



## profile: dheisheh camp

bethlehem governorate

### Overview

Dheisheh camp was established in 1949 and is located along the main street in Bethlehem. The camp was built to serve 3,000 refugees. Today, the number of residents in Dheisheh has reached roughly 15,000.

The Israeli security forces (ISF) fenced in the entire camp during the first intifada, leaving a small turnstile as the only entrance and isolating the camp from the main road between Bethlehem and Hebron. The fence has since been removed, and the turnstile is no longer in use, though it is still visible at the camp entrance. During the second intifada, Israeli forces conducted incursions, house and arrest campaigns, and put the camp under prolonged curfews. Many of Dheisheh's older male residents were arrested during the first and second intifadas. Despite being under full Palestinian control (Area A), the ISF still conducts frequent incursions and arrests inside the camp.

Dheisheh camp has a very active civil society with many community-based organizations (CBOs).

### UNRWA in Dheisheh Camp

#### General Information

- **Established:** 1949
- **Size:** 0.33 sq km
- **Population before 1967 (OCHA):** 8,236
- **Registered refugee population (PCBS):** 10,450
- **Registered persons (UNRWA):** 15,000
- **Estimated density:** 45,454 per sq km
- **Places of origin:** 45 villages in western Jerusalem and the area west of Hebron

#### UNRWA in Dheisheh Camp

##### Main UNRWA installations:

- Four schools
- One health centre
- Shams Health Centre for Non-Communicable Diseases
- Environmental health office

##### UNRWA employees working in Dheisheh camp: 158

- Education: 103
- Health: 20
- Relief and social services: 3
- Sanitation services: 14
- Administration: 11
- Shams Centre: 12

### Education

There are four UNRWA schools serving nearly 2,150 students in Dheisheh camp. The two girls' schools are divided between two buildings that share many of the same facilities. UNRWA has prioritized one of the girls' schools for rehabilitation works. The boys' schools share one building that was recently divided into two sections. The sections have separate entrances and courtyards, and thus younger students are separated from older students, which improved the school environment considerably. Facilities in the schools include libraries and computer and science laboratories. UNRWA psychosocial counsellors are present in the camp's schools. Remedial classes in Arabic and mathematics are offered on Saturdays. There is a lack of after-school activities in the camp, the addition of which would have a positive social and academic impact.

### Health

One health centre serves the refugees in Dheisheh and in the surrounding areas. The Centre provides primary health care, including reproductive health, infant and child care, immunizations, screening and medical check-ups, and treatment of communicable and non-communicable diseases. Psychosocial counselling and family and child protection are also available at the health centre. A dentist is available three times per week. The centre also has access to an x-ray machine and provides physiotherapy services. UNRWA has prioritized the reconstruction of the Health Centre.

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The Centre recently implemented the Family Health Team approach. This new approach focuses on the family with the aim of providing comprehensive, continuous care. The Family health team has improved patient flow and reduced the number of consultations that doctors perform, though this number remains high. An electronic health information system for patient files has also been implemented. This system increases the accuracy of data and health information, as well as health service efficiency in the centre.

The Shams Centre for Prevention and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) was established in 2011 in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem, St. John Eye Hospital and the local community. Shams Centre is the only UNRWA referral centre for NCDs and specializes in diabetes. The Centre accepts patients from the southern part of the West Bank and tests for diabetes on blood samples sent from UNRWA health centres in the southern and central part of the West Bank. It also conducts healthy lifestyle campaigns.

## Relief, Social Services and Emergency Response

Three social workers conduct regular home visits in the camp to identify families requiring special assistance. In this regard, UNRWA works closely with many CBOs to strengthen social services that serve vulnerable members of the community. These centres provide skills-training, awareness-raising, rehabilitation activities and recreational activities. The Community-Based Rehabilitation Centre has been particularly successful and is home to an audiology unit and a school for the hearing-impaired. Additionally, UNRWA provides quarterly food parcels to approximately 630 impoverished refugees in the camp, equivalent to 4 per cent of the registered persons in the camp, through the Social Safety Net Programme.

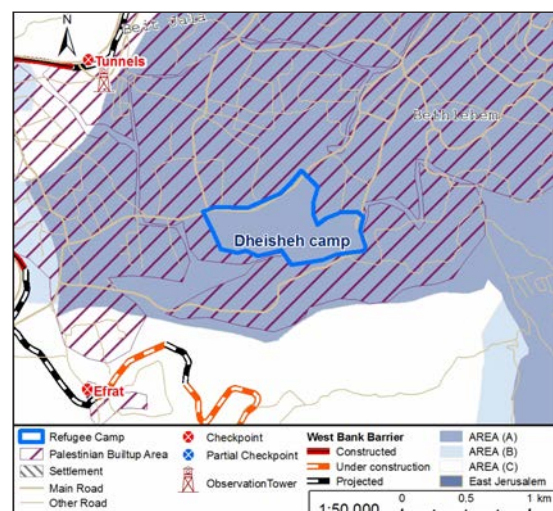
The UNRWA Crisis Intervention Unit (CIU) provides financial assistance to residents whose houses have been damaged during incursions. This includes the repair of broken doors, windows and other damages. The CIU also refers victims to services such as mental health counselling and legal assistance.

The Emergency Cash-for-Work Programme assists food-insecure families by offering three-month work opportunities inside the

camp. The family receives a cash subsidy in return for their work, helping them to meet their basic food needs. The projects are designed to benefit the camp community as a whole. Cash-for-Work labourers have supported sanitation work, been involved in sewerage and water network repairs, and undertaken road rehabilitation, among other tasks.

## Environmental Health

The sanitation foreman conducts daily water examinations and manages the team of sanitation workers. There are 13 sanitation workers who collect solid waste from shelters and maintain sewerage pipes. Approximately 95 per cent of the camp is connected to the sewerage network that was built in 1994. The remaining 5 per cent use cesspits. The water testing laboratory in the camp allows UNRWA to test the water samples of all the southern West Bank camps on a monthly basis. Access to water was greatly improved when a new water network was built in 2011. A recent agreement with the Bethlehem Water and Sewage Authority provides water to the camp four days every second week. Although this allows residents to replenish their water tanks, water is still a daily concern in the residents' lives.



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## MAIN CHALLENGES

### Unemployment

The high unemployment is a major problem for Dheisheh residents, despite the fact that many of the residents have completed a higher education degree. Job opportunities are scarce, and unemployment is particularly high among youth and women. The main sources of employment for camp residents are the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA.

### Lack of Open Space

There is a lack of safe public spaces in which children of Dheisheh can play and socialize, despite the fact that several CBOs target children and youth. Playing in the streets of the camp remains the main activity for children, exposing them to several hazards.

### Infrastructure

The sewerage network experiences frequent blockages and needs rehabilitation. In addition, 5 per cent of camp residents use latrines connected to percolation pits. Most of the pits have no concrete floor, causing sewage waste to seep into the ground. Percolation pits also pose a considerable health hazard when it rains heavily, as they flood easily. In addition, due to the insufficient storm-water network, some parts of the camp use the sewerage network to dispose of rainwater. This overburdens the sewerage network, particularly during the winter, which results in the flooding of streets and homes. In recent years UNRWA has rehabilitated 56 shelters and reconstructed 13 shelters in Dheisheh camp.

## Spotlight: Dheisheh Hearing Unit

The Dheisheh Hearing Unit was established as part of the Community-Based Rehabilitation Centre (CBRC) in 2011. It is 1 of 18 income-generating projects funded by the relief and social services (RSS) programme under the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) project. The hearing unit was established with an initial grant of US\$ 14,000 and was implemented in order to serve as a sustainable source of revenue for the CBRC. There are currently two employees and two volunteers working at the hearing unit.



Beyond its financial benefits, the Hearing Unit provides essential services to thousands of refugees with disabilities. The Unit's first step is to identify refugees that suffer from hearing and speech disabilities by conducting hearing exams at the CBRC. The unit then refers these refugees to the proper services offered at the CBRC, such as speech therapy classes. The solution is often very simple, and the provision of hearing aids can vastly improve the life of those suffering from a loss of hearing. The unit also works with parents of children with disabilities, and instructs them how to best care for their child. The Unit's goal is to ensure the integration of refugees with disabilities into society. Staff members estimate that in the last three years, more than 1,000 refugees have been treated at the Dheisheh Hearing Unit.

## "We Are Still Here."



Mustafa Ahmad Adawi sits at the head of his living room, smiling as he welcomes us to sit down. He is small in stature, and his eyes are kind. At 77 years of age, Mustafa is soft-spoken and welcoming, but we quickly learn that he is a force to be reckoned with. He is known in the region as the 'Problem Solver', and he has lived a life dedicated to serving his people.

Born in 1937 in the village of Zakaria, Mustafa and his family fled the village once mortars began striking the area. Mustafa was only 11 years old at the time, but he recalls the events with great precision. "We fled to a nearby field," he said. "There were many trees there." His village was abandoned, and the field was soon filled with hundreds of people. Peace, however, did not last long. "Shortly after we relocated, Israeli soldiers kidnapped five people:

three men, one teenager and one woman – it was terrifying." Mustafa relates to us that the teenager and woman were released, but the three men were killed. It is a memory that haunts Mustafa to this day.

In the wake of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the Red Cross provided Mustafa and his fellow villagers with tents, blankets and food. In 1949, Dheisheh camp was officially established; Mustafa recalls, "It was a hard life we lived, especially economically." Though he does not shade us from the economic hardships he and his family faced, he is also quick to commend the camp community at the time, who he says were "like his family."

The lack of employment opportunities led Mustafa to Jordan, where he became an elite member of the police force. Mustafa worked with the police in Jordan for six years until 1964, when he returned to Dheisheh camp. He recalls the dramatic changes the camp had undergone in his six-year absence, noting, "The situation was much better. Shelters had replaced tents and there were water pumps as well." Following his Jordanian career path, Mustafa joined the Jerusalem police, serving areas such as Sheikh Jarrah as well as Dheisheh camp itself. Mustafa comments that there is no longer a police force within the camp, but that he was proud to serve his camp while he could. "I was involved in all the issues within the camp. I saw everything," he says. And he continues, "I was able to protect people and to help them solve their problems."

His career in the police force gained Mustafa the title of 'Problem Solver', a label that remains with him to this day. People come from all over the region seeking Mustafa's advice on problems ranging from family matters to political debates. Mustafa believes there are two ways to solve a problem: through legal means and through the community.

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## General Overview West Bank Refugee Camps

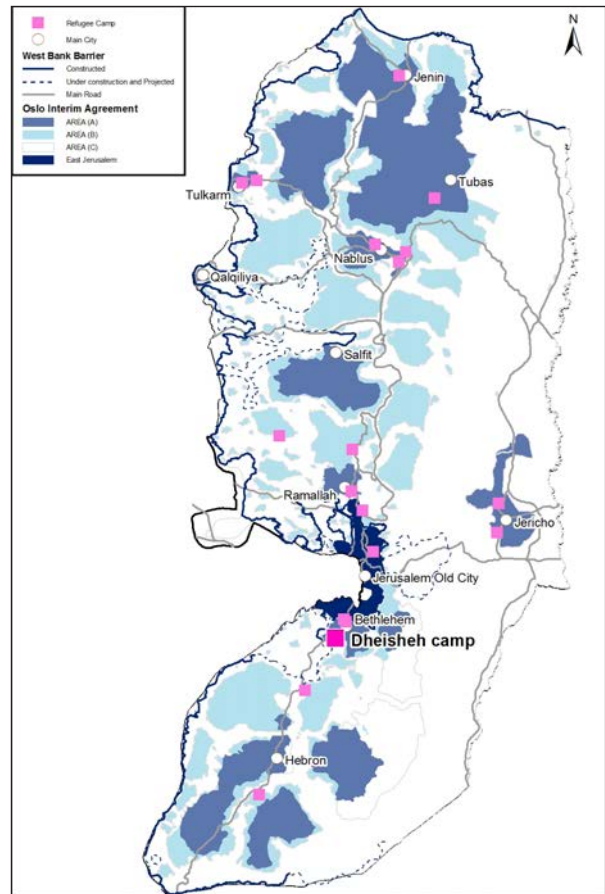
### Who is a Palestine Refugee?

A Palestine refugee is defined as any person whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period from 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948 and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict. The descendants of Palestine refugee males, as well as legally adopted children, are also eligible to register as refugees.

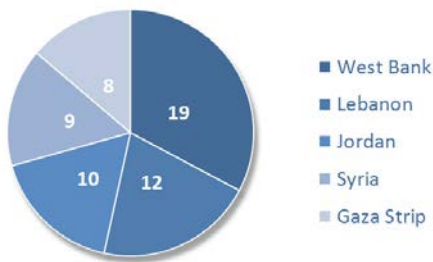
### Palestine Refugee Camps

There are 58 Palestine refugee camps located in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Gaza and the West Bank. The camps were first established as temporary tented cities for Palestine refugees who fled their homes during the 1948 conflict. For more than 60 years, this unresolved situation has challenged the camps and its residents.

The 19 Palestine refugee camps throughout the West Bank have since developed into urban areas home to more than 200,000 people (almost a quarter of the total registered persons with UNRWA), with the population in each camp varying from 2,500 to 27,000. The camps face challenges related to overcrowding, poor infrastructure, high levels of unemployment, food insecurity and protection issues.

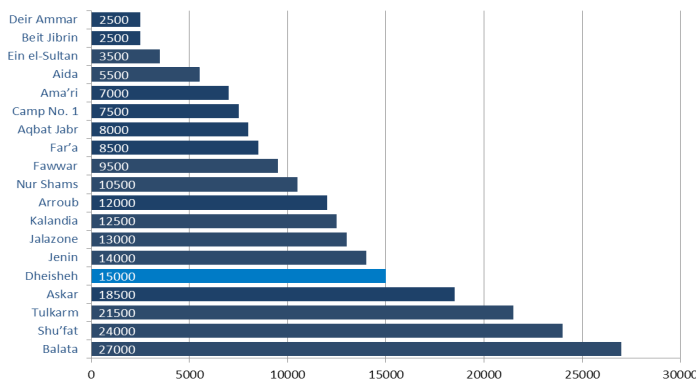


Number of UNRWA Refugee Camps per Field

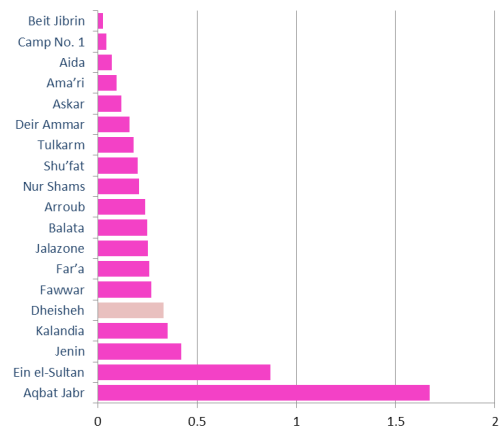


West Bank Refugee Camps Estimated populations

Total population West Bank camps: 222,500



West Bank Refugee Camps Camp surface in square kilometer



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

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

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, and microfinance.