



مجموعة العمل من أجل فلسطينيي سورية  
Action Group For Palestinians of Syria

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## التقرير اليومي

الخاص بأوضاع اللاجئين الفلسطينيين في سورية

Daily report on the situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria



### "Palestinian Migrants Exposed to Escalating Racism on Greek Island"

- UNRWA Transfers Cash Aid to Palestinians from Syria in Jordan
- US Resumes Aid to Palestine Refugee Agency
- HRW: Refugees Left Behind in Vaccine Rollout in Lebanon
- Palestinian Refugee Maher Mahmoud Forcibly Disappeared in Syria for 8th Year

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## Latest Developments

Violent and racist attacks against migrants and asylum-seekers, including Palestinian refugees, have skyrocketed on the Greek island of Kios.

Palestinian refugees from Syria told AGPS that a Palestinian refugee sustained leg injuries and was transferred to the hospital after a Greek national hit him with his motorcycle.

Incidents of racist violence have been increasingly reported among Palestinian refugees and other asylum seekers in Greece.

Greece has seen a massive influx of migrants since 2015, with thousands of people from war-torn countries like Syria seeking safety there. They either cross the Aegean Sea to get to the small southeast European country or its land border with Turkey.

In another development, UNRWA delivered cash grants to Palestinians from Syria (PRS) in Jordan.

Every registered family member received a cash grant of 84,960 Jordanian dinars. Those with Jordanian passports received 35 dinars.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) said PRS in Jordan continue to be exposed to a number of protection issues. Those without Jordanian documents who have entered from Syria and remained in Jordan irregularly are particularly vulnerable. They live under



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continuous risk of arrest, detention and potential forced return to Syria.

Following years of protracted displacement, many PRS have exhausted their coping mechanisms and rely on relief assistance to cover their basic needs.

In its fact sheet entitled “Syria Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal 2021”, UNRWA said that PRS in Jordan are confronted with increased hardship and vulnerability, due to long-term displacement and difficult socio-economic conditions, coupled with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

More than 2 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA live in Jordan.

There are ten recognized Palestine refugee camps throughout the country, which accommodate nearly 370,000 Palestine refugees. Jordan hosts the largest number of Palestine refugees of all of the UNWRA fields.

The majority of Palestine refugees have sought humanitarian assistance in Jordan, where they continue to suffer from abject poverty and live in a precarious legal status.

Along similar lines, the United States announced on Wednesday that it is contributing US \$150 million to UNRWA, restoring its role as a decades-long friend and supporter of the UN agency that provides life-saving human development and humanitarian aid assistance to Palestine refugees across the Middle East.



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Palestinian refugee Ahmed Odeh, from the Duheisheh camp, in Bethlehem, said the move represents a stark divergence from the former US administration's anti-Palestine policy.

Another refugee—Subhi Alyan, 71—said the initiative comes at a critical time for Palestinian refugees who have been suffering multiple hardships as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

UNRWA said in a press release issued on Wednesday that the restoration of funds comes after recent years of severe financial crisis for the Agency. The COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened the situation, forcing the Agency to respond to a public health crisis amid the most serious financial crisis in its history and manage its resources on a month-to-month basis due to unreliable funding.

From the time UNRWA was established in 1949 until 2018, the United States was the largest funder of the Agency, ensuring that UNRWA was able to fulfill its UN General Assembly mandate to provide humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees until a just and enduring political solution to the conflict is achieved.

Remarking on the U.S. announcement, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, “The United States is pleased to resume support for UNRWA’s services, including an education for over 500,000 Palestinian boys and girls, thereby providing hope and stability in UNRWA’s five fields of operation in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.”



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The newly announced U.S. funding will support the overall UNRWA programme budget -- the majority of which funds the operation of more than 700 schools educating over half a million children and almost 150 primary health clinics providing 8.5 million patient consultations a year -- as well as emergency appeals to respond to dire humanitarian challenges in Syria, the West Bank (including in East Jerusalem) and Gaza. These funds will support food, emergency cash assistance, emergency health, mental health and psychosocial support, education in emergencies, protection, water and sanitation, and COVID-19 response.

UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini expressed gratitude for the renewed UNRWA-U.S. relationship and welcomed the funding disbursement.

“UNRWA and the United States are historical partners in working together, alongside other generous UN Member States, to ensure that Palestine refugees can thrive. UNRWA could not be more pleased that once again we will partner with the United States to provide critical assistance to some of the most vulnerable refugees across the Middle East and fulfill our mandate to educate and provide primary health care to millions of refugees every day”, said Lazzarini.

“There is no other institution that does what UNRWA does, and we are committed to protecting the safety, health and future of the millions of refugees we serve. The U.S. contribution comes at a critical moment, as we continue to adjust to the challenges the



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COVID-19 pandemic presents. We encourage all Member States to contribute to UNRWA”, he added.

Meanwhile, the Lebanese government’s Covid-19 vaccination program risks leaving behind marginalized communities, including refugees and migrant workers, Human Rights Watch said last week.

Despite the government’s promises of an equitable program, the effort has been tainted by political interference and a lack of information.

HRW said that United Nations data shows that Syrian and Palestinian refugees have died from Covid-19 at a rate more than four and three times the national average, respectively. Yet, according to the government’s online Covid-19 vaccine registration and tracking platform, only 2.86 percent of those vaccinated and 5.36 percent of those registered to receive vaccinations are non-Lebanese, even though they constitute at least 30 percent of the population.

“With one in three people in Lebanon a refugee or migrant, a third of the population risks being left behind in the vaccination plan,” said Nadia Hardman, refugee and migrant rights researcher at Human Rights Watch. “The government needs to invest in targeted outreach to build trust with long-marginalized communities or the Covid-19 vaccination effort is doomed to fail.”

Between February and March 2021, Human Rights Watch spoke to 21 Syrian refugees, 6 Palestinian refugees, the caretaker labor



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minister, and staff from the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Anti-Racism Movement (ARM), a grassroots collective in Lebanon that fights discrimination.

As of April 5, only 3,638 Palestinians and 1,159 Syrians have been vaccinated, though 19,962 Palestinian refugees and health workers and 6,701 Syrian refugees are eligible in the first phase of the vaccine rollout.

Syrian refugees interviewed by Human Rights Watch raised fears of arrest, detention, or even deportation if they registered through a government-managed platform, especially if they do not have legal residency in Lebanon. Due to restrictive Lebanese residency policies, only 20 percent of an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon have the legal right to live in the country, leaving the vast majority vulnerable to arbitrary arrest, detention, harassment, and even deportation.

Although the 200,000 Palestinian refugees do not face the same fears over arrest and deportation, many have very little trust in the Lebanese government, which has systematically discriminated against them and barred them from getting government social services, including health care. They can get health care only through the private sector, which charges prohibitively high fees, or through international organizations like UNRWA.

Mistrust of the Lebanese government runs so deep that Palestinian refugees told Human Rights Watch they fear that even if they were



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to register, they would not actually receive the vaccine and would have to pay a fee they could not afford.

Migrant workers, many of whom are working in Lebanon under the exploitative kafala (sponsorship) system, either had no information whatsoever about the vaccine or expressed mistrust of the Lebanese authorities.

HRW said that to ensure equitable vaccine distribution despite the huge supply shortages, Lebanese authorities should follow the World Health Organization (WHO) SAGE values framework for the allocation and prioritization of Covid-19 vaccines, which offers guidance on the prioritization of groups when vaccine supply is limited. The SAGE guidance calls for ensuring national equity in vaccine access, particularly for groups experiencing greater burdens from the pandemic, such as people living in poverty, especially extreme poverty, and low-income migrant workers and refugees, especially those living in close quarters who are unable to physically distance.

In the meantime, Palestinian refugee Maher Khaled Mahmoud, born in 1994 and raised in AlHajar AlAswad in Syria, has been forcibly disappeared in Syrian government prisons for the eighth year running.

Maher was kidnapped by pro-government forces at Ali AlWahsh Street checkpoint, south of Damascus, on January 05, 2014. His condition and whereabouts remain unknown.



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AGPS has documented the secret incarceration of 1,797 Palestinian refugees in Syrian government lock-ups, among them women and children.