

# Refugees and the Right of Return

## BRIEFING CARD

- **7+ million** Palestinian refugees
- **150+ times** the UN has reaffirmed the Palestinian Right of Return
- In 1948:
  - **750,000** Palestinians were made refugees
  - **530** Palestinian villages were ethnically cleansed
  - **15%** of Palestinians kept their homes

In 1950 the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was established for Palestinian refugees.

Today UNRWA has **58 camps**, home to more than **1.5 million Palestinian refugees**. UNRWA provides education, healthcare and social services to Palestinians. After so many years, the tents have now been replaced by semi-permanent structures, but they are **still refugee camps**.



Aida Camp, set up in 1950. [UNRWA]

## The Right of Return

Shortly after the 1948 Nakba the UN passed **Resolution 194**, which confirmed the Palestinian Right of Return. This principle in **international law** guarantees Palestinians right to return to their home.

- There are now over 7 million Palestinian refugees scattered across the world, making this the **world's longest-running refugee crisis**.
- Israel refuses to abide by UN resolution 194.

*"...refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return..."*

– UN Resolution 194 December, 1948

The Right of Return is included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the Fourth Geneva Convention (1948).

*"Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and return to his country."*

– Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Since 1948 the UN has reaffirmed the Palestinian Right of Return more than 150 times. Yet Israel continues to ignore or refuse this right.

Israel allows anyone of Jewish descent to settle on Palestinian land, whilst Palestinians whose ancestors have lived on this land for centuries are denied this right.



[Wikimedia Commons]

## Absentee Property Law



A large key atop the entrance to the Aida refugee camp [Wikimedia Commons]

In 1950 Israel passed the Absentee Property Law. This **justifies Israel preventing Palestinians from returning to their homes**. It also stated that Israelis can take any property left behind by Palestinians during the 1948 Nakba.

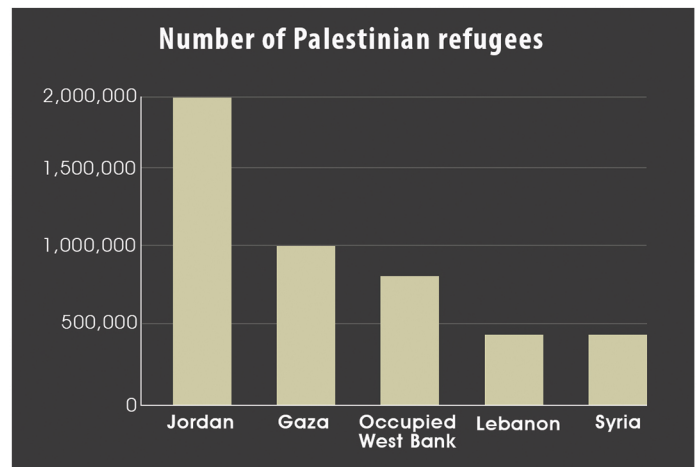
Many Palestinians still have the keys to their homes. The **key** has become an **important symbol of the Palestinian Right to Return**. It is often seen alongside other Palestinian national symbols such as the keffiyeh, olive trees and cacti.



FOA activists holding keys outside Downing Street

## The lives of Palestinian refugees

More Palestinians live outside their homeland than within Palestine.



The rights of Palestinian refugees in their host countries vary a lot.

In Jordan Palestinian refugees hold Jordanian citizenship and are fully integrated.

In Lebanon Palestinian refugees are denied the right to education and **barred from certain jobs**.

In Syria, Kuwait and other Gulf states, Palestinians have refugee status and are **vulnerable to deportation**.

Wherever they are, Palestinian refugees typically face **poor living conditions, high unemployment and discrimination**. They often feel neglected and forgotten.

## References:

- 1) 'Palestinian refugees face hitting 'rock bottom', warns UNRWA in \$1.6 billion appeal', UN News, January 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/01/1132777>
- 2) 'Israel's refusal to grant Palestinian refugees right to return has fuelled seven decades of suffering', Press Release, Amnesty International, May 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2019/05/israels-refusal-to-grant-palestinian-refugees-right-to-return-has-fuelled-seven-decades-of-suffering/>
- 3) 'Palestine Refugees', UNWRA, <https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees>

Information accurate (April 2023)

