

PALESTINIAN POPULATION, MOVEMENT AND STATISTICS

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Available figures do not provide accurate estimates of the total Palestinian population around the world and its movements, including the number of Palestinian refugees, especially unregistered ones. Nor do figures yield information about socio-economic conditions of Palestinians abroad, particularly the refugee population. This paper proposes practical methodologies useful in attaining more accurate figures on the movement and number of Palestinians to help frame knowledge-based policies and decisions.

At the end of each year, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) publishes estimates of the number of Palestinians around the world, including the percentage of Palestinian refugees, in the occupied Palestinian territory, Israel and in the Diaspora. These figures are marred by serious shortfalls, which the PCBS itself admits. On the one hand, it cannot precisely estimate the number of Palestinians abroad since relevant data is not accessible. Although reference is made to UNRWA databases on Palestinians in countries of operation (i.e. Jordan, Syria and Lebanon), available data is still short because it does not include unregistered refugees or non-refugees. This is why PCBS relies on secondary sources in its estimations. In its estimates, PCBS hypothesizes that the net international migration rate is equivalent to zero because data on the movement of the population from and into Palestine is unattainable.

Estimates of Palestinian refugees vary between UNRWA and other Palestinian sources, including the Palestine Liberation Organization. At the beginning of 2010, UNRWA estimated the number of refugees at approximately 4.7 million – all registered. In contrast, other Palestinian sources estimated that refugees amounted to 7.5 million based on the definition of the refugee. The Palestinian definition of the refugee is broader than that of the UNRWA, and it covers individuals not registered by UNRWA as refugees.

Recently, PCBS published the initial results of an international migration survey which it conducted in 2010. The methodology of this survey is, however, impaired by a major problem: it excludes households that migrated as a whole. It only includes households some members of which continue to reside in Palestine. As such, it does not present precise figures on the volume of international migration.

During the summer of 2010, UNRWA carried out a socioeconomic survey of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon in cooperation with the American University of Beirut. Covering a sample of 2,600 households, the survey aimed at describing living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Survey results featured estimates of the number of refugees in Lebanon as well as information on their socioeconomic conditions. In addition to providing all necessary indicators of

programme implementation on scientific grounds, UNRWA anticipates that the survey results will help it better understand poverty rates and parameters.

To attain more accurate information on the number and movement of the Palestinian population, including the number of refugees, this paper proposes the following:

1. Develop a computerised system to track entry and exit at Palestinian crossing points in the West Bank. Effective and accessible as it should be, the system will cover necessary data to monitor the population movement and trends as per certain social characteristics. It should be noted that this process will not currently be sufficient to track the movement of a portion of the population; it will not be capable of monitoring the movement of Jerusalem inhabitants because they do not access Palestinian crossing points. Therefore, cooperation should be in place with competent Jordanian authorities in order to attain comprehensive data on the movement of the Palestinian population.
2. Develop a computerised system to track entry and exit from the Gaza Strip. This will enable the provision of comprehensive data on the population movement in light of the Palestinian full control over Rafah International Crossing. As every Palestinian who exits or enters the Gaza Strip must access Rafah Crossing, inclusive data can be in hand.
3. Coordinate with competent authorities in the UNRWA countries of operation in order to attain data from respective administrative registers about the number of refugees abroad. In addition to the data provided by UNRWA on the number of registered refugees, this may help us provide more precise information about the number of Palestinians in these countries. Should this option be untenable as some countries might not be cooperative, surveys carried out by specialised international organisations in countries where Palestinians concentrate will contribute to producing estimates on the number of unregistered refugees. Accordingly, more accurate estimates about the number of Palestinians residing outside Palestine can be obtained.
4. Enhance the role of Palestinian embassies and representative offices in relevant countries by developing a system for registering Palestinian communities. Community members will be encouraged to register via various means, including IT, media, etc.
5. Conduct surveys about Palestinian refugees in host countries, especially in Jordan and Syria, in order to highlight their conditions and assess their needs. These surveys should cover both registered and unregistered refugees.