritism in distribution;
- Theft of identification papers and money;
- And eviction from their rental apartments in **Lebanon** because of delays in paying rent.

Testimonies

Palestinian refugees fleeing **Syria** to **Lebanon** are victims twice over. They are living in inadequate, overcrowded shelters, under poor conditions. Many of the refugees are now accommodated in the **Palestinian camps** in **Lebanon** (**UNRWA's** latest statistics, from March 2013, indicate that the number of **PSR** in **Lebanon** is estimated to have exceeded **37,000**. Half of these refugees live in the South (**31%** in **Saida** and **15%** in **Tyre**), **19%** live in the **Beirut** area, **15%** in the **North** and **21%** in **Bequaa**⁴⁴). These camps lack the most basic necessities and proper infrastructure (non-paved streets, narrow pathways, overcrowded homes, dangerous and inadequate electricity supply, inadequate hygiene services, inadequate water system and play grounds). Over **20%** of homes occupied by **Palestinian** families are not fit to live in. Many of these homes lack walls, roofs, windows or toilet facilities. In the area of **Tyre**, in south **Lebanon**, **UNRWA** has indicated that **42%** of Palestinian homes are unfit to live in.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Bi-weekly briefing issued by the **UNRWA** Office in **Beirut** (**UNRWA's** response and services to **Palestine** refugees from **Syria**, 2 April 2013, issue 13

⁴⁵ The Daily Star: Lebanon News (3 April 2013); available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2013/Apr-03/212380-uk-charities-palestinians-from-syria-vulnerable.ashx#ixzz2PaZfV7Lp>

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“**Palestinians** who’ve recently fled their homes in **Syria** have become double refugees,” said **Francis Lacasse, Oxfam’s Syria** crisis response manager. “They’re highly vulnerable, and many are in danger of falling through the aid safety net and not getting the help they urgently need.”⁴⁶

In this section we provide 4 testimonies received by **PHRO** which reflects the suffering of the **Palestinian Refugees**:

First Story: Khold

Khold is a 35 years old **Palestinian** refugee woman from **Syria**. She left **Syria** for **Lebanon** on the 15 **September** 2012. She was living in **Chatela** camp with her 2 years old baby. However, now she and the baby are renting a home with her refugee brother and his family in **Borj Al Barajneh** camp. Before we met **Khold**, we were told that **Khold** did not know that her husband had been killed in **Syria**. She still thought that he was missing. **Khold** is an educated woman, with a university degree, and she is seeking work in Lebanon.

Khold told us she moved a lot inside **Syria** before she decided to come to Lebanon. While in **Syria**, she witnessed many human rights violations and atrocities. These violations and atrocities included: bombardments, clashes, thefts, raids, arrests, torturing and a massacre of approximately 319 people in **Sayeda Zeinab**.

The main reasons which **Khold** gave for fleeing **Syria**, beside the violations she witnessed, were: the economic situation; the security situation which made her particularly fearful for her child’s safety. Furthermore, she was afraid that she would be raped. While fleeing the country, she witnessed many bombings and she was forced to stop at numerous check points.

Now that she is in Lebanon, **Khold** said that she is completely unhappy with her situation. She complained of being badly treated (hearing bad, disrespectful words). She is also constantly worrying about her husband, unaware of the fact that he has passed away. She is also in need of a lot of material assistance. The aid she has received has been helpful but insufficient to meet her needs.

Khold’s last words to us were:

*“I’m afraid that I won’t go back to my home, and if I go back I’m afraid that it will be destroyed. I’m very optimistic that the regime will fall soon, and that President **Bashar** will be killed. Now I know why the **Palestinian – Lebanese Refugees** are the people who are in the most demand for the **Right to Return**, because living in Lebanon is not considered to be a life”.*

⁴⁶ Ibid.

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Second story: Haneen

Haneen is a newly arrived refugee from **Syria**. She is 20 years old and has been married for five months. At the time of her interview she was two months pregnant. She said she had to get married quickly without any engagement period or wedding celebration, because her father was worried about her and her 17 year old sister's safety.

Haneen left **Syria** on the 27 November 2012 with her husband. They left to join her family, who were living in **Chatela** camp. Her family was living in the camp with her uncle, who had left before them. She told us that her father had escaped because he was afraid of the safety risks facing his daughters (who are six and 17 years old respectively). The father is now trying to marry off **Haneen's** 17 years old sister to anyone who asks for her hand in marriage. **Haneen** described her father as bigoted and restrictive, and mentioned how he does not allow them to leave **Chatela** camp on their own.

Haneen does not have all her documents with her because she is newly married and she did not have time to get an **UNRWA** ration card for her and her husband before they left **Syria**. However, now that she is pregnant, she needs to get a ration card before she can start receiving treatment. She also does not have a family card.

Before **Haneen** came to **Lebanon** she moved between many different camps in **Syria**. In every camp she stayed in, she witnessed many human rights violations. While staying in **Al Yarmouk** camp, where she was living with her husband and her husband's family, half of the house fell down on them. She said that she was grateful to God that she was on the side of the house that did not fall down. However, this incident still shook her up considerably. After this incident she started trembling, and she left the house without taking any clothes with her.

Haneen witnessed bombardments; she saw dead people (children and old people) and she talked about the massacre which had occurred in **Jobar** (**Jobar** is the camp where **Haneen** lived with her family before she got married). Women were being raped in this camp, and this was the main reason why her father forced her to get married and flee to **Lebanon**.

While travelling to **Lebanon** she was very scared that her baby would die because the Taxi driver she was travelling with had to drive at high speed to escape the bombings and other forms of conflict. **Haneen** described the terrifying sounds she heard on this journey.

In spite of all that she had experienced and witnessed, **Haneen** was still able to laugh and joke about her situation, and about how funny she looked now that she had to wear her mother-in-law and her sisters' clothes. Her answer to the question: *"Have you facing any difficulties in moving within Lebanon?"* was funny and at the same time sad. She said: *"Yes, I have. I'm afraid to leave the house because there are so many rats and mice. One night I opened the door and I thought that a rat standing on the stairs was a cat, because it was so big. I almost played with it! But I have to live and so I have to become accustomed to living with them."*

In order to be able to afford to pay for the taxi journey to come to **Lebanon**, **Haneen** had to sell her wedding ring. She now hopes that her husband will be able to find a job, as he told her on their way to **Lebanon**: *"I hope to find a job in Lebanon and I don't need any aids."*

Third story: Ahmad

Ahmad is a 35 years old male, **Palestinian** refugee from **Syria**. He fled **Syria** in March 2012 with his wife, who was pregnant at that time, and his two children.

Neither **Ahmad** nor his wife have an identity card or a family card, because they were stolen together with the money that he was saving up for his baby's delivery costs, from his rented home in **Chatela camp**. **Ahmad** described the difficulties faced by those who lose their IDs. It is particularly hard for those who lose their IDs in **Syria**. If someone loses his/her ID in **Syria** he/she can face punishment and torture. In addition to this risk, **Ahmad** cannot go back to **Syria** to apply for another ID because he will not be allowed to enter the country without an ID.

Ahmad witnessed atrocities and human rights violations. These atrocities and violations included: house attacks, sniping, indiscriminate killing and kidnappings. He also witnessed two whole families (**Al Hassan** and **Al Zahra**) that had been slaughtered with their children.

Ahmad talked about the prosperous life he had once lived in **Syria**. He described the nice home that he was building before he fled the country. He said that he had to flee **Syria** because he was afraid for the safety of his family. His fears were exacerbated when the camp came under siege and his sister was kidnapped. He sought asylum in **Lebanon** because he is familiar with the country, and he has previously worked in **Lebanon**. Furthermore, as a **Palestinian**, **Lebanon** is the only country out of the countries neighbouring **Syria** where he can seek asylum.

Ahmad was grateful to **UNRWA** for the Aid that they are giving him. He said the small amount of Aid they are receiving from **UNRWA** is better than not receiving anything at all. However, he said that he went to speak to the **Palestinian Ambassador in Lebanon** about all the cleaning aids they are receiving. **Ahmad** said: *"Why does everyone give us cleaning materials? Are we a contaminated people?"*

All that **Ahmad** wants to do is to work freely, because now, without his ID he cannot work outside the camp. He is only able to work inside the camp. He receives many requests for work outside the camp, but he has to refuse because he does not have an ID. He asked the Ambassador to give him a permanent document to show that he is a **Palestinian-Syrian Refugee**. Owing to the fact that **Palestine** was declared a non-member state in the **United Nations**, **Ahmad** said that this should lead to eased restrictions on freedom of movement for **Palestinian Refugees**.

Ahmad said: *"I'm a human being and I have a right to work, to move freely, to have a car and drive but all that... I can't do, because I don't have an ID. I don't need any aids; I have my own work that I can use to support my family. I have knocked on the door of UNRWA and the Embassy, but no one listened to me. The Palestinian Embassy told us to go the Syrian Embassy, but are we the responsibility of the Syrian Embassy? Is it a good reputation for our state that we have to demonstrate near the embassy and near UNRWA? My wife was accused of adultery when she delivered our baby in Haifa Hospital, because we don't have IDs and family cards! They also took from us money (\$350) in spite of the fact that they know we are refugees! All that I can think about now is how we, as refugees, can gather together and find a way to discuss our situation on*

*the **Lebanese TV** show (**Lelnasher**). On this show we would be given a platform where we could talk about our suffering in **Lebanon** and about the nepotism in distributing aid here."*

Ahmad now fears that he will not be able to go back to **Syria**. The war made him lose everything that he has and he fears he will be homeless for a second time. He expressed his love for the **Syrian** people and their treatment of the **Palestinian Refugees**. He hopes that the regime will eventually fall and that all in **Syria** will be able to coexist better in the future. He also hopes that the destiny of **Palestinian – Syrian** refugees' will not to be like that of the **Palestinian – Iraqi** people. He is also afraid that growing tensions between different religious groups in **Syria** will eventually result in a war between Muslims and Christians there.

Fourth story: Mohamed

Mohamed is a 33 year old **Palestinian refugee** who left **Syria** in July 2012 with his wife and his sister-in-law. His sister-in-law's dad told them to take his daughter with them, because of the high risk of her being raped in **Syria**. **Mohamed's** wife mentioned six rape cases she had heard of. The families of the rape victims had the rape victims undergo surgery to reconstruct their hymen. This surgery provided these women with a 'second virginity' and hereby reduced their shame from being raped.

Mohamed entered Lebanon illegally. As a result, he faced many obstacles during his journey. He resorted to hiding in refrigerators and walking very long distances, in order to escape from being caught. The main reason for **Mohamed's** choice to illegally enter the country was that before the war in **Syria** he had entered Lebanon and visited a **Palestinian** camp on numerous occasions. These visits to the camps had made the **Syrian** government believe that he belonged to an organized **Palestinian** resistance. As a result, the government had placed him in jail, where he was tortured. Now his name is on the **Syrian** government's watch list. As a result of being placed on this watch-list, if he entered Lebanon legally, he would face the risk of being investigated at every checkpoint. If they discovered that he was on the watch list he would face great risk of persecution from the **Syrian** government. Owing to this, he had no other choice than to enter **Lebanon** illegally.

Mohamed now lives with his wife and his sister in law in a small, single room. **Mohamed** witnessed a lot of human rights violations and atrocities in **Syria**. These included: random shootings and bombardments; the **Free Syrian Army** entering the camp; witnessing many dead and wounded people lying on the streets; and the raping of girls and women.

Mohamed said: *"My cause is the **Palestinian** cause, if I have to take a side. I will neither stand with the **Free Syrian Army** nor the Regime. Because of this both sides consider us (**Palestinians**) as betrayers. I think our [**Palestinians in Syria**] situation will be hard in both cases; whether the regime falls or if it remains."*

Mohamed left his family in **Syria**, but he is thinking of going back to visit them even though he knows that by doing so, he will risk his life. He wants to return for a visit in order to make sure that his elderly parents, who are still there, are ok. His parents are refusing to leave their home in **Syria**, because they fear being homeless.

Mohamed's wife was pregnant but after arriving in **Lebanon** she had an abortion in **Haifa Hospital**. While in **Haifa Hospital** she received medical tests which she had to pay for. Now she is receiving treatment from another doctor who refuses to accept the medical tests that she had in **Haifa Hospital** because he considers them unprofessional and unreliable. Owing to this, **Mohamad's** wife had to go for more tests, which resulted in additional expenses.

Analysing Results

Interviews conducted by the **PHRO** team revealed that **Palestinian Refugees** who have fled **Syria** are greatly dependant on the assistance they are receiving from host families and friends. Active bodies inside the camps and gathering such as: the popular committees, political parties and civil society organizations are supporting families with registering. Some, mainly political groups started to provide emergency assistance, yet there is no organized emergency support to these families especially for food and clothing. Organizations have started to prepare emergency proposals, but it will take time to implement these proposals. As for **UNRWA**, so far they have allowed Palestinian Refugees to access their clinics within the camps for medical care, but they are still not eligible for hospitalization. **Palestinian Refugees** who fled **Syria** are not required to register with **UNRWA**. However, as of yet, **UNRWA** has not started implementing an emergency plan to support them or the **Palestinian** families that are hosting them. **UNHCR**, however, does not register them because they do not fall under its mandate⁴⁷.

Palestinian Refugees from **Syria** are particularly vulnerable, especially with regards to their need for surrogate protection and emergency assistance. Children, pregnant women, people with disabilities and those in need of special care such as individuals with chronic diseases of lifestyle (eg. Individuals with diabetes and high blood pressure) are the most vulnerable amongst these families.

There is still a significant lack of knowledge regarding the current situation of **Palestinian Refugees** from **Syria**, residing in **Lebanon**. As such information is vital for stakeholders, a small, yet representative study was conducted amongst **Palestinian Refugees** who had fled from **Syria** to **Lebanon** in order to better understand their situations (legal, economic, social, living...). The data from this research is to be used to inform the actions which local and international stakeholders take to meet their responsibilities to provide for the refugees' short, medium and long term needs.

Chance to Go Back to Syria for a Quick Visit

13.02% of the families interviewed mentioned that they had had one chance to go back to **Syria** to check upon their houses, relatives and neighbours. However, 85.42% mentioned that they did not have the chance, or more precisely, they did not think about it, because they were afraid to go back and get stuck there, or have something bad happen to them there. 1.56% of the families interviewed did not respond to this question.

⁴⁷ Article 1 (d) of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees.

Fears

Palestinian Refugees fleeing from **Syria** to **Lebanon** indicated that the questions regarding their fears were the most difficult to answer. 78.13% of the families interviewed mentioned that they are afraid of not returning to **Syria**, while 10.94% said they are afraid to go back. 40.62% are afraid of receiving or experiencing threats if they go back. 79.69% are afraid that the conflict will be prolonged and 33.34% are afraid the conflict will spill over into Lebanon. 63.54% are afraid about losing their relatives in **Syria**. 28.65% are afraid about homelessness and 22.40% are worried that their children will fail at school. 5.73% are afraid of the future impact that the culture in **Lebanon** will have on their family members, particularly on their women.

After conducting the questionnaires we asked the interviewees if he/she would like to make any additions or changes to the questionnaire. Most of them (if not all of them), were upset that they had been displaced again and they had lost hope that they would ever go back to **Syria**. Furthermore, many said that they did not feel safe living in a place like **Lebanon**. They are very afraid about their children's future (they lost an academic year, and it is hard for them to adapt to the new curriculum). They expressed their opinion regarding **Palestinian Refugees** living in **Lebanon** by saying "*Now we know why the **Palestinian in Lebanon** is the most demand for their right to [go] back to **Palestine**".*

At the end, the interviewees demanded that the **Palestinian ambassador to Lebanon** should investigate their miserable situation because he is refusing to interview them at the embassy.

Refugees Expectations

The conflict in **Syria** has lasted for over two years. This has confounded the expectations of many observers who expected **Bashar al-Assad's** regime to collapse well before the end of 2011. There are now ominous signs that the war is becoming entrenched, in a situation where the powerful external allies of government and rebels cannot allow their chosen side to fail.

Many of the families interviewed expected that the war would not end anytime soon. They felt the situation is going to get worse and they also expressed their fear that their situation would turn out the same as the **Palestinians** who fled **Iraq**. Many felt that the **Palestinians** will not be represented in **Syria** in the future by either the Regime or opposition. While the Regime remains, they feel that they will not be allowed to return to **Syria** and if it collapses, they feel that the **Free Syrian Army** will view them as betrayers because they did not fight with them.

Recommendations

1. Develop better joint mechanisms that enable **UNRWA** to benefit from **UNHCR**'s capacities especially, the emergency, funds as **UNHCR** has quicker responses to refugee crisis situations. Such mechanisms could include the allocation of funds and inclusion of **UNRWA** whenever it is possible, within the process of funds seeking measures taken by **UNHCR** within the field of **UNRWA**'s operation. The purpose behind this would be to target **Palestinian Refugees** from **Syria** who have fled to **Lebanon**. The joint mechanisms would better the protection mechanisms and relief related to this refugee population.
2. Gather relevant, accurate statistics regarding the number of **Palestinian Refugees** who have fled from **Syria** to **Lebanon**. This process should be relatively straightforward as **Palestinian Refugees** from **Syria**, generally live in specific settings in **Lebanon** (Camps and Gatherings). Accurate statistics are important as they reduce political exploitation of statistics.
3. Work on developing a new support mechanism in response to the **Lebanese General Security** order to simplify the process of gaining residency status for **PSR**, making the process the same as the process for **Syrian Refugees**. As this residency status is temporary, if the Syrian conflict continues indefinitely then these **PSR** may face legal repercussions concerning their temporary residency status. This would be a particular risk if any significant political changes occurred in **Lebanon** which resulted in changes to previous legal procedures taken by the **Lebanese General Security**.
4. Creating a new mechanism to coordinate emergency aid to **PSR**. This mechanism could ensure that there is coordination and networking between **Palestinian organizations**, **UNRWA**, civil society organizations and international institutions providing aid to **PSR**. This would prevent disparities in distribution of aid, such as providing refugees with aid 'once off'.
5. **PSR** are afraid of being in **Lebanon** long term. This is a rationale fear, which adds weight to the importance of providing adequate and possibly long term, legal support and welfare for **PSR**. It is also recommend that pressure mechanisms be developed to ensure that the Lebanese government does not apply harmful measures against **PSR**.
6. There is a great risk that the **PSR** will be harassed when they return to **Syria**, this would be the likely outcome whether the Regime is overthrown or remains (They could face persecution from the opposition or the Regime). This risk highlights the need for forming advocacy and support systems to defend **PSR** rights once they return to **Syria**.

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