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Palestine: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA): Registration and issuance of documents

The following note describes the procedure for registration and issuance of UNRWA-documents in the West Bank (incl. East Jerusalem) and Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

The note includes a description of registration with UNWRA for Palestine refugees, the UNRWA database and the UNRWA registration card. The note also includes a short description of the family registration number and the individual registration number.

The note is primarily based on an interview conducted in Jerusalem in September 2019 and is one out of several notes focusing on Palestinian documents.

The mandate of UNRWA

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established as a subsidiary organ of the United Nations General Assembly on 8 December 1949, following the Arab-Israeli war in 1948, to carry out relief and works programmes for Palestine refugees. The United Nations General Assembly has repeatedly renewed UNRWA's mandate. Its area of operations cover the West Bank (incl. East Jerusalem) and Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.¹

UNRWA services are available within its areas of operations for those who meet the criteria for eligibility.² When the agency began operations in 1950, it was responding to the needs of about 750,000 Palestine refugees. In 2020, some 5.6 million Palestine refugees were eligible for UNRWA services.³

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¹ UNRWA, *Who We Are*, March 2021.

² Danish Immigration Services, June 2020. p. 12.

³ Danish Immigration Services, June 2020. p. 8

Registration and services

According to the Danish Immigration Services, UNRWA operates with two forms of eligibility; eligibility to register and eligibility to receive services. A person may be registered with UNRWA without receiving services, and another may receive services without being registered with UNRWA. In many cases, the two will overlap.⁴

Persons, who are not ineligible to register with UNRWA but eligible to receive services on an emergency basis, include those displaced as a result of 1967 and subsequent hostilities.⁵

Eligibility to register with UNRWA

The largest group of persons eligible to register with UNRWA falls under the UNRWA definition of Palestine refugees. UNRWA defines Palestine refugees as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.”⁶ The descendants of Palestine refugee males, including legally adopted children, are eligible for registration with UNRWA.⁷ Since 2006, husband and descendants of a registered refugee women, known as ‘married to non-refugee’ (MNR) family members, have also become eligible to be registered and to receive UNRWA services.⁸

The West Bank is an exception to this rule, as there are more registered MNR’s than in other fields. It has been decided that MNR children in the West Bank do not receive services from UNRWA.⁹

Registration procedure

Registration as Palestine refugee was initially only open for first-time registrations until June of 1952. In the beginning, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the American Friends Service Committee was in charge, but the registrations were later handed over to UNRWA. UNRWA rectified and stored the registrations as well as conducted a survey of Palestine Refugees from 1950-1951.¹⁰

Between July of 1952 and 1992, only descendants of male registered Palestine refugees could register with UNRWA. From 1992, first-time registrations were reopened for those eligible.¹¹

⁴ Danish Immigration Services, June 2020, p. 12.

⁵ Danish Immigration Services, June 2020, p. 12.

⁶ UNRWA, *Who We Are*, March 2021.

⁷ UNRWA, *Who We Are*, March 2021.

⁸ Danish Immigration Services, June 2020, p. 44.

⁹ Danish Immigration Services, June 2020, p. 44.

¹⁰ Danish Immigration Services, June 2020, p. 18.

¹¹ Danish Immigration Services, June 2020, p. 12-18.

A person will typically register with UNRWA at one of their registration offices located in the fields of operation. According to the Danish Immigration Services, there are approximately 60 registration offices distributed in the fields of operation.¹² The required document needed for the registration is the birth certificate and the ID card of the father/mother if the person is more than one year old. The person always has to bring original documents for the registration, including ID card.¹³

When registering, UNRWA notes and stores information regarding the family of the person registering including names of family members, nationality and district of origin in Palestine.¹⁴

Ideally, a person has to have legal residency, but even if the stay is illegal, UNRWA offices in the West Bank does update the said person's status. Lebanon and Syria are different as these countries do not update unless the individuals are in the government's system.¹⁵

The documents required depends on which update in the system is being made. If a marriage is to be registered, the marriage certificate is required. If a birth is to be registered, the birth certificate is required. Every update needs to be documented with original documents.¹⁶

A person normally needs to be present to register with UNRWA, but it is also possible to do so by proxy by bringing a declaration of consent.¹⁷

It is possible to transfer a UNRWA registration from one country to another. In order to do so, he/she has to visit the UNRWA registration office of his/her new country of residence. Anyone in a family above the age of 18 can transfer their registration to e.g. the West Bank.¹⁸

Electronic system

Information registered in UNRWA's five field of operation (West Bank (incl. East Jerusalem) and Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan) is centralised in an online database. Since 2010, the online system in use has been "The Refugee Registration Information System (RRIS)". With the introduction of RRIS, data from an older system was transferred to the new. Updates in the database is voluntary, and the

¹² Danish Immigration Services, June 2020, p. 16.

¹³ UNRWA, Jerusalem, September 2019.

¹⁴ Danish Immigration Services, June 2020, p. 16.

¹⁵ UNRWA, Jerusalem, September 2019.

¹⁶ UNRWA, Jerusalem, September 2019.

¹⁷ UNRWA, Jerusalem, September 2019.

¹⁸ UNRWA, Jerusalem, September 2019.

registration does therefore not reflect the actual situation of the person. Many do not update their file, because they are not interested in UNRWA's services.¹⁹

UNRWA has scanned documents electronically and stored them in the database since 1996.²⁰

UNRWA registration card

The registration card (also sometimes known as the family registration card) is issued upon registration as proof of this registration. The information given by the person is registered in the online system and the person receives the card within 15 minutes of the registration. If the registration has been transferred from another country, it may take days for the new registration card to be delivered. The card displays information regarding the person's family (head of the family, wife and children etc.) The family registration card does not have an expiry date. It is not possible to collect the registration card by proxy and thus it must be collected in person.²¹ The registration card is a uniform document across the five UNRWA fields. UNRWA registration cards are not stamped.²²

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East									
FAMILY REGISTRATION CARD									
Head of Family Information - معلومات عن رب العائلة									
Name	[Redacted]								
Family Registration No.	1-00	JERUSALEM NEW CITY			Origin				
Registration Field / Area	WEST BANK/JERUSALEM			14276 / 131	Previous Registration No.				
Residential Address	WEST BANK/JERUSALEM/JERUSALEM CLASS A								
Family Members - أفراد العائلة									
Individual Reg. No.	Name	D.O.B.	Sex	Relation	Marital Status	R			
2-01106	[Redacted]	1975	Male	Husband	Married	01			
2-07704	[Redacted]	1976	Female	Wife	Married	02			
2-01106	[Redacted]	1996	Male	Son	Single	01			
2-01106	[Redacted]	1997	Female	Daughter	Single	01			
2-01106	[Redacted]	2000	Male	Son	Single	01			
2-01106	[Redacted]	2001	Female	Daughter	Single	01			
2-07704	[Redacted]	2010	Female	Daughter	Single	01			

Image 1: Example of an UNRWA registration card (NIDC reference material).

¹⁹ UNRWA, Jerusalem, September 2019.

²⁰ Danish Immigration Services, June 2020, p. 16.

²¹ UNRWA, Jerusalem, September 2019.

²² UNRWA, Jerusalem, September 2019.

The image shows the back of an UNRWA registration card. It has a decorative border and a large grid for recording family members. The grid has 10 columns: Individual Reg. No. (رقم تسجيل الفرد), Name, D.O.B. (تاريخ الميلاد), Sex (الجنس), Relation (العلاقة), Marital Status (الوضع الاجتماعي), and R.C. (R.C.). The UNRWA logo is centered in the background of the grid.

Image 2: Example of the back of an UNRWA registration card (NIDC reference material).

<i>Reg. code (RC)</i>	<i>Status name</i>	<i>Status description</i>
1	RR	Registered refugee
2	NW	Non- refugee wife
3	NH	Non-refugee husband
4	AC	Adopted child
5	FV	Frontier villager
6	CC	Compromise case
7	JP	Poor Jerusalem
8	NC	Non-refugee child
9	OR	On Return
10	GP	Poor Gaza
11	NAC	Non Adopted Child
12	Dummy	Dummy
13	Services Only	Services Only

Image 3: Explanation of registration codes (RC).²³

UNRWA computerised form

UNRWA will sometimes issue a computerised form instead of a new registration card. This could be the case if the person comes to register a child and it is clear from the person's file that he/she has children who have not yet been registered.

²³ UNRWA, August 2022

The computerised form is signed or stamped. If the information in the system is corresponding, the person can have a new registration card issued.²⁴

Report No: [REDACTED] Printing Date: [REDACTED] 2018
Family Record UNRWA/UNRWA-WEB-325

U.N.R.W.A.

Family Status: Active SSN: No

Has UNRWA Staff: No Origin: JERUSALEM OLD CITY

Family Registration ID: 1- Previous Reg. No.:

Family Nationality ID/Family government No.: Ex-code:

Main HOF Full Name:

Registration Address

Field: WEST BANK Area: JERUSALEM Center: JERUSALEM FV In Camp: No

Physical Address

Field: WEST BANK Area: JERUSALEM Center: JERUSALEM VILLAGES In Camp: No

Location: Avenue: TBD

Family Members

Registration No.	First Name En	Birth Date	Gender	Mother Name	Relationship Name	Registration Status	Marital Status	Is Main HOF	Is HOF	Under Card No.
2		1941	Female		Wife	NW	Widow	No	Yes	
2		1970	Female		Daughter	FV	Single	No	No	
2		1977	Male		Son	FV	Single	No	No	

Total No. of members 4 Active members 3 Deceased members 1

This report is for internal use only
1 / 1

Image 4: Example of an UNRWA computerised form (NIDC reference material).

Transfer of individual registrations due to marriage

When a woman marries, she is transferred from her father's registration card to her husband's. She is then entitled to a new registration card, reflecting this change. She will still be written on the father's registration card until the father

²⁴ UNRWA, Jerusalem, September 2019.

updates his card.²⁵

Cessation of registration

A person stops being registered with UNRWA if he/she passes away and the family notifies UNRWA. A person may also be removed from the register if he/she acquires residency or citizenship in another country, and the person notifies UNRWA. However, the person is not required to update the records.²⁶

Family registration ID number

Each family is assigned a specific family registration ID number. A person is also given a unique individual registration number. A single son or daughter would have the same family number as his/her mother and father. When he/she marries, he/she would keep the individual registration number and be given a new family number.²⁷

Individual registration number

The individual registration number is a randomised and computerised serial number. However, because UNRWA's system was digitised in 2010, some of the data from before this time was transferred into the new system serially. This is why persons in the same family registered at different times can have individual registration numbers close to each other.²⁸

Individual registration cards

Individual registration cards were previously issued only in Gaza and Syria, hence not issued in the West Bank, Jordan or Lebanon. Today, UNRWA only issues the family registration card and the computerised document that is signed.²⁹

Change of address

When a person is seeking to change his/her address, UNRWA has to see ID cards with a changed address. The present address on the registration card is transcribed from the ID card.³⁰

A family of two Palestinians originating from Syria that register themselves in e.g. Lebanon would have Lebanon as registration address on their registration card. It is not possible to see from the registration card that they originate from Syria.

²⁵ UNRWA, Jerusalem, September 2019.

²⁶ UNRWA, Jerusalem, September 2019.

²⁷ UNRWA, Jerusalem, September 2019.

²⁸ UNRWA, Jerusalem, September 2019.

²⁹ UNRWA, Jerusalem, September 2019.

³⁰ UNRWA, Jerusalem, September 2019.

UNRWA can see in the online system if a person has moved his/her registration from another country.³¹

Reissue

UNRWA can reissue a document upon request in cases where the documents is lost. New documents can be issued once the identity of that person has been established.³²

³¹ UNRWA, Jerusalem, September 2019.

³² Danish Immigration Services, June 2020, p. 22.

References

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