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Introduction

The following note describes the issuance procedures of documents issued to registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon with a particular focus on identity cards and birth certificates. The note includes a brief description of the civil registry for Palestinian refugees maintained by the General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees (DPAR), criteria for registration, as well as an assessment of the trustworthiness of the registry and the documents in general.

The note is based on open source information and interviews conducted in Beirut, Lebanon, in February 2020 and March 2022.

The years of instability in Lebanon (financial and economic crisis and the explosion in the port of Beirut in August 2020) might have an effect on the accessibility and issuance of documents¹

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

About 130,000 Palestinians arrived to Lebanon before and throughout 1948, which at that time amounted to 10 % of the Lebanese population. Approximately 20,000-25,000 Palestinians were displaced in Lebanon as a result of the Six Days War in 1967. After 1970, 3,000-5,000 Palestinians arrived in Lebanon from Gaza through Egypt, from Jordan or from Syria.²

The moment in which Palestinians entered Lebanon, marked their and their descendants' legal status in Lebanon and determines their access to Lebanese documents. The first group and their descendants are formally entitled to registration with both UNRWA and the Lebanese authorities. Palestinians, who arrived in Lebanon after 1962, are not automatically registered by the Lebanese authorities, but have a right to apply for registration at the Lebanese Ministry of Interior.³

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Danish National ID Centre

Birkerød kongevej 2
DK-3436 Birkerød
Denmark

Phone +45 61 98 39 00
Email nidc@nidc.dk
Website www.nidc.dk

¹ UNRWA 2021 (May 2022).

² UK Home Office, June 2018, p. 17-19.

³ AUB and UNRWA, 2015, p. 10; BADIL Resource Center, 2018.

As a result, there are Palestinians who are both registered with UNRWA and with the Lebanese authorities (also known as “registered refugees”); Palestinians who are only registered with the Lebanese authorities, and not with UNRWA (also known as “non-registered refugees”) and Palestinians, who are neither registered with UNRWA nor with the Lebanese authorities (also known as “non-ID refugees”). Finally, there are Palestinians who have fled the war in Syria since its outbreak in 2011.⁴

Legal status and access to documents

According to the Minister of Interior’s Ordinance No. 319 of 2 August 1962, Palestinian refugees are considered to be “(...) *Foreign nationals who do not hold identity papers from their country of origin and who reside in Lebanon pursuant to residence cards issued by the Direction de la Sûreté générale or to identity cards issued by the Direction générale de l’Administration des Affaires des réfugiés palestiniens au Liban*” also known today as General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees.⁵

Palestinians registered with both the Lebanese authorities (i.e. General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees) and UNRWA, also known as “registered refugees”, are entitled to receive both a personal ID card, which states that the holder is a refugee in Lebanon and a passport, which is issued with a validity of one, three or five years and is easily renewable.⁶

“Non-registered” Palestinians are those who fall outside UNRWA’s mandate because they left Palestine after 1948; they took refuge outside UNRWA areas of operations prior to coming to Lebanon; or because they did not otherwise meet UNRWA’s eligibility criteria. This group may apply for registration with the Lebanese authorities in the registry of DPAR. If they succeed in being registered, they are entitled to the right of applying for an ID card and a one year laissez-passer which can be renewed three times.⁷

“Non-ID” refugees are not entitled to any form of documentation except for a special identification card issued by the Directorate of the General Security as a proof of identity. However, they cannot register vital events such as births, deaths, marriages and divorces, nor be recognised as a refugee in Lebanon. They are seen as illegal residents in the country.⁸

Registration in DPAR’s registry

The General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees (DPAR) was established in 1959 with the purpose of registering and issuing civil documentation, including travel documents, to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.⁹ The decisive factor in relation to document issuance for Palestinians in Lebanon is whether or not the person in question is registered with DPAR. Palestinians who are registered in the

⁴ BADIL Resource Center, 2018, p. 82.

⁵ Minister of Interior’s Ordinance, 2 August 1962, No. 319, Article 1 n. 3.

⁶ UNHCR, February 2016, p. 10; General Directorate of General Security, year of issue n/a.

⁷ UNHCR, February 2016, p. 10.

⁸ UNHCR, February 2016, p. 10.

⁹ UNHCR, February 2016, p. 4.

DPAR registry can have documents issued whereas Palestinians who are not registered cannot. There are approximately 650,000 Palestinians registered with the DPAR including those, who do no longer reside in Lebanon.¹⁰

A registration in DPAR's registry is dependent on whether your father/grandfather was registered in either 1948 or 1967. Children of registered fathers/grandfathers are most likely also registered or are at least eligible for registration.¹¹

In order for a registered Palestinian father to register his new-born child in the registry, he has to provide the birth certificate of the child; an extract of the family personal status register for registered Palestinian refugees; a request by the local mayor (*mukhtar*) of the place of residence; a copy of the his own Palestinian refugee card; and two photographs of the child. If the declaration is made through a guardian, a copy of the guardianship decision must likewise be presented. If the declaration is made through someone delegated by the family, a copy of the delegation through a notary public must be provided.¹²

For normal registration, the registration has to be conducted within the first year after birth. If the registration is conducted after the first year additional scrutiny of the case will be conducted.¹³ New-borns are reportedly registered with the family's original place of registration, regardless of where in Lebanon they were born.¹⁴

If the birth took place outside of Lebanon and the child is e.g. 15 years old, the registration can still be done, if the father himself is registered and in the presence of documents proving that the child is his. However, also in this case, additional investigations to assess why the registration did not occur earlier will be conducted.¹⁵

Cancellation in DPAR's registry

A refugee's registration with DPAR is only cancelled in three specific events:

- in case of a refugee's death and upon request of the General Security to DPAR to cancel the person's registration following his/her death,
- if a refugee obtains the nationality of a third country, or
- if a refugee has submitted an application to the General Security to have his/her registration cancelled.¹⁶

¹⁰ General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees, February 2020.

¹¹ General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees, February 2020; Landinfo, 22 September 2010.

¹² DFAT, 19 March 2019, p. 45.

¹³ General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees, February 2020.

¹⁴ UK Home Office, June 2018, p. 19.

¹⁵ General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees, February 2020.

¹⁶ UNHCR, February 2016, p. 4; General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees, February 2020.

Documents issued by DPAR

Documents issued by DPAR to Palestinian refugees registered in DPAR's registry include the following:

- ID card
- Civil registry extract
- Family registry extract
- Birth certificate
- Death certificate
- Divorce certificate
- Marriage certificate.¹⁷

Birth and marriage certificates have the same format as Lebanese certificates, including reference to the family registration.¹⁸

Birth certificates

In order to have a birth certificate issued, parents or guardians must provide the DPAR with a birth attestation from the doctor or midwife who assisted the birth, the father's Palestinian refugee card, a copy of the parents' marriage certificate, and an extract of the father's Palestinian refugee family register. By submitting these documents, parents obtain the birth certificate of the child.¹⁹

ID cards

DPAR maintains the records of Palestinian refugees registered in Lebanon. Palestinians registered with DPAR are issued a personal ID card, which states that he/she is a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon. ID cards only prove that the person is registered as Palestinian refugee in Lebanon.²⁰

The validity period for ID cards is unlimited; hence the ID card includes no expiry date. The ID card is laminated paper meaning that it over the years will be worn and maybe broken. In addition, some schools require Palestinian students to submit new ID cards every year. Likewise, an ID card can be renewed whenever there is a change in the person's situation such as marriage and divorce.²¹ Therefore, many people get new ID cards from time to time.²²

The ID card contains three numbers:

- The file number, which follows the family and is never changed (hand-written)
- The statistical number, which follows the family and is never changed (hand-written)

¹⁷ General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees, February 2020.

¹⁸ UK Home Office, June 2018, p. 61.

¹⁹ DFAT, 19 March 2019, p. 45.

²⁰ General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees, February 2020.

²¹ UK Home Office, June 2018, p. 59.

²² General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees, February 2020.

- ID card number, which follow the card and not the holder. This means that a new card will have a new number. This number is in letterpress. The one NIDC observed consisted of six digits followed by letter “A” (75XXXXA).

Issuance procedures

According to DPAR, it is preferred that all documents are applied for and issued to the document holder in person, if the holder is not a minor, but it is possible to get a document issued through the *Liban Post Service*.²³

If an ID card is renewed through Liban Post Service, the old card has to be submitted to the application.²⁴

It is free of charge to get documents issued from DPAR. However, in relation to ID cards, the applicant has to visit the mayor and the cost of fiscal stamps will be charged to the applicant. This fee is approximately 8,000 Lebanese \$ (5 US \$).²⁵ It is unclear whether the fiscal stamps are for the application itself or for a service which the mayor provides e.g. a breeder document for the application.

Trustworthiness of Lebanese documents

Lebanon was ranked 154 out of 180 countries in Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index 2021 (180 being the most corrupt).²⁶ According to Transparency International, Lebanon suffers from the consequences of a practice known in Arabic as “*wasta*”. People use their family or social contacts to skip the line and gain quicker and better access to schools, universities, hospitals or jobs, and to “speed up” government paperwork such as ID renewals or birth certificates issuance. According to a study, from 2019, 65 % of citizens used *wasta* when dealing with the judicial system and 45 % did it in connection with the issuance of identity documents. Out of these 45 %, 37 % admitted to have paid bribes.²⁷

It is reportedly very common for official documents of all kinds to contain errors. Most documents are handwritten and usually have no security features. Inconsistencies with spelling and incorrect dates may occur, and may then be reproduced and often compounded in subsequent documents. Transliteration variances from Arabic to English can cause variations in names and many other inconsistencies, which may raise concerns about the integrity of documents.²⁸

This is confirmed by a report from 2019 according to which counterfeit or fraudulent identity documents are rare in Lebanon. Since the end of the civil war, authorities have issued identity and travel documents (including passports, identity cards, registry documents, and birth certificates) in a nationally consistent format.

²³ General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees, February 2020.

²⁴ General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees, February 2020.

²⁵ General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees, February 2020.

²⁶ Transparency International, year of issue n/a.

²⁷ Transparency International, December 2019.

²⁸ DFAT, 19 March 2019, p. 46.

Records have been maintained, although sometimes in a limited capacity. Authorities take identity fraud seriously, and those convicted may be incarcerated for several months.²⁹

In relation to documents issued by DPAR, the General Director of DPAR, Faten Youness, mentioned in 2020 that the General Directorate during the past five years only has identified 1-2 cases of forged ID cards. These forgeries were easy for them to spot, as the signatures on the ID cards were incorrect.³⁰ Since the interview was conducted in 2020, this may also have changed as the crisis have progressed during the past two years.

²⁹ DFAT, 19 March 2019, p. 46.

³⁰ General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees, February 2020.

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