

Community development of Palestinian refugee camps:

Analytical support to Jordan's preparations for the June 2004 Geneva conference on the humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees

The Material and Social Infrastructure, and Environmental Conditions of Refugee Camps and Palestinian Communities in Syria

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Introduction

Jordan's Department of Palestinian Affairs, being chair of Working group II at the June Geneva conference on the humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees, has asked Fafo for assistance in its preparation. This paper provides a summary of the housing, material and social infrastructure, and environmental conditions found in the refugee camps and Palestinian communities in Syria. Fafo's support to the Geneva conference is financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The housing conditions of Palestinian refugees in camp and gatherings in Syria are similar to, and according to some aspects, considerably better than those found among camp refugees in Jordan. Like the case for Jordan, housing conditions are much better than among camp and gathering refugees in Lebanon. However, in the camps and gatherings in Syria there are wide regional differences with certain camps and gatherings being quite under-serviced and individuals living in clearly inadequate housing conditions. Across the entire range of housing and neighbourhood characteristics Yarmouk camp has much better housing conditions than any other type of area (camp or otherwise). Other camps, while many of them urban, share characteristics more in common with underserved rural areas in general than with Yarmouk camp, and combined with this the disadvantages of living in cramped conditions.

The main text of this paper is followed by tables in Annex 1. However, at the outset we shall give a short introduction to Fafo's research on Palestinian refugees and the studies on which this paper for the most part builds.

Fafo and the Study of Palestinian Refugees

Fafo Institute for Applied International studies is a Norwegian not-for-profit research organisation that has carried out statistical and other studies on Palestinian refugees for more than a decade. The bulk of activities have been financed by grants from the Norwegian Government. Other donors such as the governments of Canada,

Sweden, the US and Switzerland, along with UN agencies such as UNICEF and United Nations Special Co-ordinator for the Middle East (UNSCO) have also contributed. Fafo cooperates with Palestinian and host country partners, and in addition to implementing data collection and analysis does its utmost to ensure transfer of competences to local partners.

Over the past few years, Fafo has carried out a number of household living conditions surveys: in Jordan's refugee camps in 1999 (in cooperation with Jordan's Department of Palestinian Affairs and Yarmouk University); in refugee camps and non-camp localities of Lebanon in 1999 (with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Damascus) and in Syria in 2001 (also with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Damascus). Together with Jordan's Department of Statistics (DOS), Fafo conducted a national living conditions survey in Jordan (1996), which also identified Palestinian refugees and allowed comprehensive statistical analysis on them. A similar household survey was fielded late 2003, again together with DOS, and analysis of this material is now under way. Fafo carried out the first-ever comprehensive household surveys in the West Bank and Gaza in 1990 and 1993. Since then Fafo has cooperated with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Ramallah, on a Demographic survey, and implemented qualitative research on the effects of Israel's closure policies during the second *intifada* in the Occupied Palestinian Territories in cooperation with UNSCO in 2001 and 2002. The said fieldworks and studies have resulted in a number of publications, which are listed in Annex 2.

This paper mainly draws on data from the survey of refugee camps and non-camp localities of Syria (2001).

Housing and Material Infrastructure

Crowding within the households measured as having three or more persons per room, is less among refugees in camps and gatherings in Syria than found among camp refugees elsewhere. For example, only one in five are crowded compared to some one in four in Lebanon and one in three in Jordan. However, household size is the key determinant of crowding within the household, and there is a serious lack of appropriate

sized housing for very large families (10 or more persons), among which 60 percent experience crowding in the dwelling.

Crowding less of a problem in Syria than among camp refugees in other countries, but pockets of high crowding levels exist in certain areas

Within Syria, however, there are quite large regional variations. In Dara governorate, crowding is quite a large problem. With 36 percent crowded in Dara, this is as large a proportion crowded as found in the Gaza Strip refugee camps – considered the most dense of all the Palestinian refugee areas. Crowding is also relatively more common in Aleppo. In contrast, in Homs and Hama, only some 15 percent of households are crowded. Specific camps or gathering areas are considerably more crowded than average. For example, 52 percent of households are crowded in Jaramana, 33 percent in Neirab and Khan Danoon and 35 percent in Sit Zeinab. Yarmouk camp is unique among refugee camps in having lower than average crowding at 12 percent compared to 31 percent of other camps and 25 percent of gatherings.

Indoor environment not as poor as in camps in Jordan and Lebanon, but poor temperature control and dampness reported by about half of camp and gathering households

It is not surprising given the widespread use of concrete and concrete block in construction that dwellings often are difficult to heat in the winter or keep cool in the summer. Roughly one-half of households complain of these problems. Nearly as common are dwellings being uncomfortably damp (47 percent of households). Ventilation is somewhat of a problem, but less so than has been found in refugee camps elsewhere, with 22 percent complaining of poor ventilation. Noise from inside the building is not a widespread irritation, but noise from outside is quite common (30 percent). Here we consider ‘disturbing’ noise to be that occurring daily and of such a degree that it is difficult to carry on a normal conversation from within the dwelling. The most widespread indoor environment problem is an entirely preventable one – smoking within the dwelling. Nearly 70 percent of households report that someone or multiple persons regularly smoke within the dwelling. This has obvious health impacts, especially among children regularly exposed to second-hand smoke. Moreover, we find

that this occurs more frequently in crowded households and households with children than others on average.

Indoor environmental problems less prevalent in Yarmouk than other camps

Certain regions tend to have certain kinds of environmental disturbances within the dwelling. Again, there is a difference between Yarmouk camp and other refugee camps, and between camps and gatherings. About 10 percent fewer complain of temperature and humidity problems within the dwelling in Yarmouk compared to other refugee camps, but about one-half the proportion in gatherings complain of poor ventilation and the dwelling being “dark and gloomy” than in either Yarmouk or the other camps. The latter is due to very dense building of housing in the camps, and an indicator of camp crowding *outside* the dwelling itself

Lack of sanitation and stable drinking water supply in camps and gatherings, but this is the case generally in Syria compared to other countries

Access to adequate sanitation and water resources is lacking in Syria compared to many other countries in the region. Recent UNDP estimates (2001) report that some 10 percent do not have access to proper sanitation (compared to one percent in Jordan and Lebanon) and 20 percent do not have access to ‘improved’ water resources (compared to four percent in Jordan and none in Lebanon). While we do not have strictly comparable data to the UNDP estimates, data for camp refugees indicate that there is better sanitation coverage, but that drinking and other water resource access could be improved, as is the case in Syria as a whole. Nearly all (more than 95 percent) have room heating, connection to electricity, connection to a sewer system or septic tank, and toilet facilities inside the residence. Some 80 to 85 percent have private bath, collected garbage, and piped water. Drinking water supply is generally more stable than other water supply (85 percent versus 79 percent). Among those without piped drinking water and/or piped other water, the main source of supply is tanker truck, vendor providers.

Infrastructure considerably worse in rural Syria than urban, including camps and gatherings, but most camps are in urban areas

There are rather wide differences, however, by urban/rural and regional location as well as, but less so, by income groups. Rural camps and gatherings have very poor access to piped drinking and regular water at around 50 percent compared to nearly 100 percent of urban areas. Stability of regular water supply is also poor, but better for rural drinking water supply. Finally garbage collection is much less common in rural areas (72 percent versus 93 percent in urban areas). Looking at these amenities by regions shows, however, that the poor rural infrastructure is primarily due to very poor infrastructure in rural Damascus. Here, only 36 percent have piped regular water and 25 percent have piped drinking water, for example. Elsewhere, such as the northern region, which is 96 percent rural, water supply and stability is similar to in urban areas.

Another way to examine infrastructure amenities is to see the proportion of all amenities that households have. Yarmouk camp households have much better infrastructure than other camps, with some 70 percent having all amenities compared to about 35 percent of other camps. Again, rural Damascus is quite ill-equipped with infrastructure amenities compared to all other regions.

Clustering of poor infrastructure in Jarmana, Khan Danoon, Sbeina and Sit Zeinab

Poor infrastructure also appears to be clustered in certain camps or gathering areas: Jarmana, Khan Danoon, Sbeina and Sit Zeinab are all rural locations where we see a clustering of lack of piped water and piped drinking water, and lack of stability in the water source.

Environment

50 percent of camp and gathering households say the area they live in is “not so clean”

There is a general lack of perceived cleanliness in refugee camps and gatherings in Syria. About one-half of households say that the area in which they live is ‘not so clean’ and another 13 percent say it is dirty or very dirty. This does not vary much by the type of dwelling or household characteristics, and surprisingly there are little differences

between Yarmouk and other camps, even though Yarmouk residents less often report different kinds of outdoor environmental problems.

Dust, garbage and sewer odours, and exhaust are widespread environmental problems in camps and gatherings

In addition to this general description, households were asked about specific kinds of environmental nuisances the household is usually exposed to from within the dwelling or in its immediate vicinity. The most prevalent outdoor environmental nuisance is dust (80 percent), followed by smell and exhaust from cars (47 percent). One in four households complain from smell from sewerage or wastewater and one in five report they are usually exposed to smell from garbage. Few are regularly exposed to industry pollution (only eight percent).

In particular, families living on the outskirts of camps much more often report being exposed to smell from garbage and sewerage, and animal smells. For example, one in three report regular smell from garbage compared to less than one in five camp households. The situation is also worse for gathering/displacement residents in this regard than in camps, but not as poor as on the outskirts of camps. .

Urban and rural areas, not surprisingly, experience different outdoor environment problems: In urban areas car pollution is more of a problem and in rural areas animal smell, garbage and sewerage smell are common complaints. Camps outside of Yarmouk are also more often exposed to these types of pollution reported by rural areas.

Social Infrastructure

Since only some seven percent of households own a car or truck, having public services within walking distance is important. Beginning with educational facilities, nearly all households report having access to kindergartens, elementary and preparatory schools, but access to secondary schools is limited (about 60 percent have a secondary boys or girls school in the neighbourhood). This is mostly due to UNRWA provision of education only through the preparatory cycle.

Lack of secondary education institutions and hospital services

Primary health facilities are well supplied, with some 97 percent having a physician, dentist, pharmacy and basic health centre within walking distance. There is, however, a lack of secondary health facilities. Only 65 percent of households have a hospital nearby and cultural facilities are lacking for most, with few having access to a cultural centre or public library.

Refugee camps have better access to community services than Palestinian gatherings

The household's location in different kinds of neighbourhoods, for example within refugee camp borders, or outside does make a difference in the scope of services available. There are generally more services within camps than in gatherings.

The best access to community services are in urban areas and Yarmouk refugee camp

Overall in urban areas there is much better access to other services like banks and cultural centres and libraries. Only 11 percent of rural households have a bank nearby. Finally, Yarmouk versus other camp households more often enjoy the convenience of banks (84 percent), cultural centres (63 percent) and libraries (60 percent) than other camps. In other camps only 14 percent have a bank, 42 percent have a cultural centre and 18 percent have a library nearby.

Annex 1: Tables

Table 1: Household Crowding by Type of Location (percent of households)

	Yarmouk camp	Other camps	Gathering	Total
3 or more persons per room	11.5	31.3	24.6	
Less than 3 persons per room	88.5	68.7	75.4	
<i>n</i>	2157	2244	481	
<i>uwn</i>	1632	2628	573	

Table 2: Infrastructure Amenities by Regional Location (percent of households)

	Yarmouk camp	Other camps	Gathering	Total
Water piped into residence	99.0	64.0	97.0	83.0
Stable water supply	86	76	68	79
Independent kitchen	95	90	93	93
Private bath/shower	90	75	77	82
Toilet inside living quarters	98	96	90	96
Sewage network/septic tank	100	97	86	97
Garbage collected	93	80	75	85
Drinking water piped into residence	98	59	92	80
Stable drinking water supply	87	88	73	86
Connected to electricity network	100	99	100	100
Stable electricity supply	---	---	---	---
Room heating	100	100	100	100
<i>n</i>	2157	2244	481	4883
<i>uwn</i>	1632	2628	573	4887

Table 3: Dissatisfaction with Indoor and Outdoor Environment (percent of households)

	Yarmouk camp	Other camps	Gatherings	Total
Unsatisfied with noise	33	39	28	35
Unsatisfied with indoor environment	14	20	16	17
Unsatisfied with outdoor pollution	25	23	24	24
<i>n</i>	2157	2244	481	4883
<i>uwn</i>	1632	2682	573	4887

Table 4: Household Exposure to Garbage Smell (percent of households)

	Yarmouk camp	Other camps	Gathering	Total
Usually exposed to garbage smell	13	22	26	18
Not exposed	87	78	75	82
<i>n</i>	2157	2244	481	4883
<i>uwn</i>	1632	2682	573	4887

Table 5: Dissatisfaction with Housing and Neighbourhood (percent of Households)

	Yarmouk camp	Other camps	Gathering	Total
Unsatisfied with space/size	28	36	33	32
Unsatisfied with privacy	20	29	23	24
Unsatisfied with housing cost	22	23	17	22
Unsatisfied with safety for children	28	27	24	28
Unsatisfied with traffic	18	15	12	16
Unsatisfied with water supply	52	38	26	43
Unsatisfied with water quality	32	33	17	31
Unsatisfied with neighbours	11	17	16	14
<i>n</i>	2157	2244	481	4883
<i>uwn</i>	1632	2682	573	4887

Table 6: Dissatisfaction with Community Services by Type of Location (percent of households)

	Yarmouk camp	Other camps	Gathering	Total
Unsatisfied with schools	4	4	12	5
Unsatisfied with health services	7	9	15	9
Unsatisfied with public transportation	3	4	4	4
Unsatisfied with shops and commerce	2	8	10	6
Unsatisfied with cultural institutions	55	59	56	57
Unsatisfied with work, bus opportunities	75	82	75	78
Unsatisfied with housing conditions	11	17	16	14
Unsatisfied with neighbourhood	6	10	11	18
<i>n</i>	2157	2244	481	4883
<i>uwn</i>	1632	2682	573	4887

Annex 2: Fafo Publications on Palestinian Refugees

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- Sletten, Pål and Pedersen, Jon 2003. *Coping with Conflict: Palestinian Communities Two Years Into the Intifada*, Fafo-report 408, Oslo: Fafo.
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