

## **The Problem of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: Social, Economic, Legal Issues and Solutions**

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### **Abstract**

The situation of Palestinian refugees, a fundamental issue in the Middle East, has become particularly complex in Lebanon, warranting a thorough examination of living conditions within Palestinian refugee camps. This article investigates the consecutive massacres that started during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and continued with the 1982 occupation of Sabra and Shatila by Israeli forces and Lebanese Maronite Christian groups, amidst a subsequent crisis of forced displacement. The text delves deeper into the distinct forms of atrocities and persecution faced by Palestinian refugees within the context of "othering," "politicization," and "invisibility." This study also examines the legal frameworks adopted by the Lebanese state since the establishment of refugee camps in 1948, assessing their impact on the refugee population and suggesting alternative policy options. The conclusion assesses both "temporary" and "permanent" solutions to the Palestinian refugee crisis in Lebanon in light of contemporary developments.

**Keywords:** Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, UNRWA, Refugee Problem

### **Lübnan'daki Filistinli Mülteci Sorunu: Sosyal, Ekonomik ve Hukuki Sorunlar ile Bunların Çözümleri**

### **Özet**

Orta Doğu coğrafyasının en köklü sorunlarından biri olan Filistinli mülteciler konusu, özellikle Lübnan gibi ölkelerde çetrefilli bir hâl aldığından bilhassa kötü kamp koşullarında yaşayan Filistinliler bağlamında titizlikle çözümlenmesi gereken bir çalışma alanı doğurmuştur. Bu makalede, Lübnan İç Savaşı (1975-1990) ile başlayan, İsrail'in ve Lübnanlı Hristiyan Maruni grupların iş birliğinde 1982'de gerçekleştirilen Sabra ve Şatila katliamı ile derinleşen şiddet eylemlerine ve ardından gelen zorunlu göç sorunsalına değinilmektedir. Ayrıca Lübnan'daki Filistinli mültecilerin "ötekileştirilme", "siyasallaştırılma" ve "yok sayılma" üçgeninde maruz kaldıkları hak ihlalleri ve baskılar incelenmektedir. Bunlara ek olarak, Filistin mülteci kamplarının kurulduğu 1948'den bu yana Lübnan devletinin hangi yasal düzenlemelerle bu sorunları ele almaya çalıştığı, söz konusu politikaların mülteciler üzerinde ne tür sosyo-hukuki sonuçlar doğurduğu açıklanarak alternatif çözüm yolları sunulmaktadır. Filistinli mültecilerin Lübnan'daki kamplarda yaşadıkları sosyal, ekonomik ve hukuksal sorunların ayrı başlıklar altında sınıflandırıldığı çalışmada; Birleşmiş Milletler, UNRWA ve sivil toplum kuruluşları ekseninde alınması gereken tedbirler tartışılmaktadır. Sonuç bölümünde ise Lübnan'daki Filistinli mülteci sorununun çözümüne yönelik "geçici" ve "kalıcı" öneriler, güncel gelişmeler ışığında değerlendirilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İsrail, Filistin, Lübnan, UNRWA, Mülteci Sorunu

### **Introduction**

The contemporary era has been characterized by increasing levels of forced displacement, migration, and asylum-seeking movements across the globe. The population examined in this study consists of Palestinian refugees who fled the 1948 Israeli occupation. Unlike many other vulnerable populations, refugees often face significant legal, political, and economic constraints that limit their ability to improve their circumstances independently. Consequently, they depend heavily on host states and international organizations for protection and access to essential services. Among the countries hosting

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Palestinian refugees, Lebanon has long been associated with some of the most challenging living conditions, including restrictions on employment opportunities and access to social services. These conditions have persisted for decades and continue to shape the social, economic, and legal realities of Palestinian refugee communities in Lebanon.

Israel, rather than Lebanon alone, bears primary responsibility for the hardships faced by Palestinian refugees who receive only limited education and health services within Lebanese camps. The creation of the State of Israel, secured by the World Zionist Organization and its founder Theodor Herzl with the backing of major powers such as Britain, which had governed the area under a mandate since the late nineteenth century, is the root cause of these events.<sup>1</sup> Following Israel's declaration of independence on 14 May 1948, almost 100,000 Palestinian refugees were forced to relocate to Lebanon; by 1949, this number had risen to 700,000, and by 1950, the total number of displaced persons had reached one million.<sup>2</sup> The subsequent Arab-Israeli wars, discussed later in this article, further increased the number of displaced persons and contributed to a significant influx of refugees into Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and other Arab states.<sup>3</sup> Palestinian refugees, despite having been offered protection, were subjected to persecution, episodes of mass violence, and repeated displacement during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), including the events surrounding the Sabra and Shatila massacres of September 1982.<sup>4</sup> Those who stayed in Lebanon were rendered homeless following the destruction of camps in Rashidiyeh, Bourj el Shemali, el Buss, Ein al Hilweh, and Mieh.<sup>5</sup> The central question this article seeks to answer is: What national and international measures, particularly concerning Lebanese refugee camps, could provide viable solutions to the challenges facing Palestinian refugees in Lebanon?

Numerous challenges faced by Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and comparable countries are evident, particularly in relation to deteriorating living conditions within refugee camps and their broader social, economic, political, psychological, and legal implications. The resolution of the Palestinian refugee issue, shaped largely by social, economic, and legal factors, may depend on developments in Lebanon's domestic politics, the end of Israeli occupation, and actions taken by the international community through legal and judicial mechanisms. Questions remain as to whether the challenges facing the 12 Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon have been adequately addressed through UNRWA's activities, or whether additional support from international organizations, cooperation among states, and refugee self-organization could provide further assistance and solutions. The legal status and nationality of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon will be examined in relation to Lebanese legal documents and relevant international treaties.

In addition to the themes discussed above, the article addresses several key questions: Did the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 remain an interstate conflict or did it evolve into a clandestine struggle between Zionism, Arab nationalism, and Islam?; what roles did Christian Maronite groups, Sunni Druze communities, and Shiite Muslim groups in Lebanon play in the Sabra and Shatila massacres during the Lebanese Civil War and the subsequent

<sup>1</sup> Kasalak, Kadir, İngilizlerin Filistin Politikası ve Filistin Mandası, Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, No. 25, 2016, pp. 69-74.

<sup>2</sup> Waldman, Simon A., Anglo-American Diplomacy and the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1948-51, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 103-104.

<sup>3</sup> Abbasov, Seymur and Ercan, Murat, Tarihsel Perspektif Bağlamında, Siyonizm İdeolojisinin İsrail ile Filistin Arasında Yaşanan Çatışmalara Temel Etkileri, Anadolu Strateji Dergisi, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2024, pp. 3-4, 21.

<sup>4</sup> Çalışkan, Serkan, Katliamlara Tanıklık: Sanat Eserleri Aracılığı ile Hatırlamak, Güzel Sanatlar Enstitüsü Dergisi, No. 43, 2019, p. 110.

<sup>5</sup> Parkinson, Sarah E., Beyond the Lines: Social Networks and Palestinian Militant Organizations in Wartime Lebanon, Cornell University Press, 2023, pp. 56-57.

massacres under Israeli occupation?; what roles did the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the Israeli state, and Lebanese Christian groups play in shaping the experiences of Palestinian refugees as a result of the political turmoil in Lebanon since 1948?; to what extent have states such as Lebanon and Israel, as well as other social and political actors, contributed to the conditions prevailing in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, where people have been deprived of social services, economic development, and legal rights for nearly 76 years?; what steps can be taken by the international community or domestic actors within Lebanon to resolve the problems faced by Palestinian refugees in Lebanon?

### **The Methodology Relating to Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon**

This article adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine research topics related to Palestinian refugees who have faced hardships in Lebanon's difficult camp conditions over many years. The quantitative component draws on statistical data published by the United Nations and its affiliated agencies such as UNRWA and UNHCR, whereas the qualitative component focuses on issues related to rights deprivation, social exclusion, and the broader experiences of Palestinian refugees. The quantitative analysis examines demographic trends, unemployment, and educational developments among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The qualitative analysis explored key themes such as camp conditions, identity crises, and statelessness.

Furthermore, the psychological impacts experienced by Palestinian refugees in camps in Lebanon, along with the outcomes of death, injury, and forced displacement resulting from local conflicts, will be examined through both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative analysis will explore individual experiences and perceptions, while quantitative analysis will assess the statistical dimensions of these phenomena. The adverse consequences of camping conditions (such as water shortages and fatalities from electric shocks, etc.) will be analysed using quantitative data. The 1982 siege of Sabra and Shatila and their aftermath, including the ensuing Palestinian refugee crisis, will be investigated through data collection methods, with findings informed by the perspectives of foreign experts, relevant United Nations resolutions, and statements from Amnesty International.

The sections addressing the social, economic, and legal challenges faced by Palestinian refugees in Lebanon adopt an ethnographic and descriptive approach to examine the most significant issues affecting refugee camps and the potential measures proposed to address them. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques will be employed, given the difficulty of obtaining comprehensive information and statistical data on the entire population residing in camps. The rationale for these methodological choices will be discussed with reference to the policies and operational frameworks adopted by UNRWA and the United Nations in the region.

The theoretical framework of this study focuses on human rights protection, the effective implementation of refugee law, and efforts to address statelessness. The concluding section discusses potential long-term solutions to these challenges, which have persisted for more than 76 years. In addition, the concluding sections propose a policy roadmap for the Lebanese government, developed in accordance with the principles of international refugee law.

### **Article on the Palestinian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon References Scholarly Research and Academic Studies**

Official government statistics on Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are presented in this study; however, comparative analysis suggests that data and assessments produced by international and civil society organizations provide a more independent and comprehensive account of refugee conditions. Findings reported by Amnesty International, the Helsinki Monitor, the European Commission, the ILO, and the U.S. The Department of State, the United Nations Security Council, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East display a high degree of consistency and broadly correspond with the assessments of both local and international authors cited in this article. In addition, books, scholarly articles, and op-eds written by academics, researchers, and journalists from diverse geographical and intellectual backgrounds have been consulted to ensure a balanced and well-informed analysis.

### **The Sabra and Shatila Massacres and Palestinian Refugees in the Context of the Lebanese Civil War and Its Political Consequences**

To understand the events leading up to the Lebanese Civil War and the massacres that occurred, it is essential to briefly examine the political framework of the Palestinian resistance. This political structure has provided the framework for the key developments that have taken place since the 1970s and have shaped the lives of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The Arab-Israeli conflict persisted despite Israel's establishment in 1948, with the 1950s and 1960s marked by ongoing clashes and counterattacks.<sup>6</sup> Fatah and the PLO, led by Yasser Arafat, who were forced to leave Palestine, relocated their base to Jordan, where they operated until 1971. In the political context, as the PLO began to gain strength in Jordan, it started to provoke a reaction from Jordanian politicians, and in conjunction with the concerns of King Hussein of Jordan, there were attempts to expel both the PLO and the Palestinian refugees from the country. Between the PLO and Jordanian military units, clashes broke out, which intensified on September 1, 1970 and became known as "Black September", resulting in nearly 8 thousand deaths, with some Palestinian refugees opting to stay in Jordan and others migrating to Lebanon after these events. The Cairo Agreement, signed on November 2, 1969,<sup>7</sup> was a crucial development that allowed the PLO to enter Lebanon, resulting from a deal brokered by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser between the Lebanese government and the PLO.<sup>8</sup>

The 1967 war saw Israel capture the Golan Heights from Syria, the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza from Egypt, and the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan. Driven by a desire for revenge, Syria and Egypt clashed with Israel once more in the Yom Kippur War of 1973, with Egypt receiving backing from major powers such as the Soviet Union, East Germany, and Saudi Arabia, whereas the United States heavily supported Israel. Following this struggle, which Israel ultimately won, most Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, employed their oil export leverage, causing the price of oil to surge from \$3 to \$12 per barrel within a year. Following the largest oil price increase in history, the world faced an oil crisis that led to economic difficulties and high inflation for Western nations, including the

<sup>6</sup> Fischbach, Michael R., *Records of Dispossession: Palestinian Refugee Property and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, (The Institute for Palestine Studies Series), New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, pp. 919-921.

<sup>7</sup> Çakır, Adem, *İsrail-Filistin Meselesi Ve Filistin Güvenlik Güçleri*, *Filistin Araştırmaları Dergisi*, No. 8, 2020, pp. 24-25.

<sup>8</sup> Cooley, John K., *Green March, Black September: The Story of the Palestinian Arabs*, Routledge, 2016, pp. 121, 123-126, 153.

collapse of the Bretton Woods Agreement.<sup>9</sup> Until March 1974, oil prices continued to rise, and with the end of the oil embargo imposed by Arab countries, there was a softening in the exorbitant prices imposed by Western nations against Arab countries.<sup>10</sup>

To understand the dynamics that shaped the experiences of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, it is necessary to begin with the Lebanese Civil War in 1975 and the conflicts that escalated culminated in the Sabra and Shatila massacres in 1982.<sup>11</sup> The presence of the PLO in Lebanon from 1971 onwards, with its headquarters deployed there, prompted a reaction from both Israel and the United States, which sought to create a conflict between the Palestinian Sunni Muslims and the majority Shiite Muslims in Lebanon. Although the United States, Israel, and other foreign powers sometimes succeeded in doing so, no major war ensued as a result.<sup>12</sup> The aforementioned states exploited the religious divide between Muslims and Christian Maronites in Lebanon, using missionary activities and religious schools from 1736 onwards to pit these two communities against each other, ultimately achieving their goal and sparking conflicts that lasted for years.<sup>13</sup> In this environment, Palestinian refugees were marginalized, politicized, accused of supporting the PLO and increasingly positioned at the center of competing political narratives, particularly by the Israeli state and the Christian Maronites in Lebanon. This 'unreal legitimacy' facilitated the massacre of refugees.<sup>14</sup> Today, the same is being done by foreign powers, such as the United States and Israel against Lebanese Hezbollah, and this process creates a cycle of mutually accusing groups, with the Palestinian refugees in the region suffering the most.<sup>15</sup>

On 13 April 1975, Christian Phalangists attacked Palestinian refugees en route to Tel Ez-Zater Camp in front of St. The Maronite Church in Beirut, Lebanon's capital. A bus carrying 27 passengers, including children, women, and elderly refugees, was attacked, resulting in significant loss of life.<sup>16</sup> Following this, Lebanon's civil war broke out, dragging Beirut, once known as the "Paris of the Middle East"<sup>17</sup> for its importance, economic development, and beauty between 1950-1970, into 15 years of conflict, resulting in over 150 thousand deaths and more than 300 thousand injuries.<sup>18</sup> A major conflict also arose as a result of the persecution of Palestinian refugees, pitting the Muslim Druze against the Christian Maronites and involving 18 different religious and ethnic groups in Lebanon.<sup>19</sup> Throughout this civil war, numerous human rights abuses occurred, including Israel's blockade of aid to Lebanese civilians and people in refugee camps, which violated various

<sup>9</sup> Bini, Elisabetta et al. Garavini, Giuliano, and Romero, Federico, eds. *Oil Shock: The 1973 Crisis and Its Economic Legacy*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016, pp. 117-121, 135, 156, 177.

<sup>10</sup> Dunstan, Simon, *The Yom Kippur War 1973 (1): Golan Heights*, Osprey Publishing, 2003, pp. 7, 25-30.

<sup>11</sup> O'ballance, Edgar, *Civil War in Lebanon: 1975-92*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1998, p. 119.

<sup>12</sup> Özdemirci, Ayşe Selcan, *Suriye İç Savaşının Lübnan'a Etkileri (2011-2016)*, Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2016, pp. 85-86.

<sup>13</sup> Alijla, Abdalradi M., *Trust in Divided Societies: State, Institutions and Governance in Lebanon, Syria and Palestine*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021, pp. 94-95.

<sup>14</sup> Fisk, Robert, *The Great War for Civilisation: The Conquest of the Middle East*, Vintage, 2007, pp. 844-845, 1610, 1632, 1701, 2265.

<sup>15</sup> Yılmaz, Ahmet Yusuf, *Devlet İçinde Devlet Yapılanması: Lübnan Hizbullahı*, SDE Akademi Dergisi, Vol. 2, No. 5, 202, pp. 123-125.

<sup>16</sup> Kılavuz, M. Tahir, *When do Civil Wars Breed Ethnic Cleansing? The Cases of Lebanon and Yugoslavia*, Adam Academy Journal of Social Sciences, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2020, pp. 273-274.

<sup>17</sup> Warner, Charles D., *In the Levant, Travels in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria (2 Volume Set)*, Gorgias Press, 2002, pp. 315, 316.

<sup>18</sup> Ebre, İlker Salih, *Suriye Krizinin Etki Alanındaki Ülke: Lübnan*, MANAS Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2021, pp. 2078-2079.

<sup>19</sup> Rabah, Makram, *Conflict on Mount Lebanon: The Druze, the Maronites and Collective Memory*, Edinburgh University Press, 2022, pp. 297-298.

international agreements, including UN Security Council article 1265.<sup>20</sup> Attacks on civilians, including refugees, and the withholding of humanitarian assistance are war crimes. The article, drafted after the massacre, establishes a precedent for comparable incidents in the present day. Israel's lawless actions continued unabated, with agreements between Israel and Lebanon for the protection of Palestinian refugees frequently disregarded.<sup>21</sup>

The most heinous atrocity perpetrated against Palestinian refugees during the Lebanese Civil War occurred at Sabra and Shatila between September 16-18, 1982, resulting in the deaths of nearly 3,000 Palestinian refugees. Israel and its supporters in Lebanon, the Christian Maronite groups, who invaded Lebanon shortly before the massacre and killed 19,000 people and wounded 30,000 others within the two months they occupied the territory, took some actions that had irreversible consequences.<sup>22</sup> These actions, led by the Israeli army under then Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, resulted in the siege of Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon<sup>23</sup>, the raiding of these camps, and the killing of refugees, including women, children, and the elderly by Christian groups under Elias Hobeika<sup>24</sup> and Bashir Gemayel<sup>25</sup>, the commander of the Lebanese armed forces and a Christian Phalangist<sup>26</sup>, as well as the legitimization of Israeli untruths.<sup>27</sup> In Israeli statements, it was claimed that the Palestine Liberation Organization was conducting clandestine activities in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, while some analysts made inferences in this context<sup>28</sup>, and Robert Fisk, a renowned British journalist and author who worked as a Beirut expert for 30 years and researched the region, implied that Israel's claims were untrue.<sup>29</sup>

The events gave rise to a number of legal and judicial proceedings. Following international pressure, an Israeli commission of inquiry established in 1983 implicated Elias Hobeika and Bashir Gemayel in the Sabra and Shatila massacre<sup>30</sup>, while Ariel Sharon resigned from his position amid allegations concerning his role in the events.. Ariel Sharon, who was referred to by some commentators as the "Butcher of Beirut (Sabra and Shatila)" due to his alleged responsibility for the killing of Palestinian refugees, became the President of Israel in 2001 despite being held responsible for the massacre of Palestinian refugees in a judicial context.<sup>31</sup> Sharon's alleged responsibility subsequently became the subject of legal proceedings in Belgium following a criminal complaint filed on 18 June 2001 by twenty-three victims. The proceedings were based on Belgium's universal jurisdiction legislation, which at the time allowed Belgian courts to hear certain cases involving alleged crimes against humanity regardless of where the acts had occurred or the nationality of the accused. Under this framework, Sharon was summoned before a Belgian court; however, the

<sup>20</sup> United Nations, "Resolution 1265(1999)/Adopted by the Security Council at its 4046th Meeting", September 17, 1999, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/285718?v=pdf>, (April 12, 2025).

<sup>21</sup> Salem, Elie Adib and Salem, Eli, *Violence and Diplomacy in Lebanon: the Troubled Years, 1982-1988*, Vol. 98, IB Tauris, 1995, p. 285.

<sup>22</sup> Hamzeh, Muna, *Refugees in Our Own Land: Chronicles from a Palestinian Refugee Camp in Bethlehem*, London, Sterling, and Virginia, Pluto Press, 2001, pp. 7, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Laffin, John, *The War of Desperation, Lebanon, 1982-85*, Osprey Publishing, 1985, pp. 170-171.

<sup>24</sup> Kumaraswamy, P.R., *Historical Dictionary of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, The Scarecrow Press, 2006, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> Katz Sam and Russell, Lee E., *Armies in Lebanon 1982-84*, Vol. 165, Osprey Publishing, 1985, pp. 40-41.

<sup>26</sup> Kumaraswamy, *ibid.*, p., 37.

<sup>27</sup> O'ballance, *ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>28</sup> Timerman Jacobo, *The Longest War: Israel in Lebanon*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1982, pp. 130-132.

<sup>29</sup> Fisk, *ibid.*, pp. 844-845, 1610, 1632, 1701, 2265.

<sup>30</sup> Frank, Benis M., *US Marines in Lebanon, 1982-1984*. History and Museums Division, Headquarters, US Marine Corps, 1987, p. 164.

<sup>31</sup> Andırırba, Rüyeyda, *Lübnan Hükümeti'nin Güvenlik Sorununa Dönüşen Filistinli ve Suriyeli Mülteciler*, Uluslararası Yönetim Akademisi Dergisi, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2022, p. 249.

proceedings were ultimately discontinued. Following this incident, the Belgian government issued an apology to the State of Israel and began working to repeal the contentious law.<sup>32</sup> Similar outcomes have been observed in cases involving other Palestinian settlements<sup>33</sup>, which appear to be connected to the massacres that took place between 1985 and 1987.<sup>34</sup>

Western states frequently present themselves as defenders of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, and regularly assess other countries through institutions such as the European Union, NATO, and the United Nations. However, critics argue that these principles have not been applied consistently in relation to Israel, particularly with regard to alleged human rights violations affecting Palestinian populations, possibly due to their reluctance to confront the Israeli lobby or the Zionist establishment.<sup>35</sup> The political, social, economic, and legal factors underlying these developments have been examined extensively in the books, academic articles, and journalistic writings of regional experts, many of whom have sought to explain the causes and consequences of the challenges faced by Palestinian refugees.

### **Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon**

Palestinians, displaced following the events of May 15, 1948, the day of the Nakba or Great Catastrophe, following Israel's occupation of Palestine, sought refuge in countries like Lebanon<sup>36</sup>, Jordan, Egypt, and Syria. Many subsequently came under the mandate of UNRWA and became beneficiaries of its assistance programs. Despite the many challenges they have faced, the issue of return has remained their central concern.<sup>37</sup>

By contrast, asylum seekers and refugees typically flee their country due to persecution or fear of persecution caused by war, conflict, genocide, or ethnic cleansing.<sup>38</sup> Although the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and the 1967 New York Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees establish legal criteria for refugee protection, the legal position of Palestinian refugees has remained distinct because of the assistance provided by UNRWA since its establishment on 8 December 1949.<sup>39</sup> According to Article 1/D, Paragraph 1 of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention<sup>40</sup>, groups such as Palestinian refugees cannot claim refugee status elsewhere if they are receiving protection from another UN agency apart from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. This situation is further complicated because Lebanon, their country of refuge, is not a signatory to either the Geneva Refugee Convention

<sup>32</sup> Amnesty International, "Universal Jurisdiction: Belgian Court has Jurisdiction in Sharon Case to Investigate 1982 Sabra and Chatila Killings", April 2002, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior53/001/2002/en/>, (May 15, 2026).

<sup>33</sup> Uzun, Ekin Deniz, Palestinian Refugees in Gaza: The UNRWA and Beyond, Law and Justice Review, No. 28, 2024, pp. 34-39.

<sup>34</sup> Sayigh, Rosemary, Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon, Zed Books, 1994, pp. 231-232, 262-263, 280-282.

<sup>35</sup> Morris, Benny, The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited, (vol. 18), Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 40-41.

<sup>36</sup> Hourani, Guita G., Devlet Güvenliği ve Mülteciler: Lübnan Hükûmeti Tarafından "Tercihler Hiyerarşisi"nin İşlevselleştirilmesi, Middle East Journal of Refugee Studies, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2018, p. 109.

<sup>37</sup> Matar, Dina and Harb, Zahera, Narrating Conflict in the Middle East: Discourse, Image and Communications Practices in Lebanon and Palestine. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013, pp. 167-168.

<sup>38</sup> When analyzed in this context, Palestinian refugees have been carrying the keys to their homes around their necks since 1948 in the hope that they will return home again, waiting for the day when they will be freed from their refugee status.

<sup>39</sup> Brynen, Rex and El-Rifai, Roula (eds). The Palestinian Refugee Problem: The Search for a Resolution. Pluto Press, 2013, pp. 174-175.

<sup>40</sup> UNHCR, "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees", July 1951, p. 16, <https://www.unhcr.org/media/convention-and-protocol-relating-status-refugees>, (May 21, 2025).

or the New York Refugee Protocol, thereby limiting the legal protections available to Palestinian refugees within the country.<sup>41</sup>

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon encounter various difficulties stemming from the multiple ethnic and religious groups within the country, as well as from efforts by various local political actors to marginalize Palestinian refugees. Lebanon's population reached an estimated peak of 6.4 million between 2011 and 2015, largely as a result of the influx of Syrian refugees, before declining to approximately 6 million by 2024.<sup>42</sup> One of the principal factors behind this decline was the reduction in the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, estimated at one million, though unofficially believed to be 2 million, given the fact that the UNHCR ceased new refugee registrations after 2015 following requests from the Lebanese government.<sup>43</sup> The number of Syrian refugees continued to dwindle following the closure of the Lebanese border in 2014, with some being deported due to public pressure and economic downturn resulting from incidents like the 2020 Beirut port explosion.<sup>44</sup>

According to UNRWA's 2023 figures, the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon stood at 489,000, but this figure later increased to 520,000 following the arrival of 31,000 Palestinian refugees from the region after the Arab Spring and the civil war in Syria. The resident Lebanese population has declined to 4.5 million, although an estimated 15-20 million people of Lebanese origin reside abroad due to out-migration. Nevertheless, the demographic decline of the Lebanese population has not been accompanied by a corresponding reduction in its influence within state institutions and administrative structures.<sup>45</sup>

### Addressing the Social Challenges and Potential Solutions for Palestinian Refugees

As of May 2024, the global forcibly displaced population was estimated at approximately 120 million people, including 63 million internally displaced persons, 44 million refugees, 7 million asylum seekers, and 6 million individuals in need of other forms of international protection. Approximately 44 million refugees, including nearly 6 million Palestinian refugees, reside in nearly 70 refugee camps in countries such as Jordan, Lebanon<sup>46</sup>, Syria, the West Bank, and Gaza, where they face challenging conditions and

<sup>41</sup> United Nations, "Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees: Signatory Countries", April 1951, [https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetailsII.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=V-2&chapter=5&Temp=mtdsg2&clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetailsII.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=V-2&chapter=5&Temp=mtdsg2&clang=_en), (May 5, 2025); United Nations, "Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees: Signatory Countries", October 1967, [https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=V-5&chapter=5](https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=V-5&chapter=5), (May 29, 2025).

<sup>42</sup> Gabiam, Nell, *The Politics of Suffering: Syria's Palestinian Refugee Camps*, Indiana University Press, 2016, pp. 451-465.

<sup>43</sup> Tinas, Murat, *Lübnan Hükümeti ve Lübnan Toplumu Perspektifinden Lübnan'daki Suriyeliler*, Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2020, p. 18.

<sup>44</sup> European Commission, "European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations", 2020, [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/lebanon\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/lebanon_en), (June 17, 2025); UNHCR, "Lebanon at a Glance", 2024, <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/at-a-glance>, (June 11, 2025); ILO, "Lebanon: The World's Highest Number of Refugees Per Capita", 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/projects-and-partnerships/projects/partnership-improving-prospects-forcibly-displaced-persons-and-host/countries/lebanon>, (June 23, 2025).

<sup>45</sup> UNHCR, *ibid.* 2; ILO, *ibid.* 1; Arab News, "Lebanese Across the Globe: How the Country's International Community Came To Be", May 2008, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1296211/middle-east>, (July 16, 2025); European Commission, *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> UNHCR, "Refugee Statistics: Global Trends at-a-Glance", 2024, <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/#:~:text=Global%20Trends%20At%2Da%2DGlance,63.3%20million%20internally%20displaced%20people>, (July 25, 2025).



struggle to survive.<sup>47</sup> Palestinian refugees rely heavily on international assistance provided by organizations such as UNRWA, UNHCR, UNICEF, and various non-governmental organizations<sup>48</sup> for essential food, shelter, and humanitarian support, with the majority of aid provided by Türkiye, Iran, and Pakistan. The world's superpowers, including the USA, the UK, and France, instead of helping the refugees, support Israel and leave the refugees to their fate, thereby worsening the refugee crisis following the conflicts.<sup>49</sup> Few are willing to share the burden. Chief among them is Türkiye. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Interior, through the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), have supported humanitarian initiatives such as the "Goodness Ship" project, which continues to provide food assistance to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon with the support of numerous Turkish non-governmental organizations.<sup>50</sup>

Approximately 66 percent of the 520,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon reside in the country's twelve refugee camps, while the remainder live in urban, suburban, and rural areas outside the camps, often under precarious legal conditions.<sup>51</sup> Although many refugees live outside Beirut, several major camps, including Shatila, Burj el-Barajneh, and Sabra, are located in the

capital.<sup>52</sup> Among the major problems Palestinian refugees face are access to education, healthcare, food, water and electricity.<sup>53</sup> Access to education remains particularly significant and continues to be one of the most pressing concerns affecting refugee communities.

Approximately 37,000 Palestinian refugee children in Lebanon attend 65 UNRWA schools, while others pursue vocational education at training centres in both the north and south of the country, including Seblin, from which nearly one thousand students graduate each year. In addition, approximately 5,000 Palestinian refugee children from Syria continue their education in Lebanese schools, with support provided by UNRWA, international NGOs, and countries including Türkiye, rather than the Lebanese state. Palestinian refugee children in Lebanon study in overcrowded classrooms of 90-100 students, often under inadequate sanitary conditions, with limited educational resources and teaching staff.<sup>54</sup> The Israeli occupation frequently results in bombings of schools and hospitals, disproportionately impacting the education of refugee children.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, some refugee families choose not to send their children to school, due to various social and economic

<sup>47</sup> Adiong, Nassef M., *The Palestinian Refugee Question: A Constitutive Constructivist Interpretation, Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 2009, pp. 45-47.

<sup>48</sup> Issa, Perla, *The Endurance of Palestinian Political Factions: An Everyday Perspective From Nahr el-Bared Camp*. University of California Press, 2021, pp. 37-49.

<sup>49</sup> Andırırbu, *ibid.*, pp. 253-254.

<sup>50</sup> Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Türkiye'nin Lübnan'a Yönelik 2022 Senesinde Yürüttüğü İnsani ve Teknik Yardımları", 2023, <https://beyrut-be.mfa.gov.tr/Mission/ShowInfoNote/340800>, (September 13, 2025).

<sup>51</sup> UN Security Council, "Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Lebanon Pursuant to Human Rights Council Resolution S-2/1", November 2006, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Lebanon%20A%20HRC%203%202.pdf>, (September 20, 2025).

<sup>52</sup> Marron, Rayyar, *Humanitarian Rackets and Their Moral Hazards: The Case of the Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon*, Routledge, 2016, p. 98.

<sup>53</sup> Feldman, Ilana, *Life Lived in Relief: Humanitarian Predicaments and Palestinian Refugee Politics*, University of California Press, 2018, p. 232.

<sup>54</sup> Karacadağ, Abdulkadir, İbrahim Nasrallah'ın Tuyurul'l-Hazer Adlı Romanında Ürdün Kamplarındaki Sosyal Yapının Filistinli Mülteciler Üzerindeki Etkisi, *Kilis 7 Aralık Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2023, pp. 428-430.

<sup>55</sup> Culbertson, Shelly and Constant, Louay, *Education of Syrian refugee Children: Managing the Crisis in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan*. RAND Corporation, 2015, pp. 50-53, 60-61, 65-68.

factors, which will be explored in the following sections as part of the broader issue of economic underdevelopment. In some cases, gender norms may also influence educational participation. Certain families prioritize the education of boys over that of girls, particularly where limited economic resources require households to make difficult decisions regarding educational investment.<sup>56</sup>

Health problems in Palestinian refugee camps are largely due to inadequate access to clean water, which is a primary cause of many infectious diseases. In refugee camps near the sea, various diseases arise from the contamination of drinking water with seawater or wastewater. Nearly 28 different health institutions in Palestinian refugee camps provide care and treatment for more than one million patients annually, with nearly 950,000 treatments. Despite the availability of various health facilities, infectious diseases and viruses such as malaria, monkeypox, diphtheria, cholera, COVID-19, hepatitis, tetanus, influenza, pneumonia, dysentery, etc. are widespread in the camps due to overcrowding and limited access to health services, resulting in high levels of child and elderly mortality.<sup>57</sup>

Although the Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon was estimated at approximately one million during the 1950s, current estimates place the figure at fewer than 520,000, even after the arrival of Palestinian refugees displaced from Syria. The current refugee population is therefore substantially lower than some projected estimates, a trend that has been attributed to migration, armed conflict, displacement, and mortality associated with both violence and disease. The health conditions of refugees warrant greater attention by the UN, partly due to UNRWA's insufficient medical treatment support<sup>58</sup> and partly due to the fact that only 40% of health organisations cover the cost of medicines<sup>59</sup>, necessitating increased financial assistance to voluntary organisations and NGOs such as the World Health Organisation, the Red Cross and Red Crescent. Other pressing social problems faced by Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, such as access to nutritious food, electricity, and the internet, also require attention.<sup>60</sup>

The Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon have grown from the initial Shatila camp, established in 1948 for 3,000 inhabitants, to 20 camps in the 1950s and now encompass 12 locations<sup>61</sup>, housing approximately 520,000 people. Restrictions on vertical expansion have contributed to the informal construction of additional floors in many residential buildings. The Lebanese state intervenes if construction activities occur in the camps, imposing severe fines on the residents and halting UNRWA's assistance. Existing dwellings may generally be repaired only with prior authorization, while the installation of new infrastructure, including water and electricity networks, is often restricted.<sup>62</sup> As a result, some camps receive electricity for only a limited number of hours each day.

<sup>56</sup> Wehbe, Elizabeth, Filistinli Mülteci Çocuklar: Bir Literatür Değerlendirmesi, Middle East Journal of Refugee Studies, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2018, p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> Barbosa, Gustavo, The Best of Hard Times: Palestinian Refugee Masculinities in Lebanon. Syracuse University Press, 2022, p. 84.

<sup>58</sup> Erayman, İbrahim Oğulcan, Kent Yaşamının Dışına İtilen Filistinli Mültecilerin 'Kamp Tipi Yaşamı': Dehümanizasyon Kavramı Etrafında Bir Değerlendirme, İDEALKENT, Vol. 16, No. 43, 2024, p. 260.

<sup>59</sup> Schiocchet, Leonardo, Living in Refuge: Ritualization and Religiosity in a Christian and a Muslim Palestinian Refugee Camp in Lebanon, Transcript Verlag, 2022, pp. 86-89.

<sup>60</sup> Hajj, Nadya, Networked Refugees: Palestinian Reciprocity and Remittances in the Digital Age (Edition 1), University of California Press, 2021, p. 80.

<sup>61</sup> Noeth, Sandra, Resilient Bodies, Residual Effects: Artistic Articulations of Borders and Collectivity from Lebanon and Palestine, (vol. 52), Transcript Verlag, 2019, p. 234.

<sup>62</sup> Stel, Nora, Hybrid Political Order and the Politics of Uncertainty: Refugee Governance in Lebanon, (p. 264), Routledge, 2020, p. 133.

Hazardous electrical networks, including exposed and interconnected cables between buildings, have reportedly contributed to fatal accidents. Every year, 40-50 people lose their lives due to electrocution caused by intertwined electric cables between buildings, yet no action is taken afterwards and normal life continues.<sup>63</sup> Frequent power shortages also disrupt internet and communication services, making it difficult for residents to maintain contact with relatives in Palestine and elsewhere.<sup>64</sup> On top of all, refugees also lack access to adequate food.<sup>65</sup> Vulnerable groups, including children, older adults, pregnant women, and persons with disabilities, often have limited access to adequate nutritional support. Insufficient food assistance from international organizations and non-governmental actors has been associated with worsening health outcomes and increased vulnerability to disease.<sup>66</sup>

### **Economic Issues Facing Palestinian Refugees: Solutions and Challenges**

Lebanon has faced serious political and economic problems due to its ongoing conflict with Israel since 1948 and its isolation from the world during the Lebanese Civil War, which lasted from 1975 to 1990, with only Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt maintaining diplomatic relations and economic ties with Lebanon. The assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri on February 14, 2005, the 2006 Israeli-Lebanese War, the 2010 Arab Spring, and the 2011 Syrian Civil War have further deepened Lebanon's economic predicaments. These conditions and circumstances opened the door to forced migration.<sup>67</sup>

Many Palestinian refugees seek economic opportunities through migration to Western countries such as the United States, while others engage in informal or unauthorized employment in major urban centres such as Beirut. Several structural factors help explain this pattern. Lebanese Government Decree No. 321/1, issued in 1995, initially prohibited refugees from working in 70 business sectors nationwide, but this restriction was subsequently reduced to 39 sectors following pressure from international organizations. Nevertheless, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon remain excluded from a range of professional and public-sector occupations, including positions as doctors, teachers, bankers, engineers, nurses, police officers, and members of the armed forces.<sup>68</sup> These restrictions significantly limit employment opportunities, concentrating many refugees in lower-paid and less secure forms of work.<sup>69</sup>

Prior to 1962, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon enjoyed relatively greater social and economic opportunities. Thereafter, they were required to obtain work permits for most forms of employment, and even those who completed higher education often had to seek work abroad because of limited opportunities within Lebanon.<sup>70</sup> As a result, rather than pursuing education, these individuals typically entered the workforce at an early stage,

<sup>63</sup> Marron, *ibid.*, p. 363.

<sup>64</sup> Hajj, *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>65</sup> Marron, *ibid.*, p. 363.

<sup>66</sup> Rabil, Robert G., *The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon: The Double Tragedy of Refugees and Impacted Host Communities*. Lexington Books, 2016, pp. 10, 69, 86, 107, 140, 189, 366.

<sup>67</sup> Oralli, Levent E. and Karakaya, İskender, *Lebanese Foreign Policy and Lebanese-Syrian Relations Until the Assassination of Refik Hariri in 2005*, *Avrasya Uluslararası Araştırmalar Dergisi*, Vol. 11, No. 36, 2023, pp. 449, 450-452, 454, 461-462.

<sup>68</sup> Barbosa, *ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>69</sup> Christoff, Stefan, "The War Against Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon", 2004, <https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/the-war-against-palestinian-refugees-in-lebanon>, (September 26, 2025).

<sup>70</sup> Klaus, Dorothee, *Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon-where to Belong?*, vol. 255. Klaus Schwarz Press, 2004, p. 154.

taking on unskilled, low-paid jobs. The Lebanese government's decision in 1962 to deny Palestinian refugees citizenship<sup>71</sup>, referring to them as 'the community from Palestine living in Lebanon without any documents', further contributed to their economic marginalization.<sup>72</sup> The core of Lebanon's economic issues lies in the problem of work permits due to the country's restrictions; as long as Palestinian refugees can't secure employment to support their families, their economic difficulties will persist and the aid they receive will only provide temporary relief<sup>73</sup>, amounting to little more than a day's help for people with no prospect of a better future, which is why partial measures can only offer temporary solutions.<sup>74</sup> Unemployment and poverty rates among Palestinian refugees remain alarmingly high, at 35% and 65% respectively, and this dire situation has led to a rise in criminal cases.<sup>75</sup>

### **Palestinian Refugees' Legal Challenges and Potential Resolutions**

The limited legal protections available to Palestinian refugees under Lebanese law and the lack of a comprehensive legal framework consistent with international refugee standards inevitably contribute to ongoing concerns regarding the protection of refugee rights. Lebanon's non-accession to the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and the 1967 New York Refugee Protocol, combined with the absence of a comprehensive domestic refugee framework, are identified as key factors underlying these challenges.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, limited state oversight and weak institutional regulation within some refugee camps has led to increased levels of illicit activity, such as drug sales, arms and organ trafficking. At the same time, refugees face significant barriers to accessing judicial remedies and legal protection mechanisms, further complicating efforts to address these problems through formal legal channels.<sup>77</sup>

The Lebanese government's decision in 1962 not to grant citizenship to Palestinian refugees characterised them as 'the community from Palestine living in Lebanon without documentation', a legal infringement that should be highlighted. Furthermore, it is worth noting that in addition to Palestinians holding refugee identity documents from UNRWA or Lebanese refugee agencies, there are also unregistered refugees who are not protected by these two institutions.<sup>78</sup> The informality of their applications is due to three main reasons: a belief they will not receive full refugee protection, an intention to seek asylum elsewhere, or a need to conceal their identities due to involvement in criminal activities.

Palestinians registered in Lebanon have been denied the rights and protections afforded by the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention due to decisions made in 1962. Despite

<sup>71</sup> Kulu, Mustafa, Unutulmaması Gereken Filistin Yerleşimleri: Mülteci Kampları, Filistin Araştırmaları Dergisi, No. 7, 2020, p. 109.

<sup>72</sup> Peteet, Julie Marie, "Palestinians in Post-War Lebanon: From Refugees to Minority", 1996, <https://merip.org/1996/09/palestinians-in-post-war-lebanon/>, (October 10, 2025).

<sup>73</sup> Barak, Oren, State Expansion and Conflict: In and Between Israel/Palestine and Lebanon, Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 161.

<sup>74</sup> Young, Elise G., Gender and Nation Building in the Middle East: The Political Economy of Health from Mandate Palestine to Refugee Camps in Jordan. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011, p. 121.

<sup>75</sup> ILO, Syrian Refugees in Lebanon Face Harsh Working Conditions", 2014, <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/syrian-refugees-lebanon-face-harsh-working-conditions#:~:text=30%20per%20cent%3A%20Unemployment%20rate,unskilled%20or%20semi%2Dskilled%20jobs,> (October 16, 2025).

<sup>76</sup> United Nations, *ibid.* 2; United Nations, *ibid.* 3.

<sup>77</sup> Masalha, Nur, The Politics of Denial: Israel and the Palestinian Refugee Problem, (vol. 298), London: Pluto Press, 2003, pp. 168-169.

<sup>78</sup> Peteet, Julie Marie, Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian Refugee Camps, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005, pp. 14, 175.

their long-term residence in the country, questions concerning integration and access to citizenship continue to be the subject of legal and political debate.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, the 1962 Legal Regulation No. 319, which applied to foreign nationals entering Lebanon, including Palestinians, created a community of "refugees or stateless persons" who are excluded from the country's sphere of activity (article 19).<sup>80</sup> In this context, while Palestinian refugees are under UNRWA's supervision, they face difficulties in obtaining protection from another country and cannot benefit from refugee status elsewhere due to their UNRWA-issued refugee certificate.<sup>81</sup> According to the Geneva Refugee Convention, article 1/D, paragraph 2, they can only claim refugee status from another country when their current refugee status ends, ipso facto<sup>82</sup>; consequently, their fear of rejection of their refugee application in the transit or destination country makes it difficult for them to leave their current refugee status. In this context, the refugee certificate issued by UNRWA offers limited benefits, including partial assistance with health, transportation, shelter, and food, but in the case of forced migration outside Lebanon, it becomes a disadvantage for refugees. In short, refugees have been barred from seeking their rights in a legal framework, and Palestinians are struggling to survive in Lebanese refugee camps, often referred to as 'prisons open on four sides'.<sup>83</sup>

As these restrictions on freedom were being implemented, Palestinian refugees were denied their legal entitlements, and United Nations Resolution 194, adopted on December 11, 1948, remained unimplemented.<sup>84</sup> Under the leadership of Türkiye, the United States and France, efforts were made to establish a UN-affiliated Palestine Conciliation Commission, which would have involved the return of Palestinian refugees to their lands and the internationalization of Jerusalem, the granting of international status to Jerusalem under UN auspices and the protection of Palestinian holy sites, the demarcation of the city of Jerusalem's borders, and compensation for Palestinian refugees who wish to return to their lands.<sup>85</sup> However, these initiatives failed to produce a comprehensive and lasting solution.

## Conclusion

The post-conflict trajectories of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Lebanon reveal notable similarities, as both countries were left alone to reconcile competing religious and communal identities without effective mechanisms for resolving long-standing religious and political tensions. Lebanon has long been characterized by a complex demographic and sectarian structure. Prior to 1948, Shiite Muslims and Maronite Christians constituted a substantial proportion of the population. Subsequent refugee movements, particularly from

<sup>79</sup> Dionigi, Filippo, "Statehood and Refugees: Patterns of Integration and Segregation of Refugee Populations in Lebanon from a Comparative Perspective", *Middle East Law and Governance*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2017, pp. 132-136.

<sup>80</sup> UNHCR, "Lebanon: Order No. 319 of 1962 Regulating the Status of Foreign Nationals in Lebanon", August 1962, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/decrees/natlegbod/1962/en/74385>, (October 22, 2025).

<sup>81</sup> UNHCR, *ibid.* 1, p. 16.

<sup>82</sup> Bülbul, Hasan B., *Uluslararası Koruma Üzerine 13 Nolu Rehber: Mültecilerin Hukuki Durumuna Dair 1951 Sözleşmesi'nin 1. Maddesinin D Fıkrasının Filistinli Mültecilere Uygulanabilirliği (çev.)*, *The Boğaziçi Law Review*, No. 1, 2023, pp. 117-118; UNHCR, *ibid.* 1., p. 16.

<sup>83</sup> Prison Open on Four Sides: A place where asylum seekers and refugees who live a life of imprisonment in a state of confinement, but also have the possibility to leave freely... Forced migrants, who are torn between leaving and staying in the countries they seek refuge in, cannot actually do either, and pay the price for a life that is exhausted from the beginning (describing by the author).

<sup>84</sup> Dumper, Michael, *Palestinian Refugee Repatriation: Global Perspectives*, Routledge, 2006, pp. 2, 93, 97-101, 200, 215, 266-267.

<sup>85</sup> UNHCR, "Palestine-Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator (194 III)", December 1948, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unga/1948/en/86836>, (December 3, 2025).

Palestine and later Syria, altered the country's demographic balance. Because no official census has been conducted since 1932, however, the precise demographic composition remains uncertain..<sup>86</sup> The Lebanese state, seeking to prevent Palestinians from gaining demographic influence, chose not to integrate them into society by relocating them to city centre settlements, and the refugees have been living in poor camp conditions for 76 years.<sup>87</sup>

The foregoing discussion suggests that there are essentially two distinct approaches to addressing the refugee problem in Lebanon. The first involves the UN and the EU, through their sub-agencies responsible for refugee assistance, alerting the international community and providing material and moral support to Lebanon as part of 'burden sharing'. The second requires the Lebanese state to revise its refugee policies and establish policies and develop legal and institutional frameworks that enhance the protection and rights of Palestinian refugees. The implementation of these measures would likely require sustained international engagement and pressure; however, the strong support Israel receives from influential Western states, particularly the United States, limits the scope for significant policy change in this area.

Following the outbreak of the Hamas-Israel War on 7 October 2023, hundreds of additional waves of Palestinian displacement placed further pressure on neighbouring countries, including Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt. Combined with the presence of Syrian refugees who had arrived in Lebanon after 2011, these developments intensified existing debates regarding demographic change and population balance within Lebanon, with some political actors expressing concern that Lebanese nationals could eventually become a minority in their own country. In reality, Palestinian refugees, who often lack identity documents proving their nationality, are unlikely to pose a significant threat in Lebanon. They are unable to work in a key professional group in Lebanon and lack access to the social, commercial, and legal rights available to Lebanese citizens.<sup>88</sup>

From a sociological perspective, one relatively underexplored aspect of the international literature is the extent to which Palestinian refugees have maintained a strong collective identity despite decades of displacement and statelessness. Although many possess no recognized nationality and remain legally stateless (*heimatlos*), they have continued to express a long-standing aspiration to return to the Palestinian territories.<sup>89</sup>

A durable resolution of the Palestinian refugee issue is likely to depend on several interrelated factors, including political developments within Lebanon, progress toward ending the Israeli occupation, and the effectiveness of international legal and diplomatic mechanisms. To date, international judicial institutions have devoted limited attention to the legal implications of the Israeli occupation and to reported violations affecting Palestinian refugee communities in Lebanon. Similarly, the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council failed to develop effective mechanisms to address these challenges.

More than 520,000 Palestinian refugees reside in Lebanon, while nearly 6 million live across multiple countries worldwide, having remained unable to return to their homeland for 76 years. Many continue to seek greater legal protections, socio-economic rights, and improved living conditions within existing refugee camps. From a short-term perspective,

<sup>86</sup> U.S. Department of State, "2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Lebanon", 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/lebanon/>, (December 12, 2025).

<sup>87</sup> Gren, Nina, *Occupied Lives: Maintaining Integrity in a Palestinian Refugee Camp in the West Bank*, American University in Cairo Press, 2015, p. 45.

<sup>88</sup> Hajj, Nadya, *Protection Amid Chaos: The Creation of Property Rights in Palestinian Refugee Camps*, Columbia University Press, 2016, p. 88.

<sup>89</sup> Schiocchet, *ibid.*, pp. 53, 122, 226, 231-232.

strengthening humanitarian assistance may help alleviate some of the challenges faced by refugee communities. This involves expanding the resources and operational capacity of organizations such as UNRWA or considering alternative international assistance mechanisms. From a long-term perspective, a more durable solution would either require reforms to Lebanese policies affecting Palestinian refugees and offering greater opportunities for social and economic integration or Israel ceasing its occupation of the region, thereby allowing Palestinians to return to their homeland. Such objectives remain highly contested and politically difficult to achieve under current conditions, yet they continue to feature prominently in discussions of potential solutions to the Palestinian refugee issue.

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