

Åge A. Tiltnes



Keeping Up

A Brief on The Living Conditions of Palestinian Refugees in Syria



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Preface

This report summarizes the findings of a comprehensive household sample survey of Palestinian refugees in Syria. The principal analytical report from the study, *Palestinian Refugees in Syria: Human Capital, Economic Resources and Living Conditions*, was published by Fafo in 2005. Furthermore, the year before Fafo's cooperation partner on the study, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Natural Resources (PCBS), published a tabulation report with detailed results.

While providing a concise portrait of the living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Syria, this report has some added value over the original report as it also includes comparative statistics about Syrian nationals and Palestinian refugees residing in the neighbouring countries. The report is funded by a grant from the Norwegian Government.

Oslo, March 2007

Jon Pedersen
Managing Director
Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies

1 Introduction

Previous to Fafo's report *Palestinian Refugees in Syria: Human Capital, Economic Resources and Living Conditions* (Tiltnes ed. 2005), the living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Syria had not been well documented. The aforementioned report changed this situation and portrayed their situation using multiple statistical indicators pertaining to areas such as health, education, housing, employment and income. Key demographic features of the Palestinian refugee population were also presented, as were aspects of their social networks. This report, *Keeping Up*, draws heavily on *Palestinian Refugees in Syria* as it essentially summarises its main findings. In addition it includes data from a few other studies, principally in order to put the living standards of Palestinian refugees in Syria in perspective.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Natural Resources (PCBS), Damascus, in collaboration with Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies, Oslo, collected the data on which the two reports are based during the second half of 2001. During the "Living Conditions of Palestinian Refugees in Syria" household sample survey almost 5,000 households were successfully interviewed at 65 different locations. The survey, however, covered only Palestinian refugees living in refugee camps and gatherings, with a total population of 156,000 in the camps and 17,000 in the so-called "gatherings" of 25 Palestinian households or more. The population covered by the survey comprised approximately 60 percent of all Palestinian refugees residing in Syria. Three-quarters of the Palestinian refugees in camps and gatherings live in (urban and rural) Damascus. The remaining 25 percent reside in the Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Dar'a and Latakia *mohafazat* (governorates).

There are 13 Palestinian refugee camps in Syria: seven in Damascus, two in Aleppo, and one camp in each of the other four mohafazat mentioned. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), the body established by the United Nations to cater for the Palestinian refugees in the aftermath of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, recognizes ten of the camps. Nevertheless, UNRWA also serves the so-called "un-official" camps, albeit at lower levels. The largest location labelled "camp" is Yarmouk, situated within the borders of the capital. While not recognized by UNRWA, the Agency runs several basic schools and health centres there. The living conditions of Palestinians in Yarmouk are systematically better than the living conditions of Palestinians residing elsewhere. This is because Yarmouk is a large commercial centre with a well-functioning public transportation system and residents

benefit from easy access to educational facilities and the labour market of greater Damascus. Moreover, Damascus is the political hub for Palestinian refugees in Syria, with a plethora of “popular committees” and social non-governmental organisations providing work and secure income.

When we refer to refugee camps in this report, we shall include both “official” and “un-official” camps. We sometimes present comparisons between camp and non-camp populations, but we frequently treat Yarmouk separately and hence report on three groups of locations: Yarmouk, other camps, and non-camp areas or gatherings.

The Palestinian refugees have been better integrated into Syrian society than in Jordan, and especially in Lebanon where lack of social and economic rights have produced excessive poverty and desolation causing many to leave family behind in search of a better life elsewhere (Aasheim 2000, Al-Natour 1997, Said 2001, Shiblak 2003, Sørvig 2001, Ugland 2002). As some authors have observed, although Palestinian refugees have not been granted full Syrian citizenship, they are generally treated like Syrian Arab citizens (Brand 1988, Yorke 1988, Davis 1997, Al-Mawed 1999). For example, they are entitled to the same educational and medical services as Syrian nationals and have full access to employment in the public sector.

Equal rights have contributed to a situation where the living conditions of Palestinian refugees are basically on a par with those of Syrian citizens. Since the vast majority of refugees reside in urban centres, their socio-economic characteristics are extensively shared with other urban populations. The poorest and most underprivileged Palestinian refugees are predominantly found in rural settings, where they tend to share living conditions with Syrian nationals living in similar surroundings (comparable access to educational institutions, health facilities, and job opportunities) rather than with Palestinian refugees residing in towns and cities. The circumstances of refugees in the camps just south of Damascus serve as a good example. Here the percentage of poor is higher, poverty is deeper, public employment is lower, unemployment is above average, physical infrastructure is inadequate, and school enrolment is low.

Keeping Up describes positive developments and identifies challenges pertaining to the living conditions of Palestinian refugees. Section 2 establishes the main demographic features of the population surveyed. It essentially shows a population who share the most characteristics with those of (urban) Syrian nationals. These include a steadily increasing age of marriage, declining fertility, reduced child mortality, and a general increase in life expectancy. Moreover, the surveyed population has relatively fewer middle-aged men than middle-aged women due to labour out-migration. Over half the households have close relatives living outside of Syria. Finally, the section briefly describes the Palestinian refugee household according to family size, settlement patterns and marriage characteristics.

Section 3 examines the living areas of the Palestinian refugees surveyed. It examines housing conditions and physical infrastructure, including education and health services. In so doing, and while concluding that the overall picture is better than in Lebanon, it identifies certain localities that are underserved. These include rural refugee camps such as Neirab on the outskirts of Aleppo in the North, and Jaramana, Khan Danoun, Sbeina, Sit Zeinab and Ramadan outside the capital in the region we have called Rural Damascus. The situation is quite different in Yarmouk camp, which fares better across the entire range of housing and neighbourhood indicators. In addition to objective aspects of housing and infrastructure, the chapter provides an insight into people's subjective assessment of their own situation. While the majority is by and large satisfied with their dwelling and neighbourhood, grievances are reported in a number of areas. In relation to the dwelling itself, people are most discontented with water supply and quality, and overcrowding. With regard to the living area, shortage of jobs and cultural facilities are mentioned most often.

Section 4 looks at the education of Palestinian refugees. It finds, not surprisingly, that there have been very positive developments over time. For example, while 27 percent of persons aged 60-69 years have completed elementary schooling or more, approximately 90 percent of people aged 15-29 years have achieved the same level. Thanks not least to UNRWA, illiteracy has been reduced dramatically. Nevertheless, the fact that one in ten young adults cannot read and write well suggests that there is room for improvement. The score on all education indicators is systematically worse in Rural Damascus than in other areas.

The health status of Palestinian refugees is described in Section 5. Twelve percent of all refugees suffer from a chronic illness; approximately half of them are so impaired that they need assistance to carry out everyday tasks. As is normally the case, chronic health failure, as well as other indicators of health outcomes covered by the survey, is influenced by age and socio-economic status. For the large majority, health services are within easy reach of their living quarters. Almost all pregnant women receive maternity care, about two-thirds from UNRWA. The vast majority give birth at a hospital, but only one-half of all mothers have post-natal check-ups. Following acute illness, nearly everyone sees a doctor. The most popular place to go is a private clinic, followed by an UNRWA health centre and a government hospital. Because Palestinian refugees have access to highly subsidised, and often free, services from UNRWA and the Syrian government, their outlays on consultation and treatment are generally low. There is a substantial degree of satisfaction with service providers, and people are more satisfied than Palestinian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon.

The central conclusion from our data on employment, covered in Section 6, is that the labour force of the Palestinian camps and gatherings in Syria share the main characteristics of the national labour force. The industry distribution of employed Palestinians is the same as the national distribution of Syrians, with the exception of

the agriculture and service sectors where Syrians have a greater concentration than Palestinians. Similar to Syrian citizens, 30 percent of working Palestinians receive their salaries from the public sector. Both male and female workforce participation is higher among Palestinian refugees in Syria than in any other host country. Labour force participation is particularly high in Rural Damascus, which may be explained by poorer access to transfer and non-wage income here. The unemployment rate is comparable to national figures. Wage levels are by and large low, causing many people to work long hours. A significant proportion of the labour force is underemployed.

Section 7 examines income sources and levels, and profiles the poor. It finds that wage income is reported by three-quarters of the households and that 63 percent declare it as their largest income source. The second most significant income source is self-employment, reported by one-third of the households and as the most important source by one-fifth. Transfer income (e.g. from relatives, special hardship support from UNRWA, pensions), while reported by almost one-half of the households, is rated as the most important source by no more than 13 percent. On the other hand, for the poorest households transfer income is critical. The poverty rate is lower among Palestinian refugees in Syria than those residing in Jordan and Lebanon. Furthermore, poverty is not as serious. Nevertheless, poverty constitutes a significant problem as nearly one in four households fall below the poverty line of 1 USD per capita per day. Poverty is higher in Rural Damascus than elsewhere.

Although *Keeping Up* portrays the situation as it was in 2001, we believe most findings and conclusions are still valid. By presenting the main survey results in a briefer and less technical report than the original one, we hope to reach new readers in the Palestinian refugee population, among Palestinian and Syrian decision-makers and other stakeholders and hence benefit more those aiming to design policies and implement activities to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian refugees in Syria.

The report makes use of only a limited number of tables and graphs. For further details we refer the reader to the original *Palestinian Refugees in Syria*.

2 Population

The Survey Sample

The Palestinian refugees in Syria either live in camps or outside of camps. Of those who live outside, one may distinguish between those who live in “gatherings” - clusters of households – and those who live isolated from others. The PCBS keeps track of the location and size of the gatherings. As stated in the introduction, the “Living Conditions of Palestinian Refugees in Syria” survey was restricted to those Palestinian refugees living in camps, including their fringes, and gatherings of 25 or more Palestinian refugee households (that also had been identified by the PCBS). The survey entailed 65 locations in total.

However, some people living in camps and gatherings are neither Palestinians nor refugees. We therefore restricted the population under study to consist of the population living in households with at least one Palestinian refugee. A person was considered a Palestinian refugee for the purpose of the survey if the person reported that he or she was either a refugee from 1948, displaced from 1967 or both, or if the person reported that he or she was registered at UNRWA (either in Syria or in some other field), or if the person reported that he or she was registered at the General Administration for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR) – the Syrian government office responsible for Palestinian refugees.

Population Size, Place of Origin and External Links

According to UNRWA, the Palestinian population in Syria by mid-year 2000 was 383,000. However, this was the number of refugees *registered* with UNRWA in Syria, and not the number of refugees actually residing in the country. People may have moved to the Gulf or Europe and still be registered in Syria. The UNRWA figure is considerably higher than estimates Fafo has made based on survey information and UNRWA school enrolment data (Pedersen 2003). Using three different adjustment factors, Pedersen calculated that there were between 278,000 and 333,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria in 2000. This interval covers a “qualified guess” by the PCBS of about 291,000 Palestinian refugees for the same year. The PCBS estimate, based on its own

Census information (Table 2.1) and enrolment data, is about 10,000 people higher than the results of the 1994 National Population Census conducted by Syria's Central Bureau of Statistics (Table 2.1) and seems, in our opinion, fairly reasonable. Basing population projections on PCBS' figure for the total Palestinian population in Syria and on fertility and mortality data from the 2001 household survey, Pedersen (2003) estimated the camp population at 159,000 in 2002 and 198,000 18 years later. These projections for the total number of Palestinian refugees would estimate 296,000 in 2002 and reach 368,000 in 2020, disregarding the unknown effect of migration.

While Syria accommodated nine percent of the 3.3 million Palestinian refugees residing in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria in 2002, it could house eight percent of the 4.6 million Palestinian refugees in the same areas in 2020; the relative reduction may be explained by lower fertility rates than elsewhere, particularly in the Gaza Strip (Pedersen 2003: Tables 9.6 and 9.7).

Around the time of the "Living Conditions of Palestinian Refugees in Syria" survey, the country accommodated approximately 27,000 first-generation Palestinian refugees. According to Pedersen (2003), this figure will diminish rapidly and only comprise about 10,000 first-generation refugees, or three percent of the total refugee population in Syria in 2020.

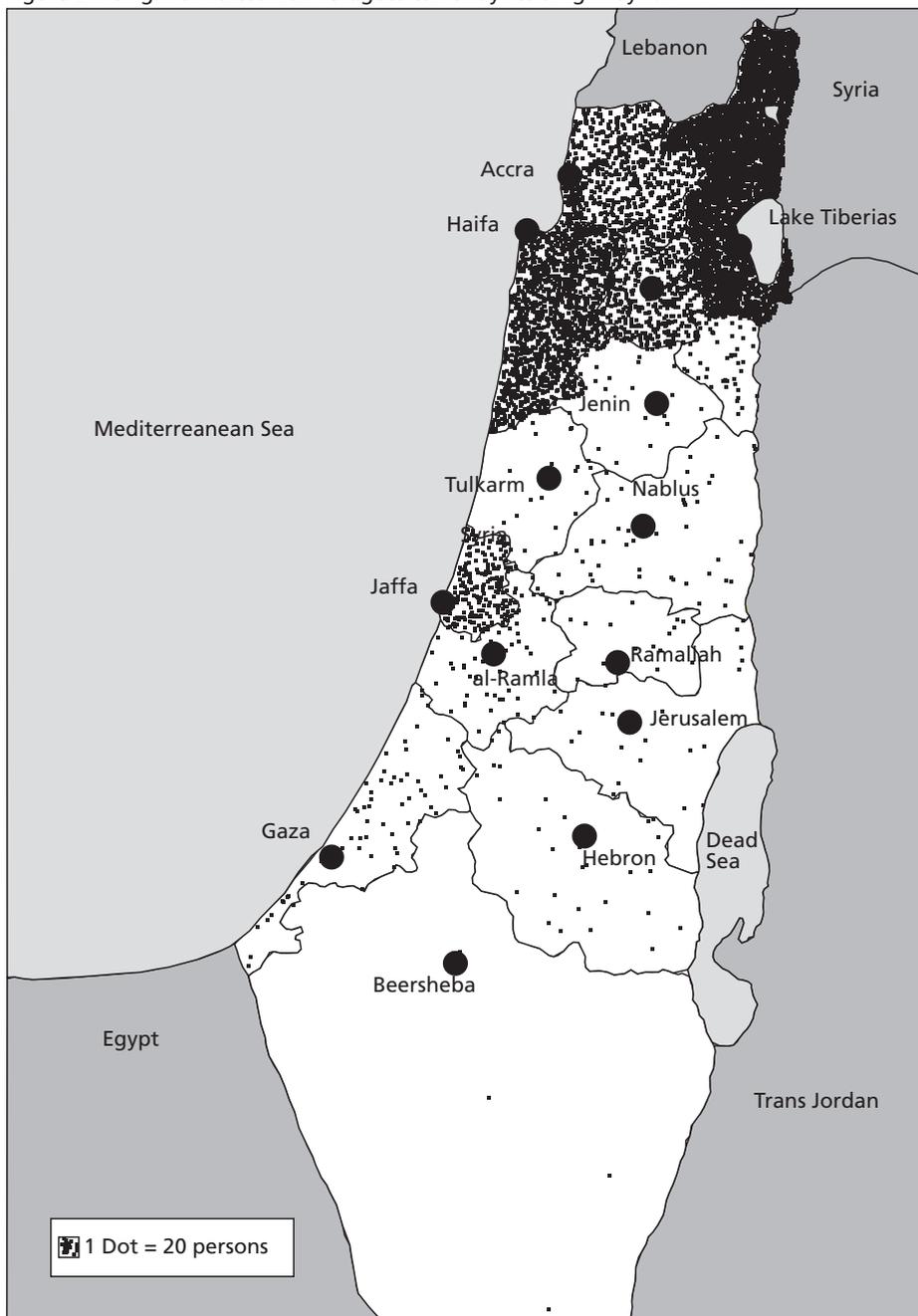
The majority of the Palestinian refugees in Syria hail from the northern part of present-day Israel. The map (Figure 2.1) shows their origins in terms of the administrative divisions of the British Mandate.

Table 2.1 Palestinian population figures from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Natural Resources (PCBS) and the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS).

	PCBS Census of 65 localities, 2000		CBS Syrian Population Census, 1994	
	Number of Palestinian refugees	Percent	Number of Palestinian refugees	Percent
Urban Damascus	80 263	46.9	123 167	43.7
Rural Damascus	45 980	26.9	98 748	35.1
Aleppo	15 399	9.0	18 957	6.7
Homs	10 447	6.1	11 684	4.2
Hama	5 234	3.1	5 321	1.9
Latakia	3 212	1.9	5 146	1.8
Dar'a	10 653	6.2	16 098	5.7
Other mohafazat	*	*	2 416	0.9
Total	171 188	100.0	281 537	100.0

* = Not covered

Figure 2.1 Origin of Palestinian refugees currently residing in Syria.



Over one-half of the households have close relatives (i.e. parents, siblings or children) living outside Syria (Table 2.2). Relatively few households have relatives living in the West Bank or Gaza Strip or Israel. On the other hand, many households have links to the Gulf countries, Jordan, Europe and Lebanon.

Table 2.2 Percent of households with close relatives living abroad by location of relatives.

Location of relative	Percent of households
West Bank and Gaza Strip	4
Israel	3
Jordan	18
Lebanon	12
Egypt	1
Gulf countries	21
Iran and Iraq	1
United States and Canada	5
Europe	15
Any location	54

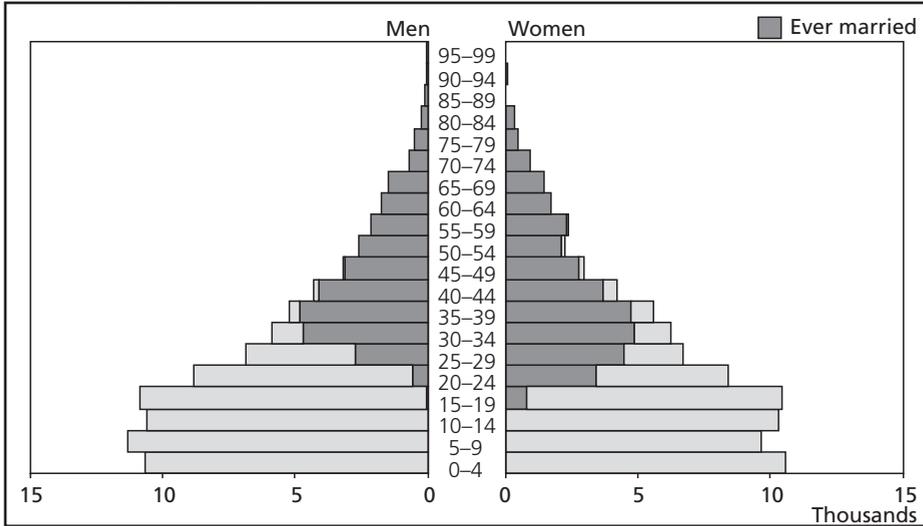
To a certain extent, people’s movements have been gender-selective. The Gulf countries and Europe have seen more migration of men, while Lebanon and Jordan have received more Palestinian women than Palestinian men from Syria. The reasons for residing outside Syria are totally different for women and men. Overall, approximately 30 percent of (both male and female) relatives are located outside Syria either because their present residence is their place of origin or place of employment. However, 54 percent of female relatives have relocated abroad because of marriage, while only two percent of males have. The percentages are reversed relative to work, where 52 percent of male relatives relocate abroad for this reason, compared to only two percent of female relatives.

Age and Sex Structure, and Age of Marriage

The age and sex structure of the refugees is typical of a population with falling fertility rates (Figure 2.2). The population pyramid is broad-based. However, concerning individuals under 20, the square form of a population with low fertility starts to appear.

The dependency ratio, i.e. the ratio of the population aged below 15 years and 65 years and above to the population aged 15 to 64 years, is 0.68. This compares to 0.84 in the Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan (reflecting the higher fertility in those

Figure 2.2 Age and sex structure of the Palestinian refugees in Syria. Ever-married persons are indicated by grey shading.



camp). The sex ratio, i.e. the ratio of males to females, is 1.02, a ratio that is primarily explained by a male surplus at early age.

Age at first marriage has been steadily increasing, both for men and women. While women born in the 1920s were 15 to 16 years when they married, and men about 21, women born in the 1970s were generally 21 years of age when they married. In contrast, men were 26. Thus, while age at first marriage has increased, the age difference between men and women has remained constant.

Fertility, Mortality and Life Expectancy

Fertility among Palestinian refugees in Syria is dropping, as it is elsewhere except in Gaza (Khawaja 2003). The average total fertility rate (TFR) for the years 1996–2000 was 3.5. This average hides, however, a general decline throughout the five-year period. Thus, in 2000 the TFR stood at 3.3.

The fertility rates observed for Palestinians are lower than the national Syrian rates, which according to the Syrian Internal Migration Survey, was 4.7 for the period 1995–1999 and 3.8 for 1999. The urban Syrian rates are nevertheless very similar to the Palestinian rates. In 1999, the urban Syrian rate was 3.2 in mohafaza centres and 3.8 in other urban areas, while in the five years preceding the survey the corresponding

rates were 3.8 and 4.7¹. Since the camps and other locations of residence of Palestinians in Syria are generally urban, one may conclude that Palestinian refugees follow similar developments in childbearing as the Syrians. That refugees and the host population should follow similar developments with regard to fertility is not surprising. This is also the case in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Jordan and Lebanon.

As expected, the fertility of employed women is lower than the fertility of women outside the labour force (TFR of 2.5 *versus* 3.9, for the years 1995-2000). However, and in line with what has been found for the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Randall 2001), fertility shows a rather weak association with educational attainment.

Maternal mortality is usually measured by the maternal mortality ratio, which is the number of deaths per 100,000 childbirths. It ranges from nearly zero in some countries, for example in Norway where maternal deaths were not observed every year, to approximately 2,000 in countries such as Afghanistan. Values in the Middle East range from seven (Israel) to 1,385 (Yemen), while most values are in the range 50 to 300 (Stanton et al. 1996).

We applied two different estimation procedures to the survey data. This resulted in a maternal mortality ratio of 74 and 75 per 100,000 births for the two methods, which is similar to the maternal mortality ratio of 65 reported for Syria as a whole (PAPFAM and CBS 2002), but much lower than the maternal mortality ratio for Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon, with 239 reported incidences (Blome Jacobsen 2003).

Our survey found an infant mortality of 21 deaths during the first year of life per 1,000 births for girls, and one of 25 for boys for the period 1996-2000. The corresponding under five-year mortality rate was 22 and 31 per 1,000, respectively. The level is similar to national Syrian levels. For example, the 1999 Syrian Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) found an infant mortality level of 24 per 1,000 (Peiris 2001).

There has been a significant improvement in the survival of children during the past twenty years among the refugees in Syria. For both boys and girls, the under five mortality is currently two thirds of the rate twenty years ago.

What explains early age mortality among Palestinian refugees in Syria? Interestingly, there is only a weak association between child survival and the education of the mother. The exception is the children of mothers without elementary schooling who exhibit a higher mortality than other children. A second factor that influences child survival significantly is so-called consanguineous marriage of the parents of the child (about 31 percent of all marriages are between cousins or people having other *hamulah*, or clan, relations). Household income shows no significant effect. This perhaps somewhat

¹ Rates for Syria have been calculated for the *Palestinian Refugees in Syria* report directly from the "Syria Internal Migration Survey" dataset. The "Family Health Survey" has produced total fertility rates slightly lower than the migration survey (PAPFAM and CBS 2002).

surprising result has also been observed elsewhere among Palestinians (Pedersen 2000) and probably stems from the fact that even poor Palestinian refugees are supplied with basic mother and childcare as well as water and sanitation infrastructure through the work of UNRWA, national governments and NGOs.

Reduced mortality has led to an increase in the life expectancy of Palestinian refugees in Syria, implying that those born in later years can expect to live longer than their parents. Estimates based on the survey data gives a life expectancy at birth for women and men of 73.0 and 69.0 years.

The Family: Types and Bonds

The predominant household type of Palestinian refugees in Syria is the nuclear family (83 percent), defined as a couple with or without children, or a single person with children (2nd to 6th row in Table 2.3). This distribution across different types of households does not vary by camp or gathering status, or by urban or rural location.

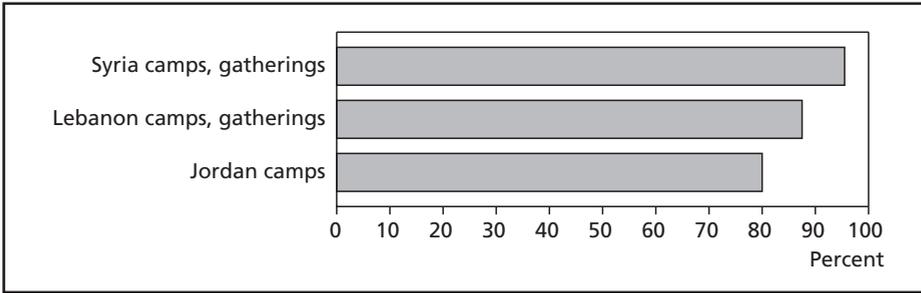
Table 2.3 Percent distribution of households by household type (n=4,487).

Person living without family	3.6
Couple without children	4.8
Couple with youngest child above 14 years	10.2
Couple with youngest child 14 years or less	58.7
Single with youngest child above 14 years	5.8
Single with youngest child 14 years or less	3.5
Extended family	13.5
Total	100.0

Nearly all households are settled among family and relatives (95 percent). By “settled among”, we mean that there are relatives of either the head or spouse living in the neighbourhood, or so close that it is possible to walk to visit them. As shown by Figure 2.3, Palestinian refugees in Syria are more often closely settled among family than Palestinian refugees elsewhere in the region.

About five in ten wives and seven in ten husbands live near their siblings. It is also quite common to live near parents. Elsewhere, households settle predominantly among the husband’s family. However, although there are somewhat more of the husband’s relatives than the wife’s in Syria, this difference between the husband’s and wife’s relations is much less pronounced here than has been found in previous studies of Palestinian refugees in Jordan or Lebanon. This may be due to less mobility among refugees in Syria compared to elsewhere.

Figure 2.3 Percent of Palestinian refugee households with family (members) living nearby.



Most households (six in ten) have relatively large family networks, with 11 or more family members living nearby. Overall, camp refugees in Syria have larger local family networks than are found among refugees elsewhere.

The “Living Conditions of Palestinian Refugees in Syria” survey asked randomly selected individuals whom they would prefer their child to marry (regardless of whether or not they had any children). They were asked to choose among a list of types of family relations, no family relation and an option for no preference. Half of the respondents reported having no preference when it concerned their child’s marriage partner. Thirty-eight percent reported a preference for a non-close-kin marriage. Thus, only 12 percent preferred marriage within the kinship group.

Women more often than men reported that they would prefer a marriage partner outside the *hamulah*. Preference for within the *hamulah* decreased with the income and education of the respondent. The reverse was true with age. Particularly among women, any education appears to lead to a large increase in preference for marriages outside the *hamulah*. Both men and women in rural areas reported more often than individuals in urban areas that they preferred kinship marriage.

The survey also examined the kinship relations of married couples. About three in ten marriages are between partners that are related by kinship, which is similar to that found elsewhere in the region. Marriage to first cousins is more common than to second cousins.

Surprisingly, the prevalence of “traditional” kinship marriages is similar across age groups. However, compared with elsewhere there are fewer cousin marriages between older people in Syria, but relatively high rates of cousin marriage in the younger generation. Inter-kin marriage is somewhat more common in rural areas (34 percent) than urban areas (29 percent).

3 Housing and Infrastructure²

Physical Infrastructure

Dwelling Types and Ownership

Overall, three of five households live in apartments and about two in five live in *dar* housing, defined as an independent, one-storey building. Very few Palestinians in camp areas (less than 0.5 percent) live in squatter-type dwellings. Most of these cases are refugees living in barracks in the Neirab refugee camp outside Aleppo. These barracks are old army buildings in which many families live together. The barracks are in a very deplorable condition, but there are plans for voluntary relocation of some 300 families to new shelters in the Ein el-Tell camp on the opposite side of the city; there are also plans to build new housing in Neirab. GAPAR and UNRWA have taken measures to improve the situation.

A predominance of apartment housing is found particularly in the Yarmouk refugee camp, where some 90 percent live in apartments, compared to 36 percent in other refugee camps and 56 percent of those in gathering areas. There is little overall difference in average dwelling size in terms of the number of rooms (three for both apartments and *dars*).

Market rates and rental costs of housing vary according to geographic location, with dwellings in the Yarmouk camp and other urban areas priced considerably higher compared to rural areas. Nevertheless, the cost of housing relative to income is highest in the poorest regions and among the poorest groups of households.

Dwelling Size and Overcrowding

Typical refugee camp dwellings measure approximately 70 to 80 square meters. Most housing (80 percent) ranges from two to four rooms (Table 3.1), which is also the case

² In addition to L. Blome Jacobsen's chapter in *Palestinian Refugees in Syria*, this section uses her analyses of the material and social infrastructure, and the environmental conditions of Palestinian refugee communities prepared for UNRWA's June 2004 Conference on the humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees (Blome Jacobsen 2004).

at the national Syrian level (78 percent; PAPFAM and CBS 2002). However, while the average number of persons per room is 1.8 at the national level (PAPFAM and CBS 2002: Table 3.11), it is slightly higher at 2.1 in the Palestinian refugee population.³ There is minimal variation in the size of dwellings in terms of the number of rooms by type (apartment and dar), with each having three rooms on average. Not surprisingly, average dwelling size increases with both household income and size.

Table 3.1 Number of rooms and rooms used for sleeping in the dwelling. Percent of households (n=4,901).

Total number of rooms	Percent of all households	Total number of sleeping rooms	Percent of all households
1	11	1	22
2	25	2	46
3	21	3	16
4	23	4	4
5 or more	9	5 or more	1

Overcrowding within the households, measured as having three or more persons per room, is less prevalent among Palestinian refugees in Syria than among camp refugees elsewhere. For example, only one in five is overcrowded compared to one in four in Lebanon and one in three in Jordan and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Within Syria, however, as indicated in Figure 3.1, there are substantial geographic variations. In the Dar'a governorate, overcrowding is a sizeable problem. With 36 percent overcrowded in Dar'a, this is as large a proportion as found in the Gaza Strip refugee camps – considered the densest of all the Palestinian refugee areas. Overcrowding is also relatively more common in Aleppo. In contrast, in Homs and Hama, only 15 percent of households are overcrowded. Specific camps or gathering areas are considerably more crowded than the average. For example, 52 percent of households are overcrowded in Jaramana, 33 percent in Neirab and Khan Danoon and 35 percent in Sit Zeinab. The Yarmouk camp is unique among refugee camps in having lower than average overcrowding at 12 percent compared to 31 percent in the other camps and 25 percent of gatherings. Overcrowding is 2.5 times higher in rural than urban households.⁴ That overcrowding is more of a problem in rural, compared with urban, areas stems from the fact that the average household size is larger (5.8 *versus* 5.3) and

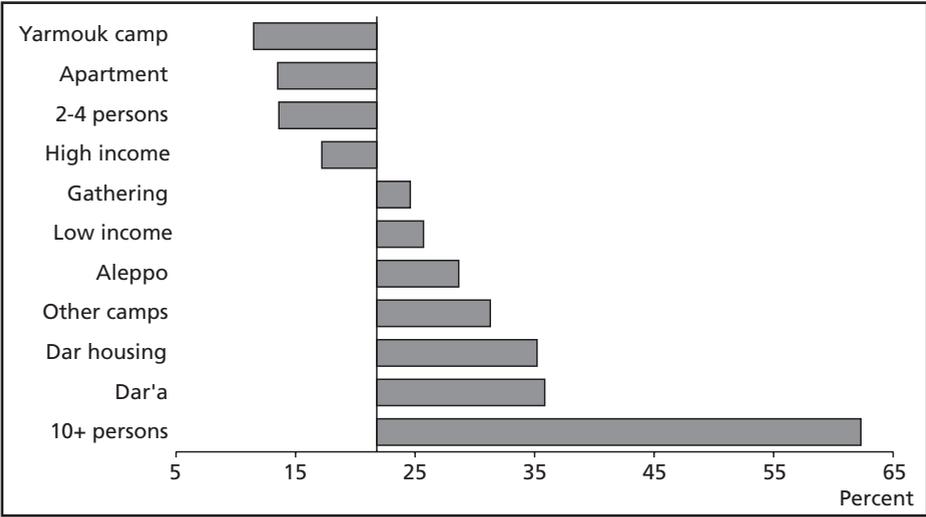
³ The comparison assumes the same definitions of a “room”. We have excluded kitchens, bathrooms and hallways.

⁴ Reflecting this, the average number of persons per room is 1.9 in urban areas compared to 2.5 in rural settings. This compares with 1.6 and 2.0 among Syrian nationals (PAPFAM and CBS 2002: Table 3.11).

average dwelling size, as measured by the number of rooms, is smaller (2.7 versus 3.2) in the countryside.

There are also variations according to socio-economic variables (Figure 3.1). Taken as a whole, household size is the key determinant of overcrowding, and there is a serious lack of appropriate-sized housing for very large families (ten or more persons), of which 60 percent experience overcrowding in the dwelling. Income is also associated with overcrowding: Some 26 percent of low-income households are overcrowded, compared to 17 percent of high-income households. A larger difference, however, is found by considering the type of dwelling. Apartments not only have a higher market value and are more often found among the better-off households, they are also typically less crowded than dars.

Figure 3.1 Percent of households with three or more persons per room. Bars represent differences from an overall average of 21.8 percent (n=4,901).



Having some extra areas outside of the main dwelling unit can help reduce the discomfort of very dense households. Such extra areas include an activity compound in apartment buildings, verandas or balconies, building roof areas, workshops and work sheds, and garden areas in the immediate vicinity of the dwelling. Overall, 82 percent of households have some sort of extra space.

Indoor Environment

It is not surprising given the widespread use of concrete and concrete block in construction that dwellings often are difficult to heat in the winter or keep cool in the summer.

Roughly one-half of households complain of these problems. Dwellings that are uncomfortably damp are nearly as common. Twenty-two percent complain about poor ventilation, which is a lower proportion than in refugee camps elsewhere. Disturbing noises from outside the dwelling are quite common (30 percent). The most widespread indoor environment problem is an entirely preventable one: Nearly 70 percent of households report that inhabitants regularly smoke within the dwelling.

Environmental disturbances are distributed unevenly across locations. Again, there is a difference between the Yarmouk camp and other refugee camps, and between camps and gatherings. Approximately ten percentage points fewer households complain of temperature and humidity problems in Yarmouk compared to other refugee camps, but about one-half the proportion in gatherings complain of poor ventilation and the dwelling being “dark and gloomy” than in either Yarmouk or the other camps. The latter problem is caused by very dense building of housing in the camps and is an indicator of camp compactness and overcrowding *outside* the dwelling itself.

Infrastructure Amenities and Sanitation

Access to adequate sanitation and water resources is lacking in Syria compared to many other countries in the region. Statistics from late 2001 (PAPFAM and CBS 2002: Tables 3.12, 3.13) suggests that six percent of Syrian nationals do not have access to proper sanitation (compared to one percent in Jordan and Lebanon) and 18 percent do not have access to ‘improved’ water resources (compared to four percent in Jordan and none in Lebanon). Data for Palestinian camp refugees indicate that they have better sanitation coverage than Syrian nationals, but that drinking and other water resource access could be improved, as is the case in Syria as a whole.

As shown in Table 3.2, nearly all have room heating, connection to electricity, connection to a sewer system or septic tank, and toilet facilities inside the residence. Some 80 to 85 percent have private baths, collected garbage, and piped water. The drinking water supply is generally more stable than other water supplies. Among those without piped drinking water and/or other piped water, the main source of supply is tanker trucks.

There are rather wide differences, however, relative to urban/rural and regional location as well as, but less so, income groups.⁵ Rural camps and gatherings reported very poor access to piped drinking and regular water at approximately 50 percent compared to nearly 100 percent of urban areas. Stability of regular water supply is also poor, but better for the rural drinking water supply. Finally, garbage collection is much less

⁵ Income groups are calculated with data on total yearly household income. The five income brackets, dividing the population into approximately equally large groups, are: low (<60,000 SYP); lower middle (60,000–87,450 SYP); middle (87,500–122,950 SYP); upper middle (123,000–182,000 SYP); and high (>182,000 SYP).

common in rural areas at 72 percent *versus* 93 percent in urban areas. Examining these amenities by mohafaza shows, however, that the poor rural infrastructure is primarily due to very poor infrastructure in Rural Damascus. Here, only 36 percent have piped regular water and 25 percent have piped drinking water, for example. Elsewhere, such as the northern region, which is 96 percent rural, water supply and stability are similar to that in urban settings.

Table 3.2 Percent of households with infrastructure amenities (n=4,901).

Independent kitchen	92.5
Private bath/shower	81.7
Toilet inside living quarters	96.4
Sewage network/septic tank	97.3
Garbage collected	85.0
Regular water piped into residence	82.8
Stable regular water supply	79.5
Connected to electricity	99.6
Drinking water piped into residence	79.6
Stable drinking water supply	86.1
Room heating	99.6

Another way to examine infrastructure amenities is to consider each household's proportion of all amenities.⁶ The Yarmouk camp has much better household infrastructures than other camps, with some 70 percent having all amenities compared to about 35 percent of other camps. Again, Rural Damascus is quite ill-equipped with infrastructure amenities compared to all other regions: Jaramana, Khan Danoon, Sbeina and Sit Zeinab are all locations in Rural Damascus where we see a clustering of lack of piped water and piped drinking water, and lack of stability in the water source.

Social Infrastructure

Since only approximately seven percent of households own a car or truck, having public services nearby is important. Table 3.3 shows the percentage of households that have easy access (within a 5-10 minute walk) to certain neighbourhood services. Beginning with educational facilities, nearly all households report having access to kindergartens,

⁶ The list of amenities includes seven items: kitchen; bath or shower; toilet in the dwelling; garbage collection; connection to sewerage; drinking water piped into the residence; and a stable drinking water supply.

elementary and preparatory schools, but access to secondary schools is more limited. This is largely due to UNRWA providing education only through the preparatory cycle. Primary health facilities are well supplied, with approximately 97 percent having a physician, dentist, pharmacy and a basic health centre within walking distance. There is, however, a lack of secondary health facilities as only 65 percent of households have a hospital nearby. Most households lack cultural facilities, with few having access to a cultural centre or public library.

Table 3.3 Percent of households within a 5-10 minute walk to public services (n=4,900).

Kindergarten	95	Dentist	97
Elementary school	96	Pharmacy	98
Preparatory school	96	Police station	79
Secondary girls school	69	Bank	45
Secondary boys school	62	Post office	76
Grocery	98	Place of worship	97
Hospital	65	Cultural center	51
Health clinic, center	96	Library	36
Physician	98		

The household's geographic location makes a difference in the scope of services available. There are generally more services within camps than in gatherings, and poorer access to services in rural areas than in urban areas. As we have seen, while the Yarmouk refugee camp has conditions typical of urban areas with better standards, housing conditions in other refugee camps are more typical of rural areas. In terms of different kinds of services, the main problems include a lack of secondary education facilities in rural areas, and a lack of hospitals in areas outside of Yarmouk. Overall, in urban areas, and particularly in Yarmouk, there is much better access to other services like banks, cultural centres and libraries.

Environmental Conditions

There is a general perception of a lack of cleanliness. About one-half of households say that the area in which they live is "not so clean" and another 13 percent say it is dirty or very dirty. The most prevalent outdoor environmental nuisance is dust (80 percent), followed by smell and exhaust from cars (47 percent). One in four households complains of smells from sewerage or wastewater, and one in five reports they are usually exposed to garbage smells.

Satisfaction with Housing and Neighbourhood

The largest degree of dissatisfaction regarding the dwelling and its environment is in respect to water supply, water quality, noise and space (between 30 and 45 percent are dissatisfied).

In addition to being one of the most common complaints among a fairly large group of households overall, water supply and quality are judged to be particularly poor among households living on the outskirts of camps, being reported unsatisfactory nearly twice as often as elsewhere. In addition rural residents report nearly 1.5 times more often that they are unsatisfied with water supply and quality than urban areas.

Approximately one in three households reports the level of noise to be a source of dissatisfaction. The same proportion of households report a lack of satisfaction with the size of the dwelling or space in general. Here, the type of dwelling makes some difference, with families living in dars more often being dissatisfied with space than those in apartments, people's subjective opinions thus reflecting objective space measurements. In general, people living in dars more often express dissatisfaction with most of the items we listed under housing and environment conditions, including housing cost.

Despite these problems, a surprisingly small proportion of households report that they are dissatisfied with housing conditions overall, or the area in which they live (14 and eight percent, respectively). People in the Yarmouk camp and urban areas in general are more often satisfied with their neighbourhood and general housing conditions.

The households' main negative feedback of community and public services in their living area relates to work and business opportunities, which nearly four in five find to be unsatisfactory, or very unsatisfactory. The second type of service that households are discontented with is the cultural facilities available in their area (60 percent). People are quite happy with the health and educational services provided, although slightly less so with health: Nine percent find health services unsatisfactory and five percent find schools unsatisfactory. Finally, nearly all households view transportation as satisfactory.

Urban areas offer better cultural and work opportunities than rural areas. In general, however, the camp seems to offer better services, regardless of urban or rural location, than those provided in gathering locations.

4 Education

School System and Availability

At the time of the fieldwork, the national education system consisted of six years of compulsory elementary education and three years of preparatory education (the basic cycle). Later, beginning with the 2002/2003 scholastic year, preparatory schooling was made compulsory. After the basic cycle, children can enter three years of public secondary school, or train for a vocation either at a vocational training centre or in an apprenticeship system. Higher education is pursued at intermediate institutes that offer two-year and three-year vocational courses, and at universities. Palestinian students have full access to all public educational facilities, on a par with Syrians and free of charge.

At the basic school level, Palestinian children attend schools run by UNRWA (95 percent of children covered by the survey), Syrian government schools (four percent) and private schools (one percent). UNRWA schools generally employ the same curricula and use the same textbooks as governmental schools. Due to financial constraints, UNRWA hardly provides optimal learning environments for all refugee children: 93 percent of schools operate on double shifts (compared to approximately ten percent of government schools); classes often have more than 50 students and the average occupancy rate is 47; and school buildings are inadequately equipped. Despite such challenges, UNRWA schools are perceived as very good. Evidence that the UN agency is performing well is a pass rate in the state preparatory cycle exams of 94-95 percent, while public schools report a pass rate of approximately 60 percent (UNRWA 2002: 2).

In addition to education at the basic level, UNRWA offers vocational education and training to over 800 students each year at both the post-preparatory and semi-professional levels (UNRWA 2002: 84-86).

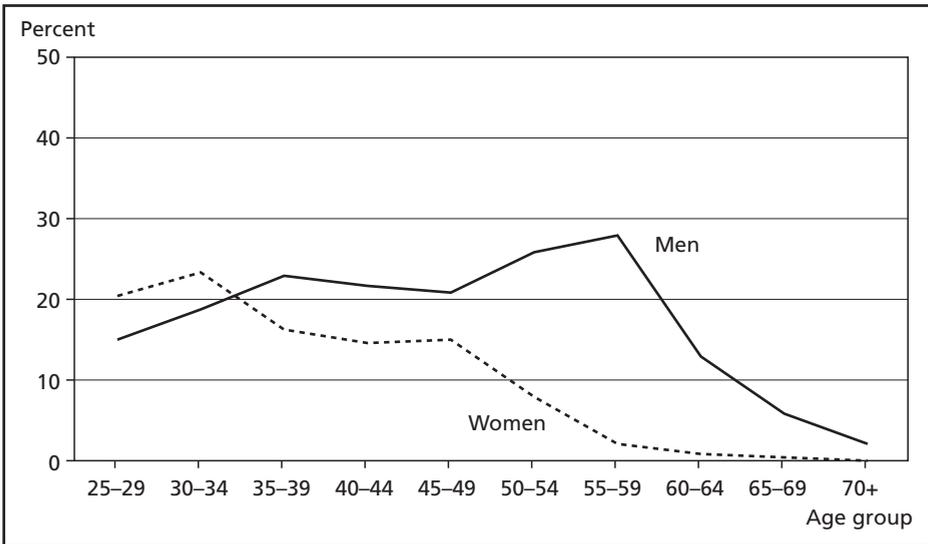
The vast majority of Palestinian children (more than 95 percent) have a kindergarten, an elementary school and a preparatory school in their neighbourhood, or within a radius of a 5-10 minute walk from their home. However, fewer refugee children (some 65 percent) have a secondary school nearby. Access to educational facilities varies somewhat across geographic locations, the main difference being that children who reside in rural settings, especially in Rural Damascus, have more difficult access than other children.

Educational Attainment

Educational achievements of Palestinian refugees in Syria have improved significantly over the years. For example, while 27 percent of persons aged 60-69 years have completed elementary school or higher, approximately 90 percent in the age group 15-29 years have achieved the same level. There has been a gradual increase in the proportion of persons with a post-secondary degree. However, it seems that this positive trend does not imply more university graduates, but rather entails a higher proportion of individuals who complete secondary school and semi-professional education at intermediate institutes. The share of university degree holders among the 30-39 year-olds is not larger than that of the 50-59 year-olds. Furthermore, a comparison of the 20-29 and 30-39 year age groups suggests that the positive development may have halted, since about 38 percent in both age groups have completed some education beyond the preparatory level. Overall, approximately 46 percent of the Palestinian refugees have extended their education beyond elementary school and about 32 percent have more than preparatory (basic) education.

As shown by Figure 4.1, very few Palestinian refugee women in the oldest age groups have completed any education above the secondary level. In contrast, some older men have achieved this level of education. Amazingly, the group with the highest attained education is found among men in their 50s. A possible explanation could be that younger, well-educated men more often have moved out of the surveyed areas

Figure 4.1 Percent of persons aged 25 years and above with a post-secondary degree, by age and gender (n=11,000).



(including out of the country) than other men. On the other hand, among the younger adults there is a higher proportion of women than men with higher education.

Middle-aged women and men have made different educational choices. First, very few women have successfully completed a vocational education at a pre-secondary level, but are on a par with men on post-secondary vocational education (intermediate institutes). Second, women to a lesser extent than men seem to have pursued a university degree, but have chosen (or have had) to stop after secondary school or before completing their degree. With regard to the youngest women (aged 15-29), they have accomplished more than men, with 24 compared to 17 percent having completed a minimum of secondary education.

The accomplishments of Palestinian refugees are not uniform across geographic locations. First, educational attainment is lower in rural areas compared to urban. While 27 percent of city dwellers aged 15 years and over have a secondary certificate or above, 16.5 percent in the rural population have the same. Second, the population in the Yarmouk camp is better educated than those residing in gathering areas, which again on average have a higher education than the Palestinian refugees living in camps other than Yarmouk. Third, there is a larger proportion of refugees in Rural Damascus without any or with only elementary schooling, and less people with a secondary and post-secondary degree than refugees elsewhere. Interestingly, there seems to be an association between geographic proximity of secondary schools and educational achievements.

Literacy

The development of literacy rates over time demonstrates the same positive trend regarding the highest level of education completed. The household survey applied a so-called functional definition of literacy, which takes into account the individual's actual reading and writing abilities. It was not assumed that a person who had completed a certain grade or year of schooling is literate. Instead, the survey asked people if they could read everyday written material such as newspapers (easily or with difficulty), and if they were able to write simple messages or letters (easily or with difficulty). More than four out of every five persons aged ten years and above were functionally literate, meaning that they could read and write well. Nine percent were semi-literate, while the same percentage was totally illiterate. There are, however, significant disparities between men and women, with the illiteracy rate for women being more than double that for men.

A study on the living conditions of Palestinian camp refugees in Jordan presents data for people aged 15 years and above, and finds that semi-literacy and total illiteracy

Table 4.1 Illiteracy rate of persons aged 25 years and above and currently not enrolled, by sex; comparison of Palestinian refugees (n=10,894) and Syrian nationals (n=43,993)*.

	Men	Women	All
Syrians	15.1	42.0	28.3
Palestinian refugees	14.6	32.0	23.4

* Source: The 2001 "Syria Internal Migration Survey", implemented jointly by Syria's Central Bureau of Statistics, Damascus University and Fafo.

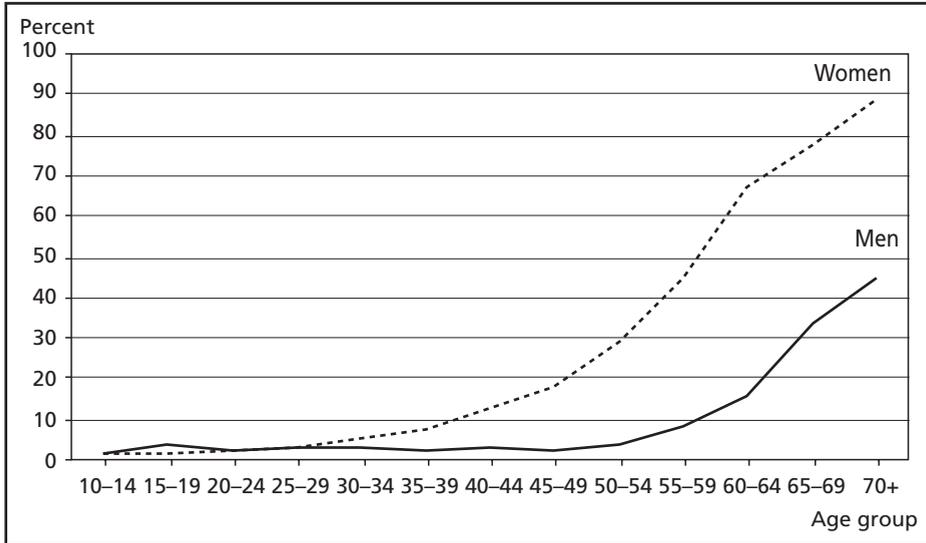
are 7.6 and 17.6 percent, respectively (Khawaja and Tiltnes 2002). For people in the same ages, the survey of Syrian camps and gatherings revealed eight and ten percent. Hence, the overall level of illiteracy among Palestinian refugees is lower in Syria. The gender disparity, however, is similar in the two populations (although at lower levels in Syria). A study of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon conducted in 1999 found that 25 percent of women and 12.5 percent of men were functionally illiterate (Tyldum and Bashour 2003).

Not only are Palestinian refugees in Syria more literate than Palestinian camp refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, they are also more literate than Syrian nationals. Table 4.1, which presents the illiteracy rates of persons aged 25 years and above and not enrolled in school at the time of the survey, suggests that the illiteracy level of men in the two populations is equal while illiteracy is less common among Palestinian refugee women than among female Syrian nationals.

However, because the methodologies applied in the two surveys were different, there is reason to believe that the disparity between the two population groups is underestimated here and, in fact, is wider. As noted earlier, in the survey of Palestinians we asked detailed questions about reading and writing skills, but in the survey of Syrian nationals all persons who had completed elementary school and higher were classified as literate. Research has shown that the reliability of literacy measures based upon educational attainment is low. For many people, reading proficiency declines with advanced age. In previous surveys Fafo has found that a considerable number of persons with elementary schooling are not able to read and write well. In the "Living Conditions of Palestinian Refugees in Syria" survey approximately seven percent of all persons with elementary certificates (but who had not completed a minimum of preparatory education, or higher) were illiterate or semi-literate. As a consequence of this argument, if the same approach to capturing literacy had been applied to Syrian nationals, it is reasonable to assume that a somewhat lower percentage would have been classified as literate, and the gap would have increased and been manifested even for men.

Figure 4.2 shows that illiteracy is far higher in the older age cohorts, and the disparities between men and women are far greater. The remarkable improvement of the reading and writing skills of females is noteworthy having dropped from a level of 90

Figure 4.2 Complete illiteracy among males and females aged 10+ by age groups (n=20,170), in percentages.



percent illiteracy among the oldest women down to 12 percent in the 40-45 year-old age group. The lines for females and males overlap for the four younger age cohorts, indicating similar reading and writing proficiency for the two sexes. If anything, girls and young women are slightly better off than their male counterparts. In the age group 10-29, 90.3 percent of girls and young women master reading and writing fully, about three percentage points higher than among boys and young men.

Illiteracy has dropped radically in all income groups. Nevertheless, a literacy gap remains across income groups in the younger generations. For example, while 16 percent of persons aged 15 to 29 years in the lowest of five income groups cannot read and write well, seven percent are illiterate in the highest income group. For the age group 30-49, the illiteracy figures are 22 percent in the poorest segment and nine percent in the richest segment of the population.

The home environments in which the refugee children grow up affect their literacy: Whereas 77 percent of children with household heads who have not completed basic education can read and write properly, an additional 19 percent with household heads with a post-secondary degree possess the same skills.

Just as there is regional disparity in educational attainment, the survey documents differentiation in literacy levels by place of residence. The proportion of functionally illiterate people is higher in rural areas than urban areas, although the gap has diminished over time. Among all persons aged ten and above, 24 percent are functionally illiterate in rural areas and 13 percent in urban areas. For the age range of 15-29, the figures are 14 percent and six percent, still a quite substantial difference.

Rural Damascus is by far worse off than the other regions. This applies whether we look at the figures for the entire population aged ten and above, or concentrate on the 15-29 year-old age group. About two and a half times as many 15-29 year-olds are illiterate in this area compared to those living in the other areas, which is quite extraordinary given that the basic school enrolment rate of Rural Damascus, although lower, does not deviate significantly from that of the other regions.

Current Enrolment

In 2001, there were in the excess of 50 kindergartens serving the Palestinian population. Only a few of them had nurseries. Most facilities offered care from 8 a.m. to 1-2 p.m., which was locally regarded as a full-day service.

A field study of Palestinian kindergartens in Syria has identified a rather poor physical infrastructure and learning environment (GAPAR and PCBS 1995, referred to in UNICEF 2000: 43), something that, at least partly, could explain the fairly low use of pre-school services: 15 percent of the three to six-year-olds were enrolled.

While higher than in the Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, this enrolment ratio is much lower than for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon where as many as half the children aged 3-5 years are enrolled in pre-school (Blome Jacobsen, Endresen and Hasselknippe 2003). Pre-school is slightly more popular among the relatively well-off and in well-educated families, enrolment is more common in urban than rural areas, and more children benefit from pre-school services in Damascus city, and particularly in the Yarmouk camp, than elsewhere.

Most young children, boys and girls alike, attend school. The educational status of the family has a significant impact on children's enrolment, and enrolment for children living with poorly educated and illiterate household heads is approximately ten percentage points lower compared to other children.

School attendance drops steadily from the age of 12-13 years onwards.⁷ Grade repetition is rather widespread, but more common in the preparatory than the elementary levels. About nine percent of children leave school without completing year six successfully.

Low interest in school is by far the most important reason given for children's premature school withdrawal followed by "repeated failure", i.e. poor school performance and grade repetition. Difficult access to school is of negligible importance; health-related explanations are provided for five percent of the cases. Thirteen-fourteen percent of

⁷ This age coincides with the end of elementary school, and thus the termination of what was compulsory education at the time of the survey.

dropouts, mostly boys, have quit school due to economic reasons. In five-six percent of the cases, the children (primarily girls) had to leave school without an elementary certificate due to norms hindering their continued school attendance, or they were needed in the home.

A higher proportion of girls than boys are enrolled in secondary schooling. However, the survey data uncover no gender disparity concerning enrolment in post-secondary education, be it a 2-3-year vocational (semi-professional) education, or a university. This is surprising given that more females than males aged 20-29 years have obtained these two certificates. The explanation might be that women and men enrol to the same degree, but that men withdraw from the educational institution before taking the final exam and/or that they fail the exams more often than women do.

Enrolment in secondary and higher education differs substantially relative to residential circumstances. First, the urban-rural differential is noteworthy and increases the higher up the educational ladder one advances, the result being that it is three times more common for children in urban settings to attend a university than for children in rural settings. Second, the enrolment rates for Rural Damascus are dramatically lower than those for the other regions. This at least partly has to do with difficult geographical access to secondary schools. Moreover, enrolment in secondary and post-secondary education is considerably more common among individuals from the Yarmouk camp compared to those living elsewhere. The proximity to semi-professional training centres and universities in the capital is most likely a contributing factor to the Yarmouk camp's superior position.

Increased income is associated with higher enrolment rates. The strongest impact on enrolment in secondary and higher education, however, is the literacy and educational status of the household head. For example, youths with literate household heads (most often one of the parents) are two times more likely to be enrolled in secondary school than youths with illiterate heads. If the head has a post-secondary degree, the chance that a person in a certain age group is enrolled in secondary education is almost four times higher than if the head has not completed basic (preparatory) schooling.

Short-term Vocational Education

Altogether five percent of persons aged 15 years and over, and who have left the formal school system, have taken at least one short vocational training course (with a duration of less than 12 months) in their lifetime. This is a considerably lower proportion than among Palestinian camp refugees in Jordan where almost four times as many have taken short-term vocational training (Khawaja and Tiltne 2002). However, similar to the situation in Jordan, women have been more involved in such training than men.

More education, and to a lesser extent, higher income increases the likelihood that a person has taken a short training course.

The most common place to receive training is from a privately run training centre. The second and third most popular places to obtain vocational schooling and instruction differ between the sexes. While many men receive on-the-job training, and attend lessons and obtain instruction at public vocational centres in addition to private ones, women more often than men benefit from UNRWA programmes and training set up by people's organisations. This reflects the fact that women and men attend training that differs in content.

Computer science is the most popular topic among both men and women, but relatively more men (48 percent) than women (30 percent) have taken a computer-related course. In second place for both men and women are issues related to education and teaching. Below this level, traditional, gendered choices dominate the picture, with electrics and mechanics for men, and personal grooming (including hairdressing), clothing, and arts and crafts for women. However, business courses as well as training in paramedics and health-related subjects have been equally popular among men and women.

5 Health and Medical Services

The Health Care System

The national health care system in Syria provides primary and secondary health care to Palestinian refugees on equal footing with Syrian nationals. This state-managed health system has universal coverage and facilitates high accessibility to health services. Primary care is free of charge at public health centres. Although hospital care is highly subsidised, the patient has to share part of the hospitalisation costs (e.g. medical tests, x-rays, medicines, blood transfusions), with the exception of emergency cases. UNRWA runs 23 clinics, and provides primary health care services, mother and child health care, family planning programmes, disease prevention and control programmes, and dental services free of charge to registered Palestinian refugees. The Agency also offers laboratory services, provides medical supplies, and refunds part of the bills for hospitalised persons who are referred by a UNRWA physician.

UNRWA and the Ministry of Health co-operate and share resources across a wide range of health activities including disease control, vaccination, and generation of health statistics. In addition to public and Agency services, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society offers health services to the refugee population in three hospitals and nine polyclinics. Here treatment is not free of charge. There is also an important private health care system in Syria. Although the services in private clinics and hospitals are costly, the household survey finds that a large proportion of Palestinian refugees utilises these services.

Chronic Illness and Physical Impairment

Twelve percent of Palestinian refugees residing in Syrian camps and gatherings suffer from a physical or psychological chronic illness, including problems resulting from accidents, injuries or old age. One-half of them have a severe chronic illness, defined as a condition preventing the individual from going out on his or her own without help. These results are very similar to what was found in a study of the Palestinian refugee camp population in Jordan (Khawaja and Tiltnes 2002), but considerably lower than what has been reported for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (Tiltnes 2003). Unmis-

takably, chronic illness is more frequent among older people, and more than one half of persons aged 60 years and above have an illness of a prolonged nature. There is no gender difference overall but boys and young men suffer more from chronic illness than their female counterparts, while women are more likely than men to become chronically ill over the age of 50.

Surveys of this kind typically present evidence that health is influenced by socio-economic status variables. This is also the case here (Table 5.1). For example, the poorer segments have a higher likelihood of suffering from chronic illnesses than the more affluent segments; three times as many refugees in the lowest income group have a severe long-standing health problem compared to those in the highest income group. The survey suggests no variation in the prevalence of chronic illness by place of residence (region, urban or rural location, or refugee camp *versus* gathering/non-camp living area).

Table 5.1 The incidence of chronic and severe chronic illness in the total population, by household income. In percentages. (n=26,782).

Income groups	Chronic illness	Severe chronic illness
Low	19	12
Lower middle	12	6
Middle	12	5
Upper middle	11	5
High	9	4
Total	12	6

Chronic health problems may vary significantly in seriousness and hence influence those afflicted to a varying degree. To get an improved understanding of the extent to which adult persons are physically impaired, we inquired about their ability to perform five everyday activities.⁸ Approximately two-thirds of all adults did not suffer from any physical impairment. We constructed a simple additive index to investigate how the five indicators of ambulatory and sensory problems accumulated, and sorted adults according to the number of impairment symptoms they reported. Persons having problems with or who could not perform three of the five listed activities at all were labelled as having “poor physical health”, while those who had problems with four or five of the activities were classified as having “very poor physical health”.

⁸ The activities were: ascending and descending stairs; going for a quick five minute walk; carrying an item weighing 5 kilos for at least 10 meters; following a normal conversation (with a hearing aid, if necessary); and reading a newspaper (with glasses, if necessary).

Results show, firstly, that women are worse off than men, and, secondly, that age gradually brings more health problems to the individual. Thirdly, people with very low education fare a great deal worse than other people. Finally, physical health deteriorates gradually from higher to lower income groups with poor and very poor health which occurs two times more often in the lowest compared with the highest income group.

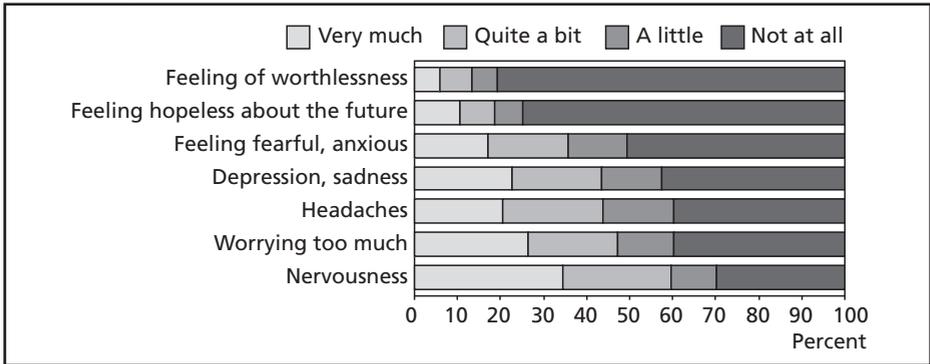
Psychological Distress

In addition to physical health, the more psychological and emotional aspects of health are naturally of great importance to people’s general well-being and living conditions. To measure psychological distress, we used a short form of the so-called Hopkins Symptoms Check-List (Moum 1992). One randomly selected adult in each household was asked whether seven symptoms or problems that people sometimes have had bothered or distressed them during the past week.

Figure 5.1 shows the respondents’ scores on each of the seven items. The range between 13 percent (“feeling of worthlessness”) and 60 percent (“nervousness”) reported having been bothered very much or quite a bit by these symptoms during the week preceding the interview.

From this limited battery of questions we constructed a simple additive index where we assumed that the higher the number of stress symptoms reported, the poorer the individual’s general mental well-being and the more intense the psychological distress. With one in five exhibiting no symptoms and one in five with 5-7 symptoms, the mental and emotional health of Palestinians in Syria appears as somewhat better than that of their “cousins” in Lebanon and Jordan.

Figure 5.1 Percentage distribution of the adult population (aged 15+) according to 7 indicators of psychological distress (n=4,870).



Women are more distressed than men, but psychological well-being does not deteriorate with age. Unmistakably, persons in the poorest households are more distressed than other persons. In fact, the lowest income group is worse off than the other four income groups on all seven indicators. For example, 51 percent said they had felt “depressed and sad” compared to 38 percent in the highest income group, and 53 percent had been “worrying too much” compared to 44 percent of those with higher incomes. Education, however, was found to have a stronger impact on people’s emotional and mental well-being than income since more than twice as many individuals in the lowest education group suffered from 5-7 distress symptoms than in the highest education group. Improved education reduces psychological distress in all age groups.

During the six months prior to the interview, 1.5 percent of the adults saw a physician due to emotional strain or psychological distress and difficulties. In contrast, approximately 38 percent visited a doctor for other symptoms and conditions of ill health.

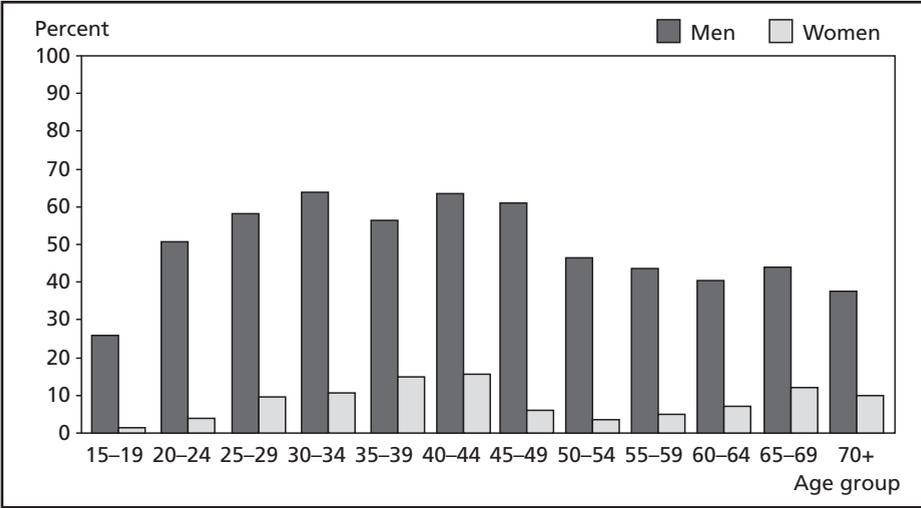
Yet approximately 19 percent of the adult respondents acknowledged taking anti-depressants, sedatives or other medicines (e.g. pain-killers) regularly to treat and alleviate psychological symptoms during the same period, while a further 20 percent had used such drugs occasionally. This is indeed a very high number.

Tobacco Smoking

A minority of adult Palestinians in Syria smoke: 28 percent are regular smokers, while three percent smoke from time to time. However, there is a noticeable gender difference in smoking habits. While 49 percent of men smoke daily, the daily rate for women is eight percent. An additional four percent of men and three percent of women smoke from time to time. Not only are there fewer female smokers, but female smokers also tend to smoke somewhat less than men. The mean number of cigarettes smoked daily is 16 for women compared to 22 cigarettes for men. Furthermore, women start smoking later than men, on the average at age 21.5 compared to age 17 for men.

Figure 5.2 portrays the smoking habits of Palestinian refugees in Syria according to gender and age groups. It is evident that the difference between men and women applies to all ages. The prevalence peaks for both sexes in middle age. Similar trends have been found in other Palestinian populations (Nuwayhid et al 1997, Tiltnes 2003).

Figure 5.2 Percentage of regular smokers (aged 15+) by gender and age groups (n=4,866).



Subjective General Health Assessment

In addition to information about chronic health failure, physical and psychological health, the survey asked the respondents to describe their own overall health according to a five-point scale ranging from “very good” to “very bad”.

The majority of Palestinian refugees in Syria, more than nine in ten, considered their own health to be satisfactory. One in four respondents (25 percent) said their health was “very good”, almost one half (46 percent) said it was “good”, while one in five (21 percent) described it as “fair”. Altogether, eight percent of the adults felt that their general health situation was bad or very bad. These numbers suggest that the health situation of the adult population in the Palestinian camps and gatherings in Syria is as good as that in the Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan (Khawaja and Tiltne 2002), and substantially better than that of Palestinians in Lebanon (Tiltne 2003).

Women’s overall health is slightly poorer than that of men. As could be expected, and in accordance with conclusions given for other health indicators, age and socio-economic status are important determinants of people’s subjective overall health.

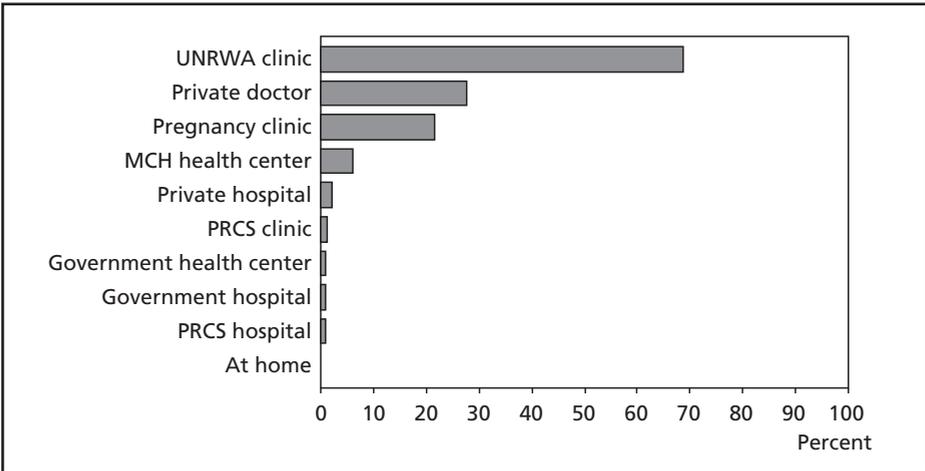
Use of Maternal Health Services

Nearly 100 percent of pregnant women see professional medical personnel for prenatal check-ups, which is slightly better than reported for Palestinian refugee populations elsewhere (Khawaja and Tiltne 2002, Tiltne 2003) and much better than in the Syrian national population where as many as three in ten women do not receive prenatal care (PAPFAM and CBS 2002: Table 9.1). The survey found that 80 percent of all pregnant women see a medical doctor at least once, and 17 percent and 14 percent of pregnancies involve at least one check-up with a midwife and/or a nurse present, respectively. Some, of course, receive maternity assistance from more than one health professional. There are no statistically significant differences related to place of residence.

By far the most common provider of maternity care to Palestinian women is UNRWA; two-thirds of all pregnant women receive maternity care at one of the Agency's clinics. Many also use private doctors and clinics specialised in prenatal care, while other providers are less important and serve a negligible proportion of the population only. Place of visit varies somewhat across geographic locations. Private doctors are more important to pregnant women in the Yarmouk camp and the South than elsewhere, while UNRWA is less important. However, even in Yarmouk and the South a majority of 55 and 63 percent of pregnancies, respectively, have included at least one visit to an UNRWA clinic.

The bulk of deliveries in the five-year period before the survey took place at a hospital: government (32 percent), private (30 percent), and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS; 11 percent). One-fifth (22 percent) of deliveries occurred in a private home, which is the same percent as found among Palestinian refugees in

Figure 5.3 Place of visit for pregnancy check-ups. Percent of pregnancies during the past 5 years by type of health facility (some have visited more than one type) (n=3,364).



Lebanon (Tiltne 2003). However, it is a significantly lower rate than found among Syrian nationals, where home deliveries reportedly are twice as common at 45 percent (PAPFAM and CBS 2002: Figure 9.4).

People tend to use nearby services, which causes regional variation; PRCS only serves people in Urban Damascus (mostly Yarmouk) and the Western region. On the other hand, home deliveries are relatively rare in the capital compared to all other regions. Giving birth at home is particularly common in the North (Aleppo), where four in ten deliveries represent this type. Instead of home deliveries, giving birth at a private hospital is frequent in Urban Damascus. Government hospitals top the list of the most widespread place of delivery in the outskirts of Damascus and in the South.

Overall, physicians assist 68 percent of deliveries; 35 percent have support from a midwife; 17 percent receive help from a trained nurse; a few deliveries (one percent) also have traditional midwives present. A substantial proportion benefit from the presence of both a medical doctor and a midwife or a nurse. Again, there are differences across geographic locations. The main observation is that deliveries in the North are assisted less by doctors and more by professional midwives, while the opposite is true in Urban Damascus.

In excess of 50 percent of the deliveries were followed by postnatal check-ups. Women in the Western region attended postnatal health controls more often (60 percent) and women in the South received such services less often (41 percent) than other women. Practically all those who had not attended a postnatal control (95 percent) said there was no need for one. The proportion that receives postnatal care is slightly higher than among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and significantly higher than that reported for Jordan's refugee camps (Tiltne 2003). The number is also much higher than the national Syrian statistics, which states that 77 percent do not receive postnatal check-ups (PAPFAM and CBS 2002: Table 9.9).

Use of Health Services After Acute Illness

Almost seven percent of Palestinian refugees reported acute illness or injury during the two weeks prior to the interview. For all individuals over the age of five, the severity of the acute illness was assessed by enquiring if it had prevented them from carrying out normal duties such as playing, going to school or work, or doing domestic chores for a period of three days or more. About two thirds of the acutely ill had an episode of serious illness.

As could be expected, the elderly suffered from acute illness more frequently than the younger generation. Acute illness was more common among those with little formal education and among people residing in low-income households. The associa-

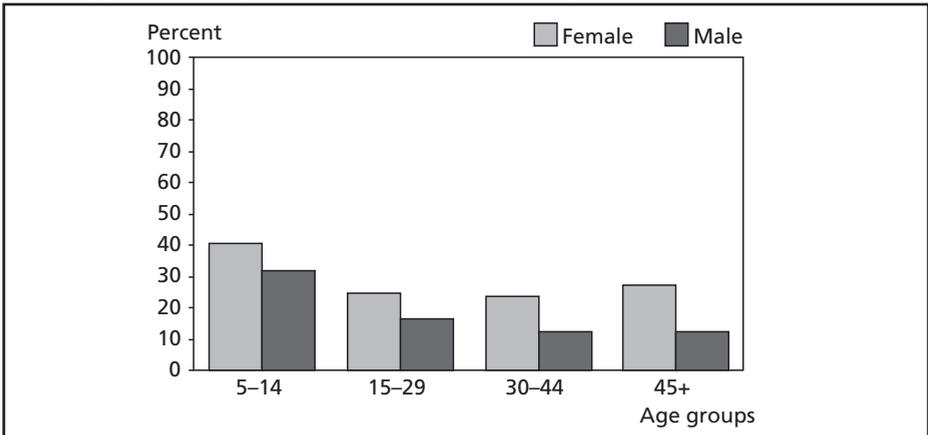
tion between education and income on the one hand and acute illness on the other is robust within age groups. However, chronic health failure has the largest impact on the prevalence of acute illness. In fact, individuals with a severe longstanding health problem experienced acute illness four times more often than other people.

As is the case for Palestinian refugees in other host countries, the demand for health services in connection with acute illness is high; four in five refugees seek medical consultation. Roughly one fourth of those who did not seek medical consultation said they did not need help; one half treated themselves with modern medicines or traditional methods, while one in five reported that they could not afford professional services. A few reported “other” reasons.

More than one half (52 percent) of those who consulted someone went to a specialist doctor, while 42 percent consulted a general doctor. The remaining saw a pharmacist or other health provider. Regarding place of consultation, almost one in two visited a private clinic, while half as many (23 percent) consulted UNRWA. A higher number of women than men approached UNRWA for help (Figure 5.4). Several explanations are plausible in our opinion. One explanation is that the UNRWA clinics are usually open only during the daytime, making it harder for the employed, who are primarily male, to benefit from the Agency’s services. A second explanation is related to UNRWA’s well-developed mother and childcare programmes, and the fact that many women are familiar with the Agency’s services. Furthermore, a number of the health problems experienced by women may be directly related to childbearing and, since a majority of pregnant women visit UNRWA clinics for check-ups, it is quite natural for them to go there should complications occur.

UNRWA clinics are more popular in the income-poorest segments of the population. This fact, no doubt, is related to cost of services, which are the lowest at UNRWA.

Figure 5.4 Percentage of persons aged 5+ who visit UNRWA for consultation following acute illness by gender and age; percentage of those who sought consultation (n=1,151).



The survey data also suggest that, when acutely ill, Palestinian refugees in the Yarmouk camp visit UNRWA clinics less often than refugees living elsewhere. This may be explained by the close proximity of alternative health facilities in Yarmouk compared to facilities serving other living areas and the higher income levels in Yarmouk.

While the majority of acutely ill persons received professional medical assistance within the locality they live, 29 percent travelled to another locality or town. Again, people residing in the Yarmouk refugee camp have easier access to health services than people elsewhere. People in Rural Damascus, and particularly the North, are disadvantaged with regard to geographic proximity of health services. In the latter region more than one-half of consultations, therefore, took place after travelling from the place of residence to a health care facility in a different locality, for example a trip from Neirab refugee camp to the city of Aleppo.

Expenditure on Health Services

Overall, 45 percent of those who consulted someone following acute illness did not pay anything for the services. As mentioned at the outset of this section, public and UNRWA medical consultation is basically free of charge. In contrast, private medical services require fees. The survey found that the average total out-of-pocket expenditure per visit (consultation and/or treatment) in private clinics is approximately seven times more expensive than in UNRWA clinics, while consultation and treatment at private hospitals costs, on average, three times more than at government hospitals. Average total costs range from 163 Syrian pounds at UNRWA clinics to 3,535 pounds at private hospitals. These differences arise as a result of various subsidies, and hence price policies between the service providers, but also result from the different types of services, some more costly than others, offered by the various providers.

Overall, out-of-pocket outlays for health services are at the same level across income groups. This fact is a testimony to the high cost of services relative to income for the poorest segments of the Palestinian refugee population in Syria.

Satisfaction with Health Services

A majority of the people surveyed have health facilities in their neighbourhood or within easy reach. Almost everyone has a physician (98 percent), pharmacy (98 percent), dentist (97 percent), or a health clinic (96 percent) in the vicinity of their home. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) even have a hospital in close proximity to their residence.

The survey asked about the households' general satisfaction with the health services they were offered. We assume that factors such as geographic proximity and the cost and quality of services were taken into account when the answers were given. Nearly eight in ten households stated that they were very or fairly satisfied with the health services, whereas less than ten percent thought that the services were fairly or very unsatisfactory.

Only minor variations related to place of residence and income level were found. However, as could be expected, the refugees in the Yarmouk camp were more satisfied with the overall health services than those living in other camps or gatherings.

Among camp and gathering refugees in Syria who actually used medical services following acute illness in the two weeks prior to the interview, there is a high general satisfaction with the services. In as many as 83 percent of cases, people reported satisfaction. This is a slightly higher figure than for Palestinian refugees in both Lebanon (Tiltne 2003) and Jordan (Khawaja and Tiltne 2002). Moreover, this is a mildly more positive assessment than the more general feedback on health services given above. A 62 percent majority were very satisfied with the services and 21 percent reported that they were fairly satisfied with the services, while six percent were neutral and 11 percent were unsatisfied. The respondents reported higher satisfaction with specialist doctors (88 percent) than with general practitioners (76 percent).

There is no difference in level of satisfaction by sex or age. However, persons who visited private hospitals and clinics are more satisfied than other users (87 percent and 86 percent report satisfaction, respectively). UNRWA clinics received the poorest rating where 76 percent were very or fairly satisfied. In addition UNRWA received the highest proportion of patients reporting dissatisfaction with services.

One reason for the higher proportion of unsatisfied clients at UNRWA clinics may be the lack of medicines. It is also possible that refugees have higher expectations of UNRWA than of public hospitals. Furthermore, even though they operate in all camps, the extremely high number of patients per doctor at UNRWA clinics (approximately 100 per doctor per day) may imply a perception of less availability.

6 Work and Working Conditions

Palestinian refugees in Syria have the same social and economic rights as Syrian citizens, including the right to seek work in all sectors. The main conclusion that emerges from our survey is that the labour force of the Palestinian camps and gatherings in Syria share the main characteristics of the non-Palestinian labour force.⁹ The industrial distribution is comparable to the national figure in Syria, with the exception of the agricultural and service sectors where Syrians have a greater concentration than Palestinians. Three in ten Palestinians who are employed work in the public sector, something they share in common with Syrians.

Labour Force Participation and Its Determinants

The adult labour-force participation rate is 48 percent in the Palestinian camps and gatherings in Syria, which is higher than in Lebanon, Jordan, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Male labour force participation is 75 percent in Syria's camps, compared with 70 percent or less among camp men in the other host countries. The 21 percent participation rate for camp women is also considerably higher than in UNRWA's other fields of operation. Female participation is 16, 13 and nine percent respectively among camp women in Lebanon, Jordan and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. As in Lebanon, there are only minor differences in economic activity rates between the camp and gathering populations.

⁹ All definitions of basic labour force concepts used in this chapter adhere to the definitions and recommended practices of the International Labour Office (ILO 1990). Labour force statistics divide the adult population into two main groups: (1) People who are in the labour force, or the economically active population, which further consists of: (a) The *employed*, defined as an individual who worked at least one hour in the week preceding the interview or who was temporarily absent from work during that week. Persons working 35 hours or more during the reference period are defined as full-time workers, while those who worked between one and 35 hours are defined as part-time workers. (b) The *unemployed*, defined as individuals who did not work, even for one hour, in the reference period, but were actively seeking work and were available for work in the same period. (2) People outside the labour force, or the economically inactive population, which is made up of all persons who did not work and were not seeking or were not available for work during the reference period.

In fact, the camp and gathering refugees in Syria have higher rates of labour force participation than the populations of the other host countries, regardless of refugee status. Only Lebanese non-refugees have rates that are nearly as high.

A range of factors determines participation in the labour force. One of the most important is the traditional attitude relating to the Palestinian family, which asserts that women should stay at home to take care of their children and the house. Married women in particular are not expected to work outside the home. The survey data confirm that these patterns prevail, as women comprise only 22 percent of the total labour force in Syrian refugee camps and gatherings.

The highest labour-force participation rates are found in rural parts of Damascus for both men and women, at 79 and 25 percent, respectively. Urban Damascus stands out as having the lowest participation rate. The high labour-force participation rate in Rural Damascus may be explained by poor access to non-wage incomes¹⁰ in this area, compared to an overall average transfer income of SYP 10,900; households in Rural Damascus on the average receive only SYP 6,300. Furthermore, the supply of jobs in education and health is relatively lower in Damascus compared to regions outside of Damascus.

In addition to differences in labour-force participation rates by place of residence and sex, the rates vary according to education levels and the household's life cycle, as reflected in differences of age and marital status. Men's participation rates are stable and high at 90-95 percent from their early 20s, when most get married, until their mid-50s (Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.2). From the age of 55 years onwards, men withdraw quickly from the labour force. Less than half (45 percent) of all men are still employed at the age of 60-64 years. The decline is closely associated with failing health. While 17 percent of the adult population report chronic health problems, the figure rises to 51 percent in the 60-64 year age group and increases rapidly for older people. The effect of education on men's participation is mainly that it slows their exit from the labour market in the upper age groups, a likely effect of more favourable working conditions in the skilled sectors compared to other sectors.

Education has a much stronger effect on the labour force participation of women than men, although education level is the strongest predictor of labour force participation in both groups. In the age group 25-54 years, the participation rates for women with at least preparatory education are three to four times higher than for women with elementary or no education, as shown in Figure 6.2. From their mid 50s, women leave the labour market at an even faster rate than men.

Unmarried women, with the exception of widows, are far more likely than married women to be members of the labour force. In total, 28 percent of never-married women

¹⁰ Non-wage income includes private and official transfers, self-employment income, property income and other less significant sources of income not earned by one's own efforts such as capital income.

Figure 6.1 Labour force participation by sex and age.

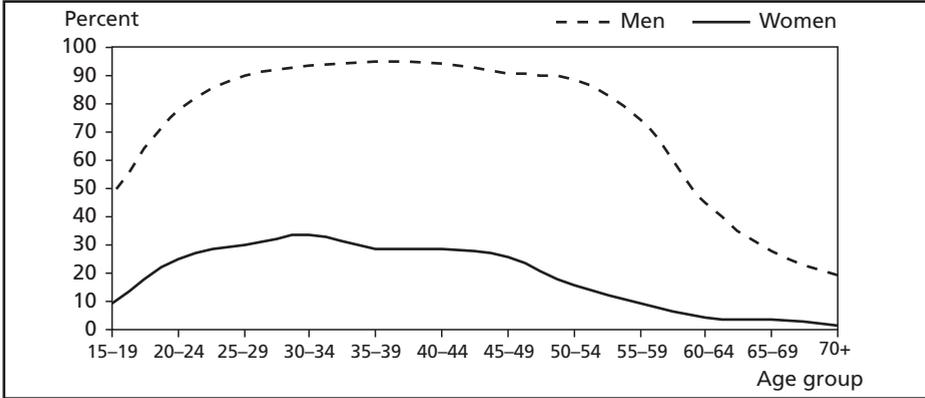
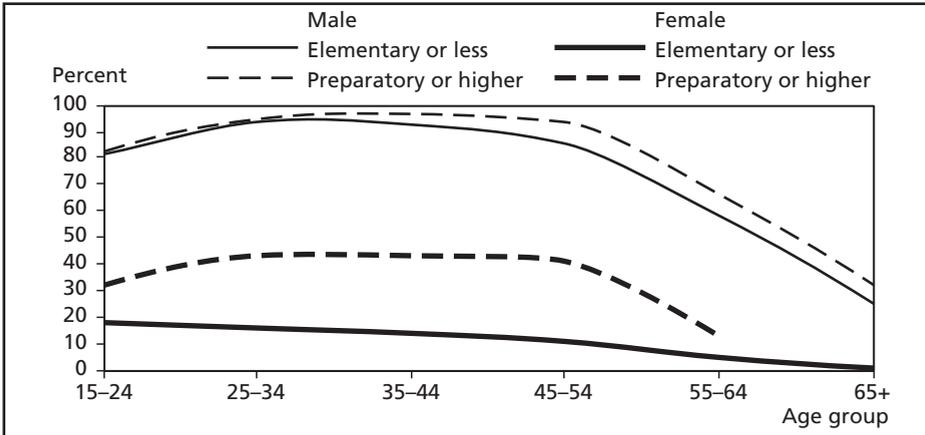


Figure 6.2 Labour force participation by sex, age and education*.



* Persons currently enrolled in school are excluded.

and 34 percent of divorced or separated women were working or seeking work outside the home, compared to 18 percent of married women. If those currently enrolled in school are excluded, the differences are further accentuated. The effect of marital status is different for women and men. Married men have a significantly increased likelihood of being in the labour force compared to their unmarried counterparts. Women’s responsibilities in the domestic sphere are the main impediment to their participation in the labour force, while men are largely pushed out of the labour force when their health fails.

The only partial exception to this pattern is found for persons aged below 25 years, where education is the main reason for not working, for both men and women, cited by 65 and 39 percent respectively. Among women in this age group, domestic duties are mentioned nearly as often. Combined with those who mention “social restrictions”

explicitly, reasons pertaining to traditional sex-role patterns are mentioned by 42 percent of women below 25 years of age. In the most work-intensive age group, 25-54 years, domestic duties are invariably the sole reason given by women.

Among those few men aged 25-54 years who are not members of the labour force, health reasons are cited by roughly one-half. From the age of 45 years onwards, the vast majority of economically inactive men cite health and retirement (which is closely affiliated with health reasons) as the reasons. Discouragement does not contribute significantly to keeping either men or women out of the labour market.

Unemployment

Among adult, economically active Palestinians, nine percent are unemployed and actively looking for work. This unemployment rate is not significantly different from the rate measured by the PCBS in two previous surveys in 1988 and 1998. Furthermore, it is very similar to that measured in a household survey among Syrian citizens one year earlier.¹¹ In all countries hosting Palestinian refugees other than Syria, the Palestinian refugee population has higher rates of unemployment than the national average, particularly in Lebanon. The prevailing rates for Palestinian refugees in Syria are lower than those found for Palestinian refugees in other host countries, including the West Bank and Gaza Strip (as measured in 1999).

Although unemployment is relatively moderate, rates vary strongly between different population groups. First of all, unemployment among women is more than double that of men, with 16 percent *versus* seven. The high female rate should be considered against the background of their low overall labour-force participation rate. A low participation rate indicates that whether or not to seek employment is far more of a choice for women than it is for men. By implication, to a larger extent than men, women may decline taking less-desirable jobs or engage in own-account work while looking for more preferable employment. Importantly, whether to work or not is not simply a choice made by the individual woman, but is as much the effect of constraints imposed on her decision through the expectations of employers, family and friends, and broader social norms.

¹¹ The "Syria Internal Migration Survey", a national household survey carried out by the University of Damascus, the Syrian Central Bureaus of Statistics and Fafo in 2000 (Khawaja 2002). The sample of more than 20,000 households excluded Palestinian refugees.

Underemployment

Eighteen percent of the Palestinian camp and gathering labour force stated that they would have liked to work more hours had additional work been available. However, the majority of those who want to work more hours already work long hours, and only one-third of them work less than 35 hours per week (and the average number of weekly working hours can be as high as 52). In addition, nearly half of those who want more work have not actively sought work or been available for more work. As a result, only five percent of the workforce meets the ILO criteria for underemployment (Table 6.1).¹² Only in two industrial sectors, agriculture and construction, is the rate of underemployment significantly higher, at 11 and 14 percent respectively. Underemployment is also higher in the private sector than in the public sector. There is a negative correlation between the number of hours worked and the hourly salary received (see below).

Table 6.1 Underemployment and desire to work more by sex, industry and sector of employment in percent of the employed.

		Percent ILO under-employed	Percent that want to work more	n
Sex	Male	5	21	5,836
	Female	5	10	1,503
Industry	Agriculture	11	22	220
	Manufacturing and mining	6	20	1,211
	Construction, electricity	14	34	1,012
	Trade, hotels, transport	3	15	1,502
	Public administration and financial intermediation	2	19	1,224
	Education, health and social work	4	10	1,133
	Community, social services and other	4	14	1,037
Type of employer*	Public enterprise or administration	3	15	2,287
	Private company	7	22	4,050
All		5	18	7,339

* People employed in private households, by UNRWA or the popular organisations, are not included because of low group sizes.

¹² ILO has set three criteria to identify the underemployed: (a) that the employee works less than “normal duration” (defined as 35 hours by us); (b) that he does so on an involuntary basis; and (c) that he is seeking work and is available for work during the reference period (ILO 1990: 123).

Structure of Employment

Certainly, given the high rate of public employment in Syria, the rate of wage-employment contrasted with self-employment is higher among Palestinian refugees there (80 and 14 percent, respectively) than in both Lebanon (71 and 21 percent) and Jordan (76 and 17 percent). Five percent of Palestinians in the labour force report that they are employers.

Although the self-employed group is a highly mixed segment, including street vendors as well as lawyers, self-employment is primarily an adaptation to labour markets by persons with resources too weak to compete in the “formal” wage-labour market. Thus, people with lower levels of education are more prone to engage in self-employment activities than those with a secondary or post-secondary degree. The incidence of self-employment also varies greatly by industrial sector. As is the case for Palestinian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, trade has the highest prevalence of self-employed at 32 percent. Construction and agriculture also have many self-employed. Finally, men are far more likely to engage in self-employment than women.

Whereas the male workforce is spread over a number of sectors in groups of rather similar sizes, as many as 40 percent of all employed women work in education, health and social work. Combined with the related sectors of public administration and community services, 68 percent of women work in the skilled service sectors. Women are completely absent from construction.

Women’s concentration in certain sectors is to a significant degree an effect of the characteristics of economically active women. Among employed women, over one-half have completed secondary education or higher. Among employed men, only 24 percent have a comparable level of education. For both men and women, education pulls workers away from manufacturing, construction and trade over to public administration, education, health and social work and services. Approximately half the workforce (46 percent) have completed secondary education or higher. Within this group, 70 percent work in the sectors mentioned above.

Regardless of education, however, women are over-represented in the service sectors. Even among female employees who have not completed their education, 45 percent are employed in public administration, education, health, and social work and services, compared to 26 percent of men with a similar educational attainment. On the other hand, nearly one-third of women with less than a secondary education work in the manufacturing sector, which is a sector that attracts only seven percent of the educated women.

There are some regional differences pertaining to people’s sectors of employment. In the South, for example, nearly half of the households surveyed live in areas where agriculture is the largest sector of work. By contrast, in the capital’s rural outskirts manufacturing employs more than one-quarter of the workforce. In Urban Damascus trade is the largest sector of work.

The public sector employs 36 percent of all Palestinian refugees who are employed, and as much as 46 percent of the employed women. Yet the proportion of younger people in public employment is considerably lower than for older age groups, despite the fact that younger people are better educated than older generations. This suggests that the public sector no longer absorbs new entrants to the same degree as before, reflecting a relative downscaling of the public sector. Employment at UNRWA is far less important for educated young people than among well-educated people in higher age groups.

“Craft work” is the largest single type of occupation for men (35 percent), while nearly one-half (49 percent) of women work as professionals of some type.

Wages and Working Conditions

The highest hourly wages are paid in education, health and social services, which is the largest sector of employment among workers with a secondary education or more. Although this sector is predominantly public, the public sector does not in general offer higher wages than the private sector. In public administration, for example, hourly wages, at USD 0.7 (SYP 37) per hour, are on the whole average and comparable to the large private sector of trade, hotels and restaurants. Moreover, the average number of hours worked per week is eight hours, or one full day, *less* in the public sector than in the private sector. The highest average wages are not found in the private nor the public sector, but at UNRWA, which is a small employer in terms of its total employment volume but significant for educated women.

Wages offered must be considered in conjunction with the level of skills in each sector or industry. Compared to the multifarious private and public sectors, UNRWA offers a relatively narrow range of skill-intensive services, mainly in health, education and social services. Consequently, 72 percent of UNRWA employees have completed secondary education or higher, compared to 53 percent in the public sector, 17 percent in the private sector and 22 percent employed by the “popular organisations”.

Working hours vary considerably with industry and employment status. The general picture is that people compensate for low hourly wages by working long hours. Those employed in trade, restaurants and hotels have the longest working hours and work on average more than 57 hours per week. On the other hand, the lowest average number of working hours is found in the education and health sectors, with only 42 hours.

Public-sector employment is associated with lower wages than private-sector employment, where education and age levels are constant. Wages cannot, therefore, explain why people with higher education prefer the public sector. Other features may contribute to its competitiveness. First, employment for those with higher education is probably limited in the private sector, which is still mainly of the informal, small-scale

type in Syria. A second issue is the question of work “appropriateness”, especially for women. The public sector, which offers short working days, a transparent and “protected” work environment, non-exhaustive conditions, job safety, etc., is the preferred choice of many a father, brother and husband. Finally, non-wage benefits and associated qualities may add to the competitiveness of the public sector. In fact, fringe benefits hardly exist at all in the private sector, where Palestinian refugees report an average of 0.3 of seven benefits.¹³ By contrast, public sector employees have access to almost three of seven benefits, on average. Public administration, which has the lowest pay of the major public sector industries, receives the highest average score.

Workers in manufacturing and construction are clearly the most exposed to adverse working conditions, in terms of working high above the ground, or being in close contact with dangerous machines, hazardous chemical substances or explosive materials. In terms of working schedules, however, the most unfavourable conditions are found in trade and transportation; both are industries with a high rate of self-employment. In these two industries, 43 percent usually work outside the “normal” schedule between 6 am and 6 pm.

Twenty-two percent of employed persons said that they acquire new skills or competence in their job on a regular basis, while an additional 28 percent reported that they do so occasionally. The percentage of workers given the opportunity to acquire new skills in their jobs is highest in education, health and social services.

Child Labour

Six percent of Palestinian children aged 10-14 years are economically active. Of these, 92 percent are boys and 43 percent are not enrolled in school. In addition, 17 percent of working children who are also attending school state that they were away from school often or sometimes due to employment during the twelve months preceding the interview. Using non-enrolment in school as the criterion as the definition of child labour, the child labour rate approaches three percent.

Nearly half of the working children (42 percent) are employed in the trade, restaurant and hotel sector, followed by 32 percent in the manufacturing sector and 13 percent in the construction sector. This implies that children are predominantly employed in the industries with the poorest working environments.

¹³ The seven benefits are: paid holiday; paid sick leave; paid maternity leave; retirement pension; subsidized or free housing; subsidized or free medical care; and other benefits including free telephone and newspapers.

7 Income and Poverty

Household Income Levels and Variation

As an integrated segment of the Syrian population, the household economy of Palestinian refugees is more affected by the general characteristics of the Syrian national economy than circumstances specific to the refugees as a group. In comparison with the other host countries of Palestinian refugees in the Middle East, Syria had by far the lowest gross national income per capita at 970 USD in 1999 (WDI 2001). Syria is one of the poorest countries in the Arab region. Nominal household income of Palestinian refugees in Syria is substantially lower than that of Palestinian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. However, after price-level adjustments, the per capita income of Palestinian refugees in the three countries becomes fairly similar.

In a pattern common to nearly all developing countries, rural areas lag behind urban areas in income, as shown in Table 7.1. This is explained by wage differential (within and across employment sectors). Well-paid jobs are predominantly found in urban centres, and in the capital in particular, including high-skilled occupations in public administration and public services and in certain type of self-employment professions. Some regions are negatively associated with household income; the North and Rural Damascus stand out, particularly when compared with Urban Damascus.

Predictably, a household's income level is closely associated with its link to the labour market: the higher the number of employed members to the number of household members, the higher the per capita income. The education level of the employed also has a strong effect: the higher the education, the higher the income. Having relatives abroad only makes a minor difference, a finding that concurs with results from the studies of Palestinian refugees elsewhere: Relatives abroad only send money to their families at home when the household's regular income is disrupted (Egset 2003). Furthermore, private-sector employment is associated with higher household income than employment in the public sector, keeping the effect of the education of the employed constant. Ignoring variables for education, the situation is the opposite because of a higher level of education among public employees. Regardless of sector,

Table 7.1 Annual Palestinian household and per capita income levels in SYP and USD by regional background variables.

	Annual house- hold income SYP	Annual house- hold income USD	Annual per capita income SYP	Annual per capita income USD	n
All	114,173	2,186	23,810	456	4,887
Urban	119,221	2,283	25,822	494	3,050
Rural	105,613	2,022	20,400	390	1,837
Yarmouk camp	122,620	2,348	26,753	512	1,632
Other camps	103,795	1,988	20,571	393	2,682
Gatherings	124,711	2,388	25,729	493	573
Damascus urban	121,915	2,335	26,673	511	1,774
Damascus rural	101,911	1,952	19,697	376	958
North	110,161	2,110	22,537	432	684
West	108,336	2,075	23,525	450	982
South	122,041	2,337	21,026	403	489

the education level of employed household members is the single most important determinant of household income.

Sources of Income

Three-quarters of the households received some form of wage income in the year preceding the survey, a slightly higher figure than in the Jordanian and Lebanese camps (see Egset 2003). One-third of the households received some form of income from self-employment, a higher proportion in urban than in rural areas, and in higher, compared to lower, income brackets. Nearly half of the households received transfer income of some sort, the most common being private domestic transfers. This result is comparable to that found in Jordanian and Lebanese refugee camps.

Although transfers are received by many, only 13 percent of households have transfers as their largest source of income, a somewhat smaller proportion than that of the camp households in Jordan (19 percent) and Lebanon (18 percent). As in Jordan and Lebanon, regular wage income is by far the most important source of income, followed by self-employment income. Altogether, 84 percent of the households draw most of their income from their own work (wages plus self-employment income).

The share of income contributed by transfers diminishes from the lowest through to the highest income groups, whereas the share of wage income increases. The relative contribution of self-employment remains more or less constant. For the ten percent of households with the lowest income (the lowest decile), transfers contribute as much as 48 percent of the total income. The transfer contribution drops to around 20 percent

Table 7.2 Frequency of grouped household income types, by urban-rural status. Percent of households.

Income types	Urban	Rural	All
Wage	71	81	74
Self-employment	39	29	35
Transfer	47	45	46
Property	7	4	6
Other	11	16	13
n	3,050	1,837	4,887

Table 7.3 Largest source of household income, by urban-rural status. Percent of households.

Income types	Urban	Rural	All
Wage	57	72	63
Self-employment	25	15	21
Transfer	14	10	13
Property and other	4	3	4
Total	100	100	100
n	3,050	1,837	4,887

in the second, third and fourth deciles, remaining at approximately ten percent from that point up. In the same way, the wage contribution is only 26 percent in the lowest income decile, increasing to approximately 60 percent in the second and third decile, and further up to 66 percent in the higher deciles. The importance of self-employment income is greater in the highest deciles than in the lowest ones.

The bulk of transfers come from private sources, regardless of income level. Private transfers include cash and in-kind assistance from relatives and friends inside or outside the country (of which remittances from abroad contribute 59 percent). Of total transfers, private sources contribute 50 percent or more in all income groups. The second largest source is the combined sum of UNRWA transfers, which contributes a remarkably similar amount (approximately 2,500 SYP or 48 USD) per household per year across the income distribution (slightly more to the lowest income bracket). While UNRWA transfers thus contribute a larger relative share of the income in the lower rather than in the higher income groups, the absolute amount transferred is about the same.

Pensions comprise a transfer type largely biased in favour of the higher income group. The 20 percent of households with the highest income receive nearly three times as much in pensions as the 20 percent of households with the lowest income.

Income Equality Compared

There is an improved level of income equality in the Palestinian refugee communities in Syria compared to those of Jordan and Lebanon; this comparison is also true in relation to these countries' national figures. Comparing the income distribution by income brackets, the variation may not appear to be large (Table 7.4). For example, the ten percent of households with the lowest income receive 1.8 percent of the total income in Syrian camps, compared to 1.4 percent in Jordanian and 0.9 in Lebanese camps (and gatherings). In Jordan as a whole the lowest decile receives 2.4 percent. At

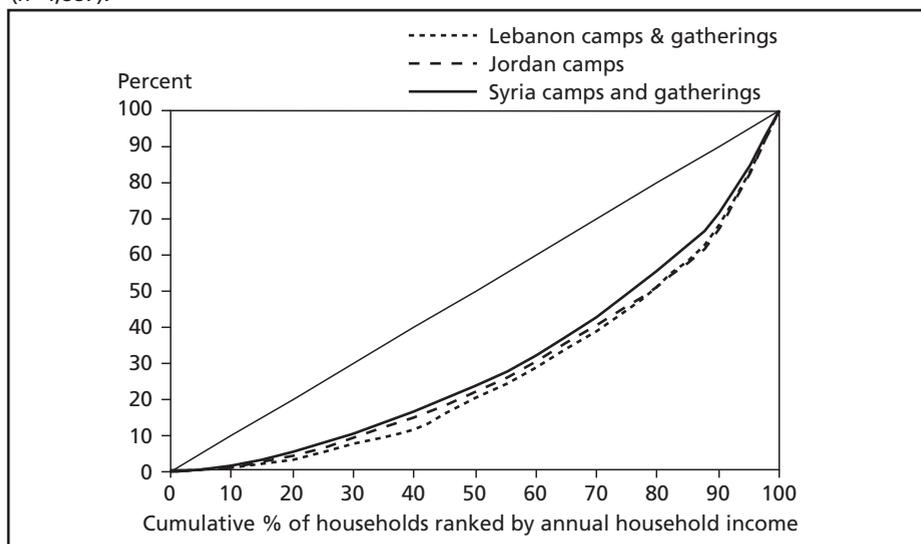
Table 7.4 Household income distribution and Gini coefficients, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.

Household income distribution in Palestinian refugee camps (& gatherings) in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon								
	Lowest 10%	Lowest 20%	Second 20%	Third 20%	Fourth 20%	Highest 20%	Highest 10%	Gini coefficient
Syria Camps*	1.8	5.8	11	15.5	23.6	44.2	28.1	0.37
Jordan refugee camps	1.4	4.5	10.7	15.4	20.7	48.7	32.7	0.46
Jordan	2.4	5.9	9.8	13.9	20.3	50.1	34.7	0.43
Lebanon camps*	0.9	3.4	8.5	16.9	22.4	48.7	31.8	0.48
Lebanon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.44

* Includes gatherings.

Sources: Fafo 1999a, Fafo 1999b, CAS 1998:71, WDI 1999.

Figure 7.1 Lorenz-curves, refugee camps (and gatherings) in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon (n=4,887).



the opposite end of the scale, the share of total income received by the highest income decile is 4-5 percentage points lower in Syrian camps compared to other Palestinian refugee areas. Yet, the seemingly modest differences are consistent across the distribution as shown by the Lorenz curves in Figure 7.1, and result in a much lower Gini coefficient for Syrian camps than all other areas (Table 7.4).

Poverty: Levels, Distribution and Determinants

Poverty is defined here as income-poverty, using 1 and 2 US dollar per capita per day as the poverty and ultra-poverty lines, commonly used in international poverty statistics, and adjusted for local prices. Since we have two poverty lines, a lower and an upper line, the proportion that falls below the lower line (the so-called “ultra-poor”) is also included in the proportion that falls below the upper line (“the poor”).

Low local prices (compared to neighbouring countries) along with a comparatively low level of income inequality combine to explain that the lowest level and depth of poverty among Palestinian camp and gathering refugees in any of the three major host countries outside of Palestine is found in Syria (Table 7.5).

The 23 percent of households and 27 percent of the population that fall below the poverty line in Syria are rather high rates of poverty. They are still significantly lower than the 31 and 35 percent of Palestinian households that are poor in Jordan and Lebanon respectively. The level of ultra-poverty, at five percent of households, is only one-third of the level found in Lebanon. In terms of estimated population figures, the number of ultra-poor Palestinian individuals in Syria (10,590) is roughly half of the number of ultra-poor in Lebanon (24,340) or Jordan (17,480).

Furthermore, the income of both the ultra-poor and the poor are nearer to the poverty line in Syria than they are in the two other areas. In Syria, the ultra-poor and the poor are on average 29 and 31 percent below the poverty line, compared to 42 and 43 percent in Lebanon and 38 and 36 percent in Jordan (the Gap-ratio).

Table 7.5 Poverty and ultra-poverty in camps (and gatherings) in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

	Syria camps and gatherings		Lebanon camps and gatherings		Jordan camps	
	Ultra-poor	Poor	Ultra-poor	Poor	Ultra-poor	Poor
% households	5 %	23 %	15 %	35 %	9 %	31 %
% persons	6 %	27 %			10 %	36 %
Gap-ratio	29 %	31 %	42 %	43 %	38 %	36 %
Poverty gap	2	7	6	15	3	11
N (estimated population)	10,590	45,850			17,480	64,150

When asked whether or not a household has experienced lack of food or lack of money to buy food during the past month, 55 percent of the ultra-poor and 45 percent of all poor answered yes. In contrast, approximately 18 percent of the non-poor had experienced the same. Lack of food should be understood in the sense of lack of *preferred* or *usual* food, since only four to five percent of those who report lack of food claim that the lack of food has prevented them entirely from eating on certain days. More commonly, those who lack food cut down on the number of daily meals, limit the adults' consumption, or seek help outside the household. Yet, by far the most common adaptation to food shortages is shifting to lesser quality food, a strategy pursued by 65 to 75 percent of those in this situation.

Results are mixed with respect to the availability of safety nets against risks of future income shortfalls in the population surveyed. Asked if the household would be able to raise SYP 5,000 (slightly less than USD 100) in a week, 65 percent of the ultra-poor and 57 percent of the poor answered "no". Yet, given the fact that the annual household income is only SYP 46,600 among the poor and SYP 24,900 among the ultra-poor, the result is not very surprising. On the other hand, the fact that 31 percent of the ultra-poor and 41 percent of the poor claim they would be able to raise that amount of money with the help of people outside their own household suggests a strong social solidarity among the refugees.

Although savings, and thus a buffer against shocks, are rare, this should not be considered evidence of widespread material deprivation as, for example, approximately 80 percent of the ultra-poor and 95 percent of the non-poor own basic household durables, such as a refrigerator, a washing machine, and a TV set. Far fewer have their own satellite dish, but even this type of item is owned by one-quarter of the poor and ultra-poor households, and as many as 42 percent of the non-poor. A car, on the other hand, is an exclusive luxury item owned by only/approximately five percent of all households.

The survey finds no strong geographical concentration of poverty. Yet, rural areas do have a higher level of poverty than urban areas, at 27 compared to 20 percent.

Poverty alleviation programmes, UNRWA's special hardship programme included, often target households headed by women because of their low income and frequently high support burden. In Syria, forty percent of female-headed Palestinian refugee households lack an employed household member and 43 percent of them rely on transfer income. Households headed by women are poorer than households headed by men, and there is a significantly higher level of ultra-poverty among female-headed households compared to male-headed households. Private and official transfers to households headed by women fail to compensate adequately for the dearth of wage income in these households.

The prevalence of poverty is highest in households whose heads are between 36 and 45 years old. The likely explanation is that these households have completed the

child-birth phase but the children are still at home, and most or all of the children are unemployed minors, resulting in a high dependency burden and low per capita income.

A majority (53 percent) of poor households have members with chronic health failure. Among the households with at least one seriously ill member, 31 percent fall below the poverty line and ten percent fall below the ultra-poverty line, compared to 19 and four percent, respectively, of households without any chronic health problem. Poor individuals with serious health problems also have lower income than poor people without health problems.

There is a strong positive correlation between the household dependency ratio and poverty (Table 7.6). Poverty nearly doubles from households with no dependants to households with a dependency ratio higher than zero but less than 1/2. Poverty increases sharply again among households with more dependants than providers, up to as much as 42 percent when the dependency ratio surpasses 2/3 (that is to say, when the number of dependants is double or more the number of adults aged between 15 and 64 years).

Table 7.6 Incidence of poverty (in percent) by household dependency ratio.

Dependency ratio	Ultra poor	Poor	Contribution	G
0	2	12	8	28
Between 0 and 1/3	4	20	24	31
Between 1/3 and 1/2	4	20	21	31
Between 1/2 and 2/3	6	30	31	30
Between 2/3 and 1	15	42	16	38

The 55 percent of households with close relatives abroad have a below-average rate of poverty. The poverty risk is lowest for households with relatives in high-wage countries such as the Gulf or Western countries. In this group, the poverty rate is 16 percent, compared to 26 percent of households without relatives in high-wage countries. However, these figures also imply that having relatives abroad by no means is a guarantee against poverty.

Households without any employed members are very strongly at risk of experiencing poverty. Then again, in the same way as in the Jordanian and Lebanese camps, employment is no guarantee against poverty. On the contrary, the majority (78 percent) of poor households have employed members. Moreover, every fifth household with employed members falls below the poverty line. However, few of them fall below the ultra-poverty line.

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Keeping Up: A Brief on The Living Conditions of Palestinian Refugees in Syria

Fafo in cooperation with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in Damascus, in coordination with the General Administration for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR) in Syria, and with financial support from the Government of Norway, carried out a living conditions survey of almost 5,000 Palestinian refugee households at 65 different locations in Syria in 2001. The main report from that survey, "Palestinian Refugees in Syria: Human Capital, Economic Resources and Living Conditions", documented the situation of Palestinian refugees with respect to demography, health, education, employment, economic resources, social networks, and housing.

Summarizing key findings from "Palestinian Refugees in Syria", this report contrasts the situation of Palestinian refugees in the Syrian Arabic Republic with that of Palestinian refugees residing elsewhere, and draws comparisons between Palestinian refugees and the host-country population.



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