



united nations relief and works agency  
for palestine refugees in the near east

وكالة الأمم المتحدة لإغاثة وتشغيل  
اللاجئين الفلسطينيين في الشرق الأدنى

department of  
legal affairs  
unrwa headquarters  
gaza ll

p.o. box 19149  
jerusalem 97200

t + 972 2 589 0227  
f + 972 2 589 0239

[www.unrwa.org](http://www.unrwa.org)

UNHCR Office for Switzerland and Liechtenstein,  
Weltpoststrasse 4,  
CH-3015 Bern,  
Switzerland  
swige@unhcr.org

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To whom it may concern:

This letter is provided to UNHCR upon its request for further information from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (**UNRWA** or the **Agency**) concerning the Agency's operations in Syria as well as its registration practices.

As general background, UNRWA was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1949 and provides assistance and protection to more than 5.5 million registered Palestine refugees registered in the Agency's fields of operation. While UNRWA's mandate focuses on Palestine Refugees, it also extends to other persons of concern to UNRWA who are eligible to register with the Agency for the receipt of services as per the Agency's regulatory framework and eligibility criteria.

UNRWA pursues its mission in Syria through provision of services and humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees since it started its field operation in 1950. Since the start of the conflict in 2011, service provision has been affected and the Agency currently has access to 10 camps out of 12. Many installations remain inaccessible or have sustained severe damage. UNRWA is the main provider of humanitarian assistance, protection and basic services to 438,000 Palestine refugees who remain in the country, and who have been among those worst affected by the crisis. The Agency's services include cash assistance for essential needs, including food, shelter and nonfood items (NFIs), basic education, primary health care, emergency relief, microfinance, shelter and infrastructural support. The Agency contributes to the protection of Palestine refugees both through its service delivery and by advocating for their rights. UNRWA does not manage the refugee camps and is not responsible for physical security or law and order in UNRWA fields of operations. The primary responsibility of ensuring the physical security of Palestine refugees residing in the UNRWA area of its operations falls within the sovereignty and responsibility of the respective host government. UNRWA is not in a position to make a statement in relation to an individual's level of physical security and his/her ability to receive physical protection from the host government. For more information on the Agency's protection work in Syria please see <https://www.unrwa.org/activity/protection-syria>.

As stated above, many UNRWA installations in Syria remain inaccessible or have sustained severe damage. Some 254,000 Palestine refugees have been displaced at least once since the beginning of the conflict and an estimated 13,500 are trapped

دائرة الشؤون القانونية  
الرئاسة العامة  
غزة II

ص.ب ١٩١٤٩  
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in hard-to-reach or inaccessible locations.<sup>1</sup> Ein el Tal, Dera'a and Yarmouk official and non-official camps, previously home to more than 30 per cent of the Palestine refugee population in Syria, have been largely destroyed by the hostilities. As you may know, Yarmouk non-official camp, previously home to 160,000 Palestine refugees, has been severely affected by the hostilities. The Agency has conducted a damage assessment of its installations in the unofficial camp of Yarmouk, near Damascus. UNRWA has 23 premises including 16 schools in Yarmouk. Almost all UNRWA premises need major repairs, 75% need to be completely rebuilt and all three of the Agency's health centres in Yarmouk are completely destroyed.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore anticipated that the levels of displacement will remain high among Palestine refugees, as the housing stock in Yarmouk unofficial camp suffered significant destruction during the conflict and most recently in May 2018. The majority of the 160,000 former residents of Yarmouk are therefore expected to remain in displacement, which further increases their vulnerability.

With respect to the registration of Palestine refugees, kindly note that UNRWA does not operate as a civil registry and does not issue travel documents or any other source document confirming the legal status of individuals.

UNRWA registers Palestine refugees for the purpose of UNRWA services and assistance based on established criteria for registration with UNRWA. Criteria for registration with UNRWA are set out in the Agency's Consolidated Eligibility and Registration Instructions (**CERI**) (available at: <https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2010011995652.pdf>). Registration with the Agency based on this criteria does not confer legal status or operate as a form of personal identification, proof of nationality or lack thereof.

Regarding the Syrian travel document for Palestinians, kindly note that the legal status and ability of Palestine refugees to obtain travel and other official documents is a matter for relevant Syrian authorities to confirm. While UNRWA is not in a position to make any authoritative statements in that regard, it is the Agency's understanding that travel documents are issued by the Syrian Government for Palestine refugees who are registered with the General Authority of Palestinian Arab Refugees (**GAPAR**).

We take this opportunity to note that nothing in or related to this letter shall be deemed a waiver, express or implied, of any of the privileges and immunities accorded to UNRWA under international law.

Sincerely,

Acting Director, Department of Legal Affairs  
UNRWA

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<sup>1</sup> UNRWA Syria Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal 2019:  
<https://unrwa.org/resources/emergency-appeals/syria-regional-crisis-emergency-appeal-2019>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/almost-all-unrwa-installations-yarmouk-and-dera%E2%80%99-camp-syria-severely-damaged>