

Syria

Palestinians in Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates



Ministry of Immigration
and Integration

The Danish
Immigration Service

This brief report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed. It should thus be weighed against other country of origin information available on the topic.

The brief report at hand does not include any policy recommendations. The information does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service.

Furthermore, this brief report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

The brief report is a synthesis of information gathered from different sources, and it brings together condensed information in a relevant manner for the reader's COI needs and it organises information together thematically to form a coherent whole of the topic in question, instead of listing or quoting information source by source.

Front page map: UN, *Syrian Arab Republic*, Map No. 4204 Rev. 3, April 2012, [url](#)

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Executive summary

The Palestinian refugees in Syria (PRS) are a diverse group with different sets of rights reflected in, among other things, their residency status, access to the labour market and documents issuance. Generally, PRS who arrived in Syria before 1956 and their descendants in paternal line are treated similarly to Syrian citizens, whereas those who arrived later have different rights depending on the individual circumstances.

PRS who arrived before 1956 have open-ended residence permits, can have travel documents issued by the Syrian authorities, and do not need a visa to return to Syria. There are different regulations for the various groups of PRS who arrived in Syria after 1956; however, none of them can obtain Syrian travel documents and would need a visa to return. Similarly, their residency in Syria is lost after a longer stay abroad.

United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) provides education and health services to PRS who are able to access its facilities, as well as economic support to vulnerable persons. Today, 91 % of the PRS population in Syria is estimated to live in absolute poverty. Housing prices in and around Damascus are high and often exceed an average monthly wage for a public servant. The currency rate has been devalued, which has resulted in higher food prices, as many goods are imported.

The Government of Syria and its allies have control over the six UNRWA camps in the Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates. Some of the camps have checkpoints at the camp entrances, while for all camps there are checkpoints on nearby roads. Five of the six camps are accessible, while Yarmouk Camp is only accessible to persons who can prove to have lived there. To settle in the camps and outside the camps, it is necessary to obtain a security clearance from the authorities. Additional demands must be met for settling in Yarmouk Camp.

Several NGOs have reported of PRS who have been arbitrarily arrested or have forcibly disappeared since 2011, including some who have returned voluntarily.

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Introduction and methodology

This brief report focuses on security, access to UNRWA services and the economic conditions for Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS) living in Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates, as well as the possibility for PRS to re-enter Syria.

The report is not a comprehensive study of all issues addressed and the information should be weighed against other available country of origin information.

The report is written in accordance with the EASO COI Report Methodology.¹

The purpose of the report was to collect updated information on the issues relevant for processing immigration cases, including asylum cases. The Terms of Reference (ToR) is included at the end of the report (Annex II).

This report is based on relevant written sources supplemented with two query responses from the Danish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), and information collected through Skype interviews with sources selected by virtue of their expertise on the topics of this report.

Minutes were drafted from each interview. These were forwarded to the source for approval, providing the source an opportunity to amend, comment or correct the context of the minutes to reflect the information shared most accurately. All sources approved their statements.

For the sake of transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the meeting minutes in Annex I have been given consecutive numbers, which are used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes.

One source, an international organisation, requested anonymity while the remaining three sources agreed to be quoted by name or name of organisation.

Two separate meetings were held with the international organisation and consequently two different minutes were written. In order to distinguish between the two meetings, these are quoted as 'international organisation (a)' and 'international organisation (b)'. Additionally, a third meeting was held with the international organisation. Information from this meeting is not included in this report upon request of the organisation and thus only used as background information.

The international organisation emphasised that some of the information pertaining to government procedures, rules and regulations was outside its mandate. The organisation therefore underlined that these issues must be confirmed by relevant governmental entities. For this reason, DIS sent a query to the Syrian authorities with questions about regarding formal procedures, rules and regulations, to which the Syrian authorities did not respond. However, DIS obtained this information through a MFA query.

The report is a synthesis of the information obtained from oral and written sources and does not include all details and nuances provided by the sources. In the report, care has been taken to present the views of the sources as accurately and transparently as possible. The individual sources should not be held accountable for the content of the brief report.

¹ EASO, *EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology*, June 2019, [url](#)

Attention should be called to the changeable and unstable in Syria, particularities due to COVID-19 and the fact that the information provided in this brief report may become outdated. Therefore, the issues addressed in this brief report should be monitored periodically and brought up to date accordingly.

Interviews for the report were conducted between January and March 2021. The situation pertaining to PRS has been monitored continuously during the subsequent writing process in order to avoid the inclusion of outdated information.

The research and editing of this brief report was finalised on 29 October 2021.

The brief report can be accessed from the website of DIS, www.us.dk, and is thus available to all stakeholders working within the field of refugee status determination as well as to the general public.

Abbreviations

AGPS	Action Group for Palestinians of Syria
AOG	Armed Opposition Groups
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
GAPAR	General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees
GoS	Government of Syria
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PFLP-GC	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command
PA	Palestinian Authority
PLA	Palestinian Liberation Army
PRS	Palestinian Refugee from Syria
SNHR	Syrian Network for Human Rights
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance

Glossary

Camp	One of the nine official (Daraa, Hama, Homs, Jaramana, Khan Dunoun, Khan Eshieh, Neirab, Qabr Essit and Sbeineh) or three unofficial camps (Ein al-Tal, Latakia and Yarmouk) in Syria as defined by UNRWA. ²
GAPAR	Government authority responsible for Palestinian affairs in Syria, including registering and issuing documents to registered PRS. ³
Palestine Branch	The common name for Branch 235 of the Military Intelligence Service.
PRS	A Palestinian who lives in or used to live in Syria, regardless of that person's registration status with UNRWA or GAPAR.
Security clearance	Known in Arabic as موافقة أمنية [<i>muwafaka amniya</i>]. It is the process through which the GoS authorities crosscheck whether a person is on a wanted list and is to be considered a security threat. ⁴
UNRWA	UN agency responsible for providing services to Palestinian refugees who lost home and livelihood because of the 1948 conflict.

² UNRWA, *Where we work: Syria*, n.d., [url](#)

³ Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *A New Palestinian Community: Syria's Uprising and Conflict, from the Perspective of the Palestinian Camps*, July 2020, [url](#), p. 8

⁴ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Issues regarding return*, October 2021, [url](#), p. 5

Background

The Government of Syria (GoS) has historically placed itself as a supporter of the Palestinian cause in regional politics. Domestically, however, GoS has mainly supported Palestinian factions that were pro-government and distanced itself from other Palestinian factions that remained loyal to the Palestinian political party, Fatah. There is a historically strong relationship between GoS and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), as well as to other Palestinian groups opposing the Fatah-dominated Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). These groups later became key players in the Syrian Civil War in support of GoS.⁵

At the outset of the Syrian conflict, many PRS chose to stay neutral.⁶ However, when clashes started to occur in areas close to as well as inside camps by mid-2012, PRS began to support different parties to the conflict. Meanwhile, GoS accused PRS of joining protests as well as the armed opposition.⁷

In broad terms, Hamas and its affiliates supported the opposition groups and their Arab regional proxies, while Fatah was divided over its stance towards the GoS. Groups that already were pro-government remained loyal to the Syrian president, Bashar Al-Assad.⁸ These groups, including the PFLP-GC, Al-Sa'iqa and Fatah Al-Intifada, participated in the government's military operations against opposition groups.⁹

The Syrian authorities have a special security branch, Branch 235 or 'the Palestine Branch', within the Military Intelligence Service that is responsible of the security files of PRS. It has close ties to the Palestinian militia PFLP-GC and is infamous for a widespread use of torture.¹⁰

⁵ Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *A New Palestinian Community: Syria's Uprising and Conflict, from the Perspective of the Palestinian Camps*, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 9-10

⁶ Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *A New Palestinian Community: Syria's Uprising and Conflict, from the Perspective of the Palestinian Camps*, July 2020, [url](#), p. 10

⁷ Al Jazeera, *How do Palestinians see the Syrian War?*, 20 October 2018, [url](#); Al-Monitor, *Syria's Palestinians divided over whom to support*, 31 August 2015, [url](#); Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *A New Palestinian Community: Syria's Uprising and Conflict, from the Perspective of the Palestinian Camps*, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 10-11

⁸ Al Jazeera, *How do Palestinians see the Syrian War?*, 20 October 2018, [url](#); Al-Monitor, *Syria's Palestinians divided over whom to support*, 31 August 2015, [url](#); Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *A New Palestinian Community: Syria's Uprising and Conflict, from the Perspective of the Palestinian Camps*, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 10-11

⁹ EASO, *Syria: Targeting of individuals*, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 88-91; Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *A New Palestinian Community: Syria's Uprising and Conflict, from the Perspective of the Palestinian Camps*, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 9-10; SNHR, *3,196 Syrian Palestinians Were Killed by Syrian Regime Forces, including 491 Due to Torture, Between March 2011 and July 2020, and 49 Appeared in Caesar Photos*, 29 July 2020, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁰ EIP, *Refugee Return in Syria: Dangers, Security Risks and Information Scarcity*, July 2019, [url](#), p. 7; Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *A New Palestinian Community: Syria's Uprising and Conflict, from the Perspective of the Palestinian Camps*, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9; Sweden, Lifos, *Syriens säkerhetsapparat (version 1.0) [The Syrian security apparatus (version 1.0)]*, 10 November 2016, [url](#), p. 24

1. Registration status of Palestinians in Syria

Palestinian refugees in Syria (PRS) consist of a diverse group of people with different rights depending on their and/or their ancestors' arrival to Syria. The first group of between 75,000-90,000 Palestinians came to Syria after the 1948 conflict between Israel and the Arab countries.¹¹

In 1949, the Syrian authorities established the Palestine Arab Refugee Institute, later renamed the General Administration for Palestinian Arab Refugees (GAPAR), to deal with issues regarding Palestinians in the country. The Syrian parliament ratified Law No. 260 in 1956 that gave Palestinians already residing in Syria similar civil rights as Syrian citizens, including employment and military service. However, PRS were not given the same rights in terms of property ownership and political participation. PRS covered by Law No. 260 of 1956 are generally registered with GAPAR, which is the government authority responsible for most issues relating to PRS, including registration, document issuance¹² and some service provisions.¹³ In January 2021, there were 557,452 PRS registered with GAPAR.¹⁴

Other groups of Palestinians came to Syria after 1956, including groups from Jordan and Gaza in 1967, Jordan in 1970, Lebanon in 1982 and Iraq around 2006.¹⁵ Generally, these groups cannot register with GAPAR and have different rights than those who came before 1956. Different sources estimated that non-GAPAR-registered PRS amount to 15-20 % of the total Palestinian population in Syria.^{16, 17}

PRS do not have the right to apply for Syrian citizenship even if they fulfil the requirements for naturalisation set by the Syrian nationality law.¹⁸ Exceptions apply to PRS women who are married to Syrian men, who in most cases would be granted citizenship after submitting an application in person at the Immigrations and Passports Department under the Ministry of Interior.¹⁹ According to an independent source interviewed by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the application will always be approved if the woman is pregnant or has a child.²⁰

¹¹ Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law (2nd edition)*, 2020, p. 220; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Palestinians of Syria: Violations of Rights and Identity Challenges*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 18

¹² Note that ID cards and travel documents are not issued by GAPAR, but by the Civil Status Department and the Immigration and Passports Department, respectively (Norway, Landinfo, *Palestinske flyktninger i Syria: Identitetsdokumenter [Palestinian Refugees in Syria: Identity Documents]*, 23 November 2016, [url](#), pp. 8-9).

¹³ AGPS: 3; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Palestinians of Syria: Violations of Rights and Identity Challenges*, October 2019, [url](#), pp. 20-22; Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *A New Palestinian Community: Syria's Uprising and Conflict, from the Perspective of the Palestinian Camps*, July 2020, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, *3,196 Syrian Palestinians Were Killed by Syrian Regime Forces, including 491 Due to Torture, Between March 2011 and July 2020, and 49 Appeared in Caesar Photos*, 29 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴ GAPAR, *جدول تعداد اللاجئين الفلسطينيين المسجلين في الهيئة العامة للاجئين الفلسطينيين العرب حتى تاريخ 2021/1/5 [Table of census of Palestinian Refugees registered with the General Administration for Palestinian Arab Refugees as of 5 January 2021]*, 5 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵ AGPS: 1-11; Tom Rollins: 5

¹⁶ AGPS: 1; ACAPS, *Palestinians from Syria: Syria Needs Analysis Project*, March 2014, [url](#), pp. 4-5; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Palestinians of Syria: Violations of Rights and Identity Challenges*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 24-30

¹⁷ No exact figures of non-GAPAR-registered PRS exist. Population figures in this report should thus be taken with precaution as, depending on the source, they frequently only refer to the GAPAR- or UNRWA-registered PRS.

¹⁸ Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law (2nd edition)*, 2020, p. 223

¹⁹ Syrian Arab Republic, Parliament of Syria, 1969 لعام 276 المرسوم التشريعي [Legislative Decree No. 276 of 1969], 24 November 1969, [url](#); UNRWA, *Regional Information Relating to Women's Nationality*, n.d., [url](#), p. 2

²⁰ Denmark, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Anmodning vedr. erhvervelse af syrisk statsborgerskab [request regarding acquisition of Syrian citizenship]*, 11 August 2020, [available upon request to DIS as mentioned in the introduction chapter of this report]

GAPAR-registered PRS

The residence status of the GAPAR-registered PRS in Syria is considered temporary. However, in practice it is open-ended, as there is no requirement for renewal of the residency.²¹

Non-GAPAR-registered PRS

Some of the non-GAPAR-registered PRS have residence permits, while others reside in Syria illegally.²² The residency status of a non-GAPAR-registered PRS generally depends on where the person arrived from, when the person entered Syria, as well as what travel document the individual possesses.²³

PRS not covered by Law No. 260 of 1956 are legally considered to be non-Syrians.²⁴ The Syrian law further distinguishes between Arab nationals and other foreigners. Non-GAPAR-registered PRS can be treated as Arab nationals or foreigners, depending on their type of travel document (i.e. whether it is issued by an Arab or a foreign country).²⁵ The PRS arriving from the West Bank in 1967 who held Jordanian passports are considered to be Arab nationals, while those arriving from Gaza in 1967 holding Egyptian travel documents²⁶, belong to the group of other foreigners.²⁷

All sources agreed that residence permits for non-GAPAR-registered PRS must be renewed periodically and are subject to proof of legal stay in the country. However, contrasting information was found as to the length of residence permits of non-GAPAR-registered PRS. The human rights organisation Action Group for Palestinians of Syria (AGPS) stated that the duration of the residency of a non-GAPAR-registered 1967 PRS depends on the individual case.²⁸

The international organisation explained that residency in Syria for aliens is regulated by Law No. 2 of 2014.²⁹ In a query response from 22 September 2021, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) explained that all non-GAPAR-registered PRS are covered by Law No. 2 of 2014 as amended by Law No. 13 of 2017.³⁰ According to article 17 of Law No. 2 of 2014, there are five types of residence permits given to Arabs as well as other foreigners:

- a) Special residency: Granted for five years
- b) Ordinary residency: Granted for three years
- c) Temporary residency: Granted for one year³¹

²¹ AGPS: 30; International organisation (b): 3

²² Norway, Landinfo, *Palestinske flyktninger i Syria: Identitetsdokumenter [Palestinian Refugees in Syria: Identity Documents]*, 23 November 2016, [url](#), p. 10

²³ AGPS: 6-11

²⁴ International organisation (b): 7; MFA query response (a); GAPAR, /2484 / قرار رقم [Decision No. 2484], 9 October 2013, [url](#)

²⁵ MFA query response (a)

²⁶ Gaza was administered by Egypt between 1949 and 1967, after which it was occupied by Israel (Sweden, Lifos, *Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument (version 1.1) [Palestinians in the Middle East – Residency rights and documents (version 1.1)]*, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 74).

²⁷ MFA query response (a); Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law (2nd edition)*, 2020, p. 225; Canada, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Syria: The legal rights and obligations of a Palestinian who has been issued a Syrian travel document, including whether they must report for military service; whether the rights and obligations apply to Palestinians that have resided outside of the country for the majority of their life and only visited it briefly (2009-November 2013)*, [url](#), 22 November 2013; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Palestinians of Syria: Violations of Rights and Identity Challenges*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 26

²⁸ AGPS: 7

²⁹ International organisation (b): 7

³⁰ MFA query response (a)

³¹ Note that *temporary* is the direct translation from Arabic. However, it should not be understood to be the only residence permit that is time-limited, cf. the other letters under article 17.

- d) Tourist residency: Granted for up to three months
- e) Work residency: Granted for up to one year

Yet, currently, the Syrian authorities only issue *temporary residency* and *tourist residency* to non-GAPAR-registered PRS, even if they are legally entitled to other types of residencies if they fulfil the requirements set up for these.³²

The Syrian Ministry of Interior issued Resolution No. 1233 in 2014, which further regulates residency for non-GAPAR-registered PRS. According to article 3 of this resolution, the following groups of Arab Palestinian nationals may be granted *temporary residency*:³³

- a) Palestinians working full time for Palestinian factions
- b) Owners of residential real estate in Syria, their spouse and children registered under the husband
- c) Investors based on letters from the Syrian Investment Authority with approval of the Ministry of Labour
- d) Students enrolled in Syrian universities or other accredited institutes
- e) Students enrolled in schools on elementary or secondary level as well as their parents
- f) Patients who receive treatment for incurable or chronic diseases
- g) Palestinians married to GAPAR-registered Palestinians or Syrians
- h) Humanitarian asylum seekers based on documents issued by UNHCR

Non-GAPAR-registered PRS apply for temporary and tourist residencies at the Immigration and Passports Department or at one of its branches in the governorate where the person is residing. It is not possible to renew residence permits from abroad.³⁴

To obtain a residence permit, the PRS must submit an application and either a declaration of residence (*sanad iqama*) or a certified lease contract. When receiving the application, the Immigration and Passports Department consults with the relevant intelligence service branch, irrespective of whether it is a first-time application or an application for renewal of residency. The intelligence service must provide a response to the application within one month. Additionally, the Political Security Service must be notified of the decision of issuing or renewing a residence permit for non-GAPAR-registered PRS.³⁵

Each week, the Immigration and Passports Department notifies the relevant intelligence services, among them the Political Security Service, of the names of all Palestinians arriving in Syria as well as their addresses. On a monthly basis, the department also sends lists of Palestinians that have obtained regular residency in Syria to the intelligence service in charge of Palestinian affairs.³⁶ The Palestine Branch of the Military Security Service is responsible for monitoring Palestinian groups, parties and refugees.³⁷

The residency for those with special and ordinary residency will be lost if the person is away from Syria for more than six months, while a person holding temporary residency will lose the right to residency after three

³² MFA query response (a)

³³ MFA query response (a)

³⁴ MFA query response (a)

³⁵ MFA query response (a)

³⁶ MFA query response (a)

³⁷ EIP, *Refugee Return in Syria: Dangers, Security Risks and Information Scarcity*, July 2019, [url](#), p. 7; Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *A New Palestinian Community: Syria's Uprising and Conflict, from the Perspective of the Palestinian Camps*, July 2020, [url](#), p. 9;

months abroad.³⁸ However, according to article 22 in Law No. 2 of 2014, it is possible for those with special and ordinary residencies, whose absence from Syria has exceeded six months, but not one year, to have these permits renewed with the permission of the Director of the Immigration and Passports Department. In certain circumstances residency might be retained even if the stay abroad exceeds one year, e.g. if the reason for staying abroad is studies or doing military service.³⁹

Contrasting with the time lengths in article 17 in Law No. 2 of 2014, several sources noted that the PRS who are considered to be Arab nationals have residence permits valid for ten years.⁴⁰ In a book published in 2020, the scholars Francesca Albanese and Lex Takkenberg wrote that there was a shift in rules in 2014, which lowered the length of residency for non-GAPAR-registered PRS from ten years to a period between one and three years.^{41, 42} However, according to an MFA query response from 22 September 2021, the length of residence permits found in the previous law regulating residency in Syria for foreigners, Law No. 29 of 1970, did not differ from the length in Law No. 2 of 2014.^{43, 44}

Omran Center for Strategic Studies, an independent think tank, noted that the PRS arriving from Gaza in 1967 needed to renew their residence permits annually.⁴⁵

A group of non-GAPAR-registered PRS stayed in Syria without legal residency since they were unable to have their travel documents reissued.⁴⁶ Yet, the Syrian authorities permitted their stay, provided they were registered with and possessed documentation issued by the Palestinian Authority (PA).⁴⁷

According to Resolution No. 1233 of 2014, however, overstaying residency implicates that the Immigration and Passports Department would refer the individual to the courts. The immigration branch will also notify the relevant intelligence service about all Palestinians staying in Syria illegally.⁴⁸

Non-GAPAR-registered PRS women can be registered with GAPAR if they marry GAPAR-registered men. It is also possible for non-GAPAR-registered PRS to register with GAPAR by presidential decree. Some non-GAPAR-registered PRS succeeded in registering with GAPAR prior to 2011 and after 2017.⁴⁹

³⁸ Syrian Arab Republic, Ministry of Tourism, *الحصول على تأشيرة* [obtaining visa], n.d., [url](#)

³⁹ MFA query response (a); Syrian Arab Republic, Parliament, *القانون 2 لعام 2014* [Law No. 2 of 2014], 11 March 2014, [url](#)

⁴⁰ ACAPS, *Palestinians from Syria: Syria Needs Analysis Project*, March 2014, [url](#), pp. 4-5; Australia, DFAT, *DFAT Thematic Report on Conditions in Syria*, 23 October 2017, p. 10; Austria, BFA, *Fact Finding Mission Report: Syrien* [Fact-finding mission report: Syria], August 2017, [url](#), p. 24

⁴¹ Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law (2nd edition)*, 2020, p. 225

⁴² The previous law-regulating residency for aliens in Syria also operated with five years as the longest residence permit (Syrian Arab Republic, *Legislative Decree No. 29 of 15 January 1970 - The Entry and Exit of Aliens to and from the Syrian Arab Republic and Their Residence Therein*, [url](#)).

⁴³ It should be noted, however, that Law No. 29 of 1970 only referred to three types of residence permits: Special, regular and temporary residency (MFA query response (a)).

⁴⁴ MFA query response (a)

⁴⁵ Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Palestinians of Syria: Violations of Rights and Identity Challenges*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 26

⁴⁶ AGPS: 8; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Palestinians of Syria: Violations of Rights and Identity Challenges*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 27

⁴⁷ AGPS: 8; Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law (2nd edition)*, 2020, p. 224; Norway, Landinfo, *Palestinske flyktninger i Syria: Identitetsdokumenter* [Palestinian Refugees in Syria: Identity Documents], 23 November 2016, [url](#), p. 10; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Palestinians of Syria: Violations of Rights and Identity Challenges*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 26

⁴⁸ MFA query response (a)

⁴⁹ Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law (2nd edition)*, 2020, pp. 224-225; Canada, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Syria: The legal rights and obligations of a Palestinian who has been issued a Syrian travel document, including whether they must report for military service; whether the rights and obligations apply to Palestinians that have resided outside of the country for the majority of their life and only visited it briefly (2009-November 2013)*, [url](#), 22 November 2013

2. UNRWA camps in Damascus and Rural Damascus

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is the UN agency responsible for the Palestine Refugees⁵⁰ in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza. UNRWA provides services such as education, health, relief and social services to Palestinian refugees. UNRWA operates in 12 camps across Syria as well as in other localities outside the camps.⁵¹

By the end of second quarter of 2021, the number of PRS registered as refugees with UNRWA in Syria was 571,849 persons.⁵² However, many PRS left during the Syrian conflict, and in a publication from September 2021, UNRWA estimated that around 438,000 PRS were still living inside Syria.⁵³

Five of the six Palestinian camps (Jaramana, Khan Dunoun, Khan Eshieh, Qabr Essit and Sbeineh) are located in Rural Damascus governorate, while one (Yarmouk) is a part of Damascus governorate. The camps in Rural Damascus have grown over time, and PRS also reside on the land outside of the official camp boundaries. These camps and their adjacent areas are surrounded by open space and are not directly integrated into neighbouring towns.⁵⁴ The UNRWA camps are not confined to PRS and Syrian citizens live there as well.⁵⁵

The Palestinian camps do not have their own Palestinian law enforcement bodies, but are subjected to the same law enforcement structures that are in place in all of Syria, with for example security services and GAPAR representation inside the camps.⁵⁶

Pre-conflict, around 75-80 % of the PRS population lived in and around Damascus.⁵⁷ The camps in Damascus and Rural Damascus hosted more than 250,000 PRS, with Yarmouk being the largest camp.⁵⁸ By January 2021, Jaramana Camp was the largest camp in terms of PRS residents, while only 4,134 PRS were registered at UNRWA with Yarmouk Camp as their residential address.⁵⁹

Table 1: Number of PRS residents in camps as of January 2021 according to information from UNRWA⁶⁰

Jaramana	Khan Dunoun	Khan Eshieh	Qabr Essit	Sbeineh	Yarmouk
44,406	17,540	8,879	17,816	12,732	4,134

⁵⁰ As this is a legal term defined by UNRWA, this report will hereafter use the term Palestinian refugees (PRS).

⁵¹ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), pp. 26-27; UNRWA, *Where we work, Syria*, n.d., [url](#)

⁵² UNRWA, *UNRWA Registered Population Dashboard*, n.d., [url](#)

⁵³ UNRWA, *unrwa: syria - humanitarian snapshot, july & august 2021*, September 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁴ Musaab Balchi: 53; Austria, BFA, *Fact Finding Mission Report: Syrien [Fact-finding mission report: Syria]*, August 2017, [url](#), p. 26; Council of the European Union, *Syria/Palestine: general situation report*, January 2002, [url](#), pp. 25-27, 29;

⁵⁵ Musaab Balchi: 15; Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *A New Palestinian Community: Syria's Uprising and Conflict, from the Perspective of the Palestinian Camps*, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 13, 17

⁵⁶ Council of the European Union, *Syria/Palestine: general situation report*, January 2002, [url](#), p. 23; Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Analysis, *Governing Palestinian Refugee Camps in the Arab East: Governmentalities in Search of Legitimacy*, October 2010, [url](#), pp. 7-8

⁵⁷ PRC, *Palestinian Refugees of Syria in Light of the Syrian Revolution*, 12 October 2012, [url](#), p. 9; USAID, *Syria – Complex Emergency: Fact Sheet #7, Fiscal Year (FY) 2017*, 4 August 2017, [url](#), p. 5

⁵⁸ Calculations conducted by DIS based on publically available data from UNRWA (UNRWA, *Jaramana Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#); UNRWA, *Khan Dunoun Camp*, 1 January 2018, [url](#); UNRWA, *Khan Eshieh Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#); UNRWA, *Qabr Essit Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#); UNRWA, *Sbeineh Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#); UNRWA, *Yarmouk (Unofficial Camp*)*, 1 January 2019, [url](#)); Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law (2nd edition)*, 2020, p. 220

⁵⁹ Numbers provided by UNRWA to DIS in January 2021. It is unclear if the numbers cover camp residents only or if residents in surrounding areas are also included. The numbers are not publically available.

⁶⁰ Numbers provided by UNRWA to DIS in January 2021. It is unclear if the numbers cover camp residents only or if residents in surrounding areas are also included. The numbers are not publically available.

There can be a difference between the actual place of residence and what is recorded in the system.⁶¹ For instance, the actual number of PRS living in Yarmouk might be less than the above numbers (see chapter 5.3).

As of January 2021, 327,995 PRS had their residential address registered in Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates, according to numbers provided by UNRWA to DIS.⁶² The majority of these (68 %) lived outside the six camps. The areas with the largest number of PRS outside the camps were Qudsaya (29,503 residents), Huseiniyah (24,249 residents) and Sahnaya (21,265 residents).⁶³

2.1. Camp infrastructure

The availability of water and electricity in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus is generally limited with frequent power shortages and the need for additional private water suppliers. In Palestinian camps, conditions are typically worse than in other areas.⁶⁴

All camps are connected to the public electricity network. However, as is also the case for Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates more broadly, electricity is only available for two to four hours a day. Camp residents therefore rely heavily on private generators. These run on gas, which is expensive and hard to obtain due to shortages.⁶⁵

Today, almost all camps rely on private water suppliers to some extent, mainly through water trucking.⁶⁶ Countrywide, 40 % of PRS households rely on water trucks as their primary water source.⁶⁷

2.2. Jaramana Camp

Jaramana Camp is located in Rural Damascus governorate, 8 km from Damascus on the road to Damascus International Airport. The camp covers an area of 30,000 m².⁶⁸ The camp was relatively unaffected by the conflict and has witnessed limited destruction.⁶⁹ Yet, the proximity to the battlegrounds in Eastern Ghouta had resulted in mortars falling inside the camp.⁷⁰

Before the conflict, over 18,000 PRS lived in the camp, while 44,406 PRS were registered as residing in the camp in January 2021. Due to its relative stability, there has been a massive influx of PRS making the camp one of the most densely populated places in the Damascus area today.⁷¹

⁶¹ Denmark, DIS, *Palestinian Refugees: Access to registration and UNRWA services, documents, and entry to Jordan*, June 2020, [url](#), p. 17

⁶² Numbers are retrieved from UNRWA's emergency database (for more information on this database, see Denmark, DIS, *Palestinian Refugees: Access to registration and UNRWA services, documents, and entry to Jordan*, June 2020, [url](#)). The numbers are not publically available.

⁶³ Calculations conducted by DIS based on numbers provided by UNRWA to DIS in January 2021. The numbers are not publically available.

⁶⁴ International organisation (b): 21; AGPS, *Khan Eshieh Camp for Palestinian Refugees Gripped with Fuel Crisis*, 8 January 2021, [url](#), AGPS, *Khan Eshieh Camp for Palestinian Refugees Gripped with Transportation Crisis*, 2 February 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁵ AGPS: 27; AGPS, *Khan Eshieh Camp for Palestinian Refugees Gripped with Fuel Crisis*, 8 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁶ AGPS: 24-25; Musaab Balchi: 30-31

⁶⁷ UNICEF, *2021 Syria HNO WASH Sector*, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁸ Council of the European Union, *Syria/Palestine: general situation report*, January 2002, [url](#), p. 26; UNRWA, *Jaramana Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁹ International organisation (b): 21

⁷⁰ AGPS: 22; AGPS and PRC, *Palestinians of Syria (PRS): Destruction and Reconstruction – Annual Field Report 2019*, n.d., [url](#), p. 46; AGPS, *8 mortars fall on Jaramana Camp, killing a Palestinian and injuring many*, 23 February 2018, [url](#)

⁷¹ AGPS: 22; International organisation (b): 21; UNRWA, *Jaramana Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#); Numbers for today was provided by UNRWA in January 2021. These numbers are not publically available.

2.3. Khan Dunoun Camp

Khan Dunoun Camp is located 23 km south of Damascus. It is one of the poorest camps in Syria. The camp itself covers 0.26 km², with PRS also residing in housing surrounding the camp.⁷² The camp did not experience direct battles during the conflict, though it was surrounded by armed opposition groups (AOGs) at various times.⁷³

In 2011, the camp was home to about 10,000 PRS of which the majority resided in irregular housing constructed without any formal approval from the municipality. A large number of internally displaced PRS sought shelter in the camp throughout the crisis, and the camp population reached 30,000 persons. The number of camp residents in January 2018 was around 12,500 persons. This number increased to 17,540 in January 2021, according to figures provided by UNRWA.⁷⁴

2.4. Khan Eshieh Camp

Khan Eshieh camp measures 0.69 km² and is located 27 km south-west of Damascus. Before the conflict, the camp was home to more than 20,000 PRS. In 2012, the farms and fields surrounding the camp became active battlegrounds, resulting in a rapid population decrease.⁷⁵ As of January 2021, UNRWA had registered 9,000 PRS living in Khan Eshieh.⁷⁶

Khan Eshieh Camp was under AOG control from 2013-2016. Some of the camp infrastructure and buildings were severely affected by the fighting, including some UNRWA installations; two UNRWA schools and the community centre were almost completely destroyed, but have now been rehabilitated.⁷⁷

2.5. Qabr Essit Camp

Qabr Essit camp is also known as Sayyedah Zeinab Camp due to its proximity to the holy site by the same name. The camp is located 15 km southeast of Damascus and covers an area of 0.023km².⁷⁸

It was home to almost 24,000 PRS before the conflict, but in late 2012, about 40 % of the inhabitants had fled the camp because of violent clashes. The GoS regained control of the camp following a seven-month military operation. In late 2013, the situation improved significantly and UNRWA was able to rehabilitate its installations and restore operations. Many refugees displaced from other parts of Damascus hereafter moved to Qabr Essit Camp and the surrounding areas, which at the time doubled the number of its original residents. In January 2021, UNRWA had registered 17,816 PRS with Qabr Essit as their residential address.⁷⁹

⁷² Council of the European Union, *Syria/Palestine: general situation report*, January 2002, [url](#), p. 27; UNRWA, *Khan Dunoun Camp*, 1 January 2018, [url](#)

⁷³ Musaab Balchi: 1; UNRWA, *Khan Dunoun Camp*, 1 January 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁴ UNRWA, *Khan Dunoun Camp*, 1 January 2018, [url](#); Numbers for today was provided by UNRWA in January 2021. These numbers are not publically available.

⁷⁵ UNRWA, *Khan Eshieh Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#); Council of the European Union, *Syria/Palestine: general situation report*, January 2002, [url](#), p. 29

⁷⁶ Numbers provided by UNRWA to DIS in January 2021. These numbers are not publically available.

⁷⁷ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 25; UNRWA, *Khan Eshieh Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁸ Council of the European Union, *Syria/Palestine: general situation report*, January 2002, [url](#), p. 28; UNRWA, *Qabr Essit Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁹ AGPS and PRC, *Palestinians of Syria (PRS): Destruction and Reconstruction – Annual Field Report 2019*, n.d., [url](#), p. 51; Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 25; UNRWA, *Qabr Essit Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#); Numbers for today was provided by UNRWA in January 2021. These numbers are not publically available.

2.6. Sbeineh Camp

Sbeineh camp is situated next to Sbeineh town and lies 14 km south of Damascus. The camp is situated on an area of 0.03 km². Before the conflict, 22,600 PRS lived in the camp. In 2013, AOGs took over the camp, which resulted in the camp being closed off for almost four years. In September 2017, civilians were able to return. All UNRWA installations were in need of repairs, and immediately after the return of PRS, UNRWA rehabilitated two of its schools. According to information from UNRWA, as of December 2018, more than 13,000 of the original 30,000 camp residents returned to the camp, as has another 3,000 individuals that live in the area around the camp. All of them have access to UNRWA services inside the camp.⁸⁰ There were 12,732 PRS living in Sbeineh Camp by January 2021.⁸¹

2.7. Yarmouk Camp

Yarmouk Camp was established as an unofficial camp⁸² in 1957 on an area covering 2.1 km², and is located 8 km from the centre of Damascus.⁸³ The initial part of the camp (also known as the ‘old camp’) is built on officially procured land, while subsequent construction outside of the designated piece of land, is largely built in an informal and unplanned manner.⁸⁴ Pre-conflict, Yarmouk was the largest Palestinian community in Syria housing 160,000-220,000 PRS out of a population of over one million. Most of the infrastructure, including UNRWA facilities, was destroyed during the conflict.⁸⁵

The camp witnessed some unrest in 2011 and in the beginning of 2012. AOGs took over the camp in December 2012, which led to major battles, resulting in massive displacement of the camp residents.⁸⁶ Most of the PRS in the camp fled to neighbouring areas, such as the Palestinian gatherings of Yalda and Babila and the camps of Jaramana and Khan Dunoun.⁸⁷ Several AOGs have been present inside the camp, including the Islamic State. The GoS retook Yarmouk Camp in May 2018.⁸⁸

In February 2021, Yarmouk Camp had no water or electricity infrastructure intact.⁸⁹ However, in September 2021, the authorities initiated efforts to have former camp residents remove rubble from the streets to begin reconstruction (see also chapter 5.3.). Damascus governorate has started providing electricity and drinking water to a few points in the camp from where residents will have to extend the lines to their homes at their own cost.⁹⁰

⁸⁰ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 25; Council of the European Union, *Syria/Palestine: general situation report*, January 2002, pp. 28-29, [url](#); UNRWA, *Sbeineh Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#)

⁸¹ Numbers provided by UNRWA to DIS in January 2021. These numbers are not publically available.

⁸² The defining difference between the two types of camps is that UNRWA collects garbage only in the official camps (Euro-Med Monitor, *Yarmouk Camp: The Abandoned Pain*, July 2018, [url](#), pp. 4-5; Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *A New Palestinian Community: Syria's Uprising and Conflict, from the Perspective of the Palestinian Camps*, July 2020, [url](#), p. 9; UNRWA, *Yarmouk (Unofficial Camp*)*, 1 January 2019, [url](#)).

⁸³ Council of the European Union, *Syria/Palestine: general situation report*, January 2002, [url](#), p. 25; UNRWA, *Yarmouk (Unofficial Camp*)*, 1 January 2019,

⁸⁴ MEI, *Talking about water pipes: The fraught reconstruction of Syria's Yarmouk Camp*, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁵ Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law (2nd edition)*, 2020, p. 220

⁸⁶ Musaab Balchi: 25; Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *A New Palestinian Community: Syria's Uprising and Conflict, from the Perspective of the Palestinian Camps*, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 17-22

⁸⁷ Musaab Balchi: 18, International organisation (b): 20 UNRWA, *Syria, Regional Crisis Response Update 77*, 11 August 2014, [url](#)

⁸⁸ Tom Rollins: 1; Euro-Med Monitor, *Yarmouk Camp: The Abandoned Pain*, July 2018, [url](#), pp. 8-9; Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *A New Palestinian Community: Syria's Uprising and Conflict, from the Perspective of the Palestinian Camps*, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 22-24

⁸⁹ International organisation (b): 21

⁹⁰ Syria Report (The), *Yarmouk Camp: Daily Security Approval Allows Temporary Return*, 21 September 2021, [url](#)

3. UNRWA services

PRS continues to be among the most affected communities of the conflict in Syria and relies heavily on UNRWA for basic services, according to UNRWA. As in previous years, UNRWA faced a severe funding shortfall in its 2021 budget, which has limited the provision of humanitarian services.⁹¹

Throughout the conflict, many of UNRWA's facilities across Syria have become inaccessible or sustained severe damage.⁹² In Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates, UNRWA continued to deliver its core services albeit with some limitations, particularly in Yarmouk Camp, because of the massive destruction of the camp. The five camps in Rural Damascus saw a varying degree of damage to UNRWA structures. The majority of installations have, however, been reconstructed and are now functional.⁹³

Only 1948 refugees are able to register with UNRWA as Palestinian Refugees. However, UNRWA can provide services to other groups as well, including those PRS who came to Syria after 1956. For example, non-GAPAR registered children may be accepted in UNRWA schools on an exceptional basis, depending on capacity and funding.⁹⁴

Consultant and analyst Musaab Balchi stated that UNRWA services have declined across the country and although UNRWA is trying to fill the gaps, its efforts are not sufficient to meet the high demand, particularly given the spike in needs resulting from the conflict.⁹⁵

3.1. Health services

UNRWA maintains the provision of primary health care in its health centres in Syria. It has rehabilitated some damaged health centres and has reinstated the provision of health services in some previously largely inaccessible areas.⁹⁶ In Damascus governorate, five out of ten health care centres are functional and accessible, while ten out of eleven health care centres in Rural Damascus are functional and accessible.⁹⁷

The UNRWA health centres in Syria are located inside as well as outside of camps. In Damascus governorate, the five functional health centres are all located outside of camps, while there is currently no operating health centres inside Yarmouk Camp. According to available information, UNRWA is operating a mobile clinic in the camp on a weekly basis.⁹⁸ In Rural Damascus governorate, there are twelve health centres operating, of which six are located inside camps.⁹⁹

⁹¹ UNRWA, *Syria Regional Crisis: Emergency Appeal 2021*, [url](#), pp. 5, 7, 9

⁹² UNRWA, *Where we work, Syria*, n.d. [url](#); UNRWA, *5th Brussels Conference on Syria: UNRWA calls for support to help Palestine refugees*, 29 March 2021, [url](#)

⁹³ UNRWA, *Jaramana Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#); UNRWA, *Khan Dunoun Camp*, 1 January 2018, [url](#); UNRWA, *Khan Eshieh Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#); UNRWA, *Qabr Essit Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#); UNRWA, *Sbeineh Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁴ Denmark, DIS, *Palestinian Refugees: Access to registration and UNRWA services, documents, and entry to Jordan*, June 2020, [url](#), p. 10-15, 26

⁹⁵ Musaab Balchi: 34

⁹⁶ UNRWA, *UNRWA Health Department Annual Report 2020, 2021*, [url](#)

⁹⁷ WHO, *2020 HeRAMS Annual Report: UNRWA Health Care Centres in the Syrian Arab Republic*, 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁸ UNRWA, *Mobile Health Clinic Brings a Sign of Hope to the devastated Yarmouk Camp*, 11 January 2021, [url](#); UNRWA, *UNRWA Commissioner-General makes official visit to Syria, reviews Palestine Refugee massive humanitarian needs*, 4 November, 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁹ Numbers provided by UNRWA to DIS in March 2021; DIS has been unable to retrieve information as to why there is an additional health centre in the numbers from March, compared to the HeRAMS report (see footnote 97).

Not all UNRWA health centres in Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates have a doctor present at all times, which means that a PRS may need to travel to UNRWA health clinics in e.g. Qudsaya or Mashrou Dummar for a doctor consultation.¹⁰⁰

As UNRWA only provides primary health care services, all GAPAR-registered PRS can access governmental health care services that will be subsidised by UNRWA.¹⁰¹ However, it appears on an undated page on UNRWA's website that GoS stopped referring PRS to Ministry of Health hospitals, making UNRWA their sole health care provider that aims to reimburse non-contracted hospital bills.¹⁰² It is unclear whether this situation remains at the time of writing. For example, two consulted sources were not familiar with this, and one of them had not heard of PRS being rejected at government hospitals.¹⁰³

According to AGPS, non-GAPAR-registered PRS do not benefit from free access to governmental health care and are considered self-paying private patients. AGPS was uncertain whether UNRWA would subsidise services for this group.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, the international organisation explained that some non-GAPAR registered PRS without valid ID documents might be unable to access secondary and tertiary health care, as hospitals often require that individuals present their ID.¹⁰⁵

3.2. Education services

There were 22 UNRWA schools operating in Damascus governorate in March 2021. In Rural Damascus, UNRWA operated 25 schools inside the camps, as well as 26 schools outside the camps.¹⁰⁶

More than 50,000 children were enrolled in 102 UNRWA schools in Syria in the beginning of the 2020-21 school year. Due to the damage and destruction of some UNRWA facilities, some schools operate from Ministry of Education buildings instead.¹⁰⁷ UNRWA reported that 40 % of its classrooms across the country have been destroyed or were deemed unusable.¹⁰⁸

According to information from 2018-2019 retrieved from UNRWA's website, in the five camps in Rural Damascus there were a total of 16 UNRWA schools operating on double shifts, as well as two schools operating in the afternoon from government school facilities. While some schools in the governorate were damaged or destroyed during the conflict, all have since been rehabilitated.¹⁰⁹ In Yarmouk Camp, all of the 16 UNRWA school buildings are in need of major repairs or rebuilding, and children residing in Yarmouk Camp must go to an UNRWA school in Damascus instead, which is enabled by UNRWA-facilitated transportation.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁰ Musaab Balchi: 40

¹⁰¹ AGPS: 29; Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 26

¹⁰² UNRWA, *Health in Syria*, n.d. [url](#)

¹⁰³ AGPS: 29; Musaab Balchi: 42

¹⁰⁴ AGPS: 29; Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law (2nd edition)*, 2020, pp. 224-225

¹⁰⁵ International organisation (b): 8

¹⁰⁶ Numbers provided by UNRWA to DIS in March 2021.

¹⁰⁷ No Lost Generation, *Continued Learning for all Syrian Children and Youth*, n.d., [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰⁸ UNRWA, *Where we work, Syria*, n.d. [url](#); UNRWA, *5th Brussels Conference on Syria: UNRWA calls for support to help Palestine refugees*, 29 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ UNRWA, *Jaramana Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#); UNRWA, *Khan Dunoun Camp*, 1 January 2018, [url](#); UNRWA, *Khan Eshieh Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#); UNRWA, *Qabr Essit Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#); UNRWA, *Sbeineh Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁰ Musaab Balchi: 37; Syria Report (The), *Yarmouk Camp: Daily Security Approval Allows Temporary Return*, 21 September 2021, [url](#); UNRWA, *Mobile Health Clinic Brings a Sign of Hope to the devastated Yarmouk Camp*, 11 January 2021, [url](#); UNRWA, UNRWA

All PRS children, irrespective of registration with GAPAR, have access to primary level education at public schools for free, though the cost of school supplies is not covered, and this can be unaffordable for some.¹¹¹

Musaab Balchi noted that more than 50 % of PRS children in the primary school age do not attend school for reasons including high transportation cost and a decline in educational quality, due to an intake of new teachers, as many have lost their lives or migrated.¹¹²

3.3. Relief and Social Services

Almost 420,000 UNRWA-registered PRS are estimated to be in need of cash assistance from UNRWA in 2021. Of these, 136,000 are considered to be the most vulnerable, being female-headed households, elderly persons, persons with disabilities or orphaned children.¹¹³

In 2018, the financial support provided to the most vulnerable reached 14 USD/person per month, which is 50 % of the food poverty line. In addition, those who did not fall in the most vulnerable category received 9 USD/person per month. The purchasing power of the financial support is reduced due to the devaluation of the Syrian pound (see chapter 6). In response to this, UNRWA reintroduced provision of food baskets twice a year; however, each basket lasts for approximately ten days and thus does not meet the full needs.¹¹⁴

UNRWA stated that its objective was to continue providing financial subsidies to the registered PRS in 2021. The target was to provide a monthly payment of 16 USD/person, while the most vulnerable would receive 27 USD/person per month. To mitigate food insecurity particularly due to the impact of COVID-19 and inflation, UNRWA also planned to distribute food parcels to all PRS in Syria throughout 2021.¹¹⁵

On 22 March 2021, the Syrian Central Bank changed the official exchange rate for UN agencies from 1,250 SYP/USD to 2,500 SYP/USD.¹¹⁶ Three days later, according to AGPS, UNRWA announced that, starting from 11 April 2021, it would increase the monthly support per person from 34,000 SYP to 60,000 SYP for those not deemed most vulnerable, and from 52,000 SYP to 90,000 SYP for the most vulnerable individuals.¹¹⁷ In April 2021, UNRWA announced that it was able to continue key interventions, including cash assistance.¹¹⁸

However, it has not been possible for DIS to find any announcement by UNRWA that mentions the increase in the economic support, and DIS is therefore unable to establish whether the changed currency rate is the reason for the increase, or whether there was an actual increase in the disbursed dollar amount.

UNRWA distributes its financial support to PRS either by cash handouts from one of its relief offices or through bank transfers. The majority of people receive the funds in cash.¹¹⁹

Commissioner-General makes official visit to Syria, reviews Palestine Refugee massive humanitarian needs, 4 November 2020, [url](#); UNRWA, *Yarmouk (Unofficial Camp*)*, 1 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹¹ AGPS: 28; Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law, second edition*, 9 June 2020, p. 225

¹¹² Musaab Balchi: 35, 37

¹¹³ International organisation (a): 3

¹¹⁴ International organisation (a): 7-11; Musaab Balchi: 43

¹¹⁵ UNRWA, *Syria: Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal, 2021, 2021*, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ WFP, *Syria Country Office: Market Price Watch Bulletin (issue 76)*, March 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹⁷ AGPS, *الأونروا تعلن عن تعديل صرف قيمة المساعدة النقدية المقدمة للفلسطينيين* [Syria.. UNRWA announces a change to the value of cash assistance provided to the Palestinians], 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁸ UNRWA, *UNRWA Cash Assistance, A lifeline for Palestine Refugees in Syria*, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ Musaab Balchi: 44

4. The general security situation

The Syrian authorities regained control of all areas in Damascus and Rural Damascus in 2018. Since then there have been no battles and military operations in the two governorates.¹²⁰ In its most recent conflict summary from August 2021, the Carter Center also illustrated that Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates remained under the control of GoS.¹²¹

Iranian-backed militias in both governorates were hit by Israeli airstrikes in 2020 and 2021. The Israeli airstrikes did not target civilian structures, but some collateral damage might have taken place.¹²² By 21 July 2021, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights had recorded seven Israeli strikes on locations in Damascus and Rural Damascus throughout 2021. None of these attacks caused civilian fatalities.¹²³ The Israeli airstrikes on targets in and around Damascus continued with incidents taking place on 19 August and 3 September 2021.¹²⁴

On 4 August 2021, an explosion happened in a military bus carrying Republican Guards, killing one person and injuring three persons. The al-Qaeda loyalist group Hurras al-Din took responsibility for the attack.¹²⁵

On 20 October 2021, two explosive devices blew up a military bus in Damascus, which caused 14 deaths and three further injuries. The attack is the deadliest in the capital since March 2017. The group Qasioun Brigades (*Saraya Qasioun*)¹²⁶ claimed responsibility for the attack.¹²⁷ Similar targeted attacks against military and security service personnel were claimed by the group during 2020.¹²⁸

All UNRWA camps are currently under control of the Syrian authorities, according to a July 2020 report.¹²⁹ An international humanitarian organisation informed DIS in 2020 that the situation was generally calm in the Palestinian refugee camps in Rural Damascus.¹³⁰

¹²⁰ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 11

¹²¹ Carter Center (The), *Monthly Conflict Summary | August 2021*, August 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹²² EASO, *Syria: Security situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 227, 239-240

¹²³ SOHR, *In 200 days | Israeli attack Syrian territory on 14 occasions, destroying over 40 targets and killing nearly 100 people*, 21 July 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁴ BBC, *Syria war: Deadly bomb blasts hit military bus in Damascus*, 20 October 2021, [url](#); Reuters, *Syrian air defenses confront Israeli attack in Damascus - state TV*, 20 August 2021, [url](#); Reuters, *Syria says Israeli air strikes target areas near Damascus*, 3 September 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁵ COAR, *Syria Update: Weekly Political, Economic, and Security Outlook (vol. 4(31))*, [url](#), p. 2

¹²⁶ Some sources indicate that the Qasioun Brigades might not exist and if so, whether they are responsible for these attacks. For more information on the Qasioun Brigades, see the report Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and Socio-Economic Situation in the Governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 15

¹²⁷ Reuters, *Director of SITE says Qasiyun Brigades claims responsibility for Damascus attack*, 20 October 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁸ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and Socio-Economic Situation in the Governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 13

¹²⁹ Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *A New Palestinian Community: Syria's Uprising and Conflict, from the Perspective of the Palestinian Camps*, July 2020, [url](#), p. 33

¹³⁰ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 11; EASO, *Syria: Security situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 225, 237

Militias and foreign military forces are present in the two governorates, including at the UNRWA camps.¹³¹ The GoS only have little influence over these actors, who exert significant influence over the areas under their control.¹³²

4.1. Targeting of civilian Palestinians

There have been reports of PRS being targeted by the Syrian authorities throughout the conflict in all of Syria including in the two governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus. The numbers below covers all of Syria, unless otherwise mentioned.

Data collected by the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) indicate that a minimum of 3,196 PRS have been killed by the Syrian authorities in the period between March 2011 and July 2020. SNHR also recorded 2,663 cases of PRS who continue to be detained or have forcibly disappeared in the same period.¹³³

Similarly, Human Rights Watch has reported cases of detentions and disappearances of 15 PRS from former opposition-held areas in southern Damascus after the areas were re-taken by the GoS in May 2018. The numbers include at least two persons who had signed reconciliation agreements, who were not required for military service and who had not participated in anti-government armed actions.¹³⁴

AGPS reported in April 2021 that more than 620 PRS, including women and children, have died under torture in Syrian prisons and detention centres throughout the conflict, while at least 1,797 PRS have been detained in GoS prisons.¹³⁵

The above-mentioned organisations noted that far from all violations are officially documented.¹³⁶

A report by AGPS covering the period between summer 2018 and March 2021 showed that PRS residing in a number of camps were subjected to interrogation and arbitrary arrest by the Syrian authorities, including threats and demands of bribes to be released.¹³⁷

AGPS and the Palestinian Return Centre also reported of PRS, including children, residing in the Palestinian camps who were abducted and kidnapped by unknown actors as well as summoned, blackmailed, threatened or sent to jail, throughout 2019.¹³⁸

¹³¹ Musaab Balchi: 3-4, 6; Tom Rollins: 3; EASO, *Syria: Security situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 225-226, 237-238

¹³² DIIS, *Mosaics of Power: Fragmentation of the Syrian state since 2011*, 2018, [url](#), pp. 8-9; EASO, *Syria: Security situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 34-35; United States, Department of State, *2020 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria*, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹³³ SNHR, *3,196 Syrian Palestinians Were Killed by Syrian Regime Forces, including 491 Due to Torture, Between March 2011 and July 2020, and 49 Appeared in Caesar Photos*, 29 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 3, 6

¹³⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Syria: Detention, Harassment in Retaken Areas*, 21 May 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁵ AGPS, *Over 1,700 Palestinian Refugees Secretly Held in Syrian Prisons*, 17 April 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁶ SNHR, *3,196 Syrian Palestinians Were Killed by Syrian Regime Forces, including 491 Due to Torture, Between March 2011 and July 2020, and 49 Appeared in Caesar Photos*, 29 July 2020, [url](#), p. 3; Human Rights Watch, *Syria: Detention, Harassment in Retaken Areas*, 21 May 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁷ AGPS, *أوروبا وإعادة لاجئي سورية - فلسطينيو دمشق وريفها نموذجاً [Europe and return of Palestinian refugees from Syria to Damascus and Rural Damascus]*, March 2021, [url](#), pp. 5-7

¹³⁸ AGPS and PRC, *Palestinians of Syria (PRS): Destruction and Reconstruction – Annual Field Report 2019*, n.d., [url](#), pp. 37, 47, 49

PRS living in areas south of Damascus have experienced scrutiny at checkpoints, blackmailing, as well as the arrests of individuals without a known reason and arrests of persons wanted for military service. AGPS has documented a number of arrests in recent years, including the arrest of more than 50 children.¹³⁹

Sources informed of unexploded ordnances (UXOs) in some camps. In Sbeineh Camp and Khan Eshieh Camp, explosive remnants of war (ERW) were identified inside the camp, but these were removed by the GoS in 2017.¹⁴⁰ An international humanitarian organisation explained to DIS in August 2020 that there were concerns of ERWs in Yarmouk.¹⁴¹ Journalist and researcher Tom Rollins was unaware of the status of UXOs in Yarmouk Camp as of January 2021, however, there were reports of a looter being injured by a UXO in late 2020.¹⁴²

Large-scale looting by pro-government militias and Syrian government forces has happened in Yarmouk Camp, while looting on a similar scale did not take place in the other camps.¹⁴³

4.2. Freedom of movement

4.2.1. Movement restrictions

Although the Syrian constitution guarantees freedom of movement for Syrian citizens and GAPAR-registered PRS¹⁴⁴, the GoS has separated areas from one another since the beginning of the conflict, including the Palestinian camps in the Damascus area, by installing manned and unmanned checkpoints. The GoS also deployed army personnel and physical boundaries to strengthen the division of the areas.¹⁴⁵ The Syrian authorities and their allies have generally had control over the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus since May 2018.¹⁴⁶

The camp checkpoints in the two governorates are manned by the Syrian military, in some camps with the assistance of pro-government Palestinian armed factions such as PFLP-GC, Al-Quds Brigade, DFLP, Al-Aqsa Shield Forces, Al-Sa'iqa and a few other smaller Palestinian factions, e.g. the Free Palestine Movement. In addition to this, the pro-Iranian factions, such as the Fatemiyoun Brigade, were present in Jaramana Camp.¹⁴⁷

The number of checkpoints in Damascus has been reduced since 2018; however, there are still checkpoints in Damascus and on main roads connecting different areas, including near the camps, and on main roads to Damascus. PRS will have to pass many checkpoints when moving in areas between camps.¹⁴⁸ Some non-GAPAR-registered PRS will face more restrictions on movement, as the documents in their possession are

¹³⁹ AGPS, *أوروبا وإعادة لاجئي سورية - فلسطينيو دمشق وريفها نموذجاً* [Europe and return of Palestinian refugees from Syria to Damascus and Rural Damascus], March 2021, [url](#), pp. 5-7

¹⁴⁰ UN, *Almost All UNRWA Installations in Yarmouk and Dera'a Camp in Syria Severely Damaged or Destroyed*, 1 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 57

¹⁴² Tom Rollins: 4

¹⁴³ Musaab Balchi: 15; AGPS and PRC, *Palestinians of Syria (PRS): Destruction and Reconstruction – Annual Field Report 2019*, n.d., [url](#), p. 25; Euro-Med Monitor, *Yarmouk Camp: The Abandoned Pain*, July 2018, [url](#), pp. 28-29; MEI, *Talking about water pipes: The fraught reconstruction of Syria's Yarmouk Camp*, 6 May 2020, [url](#);

¹⁴⁴ MFA query response (a)

¹⁴⁵ Musaab Balchi: 53-56

¹⁴⁶ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 11; BBC, *Syria war: Army takes full control of Damascus after ousting IS*, 21 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ Musaab Balchi: 3-6

¹⁴⁸ Musaab Balchi: 2; International organisation (b): 18; Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 16; Denmark, DIS and DRC, *Syria: Security Situation in Damascus Province and Issues Regarding Return to Syria*, February 2019, [url](#), p. 13

not accepted at all checkpoints. They are assessed by the international organisation to risk detention as their stay in Syria might be considered illegal.¹⁴⁹

4.2.2. Location of camp checkpoints

According to information provided by the international organisation in February 2021, three of the camps in Damascus and Rural Damascus have guarded checkpoints at the entrances; namely Yarmouk, Khan Eshieh and Sbeineh.¹⁵⁰ Concordantly, Musaab Balchi mentioned in January 2021 that checkpoints are found in front of Yarmouk and Sbeineh Camps. However, he explained that there also is a checkpoint in front of Qabr Essit Camp, while there is no checkpoint in front of Khan Eshieh Camp.¹⁵¹

To enter Yarmouk Camp, one must go through the checkpoint at Bateekha Roundabout in the northern part of the camp.¹⁵²

The consulted sources agreed that there were no checkpoints in front of the two camps of Jaramana and Khan Dunoun, but noted that there are checkpoints in areas and roads around all camps that one must go through to reach the camps.¹⁵³ Similarly, AGPS informed that many checkpoints are found in the bigger area of Jaramana and at the entrance of the town. An individual living in this area must not have any security issues, as it is necessary to go through many checkpoints when moving around outside the camp.¹⁵⁴

4.2.3. Procedures at camp checkpoints

Different procedures apply depending on whether PRS want to visit a camp or reside in one. This chapter focuses on visits (see chapter 5 for the procedures for moving).

With the exception of Yarmouk Camp, it is possible for PRS to visit the camps without obtaining permission or a security clearance.^{155, 156} Visits to Yarmouk can only take place if the following three requirements are met¹⁵⁷:

- 1) Documentation proving ownership or another form of attachment to a house in the camp (e.g. electricity bill)
- 2) ID card
- 3) Obtaining security check

The security check will take place at the checkpoint in front of the camp. A person who is wanted will be detained, whereas relatives of a wanted person will be denied access and may in some cases be subject to detention. Mainly first-degree relatives (i.e. parents and siblings) risk detention; however, second-degree relatives of a high-profiled wanted person are also at risk of being detained, according to Musaab Balchi.¹⁵⁸

¹⁴⁹ International organisation (b): 8-9

¹⁵⁰ International organisation (b): 18

¹⁵¹ Musaab Balchi: 3

¹⁵² Musaab Balchi: 6; Tom Rollins: 2

¹⁵³ International organisation (b): 18; Musaab Balchi: 3, 55

¹⁵⁴ AGPS: 23

¹⁵⁵ Musaab Balchi: 13

¹⁵⁶ Some sources refer to the security clearance as a security permit. For the sake of coherence, the report will only use the phrase security clearance. A security check is the process by which the actor checks whether a given person is wanted, which may result in issuing a document referred to as a security clearance.

¹⁵⁷ Musaab Balchi: 19

¹⁵⁸ Musaab Balchi: 20

Generally, persons passing a camp checkpoint will be required to show an ID card at the entrance and exit of the camp. However, the international organisation noted that there are no standard procedures for providing documents at the entrance and these may vary or change from time to time, often at the discretion of the security official present.¹⁵⁹

In Sbeineh Camp, residents have not been allowed to return if they had family members abroad unless they presented a certified document issued by the Syrian Immigration Directorate as a proof of their family members' legal exit of Syria, according to AGPS report of March 2021.¹⁶⁰ The report from AGPS does not contain information about whether the same requirement pertains to other camps.

4.2.4. Movement outside of camps

There are several gatherings or communities with a large number of PRS in and around Damascus and Rural Damascus. Whilst this report will not address movement restrictions in all areas where PRS reside, the area of Qudsaya, the largest in terms of PRS residents, will be addressed, as well as relevant information on the towns of Yalda, Babila and Beit Sahem, due to movement restrictions imposed on PRS in those places.

Qudsaya

Qudsaya is located north-west of Damascus in Rural Damascus governorate.¹⁶¹ The GoS took control of the town in October 2016, following several evacuation agreements with AOGs.¹⁶² As of January 2021, more than 21,500 PRS were registered in Qudsaya, according to figures provided by UNRWA.¹⁶³

There were heavily manned checkpoints in Qudsaya in 2018 and 2019, and movement in and out of the town was controlled by GoS forces and allies.¹⁶⁴ According to APGS, the tightened security and heavy deployment of security forces in and around Qudsaya continued, and there were examples of arrests at government checkpoints in Qudsaya.¹⁶⁵

Yalda, Babila and Beit Sahem

The neighbouring towns of Yalda, Babila and Beit Sahem are located in Rural Damascus governorate, south of Damascus and immediately east of Yarmouk.¹⁶⁶ The towns were controlled by AOGs until May 2018, where a series of reconciliation and evacuation agreements allowed for the GoS to take control of them.¹⁶⁷

Due to checkpoints, many PRS returning to these areas face challenges in relation to freedom of movement. This is particularly true for those PRS who are not registered with GAPAR. As far as the international

¹⁵⁹ International organisation (b): 19

¹⁶⁰ AGPS, *أوروبا وإعادة لاجئي سورية - فلسطينيو دمشق وريفها نموذجاً* [Europe and return of Palestinian refugees from Syria to Damascus and Rural Damascus], March 2021, [url](#), pp. 5-6

¹⁶¹ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: Rural Damascus Governorate*, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶² EASO, *Syria: Exercise of authority in recaptured areas*, January 2020, [url](#), p. 24; Sweden, Lifos, *Syrien: Evakueringar från tidigare rebellkontrollerade områden* [Syria: Evacuations from former rebel-held areas], 1 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 23-24

¹⁶³ Numbers provided by UNRWA to DIS in January 2021

¹⁶⁴ EASO, *Syria: Exercise of authority in recaptured areas*, January 2020, [url](#), p. 25

¹⁶⁵ AGPS, *Situation of Palestinian Refugees in Qudsaya Town Exacerbated by Security Sweeps*, 17 October 2020, [url](#); AGPS, *أوروبا وإعادة لاجئي سورية - فلسطينيو دمشق وريفها نموذجاً* [Europe and return of Palestinian refugees from Syria to Damascus and Rural Damascus], March 2021, [url](#), pp. 7-8

¹⁶⁶ UNOCHA, *Babella Sub-District*, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁷ Denmark, DIS and DRC, *Syria: Security Situation in Damascus City and Yarmouk*, August 2018, [url](#), pp. 7-8; Sweden, Lifos, *Syrien: Evakueringar från tidigare rebellkontrollerade områden* [Syria: Evacuations from former rebel-held areas], 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 26; Syria Direct, *Rebels begin evacuating final opposition-held districts in Syrian capital*, 3 May 2018, [url](#)

organisation is aware, GAPAR-registered PRS will generally possess ID cards and would not face problems crossing a checkpoint, if they are not wanted by the authorities or any other entity present.¹⁶⁸

The international organisation stated that residents in Yalda and Babila were required to apply for a security clearance to enter and exit these areas.¹⁶⁹ A November 2020 article in Al-Quds Al-Arabi confirms this information and adds that Beit Sahem is subject to the same restrictions, and that residents in these areas need a “certificate of good conduct” to enter Damascus. The article also mentions that PRS from Damascus are refused entry to towns south of Damascus, despite having entered into reconciliation agreements.¹⁷⁰

In order to obtain a security clearance to leave Yalda, Babila and Beit Sahem, the individual must present a residence permit, proof of ownership of property or a rental agreement and a list of family members. Once these requirements are met and family members have been vetted by the security services present, the application will be forwarded to the Palestine Branch for approval and issuance of a security clearance.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ International organisation (b): 20

¹⁶⁹ International organisation (b): 20

¹⁷⁰ Al-Quds Al-Arabi, *النظام السوري يشترط على اللاجئين الفلسطينيين «شهادة حسن سلوك» وموافقة أمنية من فرع فلسطين لدخول دمشق* [The Syrian regime demands Palestinian refugees to have a «certificate of good conduct» and a security approval to enter Damascus], 13 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ AGPS, *أوروبا وإعادة لاجئي سورية - فلسطينيو دمشق وريفها نموذجاً* [Europe and return of Palestinian refugees from Syria to Damascus and Rural Damascus], March 2021, [url](#), pp. 6-7

5. Housing, land and property

The Syrian authorities allow PRS to reside inside as well as outside UNRWA camps, regardless of their registration status with GAPAR. However, similar to Syrian citizens, they must obtain a security clearance when moving to a new place.¹⁷²

The camps and areas outside of camps differ in terms of residency regulations. This chapter focuses on the overall housing situation for PRS in Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates, with a particular focus on the six camps, and should be read in conjunction with chapter 6.2. addressing the economic aspects of housing.

5.1. General regulations and procedures

PRS who are registered with GAPAR can both rent and own property.¹⁷³

Non-GAPAR-registered PRS can rent property.¹⁷⁴ However, sources disagreed as to whether they could own property as well. According to a query response from the Danish MFA dated 22 September 2021, non-GAPAR-registered PRS can own property under the conditions found in Law No. 11 of 2011 (as amended in 2021), which regulates foreign ownership of properties in Syria.¹⁷⁵ Contrarily, AGPS and Tom Rollins explained that non-GAPAR-registered PRS were unable to own property altogether.¹⁷⁶

In a resolution issued by the Syrian Prime Minister in 2013, it is explicitly stated that GAPAR-registered PRS does not fall under Law No. 11 of 2011.¹⁷⁷ However, two sources provided contrasting information claiming that property ownership for GAPAR-registered PRS is actually governed by Law No. 11 of 2011.¹⁷⁸

Irrespectively, GAPAR-registered PRS are still subject to property ownership restrictions, as they may only register one residential property in the Real Estate Registry.¹⁷⁹ The same limitation is found in Article 1(a) of Law No. 11 of 2011, which additionally requires that the size of the property is minimum 140 m² and that the foreigner must be married.¹⁸⁰

It is de facto possible for PRS to own more than one house, however, the additional properties cannot be registered at the Real Estate Registry, which issues title deeds (*tabu* in Arabic).¹⁸¹ The title deed is the ownership document with the ‘most’ legal value.¹⁸² Instead, ownership would happen through court rulings, sharecropping on agricultural lands, irrevocable power of attorney and purchase contracts. The different

¹⁷² AGPS: 14; MFA query response (a); Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), pp. 22, 57; Norway, Landinfo, *Palestinske flyktninger i Syria: Identitetsdokumenter [Palestinian Refugees in Syria: Identity Documents]*, 23 November 2016, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁷³ AGPS: 12; MFA query response (a); Musaab Balchi: 7; Tom Rollins: 19; Syrian Arab Republic, eGov.sy, *ترخيص عقاري: تملك الفلسطينيين [Property ownership document: Palestinian ownership]*, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ AGPS: 13; MFA query response (a); Tom Rollins: 19

¹⁷⁵ MFA query response (a)

¹⁷⁶ AGPS: 13; Tom Rollins 19

¹⁷⁷ MFA query response (a); GAPAR, /2484 / قرار رقم [Decision No. 2484], 9 October 2013, [url](#); PAX, *Legal Obstacles to Housing, Land and Property Rights in Syria*, 6 March 2019, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁷⁸ Tom Rollins: 19; eGov.sy, *ترخيص عقاري: تملك الفلسطينيين [Property ownership document: Palestinian ownership]*, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷⁹ AGPS: 12; MFA query response (a); PAX, *Violations of Housing, Land and Property Rights: An Obstacle to Peace in Syria*, March 2020, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁸⁰ Syrian Arab Republic, Parliament, *القانون 11 عام 2011 [Law No. 11 of 2011]*, 10 April 2011, [url](#)

¹⁸¹ MFA query response (a)

¹⁸² MFA query response (a); Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Reclaiming Home: The struggle for socially just housing, land and property rights in Syria, Iraq and Libya*, 2019, [url](#), pp. 34-36; Syria Report (The), *Explained: Types of Real Estate Documents*, 30 June 2021, [url](#)

ownership models are used in and around all Palestinian camps in Syria.¹⁸³ These forms of ownership carry less rights, for instance if the property is being expropriated or has been destroyed.¹⁸⁴

Since 2011, more than 40 laws relating to housing, land and property have been enacted.¹⁸⁵ The Syrian authorities can legally confiscate property through many of these laws, including Law No. 19 of 2012 (counterterrorism)¹⁸⁶, Law No. 10 of 2018 (re-zoning)¹⁸⁷ and Law No. 39 of 2019 (evading military service).¹⁸⁸ Confiscations of property has happened in several camps, including Yarmouk and Khan Eshieh.¹⁸⁹

Law No. 10 of 2018 has been widely criticised, e.g. for undermining the rights of people with informal property documents.¹⁹⁰ Many houses in the greater Damascus area, including in and around the camps of Jaramana and Yarmouk, have been built informally, meaning that the residents are not legal owners but have used water and electricity bills to show that their properties existed.¹⁹¹

The most common way of buying or renting property is through a real estate agent. It is also possible to obtain property through personal contacts and social media.¹⁹² AGPS explained that many real estate agents are secretly recruited by the security branches, and will ask about the reason for moving.¹⁹³

Female-headed households face particular difficulties in finding residency, as the pre-war legislation required the presence of a male head of household to own a house.¹⁹⁴ If the husband is deceased or missing, the woman will need their marriage certificate, his ID card as well as his death certificate in order to claim her inheritance and family home.¹⁹⁵ According to Tom Rollins, the regulations regarding female ownership might have been relaxed in recent years, but the procedure remains complicated.¹⁹⁶

Non-GAPAR-registered PRS who have applied for extension of their tourist residency (see chapter 1) must inform the Immigration and Passports Department within three days if they change their address in Syria.¹⁹⁷

¹⁸³ AGPS: 12; Tom Rollins: 19; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Reclaiming Home: The struggle for socially just housing, land and property rights in Syria, Iraq and Libya*, 2019, [url](#), pp. 34-36; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Palestinians of Syria: Violations of Rights and Identity Challenges*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 42; Syria Report (The), *Explained: Types of Real Estate Documents*, 30 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴ PAX, *Violations of Housing, Land and Property Rights: An Obstacle to Peace in Syria*, March 2020, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁸⁵ Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, 21 January 2021, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁸⁶ Musaab Balchi: 9; PAX, *Legal Obstacles to Housing, Land and Property Rights in Syria*, 6 March 2019, [url](#), pp. 8-9

¹⁸⁷ ACPS and PRC, *Palestinians of Syria (PRS): Destruction and Reconstruction – Annual Field Report 2019*, n.d., [url](#), p. 8; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Palestinians of Syria: Violations of Rights and Identity Challenges*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 40; PAX, *Legal Obstacles to Housing, Land and Property Rights in Syria*, 6 March 2019, [url](#), pp. 9-13

¹⁸⁸ Syria Report (The), *Amendment to Military Service Law Raises Serious Concerns Over Syrians' Real Estate Rights*, 17 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹ Al Jazeera, *'Afraid of return': Palestinians fearful of life in Yarmouk camp*, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Reclaiming Home: The struggle for socially just housing, land and property rights in Syria, Iraq and Libya*, 2019, [url](#), p. 9; Human Rights Watch, *Q&A: Syria's New Property Law*, 29 May 2018, [url](#); Syria Report (The), *Displace and Dispossess: How Property Laws Ensure Those Displaced by War Can't Return*, 16 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹¹ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Reclaiming Home: The struggle for socially just housing, land and property rights in Syria, Iraq and Libya*, 2019, [url](#), p. 34; MEI, *Talking about water pipes: The fraught reconstruction of Syria's Yarmouk Camp*, 6 May 2020, [url](#); Syria Report (The), *Explained: Informal Housing Areas in Damascus*, 17 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹² AGPS: 18; Musaab Balchi: 8

¹⁹³ AGPS: 18

¹⁹⁴ Tom Rollins: 21

¹⁹⁵ Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, 21 January 2021, [url](#), p. 14; New Humanitarian (The), *Who pays the price for Syria's broken documentation system?*, 3 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶ Tom Rollins: 21

¹⁹⁷ MFA query response (a)

Security clearance

In the process of moving anywhere in the two governorates, it is necessary to obtain a security clearance. This is required even when moving from one apartment into a neighbouring apartment.¹⁹⁸ Non-GAPAR-registered PRS also need a security clearance if they rent or buy a property.¹⁹⁹

Syrians or PRS returning to his/her own house would not need a specific security clearance for moving into the house if it is habitable and the ownership can be proven.²⁰⁰

In a query response from the Danish MFA dated 22 September 2021, it is stated that PRS returning to areas that have been destroyed or are inhabitable need a license or security clearance from the security office in charge of the area/camp to be allowed to return.²⁰¹ Musaab Balchi explained that in certain areas, such as Khan Eshieh Camp, Sbeineh Camp and the gathering of Huseiniyah, persons returning to their own property would also need a security clearance.²⁰² Similarly, a security clearance is needed to return to Yarmouk Camp (see chapter 5.3).

For sales of property, the security clearance is needed before the transaction can be registered with the authorities. To obtain the approval, one would have to apply at Bureau of National Security or the intelligence services. Most often, the application would be handled by the local branch of the Political Security Service.²⁰³

When renting a property, the security clearance is obtained after the rental contract is registered in the public registers.²⁰⁴ The rental contract should be submitted to the municipality or a Citizen Service Center, which then sends the contract together with copies of ID cards²⁰⁵ of both the property owner and the tenants to the police. The police conducts a security check in addition to consulting the Political Security Service before a security clearance can be given.²⁰⁶

Persons who were either loyal to the Syrian government or managed to stay neutral throughout the conflict are more likely to obtain a security clearance. Many of the persons who returned to Sbeineh Camp for example are families of pro-government fighters.²⁰⁷ According to sources in the real estate market who spoke to the pro-opposition news outlet Enab Baladi, an estimated 60 % of security clearance applications are being rejected. In many cases, rejections happen because the property owner is sought after by the authorities on security grounds or simply because the person is outside of Syria.²⁰⁸

¹⁹⁸ AGPS: 14; International organisation (b): 5; MFA query response (a); Tom Rollins: 25; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Palestinians of Syria: Violations of Rights and Identity Challenges*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 31; PAX, *Legal Obstacles to Housing, Land and Property Rights in Syria*, 6 March 2019, [url](#), p. 6; Syria Report (The), *Explained: Security Approvals and Infringements on Property Rights*, 23 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ MFA query response (a)

²⁰⁰ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 23

²⁰¹ MFA query response (a)

²⁰² Musaab Balchi: 10

²⁰³ AGPS: 15; PAX, *Legal Obstacles to Housing, Land and Property Rights in Syria*, 6 March 2019, [url](#), p. 6; Syria Report (The), *Explained: Security Approvals and Infringements on Property Rights*, 23 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁴ Before the issuance of the Minister of Interior's Resolution No. 2744 of 2018, the security clearance was to be obtained prior to registering the rental contract with the authorities (MFA query response (a); Syria Report (The), *Explained: Security Approvals and Infringements on Property Rights*, 23 September 2020, [url](#)).

²⁰⁵ For non-GAPAR-registered PRS, travel documents will be submitted instead of an ID card (MFA query response (a)).

²⁰⁶ AGPS: 14-15; MFA query response (a); PAX, *Legal Obstacles to Housing, Land and Property Rights in Syria*, 6 March 2019, [url](#), p. 6; Syria Report (The), *Explained: Security Approvals and Infringements on Property Rights*, 23 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁷ Musaab Balchi: 12

²⁰⁸ Enab Baladi, "Security clearance"... *Property protection tool or disruption to citizens' lives*, 17 July 2020, [url](#)

AGPS told DIS in March 2021 that the Syrian security forces occasionally conduct house raids in order to check whether the residents have permission to live in that property. A person without the required security clearance would be taken to the security branch for interrogation.²⁰⁹

Individuals who have security issues with the Syrian authorities do not present themselves to the authorities to obtain a security clearance, as they fear being detained. Not obtaining a security clearance consequently means that a person is unable to return to the area s/he left.²¹⁰

5.2. Regulations in the camps in Rural Damascus

PRS can move into any of the five official UNRWA camps (Jaramana, Khan Dunoun, Khan Eshieh, Qabr Essit and Sbeineh) if a security clearance has been granted. As far as Yarmouk is concerned, the process of moving into the camp in order to reside there is different. Low housing stocks and high housing prices likely hinder the actual possibility of moving into the camps. The camps that have witnessed battles generally have a lower housing stock than those that were unaffected by armed conflict.²¹¹

After the establishment of the camps, the Syrian authorities gave GAPAR-registered PRS permission to build on a plot of land in one of the camps. However, the land itself is not owned by the PRS.²¹²

5.3. Regulations in Yarmouk Camp

Yarmouk Camp was rendered a restricted zone following the GoS takeover in May 2018. Only 100-200 persons, mostly elderly and minors, had remained inside the camp. Initially, people were not allowed to move back, but could apply for a permission at the Palestine Branch of the Military Intelligence Service to check on their properties.²¹³

Later, an unspecified number of families who were either affiliated or sympathising with Palestinians factions (e.g. PFLP-GC), people with ties to the security sector and public sector employees were allowed to return to the camp, while others were barred from this. Today, several hundred people have been granted permission to return to Yarmouk Camp.²¹⁴ The international organisation noted that some people only decided to return as housing expenses outside of the camp became unaffordable.²¹⁵

The Governorate of Damascus issued an organisational plan in June 2020 that was set to govern the future reconstruction of the camp. The organisational plan was postponed in August 2020 due to objections from the community concerning reconstruction and re-zoning of the camp; however, the plan has not been annulled.²¹⁶

²⁰⁹ AGPS: 15-16

²¹⁰ Musaab Balchi: 11

²¹¹ Tom Rollins: 29

²¹² International organisation (b): 4

²¹³ Tom Rollins: 9; EASO, *Syria: Targeting of individuals*, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 90-91

²¹⁴ Tom Rollins: 1, 3; ACPS and PRC, *Palestinians of Syria (PRS): Destruction and Reconstruction – Annual Field Report 2019*, n.d., [url](#), p. 23; PAX, *Violations of Housing, Land and Property Rights: An Obstacle to Peace in Syria*, March 2020, [url](#), p. 7; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Palestinians of Syria: Violations of Rights and Identity Challenges*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 42

²¹⁵ International organisation (b): 15

²¹⁶ Tom Rollins: 10-11; AGPS: 21; SNHR, *3,196 Syrian Palestinians Were Killed by Syrian Regime Forces, including 491 Due to Torture, Between March 2011 and July 2020, and 49 Appeared in Caesar Photos*, 29 July 2020, [url](#), p. 18

Since the beginning of 2021, the GoS has initiated a process of allowing PRS to return to Yarmouk Camp. However, in order to do so, the following three criteria must be met:²¹⁷

- 1) Obtaining a security clearance
- 2) Providing a proof of ownership/right of use of property
- 3) Having a statement noting that your house is habitable, based on a study by engineers from the Yarmouk Services Department²¹⁸

Some sources reported that additional documents must be provided, such as a family book, ID cards, family civil registration extract, and water and electricity clearance.²¹⁹ According to an article in The Syria Report, a fee of 8,000 SYP is also mandated.²²⁰

On 6 February 2021, the governor of Damascus stated that 500 out of 1,200 official requests to return to Yarmouk Camp had been approved. However, activists have criticised the credibility of these numbers, stating that the actual number of approvals are 50 or less.²²¹ The secretary-general of the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front claimed in July 2021 that around 700 families had returned to the camp.²²²

The head of PFLP-GC announced in September 2021 that president Assad had ordered that former residents of Yarmouk Camp could return without restrictions or conditions. The Palestinian Refugees Portal reported that following the statement of the president, residents of Yarmouk could enter the camp to remove rubble from their homes and shops between the 10 September and 5 October 2021. As a condition for entering the camp, residents must hand over their personal ID to the Syrian security officials present at the camp entrance and will be granted access to the camp for the defined period with the purpose of rubble removal. Persons who were unable to present official documentation of real estate ownership were prohibited entry.²²³

Security clearance for Yarmouk

A PRS must apply at the Palestine Branch of the Military Intelligence to obtain a security clearance to be allowed to move into Yarmouk Camp.²²⁴ It has not been possible for DIS to obtain more specific information on the process of obtaining a security clearance to be allowed to reside in the camp.

Proof of ownership/right of use of property

There are different legal ways of obtaining house ownership in Syria (see chapter 5.1.), which also applies to the PRS camps, including Yarmouk.

²¹⁷ Musaab Balchi: 21; Tom Rollins: 12

²¹⁸ Tom Rollins: 16

²¹⁹ Musaab Balchi: 21; Syria Report (The), *Yarmouk Camp: the Right of Return?*, 10 February 2021, [url](#); Syria Report (The), *A Return to the Yarmouk Camp, Under Certain Conditions*, 18 November 2020, [url](#)

²²⁰ Syria Report (The), *Yarmouk Camp: Daily Security Approval Allows Temporary Return*, 21 September 2021, [url](#)

²²¹ Musaab Balchi: 28; Syria Report (the), *Yarmouk Camp: the Right of Return?*, 10 February 2021, [url](#)

²²² Enab Baladi, *عودة 700 عائلة إلى مخيم "اليرموك" دون تأمين الخدمات الأساسية* [Return of 700 families to "Yarmouk" camp without providing basic services], 19 July 2021, [url](#)

²²³ AGPS, *الموافقة على دخول أهالي مخيم اليرموك إلى منازلهم لتنظيفها وإزالة الركام*, 10 September 2021, [url](#); COAR, *Syria Update: Weekly Political, Economic, and Security Outlook (vol. 4(37))*, 27 September 2021, [url](#), p. 4 Palestinian Refugees Portal, *قرار غير واضح.. أقل من شهر لأهالي مخيم اليرموك لإزالة أنقاض منازلهم* [An Unclear decision. Less than a month for the people of Yarmouk camp to remove the rubble of their homes], 9 September 2021, [url](#)

²²⁴ Tom Rollins: 14; Enab Baladi, *Palestinian families submit property documents to Syrian regime's security apparatus to allow their return to Yarmouk camp*, 5 October 2020, [url](#)

Tom Rollins was not aware of whether a rental contract would suffice as proof of use of property. However, he pointed out that the wording suggested that a rental contract would not suffice as a proof of ownership.²²⁵ The initial part of Yarmouk camp (the ‘old camp’) is built on officially procured land. Subsequent construction outside of the initial designated camp area is largely built informally resulting in informal ownership of properties. Some residents have court orders or electricity bills while others may never have regularised property ownership with the authorities.²²⁶ Thus, the residents might not be able to claim ownership and return to their properties.²²⁷

In addition, some PRS who lived in Yarmouk Camp faced difficulties proving ownership of their property as leases of the land were registered in GAPAR’s land registry, which was physically located in the buildings of the municipality. As the building was located in a frontline conflict area, it is unclear how much of the registry remains intact.²²⁸ According to Musaab Balchi, this destroyed land registry makes it impossible for PRS to have housing deeds reissued.²²⁹

Habitability of houses

Over 60 % of the buildings in Yarmouk Camp are either partially or totally destroyed, according to AGPS and Palestinian Return Centre.²³⁰ In July 2020, SNHR estimated that as much as 80 % of the buildings in Yarmouk Camp were partially or completely destroyed.²³¹

The reconstruction of housing has been very limited. It requires specialised personnel, which had not been allowed entry to the camp²³², and government funding for rehabilitation to civilians has mostly been directed to areas considered pro-government.²³³ In September 2021, residents were allowed temporary entry into the camp to assist with rubble removal and water and electricity rehabilitation would reportedly be initiated in October 2021.²³⁴

The number of habitable houses in Yarmouk has been further limited due to looting.²³⁵ The looting has allegedly been perpetrated by pro-government militias and is still ongoing, albeit on a smaller scale in 2021 due to government interference.²³⁶ Other reports indicate that GoS forces have also been conducting large-scale looting in Yarmouk.²³⁷

²²⁵ Tom Rollins: 15

²²⁶ MEI, *Talking about water pipes: The fraught reconstruction of Syria’s Yarmouk Camp*, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

²²⁷ Middle East Eye, *Palestinians’ homes stolen once again as Assad eyes Syria’s Yarmouk camp*, 4 August 2020, [url](#)

²²⁸ Tom Rollins: 7, 11; Enab Baladi, *Despite promises... Major difficulties deny Yarmouk Camp’s residents’ return and proof of ownership*, 12 June 2020, [url](#)

²²⁹ Musaab Balchi: 22

²³⁰ ACPS and PRC, *Palestinians of Syria (PRS): Destruction and Reconstruction – Annual Field Report 2019*, n.d., [url](#), p. 8

²³¹ SNHR, *3,196 Syrian Palestinians Were Killed by Syrian Regime Forces, including 491 Due to Torture, Between March 2011 and July 2020, and 49 Appeared in Caesar Photos*, 29 July 2020, [url](#), p. 19

²³² Musaab Balchi: 24

²³³ Guardian (The), *Revealed: Syrians pay tax to rebuild after war but see little benefit*, 24 May 2021, [url](#)

²³⁴ Syria Report (The), *Yarmouk Camp: Daily Security Approval Allows Temporary Return*, 21 September 2021, [url](#)

²³⁵ Musaab Balchi: 29; Tom Rollins: 17

²³⁶ AGPS: 14; Musaab Balchi: 27-29; Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 11

²³⁷ SJAC, *Seeking Justice for Property Theft in Yarmouk*, 7 June 2018, [url](#); SNHR, *3,196 Syrian Palestinians Were Killed by Syrian Regime Forces, including 491 Due to Torture, Between March 2011 and July 2020, and 49 Appeared in Caesar Photos*, 29 July 2020, [url](#), p. 16

According to Tom Rollins, the Syrian authorities sometimes arbitrarily classified a property as inhabitable even if it were structurally sound.²³⁸ AGPS reported that some returnees have been asked for up to 30,000 SYP to have a positive habitability statement issued.²³⁹

5.4. Regulations outside the camps

A security clearance is also required to reside in all other areas in Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates.²⁴⁰

PRS who lived in a former opposition-held area, such as Yarmouk Camp, would most likely face more difficulties in obtaining a security clearance than those who come from areas controlled by the GoS throughout the conflict.²⁴¹

Some areas are more difficult to obtain permission to settle in than others due to the sectarian make-up of Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates. For example, according to Musaab Balchi, it is impossible for a PRS to get a security clearance in order to settle in the Alawi-majority area of Mezzeh 86.²⁴²

²³⁸ Tom Rollins: 12

²³⁹ AGPS, *Palestinian Families Wishing to Return to Yarmouk Camp Blackmailed*, 31 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁰ MFA query response (a); Tom Rollins: 25; Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), pp. 22-23

²⁴¹ AGPS: 17; Tom Rollins: 25

²⁴² Musaab Balchi: 33

6. Economic situation of Palestinian refugees

For information on the general economic situation in Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates, see the brief reports '[Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus](#)' and '[Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the government-controlled areas](#)' issued by DIS in October 2020, as well as the EASO report '[Syria: Socio-economic situation: Damascus city](#)' from April 2021.

In September 2021, the informal exchange rate of the Syrian pound (SYP) reached 3,443 SYP/USD, which represents a year-on-year depreciation of 36 %. The official exchange rate stood at 2,500 SYP/USD after it was devalued by the Syrian Central Bank from 1,250 SYP/USD in April 2021.²⁴³ The lower currency rate vis-à-vis the US Dollar has made imported items, e.g. some food products, more expensive.²⁴⁴

In August 2021, the highest public salary was 120,360 SYP/month²⁴⁵, while by September 2021 an unskilled labourer earned on average 10,667 SYP/day in Damascus governorate and 10,444 SYP/day in Rural Damascus governorate.²⁴⁶ Unskilled labourers are often hired on a daily basis, and given the high unemployment rate, their income is often dependent on a fewer working days than a public sector employee.²⁴⁷

Three different sources estimated the average cost of living in Damascus for a family of five to be around 600,000-700,000 SYP per month in 2020 and early 2021.²⁴⁸ Many PRS rely on remittances from abroad in order to cover their cost of living. Other coping strategies are co-living in one property, eating less food, taking children out of school, marrying underage daughters off and joining armed groups.²⁴⁹

6.1. Access to work

PRS who are registered with GAPAR do not need a work permit and can access all jobs in the public and private sector, except for a few very high-ranking positions within the public sector.²⁵⁰ In order to obtain a job in the public sector, it is required to get a security clearance. With every new job contract follows the need for a new security clearance.²⁵¹

²⁴³ WFP, *Syria Country Office: Market Price Watch Bulletin (issue 77)*, April 2021, [url](#), p. 4; WFP, *Syria Country Office: Market Price Watch Bulletin (issue 82)*, September 2021, [url](#), p. 4

²⁴⁴ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the government-controlled areas*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 16; Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, *Syrian Regime No Longer Able to Provide for Loyalists*, 4 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁵ COAR, *Syria Update: Weekly Political, Economic, and Security Outlook (vol. 4(28))*, 19 July 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁴⁶ WFP, *Syria Country Office: Market Price Watch Bulletin: August 2021 (issue 82)*, September 2021, [url](#), p. 8

²⁴⁷ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Tartous, Latakia and Quneitra*, December 2020, [url](#), p. 19

²⁴⁸ AGPS: 19; COAR, *Syria Update: Weekly Political, Economic, and Security Outlook (vol. 4(8))*, 22 February 2021, [url](#), p. 5; Syrian Law Journal, *Legal Briefing – January 2021*, 13 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁹ International organisation (b): 6, 15; Musaab Balchi: 45, 48; Tom Rollins: 20; Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Tartous, Latakia and Quneitra*, December 2020, [url](#), p. 18

²⁵⁰ International organisation (b): 3; MFA query response (a); Musaab Balchi: 45; Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law (2nd edition)*, 2020, p. 223; BADIL, *Survey of Palestinians Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, 2016-2018*, n.d., [url](#), p. 90; Norway, Landinfo, *Palestinske flyktninger i Syria: Identitetsdokumenter [Palestinian Refugees in Syria: Identity Documents]*, 23 November 2016, [url](#), p. 7; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Palestinians of Syria: Violations of Rights and Identity Challenges*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 20; Syrian Arab Republic, Parliament, *القانون 50 لعام 2004 [Law No. 50 of 2004]*, 6 December 2004, [url](#)

²⁵¹ AGPS: 6

Non-GAPAR-registered PRS need to obtain a work permit to work legally.²⁵² Contrasting information is found as to whether public sector jobs are available for those PRS who are not registered with GAPAR. Pursuant to Article 7 in the 2004 Syrian law on employment in the public sector, citizens of Arab countries are allowed to work in the public sector provided the prime minister deems it necessary.²⁵³ Yet, according to two sources, this group is prohibited from working in the public sector²⁵⁴, whereas a third source informed DIS that public sector jobs are available to those who arrived from Jordan and Egypt in 1967, but not to the PRS who came from Jordan in 1970.²⁵⁵

Unemployment in Syria is widespread. The official unemployment rate for Damascus was 30 % in February 2021; however, exact data on employment is unreliable and difficult to collect. Different sources estimated the overall unemployment rate in Syria to be between 40 % and 60 in 2014 and 2015.²⁵⁶ In August 2021, a WFP survey showed that of the surveyed households across Syria, 18 % had lost more than half of their monthly income in that month, while the figures peaked in Rural Damascus reaching 23 %.²⁵⁷

It is generally harder for women in Syria to find a job. Therefore, female-headed households often turn to assistance from relatives, income from their children or engage in sexual relationships as coping strategies.²⁵⁸

6.2. Access to housing

The high housing prices makes it difficult for many PRS as well as Syrians to afford accommodation. Prices differ from area to area, with the cheapest rental accommodation being around 75,000-150,000 SYP/month in the beginning of 2021.²⁵⁹ According to a June 2020 article in Syria Times, a government-affiliated newspaper, the cost of buying a small apartment in suburbs close to Damascus is around 60 million SYP.²⁶⁰

One factor influencing the price in a given area is the number of checkpoints.²⁶¹ Due to local power dynamics, a valid security clearance issued by one government entity may not be accepted at all checkpoints, limiting the mobility of civilians.²⁶²

The housing costs have increased due to the high demand of housing in the camps that experienced the least destruction. For example, Jaramana Camp experienced a steep increase in rent prices after a large number of PRS from Yarmouk Camp and surrounding areas took refuge there.²⁶³

²⁵² AGPS: 4; MFA query response (a); Austria, BFA, *Fact Finding Mission Report: Syrien [Fact-finding mission report: Syria]*, August 2017, [url](#), p. 24; Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law (2nd edition)*, 2020, p. 225

²⁵³ MFA query response (a); Syrian Arab Republic, Parliament, *القانون 50 لعام 2004 [Law No. 50 of 2004]*, 6 December 2004, [url](#)

²⁵⁴ ACAPS, *Palestinians from Syria: Syria Needs Analysis Project*, March 2014, [url](#), pp. 4-5; Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law (2nd edition)*, 2020, p. 224-225

²⁵⁵ AGPS: 6, 9

²⁵⁶ Musaab Balchi: 45; EASO, *Syria: Socio-economic situation: Damascus city*, April 2021, [url](#), pp. 39-40; ICG, *Easing Syrian Refugees' Plight in Lebanon*, 13 February 2020, [url](#), p. 25

²⁵⁷ WFP, *Syrian Arab Republic – mVAM Bulletin Issue no. 58: August 2021*, 21 September 2021, [url](#), p. 5

²⁵⁸ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Tartous, Latakia and Quneitra*, December 2020, [url](#), p. 19; UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic*, March 2021, [url](#), p. 6

²⁵⁹ Musaab Balchi: 7; Operations & Policy Center, *Living in Damascus After a Decade of War: Employment, Income, and Consumption*, 22 June 2021, [url](#), pp. 5-6

²⁶⁰ Syria Times, *Real Estate Sector in Damascus*, 21 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁶¹ AGPS: 19

²⁶² EASO, *Syria: Situation of Returnees from Abroad*, June 2021, [url](#), p. 24

²⁶³ AGPS, *Residents of Jaramana camp complain of their aggravating economic conditions*, 4 October 2017, [url](#); UNRWA, *Jaramana Camp*, 1 January 2019, [url](#)

6.3. Access to food

According to World Food Programme (WFP) standards, the number of food insecure persons in Syria rose from 9.3 million in August 2020 to 12.4 million in January 2021.²⁶⁴ The number of PRS living in poverty is relatively higher than for Syrian citizens.²⁶⁵ In December 2020, UNRWA reported that 91 % of PRS households lived in absolute poverty.²⁶⁶

In September 2021, a survey conducted by WFP showed that 45 % of surveyed households in Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates reported inadequate food consumption, slightly lower than the national average of 47 %.²⁶⁷

In September 2021, the average price of a food basket²⁶⁸ in Syria was 186,319 SYP.²⁶⁹ High food prices are an obstacle for many to cover their nutritional needs, even if some goods are subsidised through the Smart Card system.²⁷⁰ The international organisation noted that bread, fresh food and meat is becoming increasingly unaffordable.²⁷¹ High fuel prices and power outages has increased the cost of refrigeration, and consumers increasingly request food that does not need to be refrigerated.²⁷² A low wheat production in 2021 meant that bread was in shortage, and by summer 2021, the GoS doubled the price of subsidised bread.²⁷³

According to the Humanitarian Needs Overview for 2021 that covers all of Syria, 51 % of the average household income was spent on food in September 2020.²⁷⁴ UNRWA stated that according to a July 2020 assessment, figures showed that 79 % of the UNRWA-registered PRS families claimed to have consumed less food or have reduced the number of meals, since the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020.²⁷⁵

GAPAR-registered PRS have access to the Smart Card system, while non-GAPAR-registered PRS are not entitled to a Smart Card.²⁷⁶ Yet, new-born PRS as well as some GAPAR-registered children below 14 years of age are being refused access to the Smart Card system, preventing families from obtaining subsidised food for all family members.²⁷⁷

Except for Yarmouk Camp, food stores are available inside the camps. The food prices are similar to comparable areas outside the camps.²⁷⁸

²⁶⁴ WFP, *WFP Syria Country Brief*, August 2020, [url](#), p. 1; WFP, *WFP Syria Situation Report #1*, January 2021, [url](#), p. 1

²⁶⁵ Tom Rollins: 24

²⁶⁶ UNRWA, *syria: unrwa – humanitarian snapshot, december 2020*, January 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁷ WFP, *Syrian Arab Republic – mVAM Bulletin Issue no. 59: September 2021*, 13 October 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁶⁸ A food basket is a country-specific collection of goods that covers the essential nutritional needs of a family of five for one month (WFP, *Syria Country Office: Market Price Watch Bulletin (issue 82)*, September 2021, [url](#), p. 8)

²⁶⁹ WFP, *Syria Country Office: Market Price Watch Bulletin (issue 82)*, September 2021, [url](#), p. 1

²⁷⁰ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 28; Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Tartous, Latakia and Quneitra*, December 2020, [url](#), p. 17

²⁷¹ International organisation (a): 12; International organisation (b): 15

²⁷² Syrian Law Journal, *Legal Briefing – August 2021*, 8 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁷³ Al-Monitor, *Bread crisis looms in Syria amid low wheat production*, 2 June 2021, [url](#); Syrian Law Journal, *Legal Briefing – July 2021*, 6 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁴ UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic*, March 2021, [url](#), p. 6

²⁷⁵ UNRWA, *syria regional crisis: emergency appeal 2021*, 2 March 2021, [url](#), pp. 6, 11

²⁷⁶ Musaab Balchi: 47; Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 28

²⁷⁷ AGPS, *Palestinian Refugee Children in Syria Denied Access to Food Items via Smart Card*, 1 March 2021, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), *No Smart Cards for Palestinians in Syria*, 2 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁸ Musaab Balchi: 46; Syria Report (The), *Yarmouk Camp: Daily Security Approval Allows Temporary Return*, 21 September 2021, [url](#)

7. Return procedures for Palestinian refugees from Syria

In recent years, a limited number of PRS has returned to Syria. From January 2020 to August 2021, UNRWA recorded 2,050 returns of PRS to Syria, mainly from Jordan and Lebanon.²⁷⁹ More PRS could have returned to Syria, as UNRWA might not have registered all returns.²⁸⁰

International flight traffic to Damascus resumed in October 2020 after months of closure due to COVID-19 restrictions.²⁸¹ As of October 2021, flights were available from Damascus International Airport to several foreign destinations, including Baghdad, Dubai, Muscat and Sharjah.²⁸²

Since August 2020, most adult Syrians and PRS have been required to exchange 100 USD or an equal value in another currency using the official exchange rate (see chapter 6), upon arrival to Syria.²⁸³ A negative PCR test less than four days old is also required to enter Syria.²⁸⁴

The possibility of and the process for re-entering Syria for a PRS depends on the individual's registration status with GAPAR.²⁸⁵ The following will address the entry procedures and necessary documents for both GAPAR-registered and non-GAPAR-registered PRS.

It should be noted that this chapter only deals with voluntary returns. It was not investigated whether the same procedures applied to forced returns. For more information regarding return to Syria, see the brief report '[Syria: Issues regarding return](#)' issued by DIS in October 2021.²⁸⁶

7.1. Palestinian refugees registered with GAPAR

7.1.1. Procedures for returning

A PRS who has left Syria regularly and is in possession of a valid Syrian travel document for Palestinians is able to return to the country without applying for a visa, as regulated by Decision No. 1311 of 1963, irrespective of the length of the stay abroad.²⁸⁷

The Syrian authorities treat GAPAR-registered PRS and Syrian citizens similarly regarding return procedures.²⁸⁸ According to information from the MFA query response (a) of 22 September 2021, there is no official requirement that Syrians must obtain a security clearance in order to return to Syria, referring to

²⁷⁹ UNRWA, *syria: unrwa - humanitarian snapshot, december 2020*, January 2021, [url](#); UNRWA, *unrwa: syria - humanitarian snapshot, july & august 2021*, September 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁰ EIP (European Institute for Peace), *Refugee Return in Syria: Dangers, Security Risks and Information Scarcity*, July 2019, [url](#), p. 18

²⁸¹ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Security and socio-economic situation in the government-controlled areas*, October 2020, [url](#), p. 15

²⁸² Flightradar24, *Arrivals*, n.d., [url](#)

²⁸³ International organisation (b): 25; Musaab Balchi: 52; EASO, *Syria: Situation of Returnees from Abroad*, June 2021, [url](#), p. 15

²⁸⁴ Embassy of the Syrian Arab Republic in Stockholm, *New Regulations Regarding Visa Application*, 27 December 2020, [url](#);

UNOCHA and WHO, *Syrian Arab Republic: Covid-19 – Humanitarian Update No. 26*, 10 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁸⁵ AGPS: 30-31; International organisation (b): 3

²⁸⁶ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Issues regarding return*, October 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁷ AGPS: 30; International organisation (b): 22; MFA query response (a); MFA query response (b); Musaab Balchi: 50; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of Origin Information Report Syria*, May 2020, [url](#), p. 45; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Palestinians of Syria: Violations of Rights and Identity Challenges*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 21

²⁸⁸ AGPS: 30; International organisation (b): 24; MFA query response (a); Musaab Balchi: 49; DIS and DRC, *Syria: Security Situation in Damascus City and Yarmouk*, August 2018, [url](#), p. 38

article 38 of the Syrian Constitution of 2012 stating that: “(...) no citizens may be prevented from returning to the country”. PRS are treated similar to Syrian citizens in this regard.²⁸⁹

There is however, empirical evidence that returnees from Syria’s neighbouring countries need a security clearance.²⁹⁰ AGPS also noted that PRS are subject to scrutiny and need a security clearance to return to Syria.²⁹¹ It has not been possible for DIS to find information corroborating the statement from AGPS.

PRS who want to return to Syria from abroad, and who have an unsettled issue with the authorities (e.g. if the person is a draft evader, left Syria irregularly or has security issues) must apply for a status settlement.²⁹²,²⁹³ There are however reports of returnees being subject to different form of violations despite having obtained a status settlement.²⁹⁴

According to Musaab Balchi, a PRS without any issues with the Syrian authorities should be able to return.²⁹⁵

There have been reports of individuals from former opposition-held camps, e.g. Yarmouk and Sbeineh, being more likely to have their applications for security clearance rejected when seeking to return from abroad compared to those coming from places that were GoS-controlled throughout the conflict.²⁹⁶

In a report from March 2021, AGPS gave examples of 13 PRS, including women and children, who were arrested or had disappeared forcibly after having returned voluntarily to Syria. In most cases, the GoS does not provide a reason for the arrest nor information about where the detained persons are held.²⁹⁷

7.1.2. Travel documents

Syrian travel documents to GAPAR-registered PRS are issued by the Immigration and Passports Department according to the same rules as passports for Syrian citizens.²⁹⁸ PRS outside of Syria can approach a Syrian embassy to have a travel document issued or reissued.²⁹⁹

According to the homepage of the Syrian embassy in Stockholm, the procedure for having Syrian passports and travel documents issued differs depending on whether it is a first-time issuance, an expired travel document, a lost or stolen travel document, or a damaged travel document.

²⁸⁹ MFA query response (a)

²⁹⁰ MFA query response (a)

²⁹¹ AGPS: 30

²⁹² Musaab Balchi: 49-50; Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Issues regarding return*, October 2021, [url](#), p. 12; Norway, Landinfo, *Syria: Retur fra utlandet [Syria: Return from abroad]*, 16 December 2020, [url](#), p. 18

²⁹³ Status settlement is a process through which a person, who is wanted by the Syrian authorities, applies to settle his/her issues with the GoS. If the authorities agree to settle the unsettled issues, the individual’s name will be deleted from wanted lists and the person would not be wanted anymore. For more information on status settlements for returnees see: Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Issues regarding return*, October 2021, [url](#), pp. 12-16.

²⁹⁴ For more information see the report: Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Issues regarding return*, October 2021, [url](#), pp. 17-22

²⁹⁵ Musaab Balchi: 49

²⁹⁶ Tom Rollins: 27

²⁹⁷ AGPS, *فلسطينيو دمشق وريفها نموذجاً - أوروبا وإعادة لاجئي سورية* [Europe and return of Palestinian refugees from Syria to Damascus and Rural Damascus], March 2021, [url](#), pp. 10-11. For more information on treatment of returnees, see the report: Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Issues regarding return*, October 2021, [url](#), pp. 17-22

²⁹⁸ Norway, Landinfo, *Palestinske flyktninger i Syria: Identitetsdokumenter [Palestinian Refugees in Syria: Identity Documents]*, 23 November 2016, [url](#), p. 9; Norway, Landinfo, *Syria: Identitetsdokumenter og pass [Syria: Identity documents and passports]*, 3 July 2017, [url](#), p. 15

²⁹⁹ International organisation (b): 23

To have a travel document issued for the first time, a person should:³⁰⁰

- 1) Present a) an ID card or a recently legalised personal civil registration document with a photo attached, b) four passport photos, and c) a copy of a residence permit in the country where the person resides
 - Men who have completed their military service or been exempt should also present a copy of the military book or a declaration of accession status
- 2) Be registered with the embassy in Stockholm (if the person resides in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway or Sweden)
- 3) Fill out a passport issuance form
- 4) Apply in person
 - Children who are below the age of 11 are exempt from this if the father or another family member is present. Persons below 18 years of age must apply accompanied by their father or another family member
 - Persons who live in countries with no Syrian representation can also apply through a family member (specifically father, mother, daughter, grandfather, brother, sister, uncle, aunt or spouse). The family member must prove his/her relationship to the applicant
- 5) Pay a issuance fee³⁰¹

The procedure for issuing a travel document substituting an expired one is the same as above, except that the expired travel document and a copy of it must be presented rather than the ID card or the civil registration document.

If an applicant has lost the travel document or had it stolen, a police report and a written declaration regarding the circumstances of the loss/theft should be presented, in addition to fulfilling the requirements for first-time issuances.

In case the travel document is damaged, the person must present the damaged document and a copy of it together with a written declaration stating the circumstances leading to the damage. Otherwise, the procedure is the same as for first-time issuances.³⁰²

It is also possible to have a travel document issued through a proxy inside of Syria. The proxy can be a family member or a representative who can provide a legalised power of attorney from the applicant.³⁰³

Birth registration with the Syrian authorities is a prerequisite for having Syrian identification documents issued. This registration can take place at a Syrian representation or, for Syrian citizens and GAPAR-registered

³⁰⁰ Embassy of the Syrian Arab Republic in Stockholm, *جوازات ووثائق السفر* [Passports and travel documents], n.d., [url](#)

³⁰¹ The fee for having a passport issued at the embassy in Stockholm varies between 250 and 730 euros depending on the situation. (Embassy of the Syrian Arab Republic in Stockholm, *الرسوم القنصلية* [Consular fees], n.d., [url](#))

³⁰² Embassy of the Syrian Arab Republic in Stockholm, *جوازات ووثائق السفر* [Passports and travel documents], n.d., [url](#)

³⁰³ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of Origin Information Report Syria: Documents*, December 2019, [url](#), pp. 7-8; Sweden, Lifos, *Syrien – medborgarskap och officiella document* [Syria – Citizenship and official documents], 12 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 21-22

PRS living in a country without a Syrian representation, by sending the required documents directly to the Civil Affairs Directorate in Syria.³⁰⁴

Births taking place in Nordic countries can be registered at the Syrian embassy in Stockholm. To do this, either the father, mother or a legal representative of the father must be physically present.³⁰⁵

In order to have a child registered with the Syrian authorities, it is necessary to have an official birth certificate issued by the country where the birth took place.³⁰⁶ However, PRS who reside illegally in a country are unable to have an official birth certificate issued and consequently are unable to register the child. This can create challenges for PRS in e.g. Jordan and Lebanon.³⁰⁷ Late registration is subject to a fine, and if the registration has not occurred one year after the birth, a police investigation is also required.³⁰⁸

7.2. Palestinian refugees not registered with GAPAR

7.2.1. Procedures for returning

A non-GAPAR-registered PRS needs a visa to be able to enter Syria, which can be obtained either at the border or a Syrian embassy.³⁰⁹

Non-GAPAR-registered PRS from Occupied Palestine [Israel], territories of PA, Iraq, Libya and Jordan need a security clearance from the intelligence services in order to enter Syria pursuant to Resolution No. 1233 of 2014. The individual can apply for a security clearance either through a Syrian embassy, through a first-degree relative or through a legal agent in Syria. After the security clearance has been given, it is possible to obtain a visa.³¹⁰

Non-GAPAR-registered Palestinians from other countries can get a tourist visa on arrival. The visa will be valid for 30 days if the travel documents are issued by an Arab country, and 15 days if the travel documents are issued by a non-Arab country. The tourist visa may be extended for up to three months upon application to the immigration department.³¹¹

In case there is a claim against a non-GAPAR-registered PRS, the person could be required to approach the police or an intelligence office for questioning after having returned to Syria.³¹²

Non-GAPAR-registered PRS have the opportunity to apply for a 00-passport at the Palestinian embassy (see chapter 7.2.2.). However, it is uncertain whether the Syrian authorities consider this passport valid for

³⁰⁴ Syrian Arab Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *الأحكام المتعلقة بالولادات* [Birth provisions], n.d., [url](#); Syrian Arab Republic, Ministry of Interior, Civil Affairs Directorate and UNHCR, *Civil Documentation and Registration in the Syrian Arab Republic*, n.d., [url](#), pp. 20-23

³⁰⁵ Embassy of the Syrian Arab Republic in Stockholm, *تسجيل واقعات الأحوال المدنية* [Civil status registration], n.d., [url](#)

³⁰⁶ Syrian Arab Republic, Ministry of Interior, Civil Affairs Directorate and UNHCR, *Civil Documentation and Registration in the Syrian Arab Republic*, n.d., [url](#), pp. 21

³⁰⁷ Denmark, DIS, *Palestinian Refugees: Access to registration and UNRWA services, documents, and entry to Jordan*, June 2020, [url](#), p. 21

³⁰⁸ Syrian Arab Republic, Ministry of Interior, Civil Affairs Directorate and UNHCR, *Civil Documentation and Registration in the Syrian Arab Republic*, n.d., [url](#), pp. 20-21; Syrian Arab Republic, Ministry of Interior, *الخدمات التي تقدمها الشؤون المدنية* [Services provided by Civil Affairs], n.d., [url](#)

³⁰⁹ MFA query response (a); MFA query response (b)

³¹⁰ MFA query response (a)

³¹¹ MFA query response (a)

³¹² MFA query response (a)

traveling. According to Francesca Albanese and Lex Takkenberg, these passports can be used to travel abroad.³¹³ Yet, information from Landinfo from 2016 indicate that it cannot be used to enter nor exit Syria.³¹⁴

AGPS explained that it had no knowledge of any non-GAPAR-registered PRS who had returned to Syria, and found it unlikely that individuals from this group could return due to their time-limited residence status. There had been examples of PRS with Jordanian passports, who were deported back to Jordan upon entry to Syria.³¹⁵ The Swedish governmental entity, Lifos, also estimated in 2019 that it was increasingly difficult for non-GAPAR-registered PRS without documents to return to Syria.³¹⁶

The Syrian Ministry of Interior states on their website that holders of special, ordinary and temporary residency (see chapter 1. for information on the different types of residency) must have an exit and re-entry visa before leaving Syria.³¹⁷ This information is also provided by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.³¹⁸ However, contrasting information is found in a report by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which states that PRS without Syrian travel documents do not need a permission to leave the country, but they must hand in their residency documents to the Immigration and Passports Department, who will return the documents upon return to Syria.³¹⁹

7.2.2. Documents

Syrian authorities do not issue travel documents or other identity documents to PRS not registered with GAPAR. Instead, they can have identity documents issued by PA, e.g. data records, by approaching the Palestinian embassy in Damascus. These documents might support the person in obtaining residency in Syria. To have the identity documents issued, the embassy will verify with GAPAR that the person is not in GAPAR's registers.³²⁰

One of the documents Palestinian embassies can provide to the non-GAPAR-registered PRS is the so-called 00-passport.^{321, 322} A precondition to have the 00-passport issued is that the PRS can prove to be of Palestinian origin and explain the reason for needing a 00-passport. Additionally, an application form, four photos and a fee should be provided.³²³

³¹³ Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law (2nd edition)*, 2020, pp. 224-225

³¹⁴ Norway, Landinfo, *Palestinske flyktninger i Syria: Identitetsdokumenter [Palestinian Refugees in Syria: Identity Documents]*, 23 November 2016, [url](#), p. 11

³¹⁵ AGPS: 31

³¹⁶ Sweden, Lifos, *Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument (version 1.1) [Palestinians in the Middle East – Residency rights and documents (version 1.1)]*, 15 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 72-73

³¹⁷ Syrian Arab Republic, Ministry of Interior, الإقامة [Residency], n.d., [url](#)

³¹⁸ Australia, DFAT, *Syria*, n.d, [url](#)

³¹⁹ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Syrië [General Public Report Syria]*, June 2021, [url](#), p. 88

³²⁰ MFA query response (b); Austria, BFA, *Fact Finding Mission Report: Syrien [Fact-finding mission report: Syria]*, August 2017, [url](#), p. 28; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of Origin Information Report Syria: Documents*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 12; Norway, Landinfo, *Palestinske flyktninger i Syria: Identitetsdokumenter [Palestinian Refugees in Syria: Identity Documents]*, 23 November 2016, [url](#), pp. 10-11

³²¹ MFA query response (b); Norway, Landinfo, *Palestina: Søknad om 00-pass til barn [Palestine: Application for 00-passport for children]*, 7 October 2021, [url](#), p. 1

³²² The 00-passports are similar to ordinary travel documents issued by PA, but are distinguished by the field where the identity number is found, as the number starts with 00 (Norway, Landinfo, *Palestinske flyktninger i Syria: Identitetsdokumenter [Palestinian Refugees in Syria: Identity Documents]*, 23 November 2016, [url](#), p. 11).

³²³ Norway, Landinfo, *Palestina: Søknad om 00-pass til barn [Palestine: Application for 00-passport for children]*, 7 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 1-2; State of Palestine, Council of Ministers, (إصدار جواز سفر استخدام خارجي (بدون رقم هوية فلسطيني) [Issuance of a passport for external use (without a Palestinian identity number)]), n.d. [url](#)

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Annex I: Meeting minutes

Minutes from meeting with Action Group for Palestinians of Syria, Skype, 5 March 2021

The Action Group for Palestinians of Syria (AGPS) is a London-based human rights organisation that monitors the situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria. AGPS produces regular articles and reports on the situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria.

Palestinian Refugees in Syria

1. AGPS informed that the official UNRWA number of PRS in Syria is around 510,000. However, the actual number of Palestinians in Syria (PRS) is 630,000 persons, as those not registered with GAPAR are not counted in UNRWA numbers. The non-GAPAR-registered refugees originate from Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait and Iraq.
2. AGPS explained that Palestinians in Syria can be categorised into three different groups, that legally have different rights.

GAPAR-registered Palestinian refugees

1948 UNRWA-registered refugees

3. This group is the vast majority of Palestinian refugees in Syria. They are treated equally to Syrian citizens, with exception of political participation.

Non-GAPAR-registered Palestinian refugees

1967 Palestinian refugees

4. This group of people are categorised similar to other Arab foreigners. They can work and join the labour market but they do not enjoy the same rights as Syrian citizens, as their work permits are temporary and need regular renewal.
5. The group of 1967 Palestinian refugees can be further divided into two categories:
 - 1) Persons holding Jordanian citizenship and 2) persons holding an Egyptian travel document.
6. Generally, persons holding Jordanian citizenship will be treated better and have more rights in terms of work and legal stay, as they are given the same rights as Syrians residing in Jordan. While holders of Egyptian travel documents have fewer opportunities. It is necessary for individuals in both groups to get a security clearance to obtain any job in the public sector, which is similar to the situation for 1948 PRS and Syrian citizens. AGPS noted that it could be more difficult and time consuming for 1967 Palestinian refugees to obtain this clearance. With every renewal of a job contract, a new security clearance must also be obtained. This often take place annually.
7. The group of 1967 Palestinian refugees reside in Syria on the basis of their passports/travel documents from Jordan and Egypt. Their residency permit is renewed by the Palestine Branch, if the travel document is valid. The duration of the residency varied as it depends on the individual case. By

requesting frequent renewal, it is possible for the authorities to keep updating the records of the individuals temporarily residing in the country.

1970 Palestinian refugees

8. This group do not carry any ID and are treated as non-Arab foreigners. They can legally reside in the country, but do not have residence permits issued by the Syrian government. The only paper that allows them to stay in the country is the *nufus* issued by the PLO representative office in Damascus, which now is the Palestinian embassy in Damascus. There are no official statistics on the number of PRS without ID, but before 2011, it was estimated that the group of 1970 Palestinian refugees consisted of 7,000 persons.
9. The 1970 Palestinian refugees work in the private sector, as they are not allowed to work in the public sector. Sometimes they will also be paid less.
10. AGPS informed that the non-GAPAR-registered persons (both the 1967 and 1970 Palestinian refugees) do not have access to free health care nor medication but can obtain these services by paying the fees associate with them. They may be accepted in UNRWA schools but this is not done in an official manner, unless the child can provide ID and other specific documents to obtain the approval for admittance. Generally, these people have limited access to services from UNRWA.
11. Concerning Palestinians who came from Iraq, AGPS informed that these individuals fall under the mandate of UNHCR, and therefore are treated on this basis.

Residency

12. GAPAR-registered PRS have the right to own one residential property. It is also possible to own other pieces of land through a notarised contract between the seller and the buyer; however, this is not considered official ownership. Therefore, GAPAR-registered persons can officially own one property and any property beyond that will have to be obtained through an alternative solution.
13. Non-GAPAR-registered PRS cannot own property, but are allowed to rent housing. They need to obtain a security clearance as part of the rental process. According to AGPS, the only way for a non-GAPAR registered refugee to informally own property, is to buy it through a middle man who is either a GAPAR-registered Palestinian or a Syrian. This means that the GAPAR-registered person or the Syrian will be the legal owner. As such, a non-GAPAR registered person, cannot own property officially in Syria.
14. Palestinians can choose to move between camps or outside of camps, regardless of which category they belong to (i.e. 1948, 1967 and 1970). They will need a security clearance irrespective of whether they rent or buy accommodation, as is the case for anyone moving to a new place. The security clearance for PRS is obtained from the Political Security Branch, which are located across the country in cities and provinces. In some instances, the permits are not approved. If a permit is denied, the person must visit the Palestine Branch to get clearance.

15. All individuals that will live in the accommodation must be clearly stated on the lease agreement as must the name of the landlord and the tenant. If a person is not registered on the contract, s/he cannot legally stay in the house. Children must also be listed. Most likely, if there is a new-born child, this child will be included in the upcoming renewal of the lease agreement.
16. The security forces conduct security checks on houses from time to time. During these, they will ask to see the contract and it must obtain the names of all individuals living on the property. If a person is not listed in the rental agreement, he will be subject to interrogation. The person will be addressed as a security concern and be taken by the security force to the security branch for interrogation. S/he will be questioned, in order to obtain information about why s/he was not listed at the lease, but living there anyway.
17. AGPS informed that in the process of obtaining a security permit/clearance, people from Yarmouk Camp are more likely to be scrutinised more, when moving to a new area, such as Jaramana Camp.
18. There are a large number of real estate agencies with rental apartment listings, covering vacancies in camps as well as outside of camps. AGPS informed that most often, the real estate agents also conduct some level of security observation tasks, as a large number of real estate agents will be secretly recruited by the security branches, according to AGPS. They will also ask you where you are moving from and why you are moving. In most cases, individuals will have to go through a real estate agent to find vacant accommodation, unless you know someone privately, who are renting out him/herself or know of someone who is renting out.
19. The prices of rent vary, depending on the specific area. There is a notable difference between renting housing inside or around Damascus. The rule is that the less checkpoints you need to pass, the higher the rent. On average, the total estimated cost of living was estimated to be 600,000 SYP in 2019. It is worth noting that average wages (approximately 50,000 SYP/month) do not cover the cost of even the least expensive rental apartments. Even in the cheapest areas, such as Khan Eshieh Camp, the rent is higher than the average monthly income. Most often, people must rely on funds from family living abroad or in some cases be successful financially in Syria. AGPS noted that while it is still often unaffordable for many, accommodation is relatively lower in Palestinian camps.
20. Prior to 2011 most of the Palestinian camps were overcrowded. Now due to the large number of people having fled or been displaced, some camps have become a bit cheaper with a few more vacancies.

Information on the different camps

21. AGPS informed that the Yarmouk reconstruction plan consists of three stages of which each stage will take 15 years to complete. The plan has not been cancelled, but has been put on hold due to push back from the local community and community leaders, as the proposed plan is likely to change the map of the camp. Private property could be taken away from individuals and less space/areas will be made available to Palestinians.

22. Jaramana Camp is located in Rural Damascus. Estimations indicate that 25,000 persons live in the camp today. A large number of the inhabitants are IDPs from Yarmouk Camp and other areas that were subject to direct conflict. It is one of the most overpopulated and poverty-stricken camps in Syria. According to AGPS, the camp was exposed to military acts, as it is close to Al-Mliha in Eastern Ghouta.
23. The camp is a part of the bigger Jaramana area. The town of Jaramana is inhabited by Druze and Christians. Due to this sectarian make-up, there are many security checkpoints in the entire area and at the entrance of the town. This makes it difficult to access and exit the area of Jaramana. When going to the camp, you have to go through the town checkpoint. The AGPS has documented incidents of people being arrested at the checkpoints. Anyone living in this area, must be certain that s/he has no security issues at all, as he will need to go through many checkpoints whenever exiting or entering the camp.

Infrastructure in the camps

Water network

24. Prior to 2011, almost all camps were connected to the public water network. However, now almost all of the camps rely on some level of private water suppliers who provide water through trucks. The inhabitants pay for themselves for the water coming from private suppliers. The camps that are still connected to the water network are Jaramana, Khan Dunoun, Sbeineh and Khan Eshieh. However, this does not mean it operates all the time nor that all parts of the camps are connected.
25. In Yarmouk Camp specifically, there has been no functional water network since 2014. Since then, the vast majority of camp residents have been relying on water trucks.
26. People used to have wells in their neighbourhoods but in order to use these, they would rely on infrastructure and electricity, which has also been severely damaged.

Electricity networks

27. All camps are connected to the electricity supply network of the government. However, as is also the case for Damascus and Rural Damascus more broadly, electricity is only available for two to four hours a day. For this reason, camp residents rely on private generators. These run on gas, which is expensive and hard to obtain due to shortages.

Access to services

Education

28. In addition to UNRWA services for 1948 refugees and limited access for other groups, Palestinian children can access governmental public schools for free and there is no quota as to how many Palestinian refugees there can be in each public school. Families only need to pay for school supplies, which can be expensive for some families. This expense some parents to take their children out of school. According to AGPS, all Palestinian children, including those who belong to the 1967 and 1970 groups, have access to the public schools.

Health care

29. 1948 Palestinian refugees registered with GAPAR have access to governmental health care services on equal terms as Syrian citizens. UNRWA subsidises these services. For the group of 1967 and 1970 non-GAPAR-registered refugees, they are deprived of free access and will be treated as private patients that must pay for the services. AGPS is not certain on whether UNRWA will subsidise the treatment for this group.

Return

30. The 1948 Palestinian refugees do not need visa to enter Syria can travel back on the same conditions and rules as Syrian citizens, as their residency is open-ended. AGPS noted however, that PRS are subject to scrutiny and also need a security approval in order to return to Syria.
31. According to AGPS, it is unlikely that persons belonging to either the 1967 or the 1970 group of Palestinian refugees, can return to Syria as they do not hold open-ended residence permits similar to the 1948 Palestinians. AGPS has not documented any cases of returns to Syria for persons belonging to these groups, however, if they could get a visa and enter they would be allowed to re-establish their lives as it was before leaving the country. On the other hand, AGPS has documented cases of Palestinians from Syria holding Jordanian travel documents, who have been deported back to Jordan upon return to Syria. If these individuals are outside Syria, they will need to obtain a new visa and a security clearance. They will also not be able to return to Egypt or Jordan. As for the Egyptian travel document, if this has not been renewed within a certain timeframe, the person will no longer be granted a new travel document and not be allowed re-entry in to Egypt. Persons, who hold Jordanian travel documents, will have left Jordan for security reasons. For these individuals to re-enter Jordan, they will need a security clearance from the Jordanian authorities to travel back to Jordan.
32. AGPS noted that there are no official procedures in place that one can follow, if you want to return to Syria safely. Even when a person has conducted a security check, there is no guarantee that the person arriving to Syria will not be detained at the borders or in the airport.
33. Since 2015, AGPS has documented at least 12 cases of Palestinians from Syria, who have arrived back to Syria that were arrested. Some were arrested immediately upon arrival at the airport. Others after return to Syria and yet others while trying to leave Syria. AGPS explained that there is no clear information on the reason for their arrests. Some are still in prison for unknown reasons. They are most likely not held back for criminal acts, but for political reasons as they are considered a security concern.

Minutes of meeting (a) with an international organisation, Skype, 18 January 2021

The international organisation is present in several locations in Syria and monitors the situation on the ground in many locations where Palestinians reside.

Access and availability of economic support from international organisation

1. The following information is based on the organisation's current planning assumptions for 2021, noting that it believes it is unlikely that it will be covered by the budget for this year.

2. The large-scale displacement and scattering of Palestinian families in Syria, has resulted in a high number of abandoned women and elderly people who can no longer rely on neighborhood or family networks because their families have disappeared. These persons are very highly dependent on the organisation.
3. As such, the organisation's planned caseload for cash assistance for 2021 focuses on providing cash assistance to 418,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria. Out of these, 136,000 persons fall into the 'most vulnerable' category. These persons belong to families either headed by a female, a person older than 60 years old, a disabled person or are cases where the person is an orphaned child and fall under the organisation's social safety network (SSN) programme.
4. The rest of the population will also receive cash assistance but as part of an emergency caseload. This way, if funding goes down, the organisation is more likely to be in a position to preserve the cash assistance for the most vulnerable and reduce the cash assistance for the rest of the population.
5. Also, should the economic situation in Syria improve in the future, the most vulnerable will still be supported through SSN programme while the rest of the population should be able to rely on generating income at the household level.
6. Despite the organisation's efforts to at least maintain 14 USD for the most vulnerable if funding is not available to provide funds to everyone, the government has stated that if UNRWA decreases the amount for some, it must do so for all.
7. In 2018, the organization pegged the transfers for the most vulnerable at 14 USD per person per month, which was 50 % of the food poverty line. In addition, those who did not fall in the most vulnerable category received 9 USD per person per month.
8. The economic crisis and devaluation of the Syrian pound and rising inflation has reduced the purchasing power of the financial assistance cash provided to the beneficiaries.
9. In order to reflect the rising inflation, the organisation will aim to increase the amount of cash assistance for the most vulnerable to 16 USD per person per month, while the remaining persons would receive 12 USD per person per month. However, funding projections indicate this is not likely.
10. Rather, the organisation's funding projections for 2021 indicate that it is unlikely to obtain sufficient funds to maintain the existing level of financial support of 14 USD per person per month. If sufficient funds are not obtained, the organisation may be required to extend the duration between each payment. Instead of disbursing cash four times a year, it will only be distributed three times a year.
11. Because of the lower purchasing power of the cash assistance, the organisation supplements the cash assistance with food assistance. In 2020, the food basket was only given to the most vulnerable but in 2021 the intention is to broaden coverage to all cash assistance beneficiaries (418,000 persons) subject

to available funding. The food baskets will be distributed twice a year, in April and September, and each basket will cover food needs for ten days. The food baskets will be a supplement but by no means a regular supplement. The food basket will include wheat, for the first time.

12. Currently, there is a wheat and fuel crisis in Syria. Additionally, because of the inflation rate, bread, fresh food and meats are becoming increasingly unaffordable and people generally only procure basic food such as potatoes, onions and tomatoes.

Birth registration from abroad

13. Overall, the organization emphasized that official confirmation regarding birth registration of Palestinian refugees born abroad must be provided by the Syrian authorities. Based on information the organization has obtained, its unofficial understanding is that children born abroad must be registered with the Syrian embassy or consulate within 90 days, which requires the official birth certificate from the country where the child was born together with the marriage certificate of the parents. If the registration takes place between 90 days and one year after the birth of the child, the parents may be required to pay a fine to enable registration. If more than one year has passed, a police investigation may also be required for the child to be registered. However, the organization defers to the Syrian authorities for official confirmation in this regard.

Once the birth registration procedure has been completed, the family can request Syrian identity documents for the child.

14. In order to register a child with UNRWA in Syria, the child must first be registered with GAPAR. However, some of the children born outside of Syria will not have birth certificates from the relevant authorities. The organisation is not in a position to provide further information on whether or not a child not in possession of a birth certificate may register with GAPAR under certain circumstances or not at all, and defers to the relevant Syrian authorities for confirmation.

Minutes from meeting (b) with an international organisation, Skype, 2 February 2021

The international organisation is present in several locations in Syria and monitors the situation on the ground in many locations where Palestinian refugees reside.

1. For the record, the international organisation's wishes to clarify that any information provided on matters that are not within the organisation's direct control or mandate is provided on an unofficial basis. The organisation defers to relevant national authorities or other third parties for official confirmation of matters within their direct purview.

Situation in camps³²⁴

2. Based on general information available to the organisation, including prior to the Syrian conflict the ability and specific conditions under which Palestinian refugees are able to rent or own housing in Syria

³²⁴ Please note, the organisation is not responsible for administering or managing refugee camps. This responsibility lies with the host country.

depends on their registration status with the General Authority for Palestinian Arab Refugees (GAPAR) in Syria.

GAPAR-registered Palestinian refugees

3. Based on information available to the organisation, it understands GAPAR-registered Palestinian refugees are primarily persons and their descendants who arrived in Syria before 1956. They are recognized by the Syrian authorities as refugees, and therefore enjoy a minimum level of legal and civil rights, which extent may vary depending on the date of registration, i.e before or after 1956. The organisation understands the Syrian authorities have granted them temporary residency but with no need for renewal and therefore it is considered open-ended. The legal framework allows for GAPAR-registered Palestinian refugees to take up most jobs, except for certain high-level positions within the government. However, the Syrian authorities are responsible for official confirmation of the legal status of Palestinian refugees living there. Registration with the organisation only confers access to services but does not constitute legal status, which is a matter that strictly falls within the domain of Syrian authorities to determine.

4. With respect to living arrangements, to the organisation’s knowledge, GAPAR-registered Palestinian refugees were originally granted permission from GAPAR to build and reside on a certain plot of land in a specific camp. For example, in Sbeineh Camp, some government land was put at the disposal of GAPAR by law, and it was then assigned to certain families to reside on, until their return to their original homes from which they were displaced as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict, in line with relevant UN resolutions. This means that they do not have ownership over the land and the property built on it, but rather a legally based relation that provides the Palestinian refugee family and descendants the right to use this plot of land for residential purposes. The land was provided free of charge. As such, if a Palestinian refugee displaced from Sbeineh Camp, whose family was assigned to a plot of land in this camp, wants to move to another camp, such as Jaramana, s/he will not be granted a new plot of land.

5. Based on the organisation’s understanding, Palestinian refugees are able to move to other camps or gatherings to rent accommodation. However, this is subject to security clearance. The security clearance is specific to each rented accommodation, and thus one security clearance does not cover all camps or gatherings. For example, if a Palestinian refugee wishes to move to the neighbouring apartment of where they live, they would have to re-apply for and obtain new security clearance. Subject to official confirmation from relevant authorities, the information available to the organisation indicates that to apply for security clearance, a person must submit the following: 1) a document stating the name of the landlord with a copy of the landlord’s ID; 2) the name of the tenant and a copy of his/her ID; and 3) proof of ownership of the house from the landlord, with a power of attorney in case the landlord is absent. These documents are necessary for any new apartment rental, i.e. if a Palestinian refugee moves to the neighbouring apartment, they need to have a new document issued through the above process.

6. However, due to the previously mentioned limitations on ownership for Palestinian refugees, coupled with high rental prices and the need to obtain security clearance, the information available to the

organisation indicates that it will often be very difficult for a Palestinian refugee to find or move to a new place to live. In addition, due to the massive displacement of Palestinian refugees as well as Syrians, it is very hard to find a vacant apartment in certain areas. In Jaramana camp for example, the population has grown significantly and the camp is overcrowded. This results in many families renting housing in a different area than where they previously lived, and often live together with other families in order to afford the cost of rent. There is also no guarantee that a person will obtain security clearance to be allowed to move to another place, despite having all the needed paperwork in order.

Non-GAPAR-registered Palestinian refugees

7. Non-GAPAR-registered Palestinian refugees generally arrived in Syria after 1956. According to the organisation's information, Non-GAPAR registered Palestinian refugees are treated as foreigners in Syria and not granted the basic legal rights as refugees. Subject to confirmation by the Syrian authorities, the organisation understands they do not have the same legal status as GAPAR-registered individuals, including limited job opportunities and may be prohibited from working in public or certain other sectors. The rules and regulations for aliens/foreigners in Syria are regulated by Law no. 2 of 2014, which also regulates residency and entry into Syria. There are certain categories of persons that can apply for a residency, as outlined in the law. The organisation defers to the Syrian authorities for official confirmation.
8. By way of background, the organisation notes that those not registered with GAPAR largely came from different places, including Iraq, Gaza and Jordan. The organization understands some individuals may be in possession of a valid passport with a Syrian residency permit – and in these cases are treated as foreigners with temporary residency. Others have passports that have expired and that are not renewable, or have no documents at all. The organization understands that those who are unable to renew their identity documents may face significant challenges, including in relation to freedom of movement, access to health care, employment and government services. For instance, some non-GAPAR registered Palestinian refugees will face challenges accessing secondary and tertiary health care as often hospitals require that individuals present their ID.
9. In some instances, the Palestinian Embassy in Syria, or outside, e.g. in Lebanon, may be able to provide individuals with an identification statement to testify that they are Palestinian, but the international organisation understands this may not in itself be sufficient to obtain legal stay in Syria. Furthermore, anecdotally it is understood this type of document is not generally accepted at all checkpoints and persons presenting it risk being detained as they will be considered aliens without legal status in the country.
10. Based on the organisation's understanding, whether or not non-GAPAR-registered Palestinian refugees may rent a house depends on, for the most part, their legal status in Syria.
11. In this regard, information available to the international organisation indicates non-GAPAR-registered Palestinian refugees and their descendants are not entitled to a plot of land and thus have not been provided this by GAPAR. The organisation understands that the property or rental rights of foreigners or Arabs in Syria are governed under the provisions in Law no. 11 of 2011, which, subject to official

confirmation of Syrian authorities, concerns their rights to own, transfer and develop property. Approval for renting property for non-GAPAR registered persons falls under the authority of the Ministry of Interior. The organisation understands that such approval, however, does not amount to a security clearance.

12. Subject to the confirmation of relevant Syrian authorities, the organisation unofficially understands that real estate ownership law does not differentiate between men and women. However, the civil registry law, which dates back to Ottoman times, builds on the assumption that the head of household is the man. Therefore, he is also the owner of the family booklet. Until recently, a person wanting to buy property had to present the family booklet. This is no longer a requirement. Instead, it is understood that the woman must obtain a civil registration document stating that her husband is deceased or missing but the organisation defers to Syrian authorities for official confirmation in this regard. This document is issued by GAPAR. The international organisation was not in a position to comment on the ease or difficulty of obtaining this document.
13. In case of rented accommodation, anecdotal information indicates there are no formal obstacles for female-headed households, as no family booklet is required. The organisation is not in a position to comment on whether, in practice, gender discrimination makes it more difficult for female-headed households to rent in practice.

Economic conditions

14. The economic challenges in Syria are massive and severely affect Palestinian refugees. They are economically more vulnerable than Syrian citizens. Before the start of the conflict, approximately 91% of Palestinian refugees were living in absolute poverty. They are currently even more vulnerable.
15. Reportedly, the majority of Palestinian refugees residing in Syria struggle to, among other things, pay rent in the current circumstances, buy food due to the increase in price of basic goods in Syria³²⁵ and broadly to cope with COVID-19 challenges and the economic crisis. Information available to the organisation indicates the majority spends their income on rent rather than meeting their basic food needs. Many Palestinian refugees also expressed to the organisation that they feared eviction due to their lack of financial resources. In turn, the organisation understands some Palestinian refugees have tried to return to Yarmouk, due to the inability to afford the cost of living outside the camp, despite the level of destruction, including to their homes, and limited services. According to an assessment conducted by the organisation in July 2020 on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on Palestinian refugees in Syria, close to 80 per cent of the surveyed persons stated that the number of meals or quantity of food consumed had reduced since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020. More than 90 per cent of Palestine refugee households stated that they had to resort to consuming cheaper food and/or food of lower nutritious value. Ninety nine per cent of Palestine refugee households

³²⁵ For instance, according to the World Food Programme, "[o]ver the last year food prices across Syria have soared, and the price of basic items has increased by 236 percent, just as the value of the Syrian Pound has plummeted. On average, the price of oil has increased from 1000 Syrian pounds in Jan 2020, to 5000 Syrian pounds in Jan 2021", available at: <https://www.wfp.org/news/twelve-million-syrians-now-grip-hunger-worn-down-conflict-and-soaring-food-prices#:~:text=Over%20the%20last%20year%20food,Syrian%20pounds%20in%20Jan%202021>

surveyed reported that they struggled to purchase food and other basic items due to the increasing market prices, with many going into debt to meet their basic needs.³²⁶

16. Existing protection challenges due to protracted conflict are now also exacerbated by the COVID-19 situation. The majority of Palestine refugees in Syria live in camps or overcrowded locations elsewhere. With lack of financial means to obtain more suitable accommodation, many families are residing with extended family members in one space with little or no privacy, which has led to heightened tensions and protection risks, particularly for women and children. According to reports, fifty percent of families surveyed by the organisation identified an increasing level of gender-based violence (GBV)³²⁷ in the community and high reported instances of anxiety and mental health concerns.
17. Before the pandemic, there were already limited services available in the country to prevent and respond to GBV and child protection incidents. Due to COVID-19 protection actors across the country carried out 2.2 million fewer interventions despite heightened need.³²⁸ The closure of schools and economic conditions are also expected to increase the risk of child marriage, child labour, abuse and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) incidents for children engaged in hazardous forms of labor and who do not have access to safe spaces for school and recreation.

Freedom of movement

18. While the organisation is not in a position to provide official or comprehensive information on the presence checkpoints or other limits on freedom of movement, it was aware of the presence of checkpoints at the entrance of certain camps in the Damascus and Rural Damascus area, such as Khan Eshieh, Sbeineh, and Yarmouk, as well as to enter the surrounding villages or neighbouring areas of camps, such as in the vicinity of Jaramana camp. In addition, while the organization was aware of few checkpoints inside Damascus City, checkpoints existed on main roads connecting different areas and villages, including in the vicinity of camps.
19. The organisation understands that persons passing a checkpoint will generally be required to show an ID, both at entrance and exit of the camp. There are no standard procedures for providing documents at the entrance and these may vary or change from time to time. However, the organisation is aware that the regulations at the entrances of Yarmouk may differ and individuals, in addition to being required to show ID upon entrance and exit of the camp, may also be required to show proof of renting/owning property as well as required to obtain security approval, before being able to request and obtain approval to resettle in the camp. Subject to confirmation by the relevant authorities, general information indicates that those wishing to enter for just one day to check on their property without prior approval must leave their ID at the checkpoint.

³²⁶ UNRWA, Syria Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal 2021, p. 11, available at: <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/emergency-appeals/syria-regional-crisis-emergency-appeal-2021>.

³²⁷ UNRWA, Syria Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal 2021, p. 12. From quarter one to quarter three in 2020, 87 per cent of the GBV cases reported to UNRWA were women and girls; numbers rose in quarters two and three, as COVID-19 spread.

³²⁸ Protection Sector and Community Services Sector, Protection situation during COVID-19 in Syria, February 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/The%20impact%20of%20COVID-19%20on%20protection%20activities%20and%20on%20vulnerable%20groups%20in%20Syria.pdf>

20. Some internally displaced Palestinian refugees were residing in areas other than camps, considered Palestinian gatherings - such as Yalda and Eastern Ghouta. In two Palestinian gatherings – Yalda and Babila – the Agency is aware that inhabitants need to obtain security clearance to enter and exit the areas. Information obtained by the Organization indicates that many Palestinian refugees returning to these areas are facing challenges in relation to freedom of movement due to the presence of checkpoints as well as challenges in accessing basic services, independent of the type of provider. For example, families currently living in Eastern Ghouta have to access services in Damascus. The types and degree of challenges that Palestinian refugees face vary and may in many cases depend on whether the person is registered with GAPAR or not. Those registered with GAPAR will generally be in possession of an ID card for Palestinians and as far as the organisation is aware normally not face problems crossing a checkpoint, as long as they are not wanted by the authorities or any other entity present. The organisation was aware that at the checkpoints the authorities will scan the ID of the person and if they are wanted, the person will be arrested.

Infrastructure

21. All camps have been subject to some level of destruction. According to the organisation's information, there has been a massive influx of Palestinian refugees to Jaramana Camp, since this camp has witnessed less destruction. As a result, Jaramana has become one of the most densely populated areas of Damascus and the need for basic services has increased. Water and electricity are sparse commodities in Damascus and Rural Damascus provinces, and it is a challenge to ensure that both are sufficiently available. There are regular electricity cuts of four hours or longer. Once electricity returns, it may stay on for about two hours, though not consistently. In the camps and gatherings, it can be even worse than in other areas. The worst affected camp is Yarmouk, where there is no water or electricity infrastructure intact and no repair of this has been initiated. In other camps where Palestinian refugees are returning to, the network is somewhat better maintained, however, the water and electricity supply is still sparse in these camps. The infrastructure inside the camps is the responsibility of the municipality, however the organisation provides these services in the best interests of Palestinian refugees and without prejudice to the responsibility of the host country.

Documents required for return to place of habitual residence

22. Registration of Palestinian refugees with does not confer any legal status or residency rights in Syria. Official confirmation of legal status must be provided by the Syrian authorities. The Syrian authorities also do not recognise a registration card issued by the organisation as valid proof of identity. The organisation understands that Palestinian refugees who are registered with GAPAR may be issued a Syrian travel document which provides the right to travel abroad and return to Syria without a visa.
23. With respect to lost documents, and subject to official confirmation by Syrian authorities, the source is aware of reports indicating that GAPAR registered Palestine refugees may approach a Syrian embassy abroad in the event their travel documents are lost. In cases where all documents are lost, it is understood this requires that the person presents a police report stating that all original documents have been lost.

24. According to information available to the organisation, it unofficially understands that Palestinian refugees wishing to return to Syria will be subject to the same requirements for other returnees, including Syrian citizens. While the organisation defers to the Syrian authorities for official confirmation, it understands that Palestinian refugees may be permitted to return if they can prove, among other things, they had valid legal status in Syria or were entitled to a residency permit before the crisis.
25. Palestinian refugees who currently want to return to Syria from abroad, must similar to all other returnees, exchange 100 USD to Syrian pounds before entry into the territory, at the official exchange rate.³²⁹

Minutes from meeting with Musaab Balchi, Skype, 22 January 2021

Musaab Balchi is a Palestinian consultant, MENA real-time information analyst and former journalist based in Washington D.C. Musaab Balchi was born and raised in Yarmouk, where he lived until 2013. He has worked with documenting violations against Palestinians in Syria and is in regular contact with sources inside of Syria.

General security situation

1. Out of the six camps in Damascus and Rural Damascus, four have been affected by clashes. Only Jaramana Camp and Khan Dunoun Camp were not affected.
2. The number of checkpoints in Damascus has been reduced since 2018; however, there are still checkpoints in Damascus and on all roads going to Damascus. There are no checkpoints inside the camps.
3. There is a checkpoint in front of Yarmouk Camp, Sbeineh Camp, Sayyeda Zeinab Camp and the Palestinian gathering of Huseiniyah. The checkpoint at Sayyeda Zeinab Camp is larger than the others due to the religious significance of that area. Although there are no checkpoints in front of Khan Eshieh, Khan Dunoun and Jaramana, people must go through checkpoints to reach these camps. There are no checkpoints inside the camps.
4. The Palestinian Liberation Army do not have presence at the checkpoints at the camp entrances, however Palestinian armed factions allied with the government are present, including Jabhat Al-Shaabi (PFLP-GC), Al-Quds Brigade, Jabhat Al-Tahrir (DFLP), Al-Aqsa Shield Forces and Sai'qa.

Jaramana Camp and Khan Dunoun Camp

5. Jaramana and Khan Dunoun are considered as safe camps. Most Palestinian military factions are present in Jaramana Camp because it is strategically important, being close to the airport. There are also pro-Iranian factions like the Fatemiyoun Brigade present inside the camp. Musaab Balchi is

³²⁹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/23/syrias-100-dollar-barrier-return#:~:text=The%20Syrian%20government%20insists%20that,amid%20an%20unprecedented%20economic%20crisis.>

unaware of whether units from the Syria Arab Army (SAA) are inside as well. Additionally, there are Iranian-linked militias in the area surrounding Jaramana Camp. There are no militarised Palestinian factions present inside the camp.

Yarmouk Camp

6. The checkpoint in front of Yarmouk Camp is controlled by the Syrian military, the Ahmed Jibril group (PFLP-GC) and a few other smaller Palestinian factions, e.g. the Free Palestine Movement. These factions are actively standing there. All persons who want to enter and exit Yarmouk Camp must pass through this checkpoint. Musaab Balchi is unaware of what security branch of the Syrian military that is present at the checkpoint in front of the camp.

Access and residency

7. PRS can both rent and own houses. There are no legal obstacles in place for PRS to rent houses and apartments; however, there is a lack of apartments and housing is generally expensive. The rent differs from area to area, but the lowest rent is around 100,000-150,000 SYP/month. As the average wage in Syria is 50,000 SYP/month, it is difficult for people to pay rent solely based on their salaries.
8. There are offices in charge of renting out or selling houses inside the camps. People also find housing through social media and personal contacts.
9. Some individuals affiliated with the opposition lost ownership over their houses under the provisions of Law no. 19 of 2012, which is a part of the counter-terrorism law.
10. It is possible to move into three of the camps that witnessed battles, i.e. Khan Elshieh, Sbeineh and Huseinyeh. However, it is necessary to have a prior security approval from the authorities in order to move there. Persons who previously lived in one of these camps and wish to return to live in the same camp also require a prior security approval. In order to get a security approval you need to approach the relevant security branch and ask for permission.
11. According to Musaab Balchi, individuals who have security issues with the Syrian authorities do not present themselves at a security branch to obtain a security clearance, as they fear being detained. Not obtaining a security clearance consequently means that they are unable to return to the camp they once fled.
12. Individuals, who were either loyal to the Syrian government or managed to stay neutral throughout the conflict, are more likely to apply for a security clearance. Many of the persons who returned to Sbeineh Camp for example, are families of pro-government fighters. Such individuals are better positioned to obtain a security clearance.
13. Except for Yarmouk Camp, it is possible for PRS to visit the camps without getting a prior permission.
14. The quality of the infrastructure varies from camp to camp. This was the case even before the war, e.g. in rural camps such as Khan Eshieh and Sbeineh, the infrastructure was worse than in Yarmouk. Today,

the camps that witnessed battles generally have a worse infrastructure than the camps that did not.

15. There is currently large scale looting going on in Yarmouk Camp, as only few people reside there, while similar large-scale looting does not take place in the other camps.

Jaramana Camp and Khan Dunoun Camp

16. It is not necessary to get a security clearance to move to Jaramana Camp or Khan Dunoun Camp if you originate from there. However, if you are an IDP who wish to reside in those camps, you would need a security clearance.
17. Persons who received a security clearance from the Syrian authorities to move into Jaramana Camp and Khan Dunoun Camp would not face problems with the Palestinian factions in those camps.
18. Both camps have many IDP residents, this includes PRS as well as Syrian citizens, because they consider the camps to be safe. Many of the PRS IDPs originate from Yarmouk Camp. The demand for housing in these camps is high, which means that the rent has increased. The overpopulation in Jaramana Camp also means that some services, such as electricity, are in shortage.

Yarmouk Camp

19. PRS can enter and reside in Yarmouk Camp under the provision of the Syrian authorities. A person wishing to visit the camp can do so if he/she 1) provides a proof of ownership, or electricity or water payments that document an attachment to the camp; 2) provides an ID card; and 3) complete a security check.
20. The security check is done at the checkpoint in front of the camp, which has a laptop and access to a database of individuals who are wanted for security reasons. Those who are wanted face detention, whereas relatives of wanted individuals are denied access and may in few cases also be arrested. The relatives at risk of arrest are mainly first-degree relatives but second-degree relatives of wanted high profile individuals, including prominent civil activists and figures may also be subject to arrest. What will happen to the arrested relatives is arbitrary with no systematic process in place.
21. In order to return to live in Yarmouk Camp, the following four documents are needed: Proof of ownership/deed; security clearance; family book; and IDs for every person above 14 years of age. It is a requirement that your house is not in risk of collapsing.
22. The deeds are usually kept in a local office inside the camps, however these records of ownership have been destroyed in many camps that witnessed conflicts, including Yarmouk. This makes it impossible to have deeds reissued. The only deeds that are recognised are those issued by the GoS.
23. The people who have been allowed to return to the camp have been allowed to bring reconstruction material. The persons who have not received a security permission to enter are unable to reconstruct their houses.

24. Reconstruction of housing in Yarmouk Camp has been very limited as reconstruction teams (construction workers, electricians, plumbers) have not been permitted to enter. The severity of the damage in most houses and areas is so severe that it requires specialised people to rebuild the houses.
25. Most persons rushed to leave Yarmouk when the siege of the camp took place in December 2012. The day after the siege began, only 20,000 persons were left in the camp. Everyone else fled to the neighbouring areas such as the Palestinian gathering of Yalda, believing they could return to Yarmouk Camp soon after. Most of these persons left their ownership documents in the camp or later lost these documents. This means that today they are unable to provide all the necessary documents that could allow them to return. Many would also avoid approaching the authorities to get a security clearance, fearing that they would be detained because the authorities might suspect them of oppositional activities.
26. Damascus Governorate took authority over the camp in 2018. This resulted in the camp being divided into three sections and big areas have been taken out for reconstruction. In the reconstruction areas, a person must prove ownership of his/her house; otherwise, the authorities will take it. Therefore, it is not possible to move back to Yarmouk, unless you can prove ownership of a house there. No substitute documents, such as water and electricity payments, are accepted.
27. The pro-government militias who were involved in the fight to take over Yarmouk Camp continues to loot the camp, taking everything of value, e.g. household goods. Looting of this sort by pro-government militias also take place in other areas where the government has regained control.
28. Recently, 500 families got a permission to move back to Yarmouk Camp; however, the actual number might be lower. The government made a decision that gave the looters one week to evacuate everything that they had collected to outside of Damascus. However, looting continued after the deadline for this on 22 January 2021, albeit on a smaller scale.
29. Because of the looting, the overall infrastructure in the camp has declined since the authorities retook the area in 2018. Many have avoided reconstructing their houses because they fear looting. According to Musaab Balchi, the looters and the militias controlling the entrance to Yarmouk Camp are the same, so they know what items are brought in and out of the camp.

Sbeineh Camp

30. People in Sbeineh Camp rely on water trucks to receive water.

Khan Eshieh Camp

31. The residents in Khan Eshieh Camp are dependent on water trucks that only comes to the camp once a week. The water from these trucks are highly polluted.

Outside the camps

32. In case PRS wish to settle outside of the camps in Damascus or Rural Damascus, they must get a security clearance. This is the only formal requirement for PRS in order to do this.
33. There are some areas where it is more difficult for a PRS to get permission to live in than others, e.g. in downtown Damascus. This is due to the sectarian make-up of the city, with many areas being dominated by a certain sect. The relevant security branch might decline to give a security clearance to someone belonging to another sectarian group. For example, Musaab Balchi explained that a PRS would have an application for security clearance to live in Alawi-majority areas such as Mezzeh 86 or to enter Republican Guard Residences rejected.

UNRWA services

34. The UNRWA services have declined with the overall situation in Syria. UNRWA is trying to be creative, e.g. by sending mobile health clinics to Yarmouk Camp. However, the overall demand for UNRWA services is high and the provided service level is not enough, according to Musaab Balchi.

Education

35. Over 50 % of the PRS children in the primary school age do not attend school. There are various reasons for children not attending school, including transportation costs and a lower quality of education. Many teachers have migrated or passed away, and many new teachers do not have the same qualifications. However, the low attendance rate is not due to UNRWA rejecting pupils from attending schools.
36. Around 40 % of the UNRWA schools have been devastated. In some areas where PRS have settled more recently, UNRWA has been able to open new schools. These areas include Qudsaya and Sahnaya.
37. In Yarmouk Camp, there are currently no open UNRWA schools. UNRWA has provided buses for children in Yarmouk Camp to allow them to reach an UNRWA school outside of the camp, as the high transportation costs otherwise would have prevented them from this. However, elsewhere the transportation costs remains an issue for some to receive education.
38. UNRWA schools are better than public schools in Syria. Public schools are of a low quality, and many put their children in private schools instead. PRS can choose to attend public schools, which is free.

Healthcare

39. Healthcare services have been in decline because of the war and many hospitals and health clinics have been devastated. UNRWA is trying to open new health facilities to meet the demands.
40. There are UNRWA doctors present in Damascus and Rural Damascus province, but not at all health centres. Some people have to go to Qudsaya or Mashrou Dummar to consult doctors at UNRWA health facilities, which can entail long travels. At all UNRWA clinics there are nurses present.
41. UNRWA has contracts with private hospitals, but they only cover the full cost for major and critical surgeries and not for all surgeries, which was previously the case. In addition, UNRWA has cut much of

the medicine it was providing.

42. Musaab Balchi has not heard of PRS who have been rejected treatment at government hospitals.

Relief services

43. UNRWA has cut much of its economic support. Currently, they provide a monthly support of 9 USD and 14 USD. The amount depends on whether the cases are critical. The economic support is provided in Syrian pounds using the official exchange rate of 1,250 SYP/USD; meanwhile, the unofficial exchange rate is 3,036 SYP/USD.
44. There are two ways of getting the actual economic support, either by cash handout through one of UNRWA's offices or through banks. Most people choose to get the money in cash.

Economic situation

45. The unemployment rate in Syria is generally high and the majority are unemployed. PRS enjoy the same access to work as Syrian citizens, except for some very senior official positions in the public sector. The problem for everyone is that there are no jobs available. It is mostly construction workers, who are able to find work. Some people resort to joining militias due to lack of other income opportunities.
46. There are food stores available inside the camps. The food prices are similar to the prices in comparable areas outside the camps. However, in Yarmouk Camp, there are currently no food stores open. Some food stores opened inside the camp after the government took control of it, but these have closed again.
47. It is possible for most PRS to access the Smart Card system. However, non-GAPAR-registered PRS cannot access this system.
48. The vast majority of Palestinians living in Syria rely on remittances from family living abroad. Those who do not get remittances live on whatever they can get hold on and most PRS live in extreme poverty.

Entry conditions

49. PRS who have no unresolved issues with the Syrian authorities can go back to Syria from abroad, but most people avoid approaching the authorities because they fear the security consequences. The authorities treat PRS and Syrian citizens similarly regarding return procedures.
50. It is necessary to have a valid travel document in case you want to return to Syria from Europe. Those who want to return also need to proof that they left Syria regularly and that they have clarified any outstanding issues regarding military service. A PRS with a valid travel document issued by the Syrian authorities do not need a visa to return.
51. It is possible to have new identity papers issued if a person has family members inside Syria to help him/her. The person and the family member must be in the same family book. Musaab Balchi is unaware of whether a declaration of consent given to other persons inside of Syria could allow for

issuing of identity papers as well.

52. All PRS and Syrian citizens are required to exchange 100 USD using the official exchange rate in order to enter the country. The Syrian authorities have announced that they would waive this fee; however, this has not been implemented.

Additional information on camps

53. Palestinian camps are vastly located in rural Damascus, which is mostly still underdeveloped and open area. Those areas are accessible by main roads heavily guarded by military checkpoints, physical boundaries, and others. Palestinian camps are not "really integrated" with other towns. In fact, they are surrounded by open spaces of flat grounds. The most integrated was Yarmouk, and the regime was affectively able to besiege it with four main checkpoints at the main roads equipped with snipers, tanks, soldiers, in addition to road closures.
54. Since the beginning of the Syrian uprising, the Syrian regime has effectively isolated areas from each other and imposed heavy sieges on them. It is not a phenomenon exclusive to the Palestinian experience in Syria but was applied throughout the country.
55. In short, there are manned and unnamed checkpoints throughout Damascus to isolate the regions from each other. The strategy of cutting off areas includes deploying snipers, physical boundaries, soldiers, and others.
56. Those checkpoints have heavily increased by the end of 2012. Checkpoints and elimination of access to Palestinian camps evolved with the increasing materialization of each area separately, meaning when the Syrian regime began to send the military to areas to oppress demonstrations (if the camp witnessed demonstrations), or when oppositions started to use these areas for military activities.

Minutes from meeting with Tom Rollins, Skype, 28 January 2021

Tom Rollins is an independent journalist and researcher focusing on Syria, and particularly on the situation for Palestinians in Syria. He is a non-resident scholar at Middle East Institute, and has previously been working as editor-in-chief at Syria Direct and as an analyst at Mercy Corps.

Security situation in Yarmouk Camp

1. When the Government of Syria retook Yarmouk Camp in May 2018, between 100-200 persons remained inside the camp. These persons were mostly elderly and minors. Later, families affiliated/sympathising with Palestinian factions and members of their political wings, public sector employees working with e.g. GAPAR and people with ties to the Syrian security apparatus were permitted to reside in Yarmouk while the camp was closed to the rest of displaced residents. Following the Government of Syria takeover of the camp, several hundred people returned to the camp are now living in Yarmouk.

2. The northern camp entrance at the Bateekha Roundabout, at the northern entrance of Yarmouk Street and Palestine Street, is the only way into the camp today.
3. The PFLP-GC headquarters in Yarmouk was destroyed early on in the conflict. They were manning different front lines in the north of the camp near Batheeka Roundabout and northern areas of Yarmouk. The PFLP-GC still have good relations with the security apparatus of the Government of Syria (GoS) and thus has some form of presence in and around the camp today. Some of the returnees were also affiliated to PFLP-GC. Similar to developments in other camps, factions such as PFLP-GC and Free Palestine Movement, have begun to take up post-conflict activities as a kind of 'humanitarian response'.
4. As far as Tom Rollins is aware, there are no checkpoints inside Yarmouk Camp. He does not have concrete information on the presence of unexploded ordnances (UXO) in the camp; however, his sources have spoken about this being a factor challenging safe returns to the camp and there were reports that a looter was injured by an UXO in late 2020. The UN has not conducted de-mining in Yarmouk until now.

Residency and services in Yarmouk Camp

5. The situation for PRS regarding documents and residency rights differs depending on whether the person is registered with GAPAR or not. Individuals who are not registered with GAPAR includes those who came to Syria from Jordan in the 1970s, from Lebanon in 1982 and from Iraq in 2006.
6. GAPAR leased the land in Yarmouk to the GAPAR-registered Palestinian families, which gave them the right to build on the allocated plot. As such, the PRS do not own per se but rather have a right of use of the properties there.
7. The leases in Yarmouk Camp were registered in GAPAR's land registry, which was based in the municipality (*baladiya*) building that was placed in the northeastern part of Yarmouk. This area was a frontline in 2012-13 and it remains unclear how many of the documents in the registry remain intact, particularly given that the area around the municipality was a frontline between 2012-2013. There have been reports in pro-opposition media that GAPAR now requests original copies of documents.
8. Similarly, there have been reports about inhabitants in Hajar Al-Aswad who were informed that the land registry building was destroyed in a fire that took place when IS controlled the area. Consequently, these inhabitants cannot get any documents from the registry.
9. Yarmouk Camp was rendered a restricted zone when it came under GoS control in May 2018. A system of permits was introduced by which people could apply for a permission from the Palestine Branch under the Military Intelligence to check on their properties; however, this system did not allow for returns and entry permits were only granted for 24 hours.
10. The Damascus Governorate issued an organisational plan in the end of June 2020, which intended to govern the future reconstruction of the camp. However, the plan was postponed in late August 2020,

after the governorate had received a large number of objections during the 30-day mandated objection period.

11. The organisational plan would maintain most, but not all, of the original area of Yarmouk, i.e. the triangle between Yarmouk Street and Palestine Street. GAPAR leased this land to the PRS and it is the area in the camp where most people have returned to. The rest of the camp would be applied under Law no. 5 of 1982 and Law no. 23 of 2015, and would be rezoned and completely rebuild.
12. In October 2020, the Damascus Governorate introduced a mechanism for return to Yarmouk Camp. There are three criteria for return: 1) Security permit; 2) proof of ownership/right of use of property; and 3) study commissioned by engineers from the Yarmouk Services Department that states that your house is habitable and structurally sound etc. If you meet the three criteria then you should be able to move back; however, but there are any number of factors that could mean you fit the three criteria and do not get accepted, or you are arbitrarily/unfairly classified as not meeting the three criteria. According to Tom Rollins, the Syrian government has been using property studies to justify demolitions when the displaced/current residents of that property say the property is sound.
13. In the beginning of 2021, some people were allowed to return to Yarmouk Camp through this mechanism.
14. To obtain a security permit, a person must apply at the Palestine Branch of the Military Intelligence in the area to which the person wants to move.
15. An applicant intending to return to a property they own must present an “identity card, family card, proof of ownership, security approval number and a written request to obtain the restoration permit.” There is no uniform way of proving ownership or right of use, which might pose a problem for those who apply to return. The wording suggest that a rental contract would not suffice as a proof own ownership.
16. The third criteria, a permission from Yarmouk Services Department, entails that engineers are commissioned to determine whether a property is safe and habitable. The Yarmouk Services Department is located in the same place as the municipality, which was dissolved in the end of 2019.
17. The number of habitable houses in Yarmouk Camp is limited due to the destruction, and there are basically no services available.
18. The Syrian government’s implementation of HLP and redevelopment legislation threatens to entrench the displacement of large numbers of Palestinians displaced from Yarmouk and other camps, particularly refugees now outside the country who are less able to participate in property verification procedures mandated in the law. As such HLP issues should be considered as a key barrier for refugees and internally displaced persons that make safe, dignified return to Palestinian camps difficult and, for some, actually impossible.

Security, residency and services in other camps

19. Palestinian property ownership in Syria was first permitted in the 1960s. Now, PRS both own and rent houses, although non-GAPAR-registered refugees can only rent properties. Today, Law No. 11 of 2011 governs the PRS property ownership, which gives them the right to own one residential property. However, several conditions should be met, including being married and having certain approvals, including a security approval. There are also different models of ownership. People can be sharecropping on agricultural land, enter private contracts, or own property through a court order or by a power of attorney. There is a mixture of all these different ownership models in and around all Palestinian camps in Syria.
20. The number of habitable houses differs from camp to camp. Those who witnessed battles are likely to have lower housing stocks than those camps that were unaffected by battles. It has been a tendency that families move in with other family members in order to keep the rental costs down. This has resulted in many living in cramped conditions.
21. Female-headed households might face particular obstacles to obtain housing in camps, as pre-war legislation required that a male head of household should be present for a family to own a property. This might have been relaxed recently as many male head of households have disappeared or been killed; yet, the procedure remains complicated.
22. UNRWA has succeeded in rehabilitating some of its facilities in other camps.

Residency outside the camps

23. The rental market in Damascus is incredibly speculative. Many are predatory practices by landlords, include rent overcharge from IDP families.
24. Tom Rollins is unaware of the general availability of housing in Damascus. Affordability of housing is a major issue for PRS, as 90 % of PRS in the GoS-held areas live in absolute poverty, according to UNRWA. This percentage is above average compared to Syrian citizens.
25. A security permit is required to settle in other areas of Damascus. According to Tom Rollins, it may be more difficult for a PRS from a formerly opposition-held area to get a security clearance than it is for those who come from an area that has been GoS-controlled throughout the conflict.

Return to Syria

26. Tom Rollins do not have detailed accounts of what documentation is needed for persons returning to Syria from Europe.
27. Individuals from Yarmouk, Sbeineh and possibly Khan Eshieh are more likely to have their application for return rejected than persons who lived in camps that were not opposition-held. The dynamic is not based on whether a person is a PRS or a Syrian citizen but rather on whether the area of origin was held by the opposition.

Annex II: Terms of Reference

1. Current situation in each of the six UNRWA camps in Damascus and Rural Damascus provinces

- 1.1. General security situation and the impact of the conflict in the camps
- 1.2. Access to UNRWA services in the camps
 - 1.2.1. Access to and availability of UNRWA healthcare services as well as supplementary healthcare service provided by the GoS
 - 1.2.2. Access to and availability of UNRWA educational services
 - 1.2.3. Access and availability of economic support from UNRWA
- 1.3. Access to and availability of camp accommodation

2. Current situation of Palestinians living outside the camps

- 2.1. Possibility to settle outside the camps
- 2.2. Access to UNRWA services for Palestinian Refugees living outside the camps
- 2.3. Possibility of Palestinians who previously lived outside the camps, to settle in any one of the functional UNRWA camps.

3. Economic conditions for Palestinian refugees

- 3.1. Access to the labour market

4. Entry conditions for Palestinian refugees from Syria into Syria

- 4.1. Procedure for voluntary returns; including document requirements and official approval