

For Immediate Release



AUB-UNRWA socio-economic survey reveals first-time and updated figures on Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

Beirut, Lebanon- 14/12/2010 - Only about 270,000 Palestinian refugees of the 425,000 officially registered in Lebanon, actually live here. Of those, about 70,000 need jobs, and only 6,000 can compete with qualified Lebanese job-seekers. These are the most recent figures unveiled by an AUB-UNRWA socio-economic survey that spanned 2,600 Palestinian refugee households nationwide, including non-registered refugees, over a six-month period in 2010.

On the other hand, 160,000 Palestinian refugees living here are poor and 16,000 extremely poor, meaning they do not receive basic essential food requirements. While the first set of figures is expected to appease many Lebanese concerned about the perceived threat of giving Palestinian refugees the basic rights of long-term residents, the second set of figures leaves policy-makers concerned about the potential for violence-in-the-making, if solutions for extreme poverty are not meted out. This was the main message delivered during a public seminar held at AUB on December 14, 2010, in which the findings of the multi-disciplinary survey were presented.

"These figures reveal for the first time accurate information on the demographic characteristics of refugees, in addition to health, food security, education, employment, housing, and livelihood conditions," said Jad Chaaban, the survey's principal investigator and assistant professor of economics at AUB's Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences, who overviewed the main findings to a packed audience.

Chaaban was joined by an AUB team of academics and researchers from the departments of public health, economics, and sociology who collected and analyzed data on a variety of indicators including food security, health, housing, assets, social inclusion, education, and income, among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

The opening session included remarks by Provost Ahmad Dallal, FAFS Dean Nahla Hwalla, Salvatore Lombardo, director of UNRWA Affairs in Lebanon; Maya Majzoub, chair of Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee; Diego Escalona, the head of the Operations Section in the Delegation of the European Union; and Dr. Abdallah Abdallah, the Palestinian Organization Representative in Lebanon.

"There is a common misconception that Palestinian refugees will take job opportunities away from qualified Lebanese, [if they had access to a larger number of professions]," said Chaaban. "But the fact is, refugees have a different skills set than Lebanese."

In contrast, Chaaban noted that there are twice as many poor and four times as many extremely poor among Palestinian refugees than among the Lebanese population.

The greatest concentration of extremely poor refugees exists in non-camp gatherings in Jal el-Bahr and Qasmiyyeh in south Lebanon, not in the Nahr el-Barid camp in north Lebanon, as is commonly perceived. In any case, more than 50 percent of refugees live in south Lebanon, mainly the Sidon and Tyre regions.

On the other hand, Palestinian refugees contribute \$340 million in consumption expenditures per year and rely either on UNRWA, charity organizations or family remittances—not the Lebanese government—for health insurance and education needs.

Some contributing factors to poverty among refugees include, large household size (4.5 people per family); disability; and low education levels, more than 65 percent of Palestinians do not have Brevet-level [or grade 9-level] education, versus 50 percent of Lebanese—an alarming figure as well, said Chaaban.

Moreover, many refugees follow an unhealthy diet that is high in sugar and low in fresh fruit and vegetables and micronutrients, which will increase the incidence of chronic diseases over time.

Chaaban noted that UNRWA's role is essential in curbing more severe problems.

"Without UNRWA, poverty would increase by 14 percent, and extreme poverty would triple," he told the AUB audience. "Nevertheless, we recommend that UNRWA reform its program strategies and continue lobbying the Lebanese government not only for improving the status of refugees but also for erasing misconceptions about them."

UNRWA's Lombardo emphasized the importance of having an evidence-based survey to help the agency design more effective programs. "One of the purposes of this survey is to initiate a public discussion that is based on evidence," he said. "It also helps us think through our programmatic capacity and improve the accountability of the person in charge—that's me."

Lombardo reminded, however, that although about 270,000 refugees currently reside in the country, 425,000 have "a legal attachment to it," as they want to safeguard their mobility rights and international legal status.

The report resulting from the survey is expected to be published on-line by the end of December 31, 2010.

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Note to Editors

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Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of more than 7,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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