Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's Refworld website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the Knowledge and Information Management Unit.

LBN104692.E

10 December 2013

Lebanon: Treatment of Palestinians by society and authorities; state protection; treatment of Sunni Palestinians from refugee camps near Beirut by Hezbollah (2012-December 2013)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. General Situation

Sources provide a range of population estimates for Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon: Al Monitor, an online news source reporting on the Middle East (n.d.), reports that there are 475,000 Palestinian refugees living across Lebanon's six governorates (26 Dec. 2012). The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) reports there are 441,543 registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (n.d.a). Sources report that 300,000 Palestinians live in refugee camps across Lebanon (Human Rights Watch 31 Jan. 2013; CLDH 2012, 42). UNRWA reports there are twelve refugee camps for Palestinians in Lebanon (Oct. 2013).

Sources report that Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention (ANERA June 2012, 2; Professor 28 Nov. 2013). Further, in a June 2012 report titled Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon, American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA), a non-governmental development organization supporting Palestinian refugees and poor families in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon (n.d.), stated that Lebanon does not recognize the UN's 1967 protocol and "does not recognize the basic rights and legal obligations to people with refugee status" (June 2012, 2). For detailed information about the treatment of Palestinian refugees throughout Lebanon, see Response to Information Request LBN103848.

2. Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon near Beirut

The UNRWA website indicates that the Dbayeh, Shatila, and Burj [el] Barajneh Palestinian refugee camps are the nearest camps to Beirut (n.d.a). ANERA reports that the Mar Elias camp is southwest of Beirut (June 2012). The following information on the camps was found:

- The Dbayeh camp "is 12 km east of Beirut" (UN n.d.b). Its "residents live in severe economic hardship and many are unemployed" (ibid.). There are more than 4,000 registered refugees in Dbayeh camp (ibid.). ANERA reports that of the 4,000 residents, most are Christian Palestinians (June 2012, 5).
- The Shatila camp is in southern Beirut and houses more than 8,500 registered refugees (UN n.d.b). ANERA reports that camp "living conditions are very bad, with open sewers, overcrowded housing and only one health centre to service residents" (June 2012, 6).
- The Burj [el] Barajneh camp "is in the southern suburbs of Beirut" (UN n.d.b). According to UNRWA, it is "the most overpopulated camp around Beirut," with more than 16,000 registered refugees and where "living conditions are extremely poor" (ibid.). ANERA reports that its "water
...and sewage systems are deteriorated” (June 2012, 6). The Minority Rights Group International report State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2013-Case Study: Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon, reports numerous deaths in the camp related to electrocution (MRG 24 Sept. 2013). Further, according to one resident of the camp that was interviewed, health issues in the camp "are a result of the pressures of life, poverty, the lack of movement, the electricity, the water, and the overcrowding" (ibid.).

- The Mar Elias camp is the smallest of UNRWA camps with about 600 residents (ANERA June 2012, 5).

2.1 Palestinian Refugee Camp Conditions

Al Monitor reports that Palestinian refugees live "inside and outside of Lebanon's 12 refugee camps" (26 Dec. 2012). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of political science at McGill University, who researches Middle East politics with an emphasis on refugees and development assistance, states that "the majority of Palestinian refugees [in Lebanon] still reside in poor quality housing in refugee camps" (28 Nov. 2013).

Sources report that the camps are overcrowded and are characterised by high health risks, water contamination and high rates of poverty (MRG 24 Sept. 2013; UN Oct. 2013). Human Rights Watch characterises the social and economic conditions of the camps as "appalling" (31 Jan. 2013). On 12 July 2013, Al Jazeera reported that "Palestinian refugee camps [in Lebanon] are isolated communities, alienated from their surroundings."

In a report titled Civil and Political Rights in Lebanon in 2012, the Lebanese Center for Human Rights (Centre libanais des droits humains, CLDH), a non-profit and non-partisan Lebanese human rights organization based in Beirut (n.d.), states that "Palestinian refugee camps are in constant demographic growth" (2012, 43). Sources note that the camps are overcrowded (ANERA June 2012, 6; UN Oct. 2013). However, sources also indicate that the expansion of camps is prohibited by local Lebanese laws (MRG 24 Sept. 2013; ANERA June 2012, 3).

2.2 Refugee Camp Security

Voice of America (VOA), a US government multimedia broadcaster (n.d.), reports that "by long-standing agreement, the Lebanese army does not enter the country's dozen refugee camps, leaving security inside to the Palestinians themselves" (12 Aug. 2013). The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), an independent NGO which promotes human rights and democracy in the Arab region (n.d.), reports that in 2012, the Lebanese army assumed more control over political life and the public sphere, which resulted in additional human rights violations by the military. Among these violations were severe and at times violent security measures taken against the camps of Palestinians. (CIHRS Sept. 2013, 259)

Similarly, the US Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012 reports that "Palestinian refugee camps continued to act as self-governed entities and maintained security and militia forces not under the direction of government officials" (US 19 Apr. 2013). Furthermore, "in accordance with their agreement, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) security committees, not the government, provided security for refugee camps" (ibid.).

In a report titled Palestinians in Lebanon: Status, Governance and Security, Conciliation Resources, a peace-building NGO that supports people in conflicts (n.d.), reports that "governance of [Palestinian refugee] camps has also provided sources of tension - between Lebanese and Palestinians, but also among Palestinians themselves" (2012, 68). Further, in the 2012 report, Conciliation Resources states that [t]here is a real crisis of governance in [the] camps. Each is home to dozens of factions: PLO groups, pro-Syrian factions and Islamist militant groups. Popular and security committees seek to govern each camp under the supervision of the PLO or through coalitions of factions, and are expected to keep the peace, solve internal disputes, provide security, interact with the Lebanese government and aid agencies, and generally administer the camp in coordination with UNRWA. Popular committees are seen by many Palestinians as unable to, either agree on important issues, coordinate their activities, or protect their constituents from harassment by Lebanese security forces. (2012, 69)

Further information about the security situation in refugee camps could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Rights of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

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Sources report that government policies discriminate against Palestinian refugees (Al Jazeera 12 July 2013; Professor 28 Nov. 2013; US 19 Apr. 2013) and two sources characterise this discrimination as "systematic" (ibid., Professor 28 Nov. 2013). Conciliation Resources states that "Palestinians have been discriminated against by the Lebanese state for decades, and there are few signs that this will improve" (2012, 67). Sources report that Palestinian refugees are subject to employment restrictions on certain professions (Conciliation Resources 2012, 67; CLDH 2012, 42) or have limited access to employment (US 19 Apr. 2013). Palestinian refugees are characterised as poor, living in extreme poverty, and economically disadvantaged (CLDH 2012; Conciliation Resources 2012, 67; Professor 28 Nov. 2013). Country Reports for 2012 states that Palestinians "cannot access public schools, health-care facilities, or official marriage or birth registration" (19 Apr. 2013). Sources state that Palestinians are prohibited from owning property (ANERA June 2012, 2; Conciliation Resources 2012, 67; Professor 28 Nov. 2013).

Country Reports for 2012 states that "UNRWA has the sole mandate to provide health, education, social services, and emergency assistance to the 474,053 registered Palestinian refugees residing in the country" (19 Apr. 2013). The CLDH reports that various civil society organizations, as well as the UNRWA continued in 2012 to assist the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (2012). ANERA states that "the majority of the camps' population completely dependent on UNRWA and other non-profits - local and international - for everything from schools to humanitarian assistance" (June 2012, 2).

3.1 Citizenship and Identity Cards

Country Reports for 2012 states that "Palestinian refugees residing in the country were not able to obtain citizenship and were not citizens of any other country" (US 19 Apr. 2013) and that "stateless individuals lack official identity documents that would permit them to travel abroad and may face difficulties travelling in the country or detention for not carrying identity documents" (ibid.). Similarly, Learning for the Empowerment and Advancement of Palestinians (LEAP), an educational empowerment program for Palestinian refugee-youth in Lebanon (n.d.a), reports that Palestinians in Lebanon are denied basic rights and are not considered citizens of any country (n.d.b). ANERA also reports that "stateless Palestinians who came from outside Lebanon do not enjoy the rights given to foreigners holding citizenship from another country" (June 2012, 2).

The CLDH reports that Palestinian men who marry Lebanese women are not allowed to naturalise under Lebanese law; however, "the Palestinian wife of a Lebanese national is granted the right to transmit the Lebanese nationality" (CLDH 2012, 30). Similarly, Country Reports for 2012 states that "Palestinian refugee women married to citizens were able to obtain citizenship and transmit citizenship to their children" (19 Apr. 2013).

Amnesty International (AI) states that "an unknown number of Palestinian refugees continued to reside in Lebanon without an official ID card, leaving them with even fewer rights" (24 May 2012). Similarly, Country Reports for 2012 states that "approximately 3,000 Palestinian refugees were not registered with UNRWA or the government ... non-ID Palestinians faced restrictions on movement and lacked access to fundamental rights under the law" (US 19 Apr. 2013). Further, "in 2011 the government issued a special identification card to an estimated 2,000 non-ID Palestinians, but the Ministry of the Interior rejected 1,000 Palestinian refugees' applications" (ibid.). Corroboration about this special identification card could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3.2 Employment of Palestinians

Sources state that Palestinian refugees have limited access to the labour market in Lebanon (CLDH 2012, 42; LEAP n.d.b; NRC 16 Nov. 2013). The CLDH reports that Palestinian refugees "are still unable to work in some professions, for example, as doctors, dentists, lawyers, engineers or accountants" (2012, 42).

Sources state that in 2010, the Lebanese government amended the Labour Code to ease access of Palestinians to the official labour market; however there was no concrete improvement in access to the labour market (CLDH 2012, 42; Human Rights Watch 31 Jan. 2013; Professor 28 Nov. 2013). Furthermore, ANERA reports that this amendment "does not address the exclusion of Palestinian refugees from 30 syndicated professions" (June 2012, 4). In its 2012 report, ANERA states that "roughly 56% of Palestinian refugee workers are jobless" (ibid.).

4. Political and Societal Attitudes Toward Palestinian Refugees

In reference to the attitudes of political coalitions in Lebanon, Conciliation Resources reports that while 14 March parties [the former government coalition] from all denominations oppose granting Palestinians the right to work and own property, resentment against Palestinians is also felt among Christian and Shia constituencies of 8 March parties [the former opposition coalition]. (2012, 69)
The Professor stated that, in his opinion, "on an individual level, Lebanese attitudes towards Palestinians vary. However, there is some degree of residual mistrust or hostility dating back to the civil war (although this has declined somewhat in recent years)" (28 Nov. 2013). Corroboration could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

In relation to the Syrian conflict's impacts on Lebanon, Al Jazeera reports that "Palestinians in Lebanon are struggling to secure their camps and stay out of the way of internal clashes in order to avoid being made scapegoats" (12 July 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

5. Treatment of Sunni Palestinians from Refugee Camps near Beirut by Hezbollah

Information on the treatment of Sunni Palestinians from refugee camps near Beirut by Hezbollah was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

The Professor stated that "in general, Sunnis in refugee camps near Beirut are treated well by Hizbullah, unless they are believed to be involved in anti-Hizbullah activities" (28 Nov. 2013). Corroboration could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Al Jazeera reports that "to many Palestinians in Lebanon, Hezbollah is different from the rest of the country's political parties. Respected for its resistance against Israelis, the party has remained largely respected by those living in the camps" (5 July 2013). Corroboration could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

In reference to the Syrian conflict, the Washington Post states that in the Ain Helweh Palestinian refugee camp, near Sidon, "Palestinians in Lebanon largely sympathize with their fellow Sunnis in the Syrian opposition" and reportedly set fire to boxes of humanitarian aid supplies sent to the refugee camp by Hezbollah to protest Hezbollah's decision to send fighters to support the Syrian President (Washington Post 5 July 2013). According to the same source, as of July 5, 2013, the situation in Ain Helweh remains "tense" (ibid.).

Two sources report that a Palestinian was killed in clashes near the Burj al-Barajneh camp, near Beirut (The Daily Star 9 Sept. 2013; Ya Libnan 9 Sept. 2013). Both sources indicate that the clash was believed to have occurred between Hezbollah and a group of Palestinians celebrating a wedding, when the latter refused to be searched at a Hezbollah checkpoint (ibid.; The Daily Star 9 Sept. 2013). The same two sources note that members of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Hezbollah met after the clash to agree to contain future clashes (ibid.; Ya Libnan 9 Sept. 2013).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References


Centre libanais des droits humains (CLDH). 2012. Civil and Political Rights in Lebanon in 2012. <https://11b9698a-a-df5f2e80-sites.googleusercontent.com/a/cldh-lebanon.org/cldh/Home/Civil%20and%20Political%20Rights%202012%20ENG.pdf?attachauth=ANoY7crKdTaVBA9yK_bCKGBVJqS01UK57qLSW-qrp62MkZ50iWcv8ZNaEkatlEieojwpM7d4j3awVcf9mdSk5rwwvpjMnJVDhHiZa-huHat73BFt54U4QZbpxOYQe3hAPwbtTxyaSNGrq95-rSurw7P7QhD1SMBK9F5nag0g1ltIoT_y2icR-Qoj84foXDphbJns_vExzLWurrAe2jSBM4dhBVQzG7Gx6oZjksSogqE6cc771BTgSbFPIEMIQSEBN0yAsBa9XW&attredirects=0> [Accessed 20 Nov. 2013]


Professor, McGill University. 28 November 2013. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.


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Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral source:** Attempts to contact the following persons were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto; Institute for Palestine Studies; Professor of International Law and Practice at Princeton University; Professor of Political Science at the American University of Beirut; Professor of Political Science at McGill University; Senior Fellow at the Middle East Initiative; UN – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Middle East Regional Office, RWA-Lebanon Headquarters & Legal Department.

**Internet sites, including:** Ecoi.net; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre; Institute for Palestinian Studies; International Organization for Migration; Lebanese Centre for Human Rights; Lebanese University; Lebanon – Ministry of Interior, Directorate of Palestinian Refugees; Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee; UN – HCR, Refworld; Washington Institute