



An-Najah National  
University



AL-BALQA'  
APPLIED  
UNIVERSITY



# Social Work with Refugees in Germany, Jordan and Palestine

## Services Offered to Women by NGOs and UNRWA in Refugee Camps in Nablus District (Progress Report)

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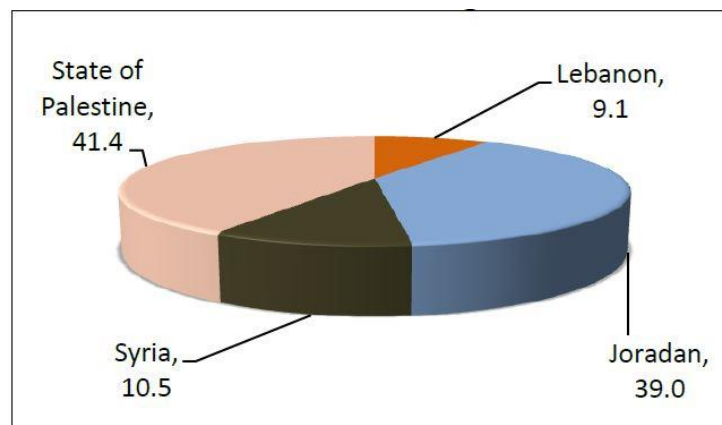
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## INTRODUCTION

The Palestinian refugee is defined by the UNRWA as a person whose original place of living was Palestine before losing it in 1948. The infamous year of 1948 (or 'Nakba' as it is referred to by Palestinians) is when the Jewish army of the to be declared state of Israel fought the Arab liberation army and won, this is the first pivotal point for Palestinian refugees in which nearly 700,000 civilians were expelled from their place of living or have fled their homes in search of safety.<sup>1</sup>

Today, the total Palestinian population is around 12 million, of which, approximately 5.9 million Palestinians live as refugees in Palestine itself as they were moved from their original place of living to new one within Palestine, this makes up for approximately 41.4% of the entire Palestinian refugee population. The reminder of the said population lives in Jordan (39%), Syria (10.5%), Lebanon (9.1%), and the rest of the world.<sup>2</sup>



**The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)** was established by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949 to carry out direct relief and works programs for Palestine refugees. The Agency began operations on 1 May 1950. In the absence of a solution to the Palestine refugee problem, the General Assembly has repeatedly renewed

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<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Relief and Works Agency. <<https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees>>

<sup>2</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2018.

<[https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_En\\_20-6-2018-REF-en.pdf](https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_20-6-2018-REF-en.pdf)>

UNRWA's mandate, most recently extending it until 30 June 2020. UNRWA is unique in terms of its long-standing commitment to one group of refugees. It has contributed to the welfare and human development of four generations of Palestinian refugees.<sup>3</sup>

In numbers, UNRWA provides access to medical care to roughly 3.1 million refugees each year.<sup>4</sup>

### **UNRWA and the PALESTINIAN REFUGEES**

Refugees in West Bank and Gaza constitute a special category of refugees as they live among their people and not hosted by another nation. The target refugee population of our Research Project is part of this category; refugees who fled from their homes in one part of their homeland to another. Refugees in the vicinity of Nablus city live in three refugee camps, besides having less numbers live in the city itself.

UNRWA services have been, since its establishment, a major source of help to Palestinian refugees in education, health and social welfare. UNRWA could sustain these services almost to a good level until it recently started having financial difficulties majorly because of assistance cut from some donors. The most harmful cut was by USA current administration. As a result, UNRWA started decreasing its helping programs by cutting some services and ending contracts with numbers of employees. This new situation affected refugees, especially the poor families, and triggered a wave of protest among refugees against UNRWA's measures.

UNRWA resembles for Palestinian refugees more than a source of services, although this is very important for their wellbeing. It is linked to their refugee status that is attached to their continuous struggle for, determination to, and hope of a just solution to their situation based on international resolutions that recognize their rights to return and compensation. So as it was put by one of the public figures in Balata refugee camp "we have the right for a dignified life and ask UNRWA to continue its services accordingly, and at the same time we refuse giving up our right to return and refuse projects for integration and settlement in refugee places".

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<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Relief and Works Agency. <<https://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are>>

<sup>4</sup> The United Nations Relief and Works Agency. <<https://www.unrwa.org/what-we-do>>

## OUR RESEARCH PROJECT

By joining this project with German and Jordanian partners, we aimed at giving our students a valuable learning experience that includes doing a field research and exchanging experiences with other international participants. Doing the research project is intended by itself, it is rather intended to be a learning tool for the participant students and their colleagues in the department. The selection process of participants was done carefully to determine the participating students. The criteria for this selection was based on interest in the project and the topic; language abilities as English will be the media of communication in the activities of the project while Arabic is the teaching language in the department; and communication skills of the participants.

As a result, attention to the process and how the activities are applied in carrying out the research and the exchange activities was equally important as the outcome of the research itself.

To accommodate the specific, if not the uniqueness, of the Palestinian refugees' problem, we suggested to have "social work with refugees", rather than "integration of refugees" as the title of the project. This change also was intended to link with department program that includes courses related to refugee theory and social practice with refugees.

The selected topic for the research was **"Services Offered to Women by NGOs and UNRWA in Refugee Camps in Nablus District"**. Choosing refugee women as the target group of the project was due to considering this group as a double marginalized group, and to take in consideration the research and learning interests of participating staff and students.

It was important for the research to identify the current services that are offered in the refugee camps. In addition, it aimed at comparing the current offered services to what was offered before and see the effect of downgrading UNRWA's services to refugees due to the international financial aid cuts to UNRWA. It was also important to see if these services are done in a way that respects human rights. Thus the research aimed at answering the following questions:

- 1- What are the refugee women's needs?

- 2- What are the services that refugee women receive?
- 3- What are the different factors that affect the services offered to refugee women?
- 4- How are these services offered to refugee women?
- 5- To what extent do these services follow the Rights-Based Approach to Social Work?

**Qualitative methodology approach** was considered as more appropriate to this research, and thus it included the following methods:

- 1- Short pilot survey
- 2- Individual interviews with selected community workers, NGOs representatives, and beneficiaries.
- 3- Focus groups with human rights and social rights activists.

To apply these methods, two **research tools** were developed; an interview guide for individual interviews and a list of questions to facilitate focus groups. The tools were drafted firstly in a brainstorming discussion that included staff members and students who are participating in the project. The final form of the tool was done by a staff member and approved by the participants. The tools included questions that constitute 4 main sections:

- Demographic data about participating interviewees,
- The offered services and women participation in needs assessment and volunteerism,
- Community organizations working in the camps,
- UNRWA services and women role in activities in response to downgrading services, and
- To what extent the services meet human rights and done in a way that respects human rights?

## **PROJECT DEVELOPMENT**

The project field activities had started late compared to scheduled plan due to logistical problems and the timing of exams at An-Najah National University (ANU). The field work was also interrupted by coinciding with the month of Ramadan that was followed by Eid AlFetr vacation; two occasions in which people are less available for meetings and interviews. Thus,

there are still scheduled interviews and visits to be done. The following are the major activities that are implemented so far.

1- Training involved students in the project (KDPP1/KDPP2):

A preparatory training was organized for selected students to give them a general idea about the project and the importance of exchange. Dr. Saleh and Mr. Salameh facilitated this training highlighting the importance of such projects to students' learning process in social work, especially acquiring skills of qualitative research and field work, as well as on the development of personality through dialogue with international students and exchanging experiences across cultures.

Another training session was organized to discuss with participating students our proposed intervention project. Students participated in discussing the proposal and how it can be linked to their interests in social work study subjects. This session included general orientation about implementing the project. It was agreed that there will follow-up meetings during the implementation of the project which are considered as a continuation to this kind training; training by doing. The session and follow-up was also by Dr. Saleh and Mr. Salameh.

A third brain storming meeting with students aimed at drafting the research tools based on pilot exploratory visits to the refugee camps by the students in which students got to know the camps social environment. A first draft was drafted in the session to be fine-tuned by Dr. Zaidalkilani and finalized through follow-up. In this session the team reached a conclusion that it is better, due to practical issues and time limitations, to focus on the refugee camps inside the vicinity of Nablus city: Balatah, Askar and Al-Ain. This session was facilitated by all staff members of the team.

Follow-up short meetings took place during the implementation of the project that included discussing arising points and giving hints and advises to students.

2- Data collection:

a) Conducting a short pilot survey (KDPP3):

The students made visits to the refugee camps with a short list of questions about the situation and services in the camps. The aim of these visits was to collect general data and to create for them a mind-setting for the implementation of the project.

- b) Conducting individual interviews with selected community workers, NGOs representatives, and beneficiaries (KDPP4):

The students have done about 30 interviews with refugee women including individual beneficiaries who receive services; social workers; volunteers and community workers; and NGOs representatives.

Other interviews are scheduled with a major active community organization in Balatah camp. (a list of interviewees is appended).

- c) Organizing and facilitating focus groups with human rights and social rights activists:

Two focus groups were conducted and a third is scheduled.

- 3- Analysing collected data (KDL5+6):

In qualitative research traditions, Data Analysis is considered a dynamic process that continues in parallel of the data collection process. This makes both data collection and analysis mutually benefit from emerging themes of the research process. As there are still data collection activities, we can talk about emerging themes from the so far collected data. These themes will be appended to this report and presented in our coming meeting.

- 4- Writing the study report:

The study report writing is an accumulative process. This first report is part of this process. The final report will be written after concluding the research project. Our intention is to have that report as a basis for a wider study that will include a bigger team of students who will be taking relevant courses in next semester.

- 5- Organizing a special forum (including academics and other stake-holders) in which the report will be presented and discussed towards practical recommendation:

A meeting was organized that included team members with a number of students from the department of social work at ANU and a number of NGOs representatives to introduce to them the project and give general directions of the project development. This meeting will help prepare the ground for the intended special forum to present the findings of the project.

### **Field Visits within the Project**

A. Discussion with politicians:

Due to the interruption of the project implementation and to long period of transitional period for changing the Palestinian council of ministers, it was not possible to schedule a meeting with deputy Minister of social development. It may be possible to do that during the remaining period of the project. Nevertheless, a discussion can be made with the head Nablus directorate of the ministry. A visit was conducted to Nablus district Governorate office that included meeting the Deputy Governor, Mrs. Anan Atteereh.

B. Discussion with refugees related departments:

A visit was conducted to UNRWA headquarters in Nablus that included a meeting with Mr. Awni Mashaqi, the head of the department of social affairs and services in UNRWA's office of north West Bank. A meeting is being scheduled with a representative of PLO's refugees' department.

C. Field trip to a refugee camp:

Team members visited Balatah, Askar, and Al-Ain refugee camps many times for making contacts, preparing for meetings and interviews, and conducting interviews.

D. Field trip to a human aid or welfare aid organization (as an example: UN, Red Crescent, Caritas etc.) in the Field of Social Work with Refugees:

Visits to such organizations were not conducted. Two visits to local community organizations working in the camps were conducted: As-Safir Society that is active mainly in Askar camp in helping women and children, and Yafa Social and Cultural Center in Balatah camp that runs many social and cultural programs.

## **Project Status**

As it was mentioned earlier, the implementation of the project components was interrupted by factors related to end of term exams and to other factors related to community life and bureaucracy of offices and departments with which the team tried to set appointments. Thus, this report is a progress report that is considered trivial and is open for inputs until being presented to partners' meetings. Based on this, we propose extending the period of the project by additional months to make-up for the interruptions and to make use of the beginning of a new semester at ANU. This opportunity will provide time to reflect on what was done, plan for complementing activities, and inviting more students to volunteer and support the team.

## **Expected Outcomes for Teaching**

The outcome of the project will be focused in the teaching-learning process for courses like Methods of Social Research, Social Work Practice with Refugees, Community Organization, and Social Work Skills. Different parts of the outcome can be probed and studied from different angles.



Also participating students can organize discussions with their fellow students to reflect on their experience in the research part, as well as on their experience in exchange and dialogue with students from the other participating universities and other cultural environments.

## Appendices

### Appendix (1)

#### Interview Guide

(To be added after translation)

## Appendix (2)

List of interviewees

(to be added)

### Appendix (3)

Emerging themes from interviews and visits

(to be added)

## Appendix (4)

Activities in pictures

(more will be added)



Meeting with Nablus District Deputy-Governor



A visit to Safir Society, Askar Reugee camp



Attending an honoring activity for community volunteers, Askar Refugee Camp.