



Fafo's Research on Palestinian Refugees

– An Overview

May 2008

Over the past 15 years or so, Fafo has carried out a number of research projects on Palestinian refugees. This brief is intended to provide an outline of this research, with a focus on the most recent work. Note that some of the projects have concentrated solely on Palestinian refugees while other projects have covered both refugees and non-refugee populations. If nothing else is mentioned, the projects have been funded by the Norwegian Government in their entirety.

References are made to reports in the name of Fafo and some pieces published elsewhere, including by professionals who were no longer with Fafo at the time of publication.

The West Bank and Gaza Strip

In the wake of the Oslo Accords and the first two living conditions surveys (Heiberg and Øvensen ed. 1993; Øvensen 1994), Fafo implemented a series of research activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The research was partly concerned with statistics related to Palestinian refugees and the collection and analysis of population statistics from the West Bank and Gaza strip in collaboration with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) (Pedersen 2000; Pedersen, Randall and Khawaja eds. 2001; Dalen and Pedersen 2004; Khawaja and Randall 2006).

Statistics and articles were produced and used for the analysis of social development planning purposes (Tiltnes 1998, Pedersen and Hooper ed. 1998; Hooper 1999), as well as for discussions on the peace process in the region. Parts of the statistics were brought together in a compendium and offered to the Palestinian Authority (Fafo 2005).

Some of the earlier research, carried out within the framework of the Multilateral Middle East Peace process and the so-called “Refugee Working Group”, applied qualitative research methods and was concerned with coping mechanisms (Gilen et al. 1994; Hovdenak et al. 1997).

Following the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000, Fafo conducted qualitative studies on four Palestinian localities – namely, Jericho, Beit Furik, Rantis on the

West Bank, and the Gaza strip – so as to chart out the effects of Israeli policies and the Intifada on the Palestinians’ ability to support themselves and maintain their standard of living (Pedersen, Christophersen, Endresen and Sletten 2001; Pedersen, Christophersen and Sletten 2001; Egset and Endresen 2001; Sletten and Pedersen 2003) These two studies conducted in 2000¹ and 2001 were followed by a third study, conducted in a similar vein in March of 2007, and collecting data from the aforementioned four Palestinian places. What is the situation now, we asked, five years on? How have factors such as Israeli settlements, separation barriers (“the wall”), strife between the Hamas-government and Fatah, discontinuation of Western aid, and so on, affected the people and how they cope with the changing circumstances? (Hasselknappe and Tveit 2007). Fafo keeps a watchful eye on the situation in the West Bank and Gaza and will carry out qualitative fieldwork in 2008 also.

Fafo conducted an opinion poll on the West Bank and Gaza strip in September 2005, followed by a second poll at the turn of the year 2005/2006, ahead of the election that lead Hamas to the power (Hasselknappe 2006).² We followed up with a third opinion poll in December 2006³, and again in July 2007.⁴ In addition to covering such issues as political orientations and preferences, the polls capture the views and attitudes on the security situation, peace process and dialogue with Israel, and services. Furthermore, our polls have provided more comprehensive data on people’s socio-economic situation than similar opinion polls. The polls allow for comparisons between refugees and the remaining Palestinian population. Fafo’s latest addition to polls in the West Bank and Gaza was a survey administered in March 2008.⁵ It has a larger sample size than our previous polls/ surveys and put more emphasis on examining people’s living conditions than before.

Jordan

A large part of Fafo’s engagement in Jordan in recent years has focused on Palestinian refugees, in particular the collection and analysis of data on living conditions. We have worked in cooperation with the Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA, which is responsible for the refugee camps), Jordan’s Department of Statistics (DOS) and Yarmouk University. Jordan’s first living conditions survey (Hanssen-Bauer, Pedersen and Tiltnes eds. 1998) yielded a dataset that rendered it possible for the first time to produce and publish national statistics for the Palestinian refugees in the country (Arneberg 1997; Tiltnes 1999).

This was followed up by living conditions research on the most disadvantaged Palestinian refugees – namely those residing in Jordan’s refugee camps (Khawaja and

¹ The first round of “coping” studies was funded by the United Nations Special Co-ordinator Office (UNSCO).

² Results from these two polls, in the form of a tabulation report and PowerPoint presentations with key findings, are found at: <http://www.fafo.no/ais/middeast/opt/opinionpolls/2005-poll.htm>.

³ A summary of the results and a set of tables are found at: <http://www.fafo.no/ais/middeast/opt/opinionpolls/index.htm>.

⁴ A summary of the poll results and a variety of tables can be downloaded from: <http://www.fafo.no/ais/middeast/opt/opinionpolls/poll2007.htm>.

⁵ A summary of the poll results and a set of tables can be downloaded from: <http://www.fafo.no/ais/middeast/opt/opinionpolls/poll2008.html>.

Tiltnes 2002; Khawaja 2003).⁶ On this study, we had the pleasure of working closely and effectively with the UNRWA.

Fafo collaborated further with the DPA in preparation for the UNRWA conference in Geneva in June 2004. We engaged in discussions and produced a series of background documents (Blome Jacobsen 2004a, b, c).

This year, Fafo is implementing a study that will investigate the effects of the employment of thousands of women in the so-called Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZs) on people's perceptions of women's work and societal roles. Are women being empowered, or do the low-skilled low-paid jobs typically found in the QIZs reinforce their 'inferior' status in society, we ask. The study investigates the situation in one Palestinian refugee setting (Azmi al-Mufti camp) and one non-refugee community (Kufur Yuba), both outside Irbid.

Lebanon

Fafo conducted a living conditions survey of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon in the years 1998-99. The project was rather difficult to put in effect due to the sensitivity surrounding the issue of Palestinian refugees in the multi-creed and conflict-ridden country. We eventually received (informal) clearance from the Lebanese government, the UNRWA, as well as ensured the support of the numerous Palestinian political factions. The study resulted in a good overview of living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (Ugland 2002; Khawaja and Blome Jacobsen 2003; Tiltnes 2005). The main report has been translated to Arabic.

In April 2006, Fafo embarked on a research project that entails interviewing 3,000 households plus collecting data based on qualitative methods, in order to analyse the working conditions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The numerical data and analysis serve as the basis of discussion when the Lebanese government and Palestinians consult on laws and reforms aimed at enhancing the integration of Palestinian refugees in the Lebanese labour market. A draft tabulation report has been available to relevant research, community and political circles, and presentations of results and discussions have been held. This work continues in coordination with several Lebanese ministries (Labour, Foreign Affairs, and Social Affairs), UNRWA, ILO and Palestinian organizations.⁷ The final report from the project will be published later this year (Tiltnes et al. 2008). A journal article on the situation of Palestinian professionals in Lebanon has also been written (Hanafi and Tiltnes 2008, forthcoming).

In the fall of 2006 Fafo commenced a partnership with UNRWA to conduct a socio-economic study of the Ein El-Hilweh refugee camp outside the southern city of Saida. This is the largest, poorest and perhaps the most politically complex camp in Lebanon. The work was implemented in conjunction with UNRWA's "camp rehabilitation program". Again we administered questionnaires (to 900 households), together with conducting 120 in-depth interviews with individuals. Furthermore, the study entailed group discussions with the camp population. The objective was to

⁶ In addition to Norway, the governments of Canada, Sweden and the United States contributed to the funding of this study. The Khawaja and Tiltnes report is also available in Arabic.

⁷ In addition to the support of the Norwegian Government, the labour market project has an additional component covered by the contribution from Canada via the International Development Research Center, IDRC.

provide an overview of people's living conditions and their coping strategies in a time riddled with political insecurity and labour shortage, and so on. The project involved people in identifying key problem areas, prioritizing amongst them, and offering solutions to these problems. Although so far findings have been reported to UNRWA only, we expect to publish the results later this year.

Last summer's tragic fighting between the salafi-jihadist group Fatah al-Islam and the Lebanese army resulted in the demolition of the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp outside Tripoli. To provide baseline data on the populations affected by the crisis, including the nearby Beddawi refugee camp where a majority of the Palestinians displaced by the armed debacle sought refuge, we wrote a brief report with statistics calculated from the 2006 labour force survey data set (Tiltnes 2007b). Later, we assisted UNRWA and the ILO in writing up a report based on data they collected from the displaced Palestinians (Tiltnes 2008a).

Syria

Fafo has cooperated with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in Syria (PCBS-Damascus, which is under the authority of the PCBS-Ramallah) on research on Palestinian refugees in Syria. We implemented a multi-topic household survey in all refugee camps and a number of other areas where Palestinian refugees reside. Fafo coordinated the research with the Syrian Government through the General Agency for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR) and consulted UNRWA. The ensuing report provides the first ever comprehensive picture of the living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Syria (Tiltnes ed. 2006; Tiltnes 2007a).⁸

Regional Aspects

Through more than a decade Fafo has carried out research on the Palestinian refugee population of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, applying both quantitative and qualitative data to map their living standards and coping mechanisms. We have hitherto referred to country studies. However, a key objective of these assessments in the various countries has been to compare their circumstances with those of non-refugees as well as with fellow refugees in the neighbouring countries. Some of Fafo's country reports contain comparative data, but not all. For example, the Syrian Government (GAPAR) did not wish such comparisons in the main report from the living conditions survey in Syria (Tiltnes ed. 2006). Instead we included comparisons in the short report published later (Tiltnes 2007a).

Fafo's main contribution to comparisons between the various refugee populations was a large analytical effort, relying on Fafo's statistics as well as additional data sources, resulting in a three-volume report (Blome Jacobsen ed. 2003a, b, c) and a shorter summary report (Blome Jacobsen 2003). Furthermore, the situation of Palestinian refugee women has been contrasted across national borders (Blome Jacobsen 2004d), we have analysed the association between vocational training, work and living conditions (Arneberg og Pedersen 1998), Fafo has investigated the demographic development of the Palestinian refugee population until 2020 (Pedersen 2002a), and

⁸ In cooperation with Fafo, the PCBS also published a tabulation report, to be found at <http://www.fafo.no/pub/rapp/418/index.htm>.

we have compared the employment and poverty of Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon (Egset 2002).

Our latest project examining Palestinian refugees across the various host countries aims at discussing the future collection, production, analysis and use of statistics on Palestinian refugees. We want to invite to a technical discussion of the experiences that UNRWA, national statistical agencies, national agencies in charge of Palestinian refugee files, Fafo and others have gained from such exercises over the past decade or so. Questions that could be raised are: How useful are the existing indicators for the various data users? Is it possible and indeed advantageous to agree on a set of indicators for the future? Could one agree on, not only which indicators ought to be collected, but also how it should be done, by whom, and how often? In 2007 Fafo held a number of meetings with relevant actors. It seems to be a joint understanding that one or more technical seminars as suggested here, evaluating past experiences and looking forward, would be useful. We continue talking to relevant actors and will initiate one or more meetings this year.

Non-Fafo Publications

Fafo's living conditions data on Palestinian refugees have been utilized by Fafo researchers and former Fafo staff to analyse "narrower" topics than we normally do. One example is violence against women (Khawaja 2004; Khawaja and Tewtel-Salem 2003; Khawaja and Barazi 2005; Khawaja, Linos and El-Roueiheb 2008; Tiltnes 2008b). The living conditions data have also been used to examine the relationship between employment and poverty (Egset 2002) and to analyse child mortality (Pedersen 2002b).

Publications

Most Fafo reports are downloadable from Fafo's homepage (www.fafo.no).

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Blome Jacobsen, Laurie (ed.) 2003, *Finding Means, UNRWA's Financial Situation and the Living Conditions of Palestinian Refugees, Summary Report*, Fafo-report 415, Oslo: Fafo.

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