



# World Directory of Minorities

Middle East MRG Directory → Lebanon → Palestinians

## Palestinians

### Profile

There are around 250-300,000 Palestinians in Lebanon, who are officially refugees and their descendents who fled to Lebanon following their expulsion from Palestine through the 1948 creation of Israel. They are Sunni Muslims and live mainly in Beirut and the outskirts of Sidon, Tyre and Tripoli.

### Historical context

About 110,000 Palestinian refugees arrived in Lebanon in 1948, from Jaffa, Haifa, Acre and Galilee. They were settled in official camps, though many moved into neighbouring low-income areas. These camps have hardly expanded despite the fourfold increase in population, and the total destruction of four camps during the 1970s and the almost total destruction of Shatila camp in 1985-1986.

A few middle class and mainly Christian Palestinians obtained Lebanese citizenship, but partly out of fear that integration of so many Sunnis would upset the country's precarious sectarian political balance, the vast majority were given the status of foreigners, requiring work permits. They thus formed pools of cheap and casual labour located almost solely in predominantly Muslim areas. During the 1960s, the heyday of revolutionary nationalism in the region, from which the Lebanese state tried to protect itself, the camps were kept under tight surveillance and control by the Deuxième Bureau. In 1969, with the growth of Palestinian national feeling, the camps ejected the Bureau and its many agents, and established Palestinian control of the camps.

With the transfer of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from Amman to Beirut in 1971, the Palestinians effectively took control of much of southern Lebanon and parts of Beirut and Sidon, and launched raids into Israel. Punitive Israeli raids on Lebanese as well as Palestinian targets drove a wedge between allied Palestinians and Shia Lebanese, as did high-handed behaviour by Palestinians towards the indigenous population that was expected to subordinate its own concerns to the guerrilla war.

After its short-lived invasion of 1978, Israel invaded again in 1982, determined to destroy the PLO and install a right-wing regime in Beirut. Israel failed in these objectives, although the removal of PLO forces from Beirut and the south left the refugee population vulnerable to the contesting forces, demonstrated in the massacre of over 1,000 inhabitants of Shatila camp in 1982 by the Lebanese forces acting under Israeli auspices, and the bloody sieges of Shatila by (Shia) Amal forces with Syria's blessing from 1985-1987.

After the Ta'if agreement (1989), the Gulf War (1991) and the PLO-Israeli Declaration of Principles (DoP, 1993), the Palestinian predicament in Lebanon seriously deteriorated. The community faced the loss of remittances following eviction from Kuwait and other Gulf states, the collapse of political and financial support for the PLO, a high level of unemployment in Lebanon and widespread eviction of war-displaced people from unauthorized accommodation. Perhaps most seriously, Palestinians saw the DoP as almost certainly liquidating the refugee question. Refugees in Lebanon were in a more serious dilemma than those in Syria or Jordan. The government had stated that 'under no circumstances will Lebanon agree to give Palestinians citizenship', and spoken of a 'redistribution' of refugees, a euphemism for the expulsion of a substantial proportion of refugees. They thus seemed destined to remain without civic rights. Refugees shared with Lebanon a commitment to the right of return, but both parties knew that Israel was

unlikely to honour this humanitarian obligation even in part.

The 2006 conflict between Hezbollah and Israel again caused widespread suffering among Palestinians in southern Lebanon. Not only were some camps damaged by Israeli air raids, but many Palestinians also lost their livelihoods. Israel made broad use of cluster bombs during the war, and in the war's wake, hundreds of thousands of unexploded munitions littered southern Lebanese agricultural fields on which many Palestinian labourers rely for their income.

## **Current issues**

In the midst of Lebanon's ongoing political and sectarian crisis, the festering plight of the country's 250-300,000 Palestinian refugees erupted anew during 2007. The Lebanese government accused Palestinian militants of the Fatah al-Islam faction of bombing two buses in a Christian town in February 2007, killing three; the attack was one day prior to the two-year anniversary of the Hariri assassination. The government also accused the group of several bank robberies throughout early 2007. Following arrests of faction members for one such robbery in May, Fatah al-Islam militants holed-up in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp fired on Lebanese soldiers with rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns. The army responded with indiscriminate shelling, and fighting lasted for the next 15 weeks. An estimated 35-40,000 Palestinian civilians fled the camp during the conflict, in which 40 civilians died along with 168 Lebanese soldiers; around 400 militants were captured or killed as the army eventually prevailed. In October the first of the camp's residents were allowed to return, many finding their houses destroyed and some complaining that the army had looted their property.

powered by [the webbler](#)