

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Education of Palestinian Refugees in Jordan



A report by Stephen McCloskey

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Acknowledgements

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Cover photo: Marka Preparatory School for Girls 1 and 2, 23 November 2021, Photo: Stephen McCloskey.

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1 Centre for Global Education

The Centre for Global Education is a development non-governmental organisation that provides education services to enhance awareness of international development issues. Its central remit is to provide learning that will enable individuals and organisations to address the causes of poverty, inequality and injustice at local and global levels. The Centre enables learners in formal and informal education sectors to understand the cultural, economic, social and political influences on our lives that result from our growing interdependence with other countries and societies. It also provides learners with the skills, values, knowledge and understanding necessary to facilitate action that will contribute to poverty eradication both locally and globally.



Centre for Global Education's library.

The Centre for Global Education provides training and resources to local target groups that tailor development education content and practice to their needs. We consider the development process in Ireland within the context of the global South and support multiculturalism and mutual respect by providing opportunities to learn about other cultures, faiths and lifestyles. The Centre supports the view that we can learn more about ourselves and local communities by extending our knowledge and experience of the wider world. The local and global axis of development education is central to its learning methodology and informed by the work of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator and philosopher. The Centre's activities include the provision of a library on our premises to support research and teaching on international development issues. We also provide: continuing professional development training to teachers; publish a bi-annual, peer reviewed development education journal, *Policy and Practice*; and compile research on development issues.

Since 2011, the Centre for Global Education has been delivering education and psycho-social support activities to Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip, Palestine. Our activities are delivered to young people suffering from the trauma and stress caused by constant exposure to conflict and grinding poverty. The Centre works in partnership in Gaza with a Palestinian non-governmental organisation called the Canaan Institute of New Pedagogy which provides community-based, grassroots education that

supplements the schooling of children who currently receive a part-time education because of the lack of school buildings in Gaza. The learning activities in Gaza are funded by four local trade unions and the Centre for Global Education. A report on the most recent education programme in Gaza is available at: <https://www.centreforglobaleducation.com/sites/default/files/Gaza%20Report%202020%20Final.pdf>.

In 2020, CGE commenced delivery of a second programme for Palestinian refugees in Burj Barajneh refugee camp, Beirut, Lebanon. The project is being delivered in partnership with the Women's Program Association, a Palestinian NGO based in Lebanon and is funded by the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) Global Solidarity and Developing World Fund. The need for the project was identified through research carried out by CGE in three Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut in 2018 which found evidence of extreme levels of poverty and marginalisation. CGE subsequently secured a two-year grant from NIPSA to deliver an education programme to 100 Palestinian and Syrian refugee children living in the camp. The project was labelled 'Nour' (meaning light in Arabic) after the Nour Center where the project is delivered in Burj Barajneh camp. The project provides educational support services to children aged 6-13 years unable to attend school and suffering from the acute effects of trauma caused by exposure to severe poverty in Burj Barajneh. The project offers psychosocial care to help address mental health problems among the children and also provides a hot meal to every child daily for the duration of the project. A report on the delivery of the project in Beirut in 2021 is available at: <https://www.centreforglobaleducation.com/sites/default/files/Project%20Nour%20Rep%20FINAL%202021.pdf>.



Some of the 100 children who participated in the CGE / Women's Program Association project in Burj Barajneh refugee camp, Beirut, 2021. Photo: Stephen McCloskey.

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2 Introduction

Palestinian refugees in Jordan

This report is based on a short visit to Jordan in November 2021 with the aim of identifying how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on the education of Palestinian refugees both during the lockdown period when schools were closed from mid-March 2020 until the middle of August 2021, and since the resumption of face-to-face teaching in August 2021. The report's purpose is to identify issues for further, formal qualitative and quantitative research by the Centre for Global Education in future studies. It is important to stress, therefore, that the conclusions of this report are not based upon a formal research exercise but informal meetings with education staff and students in four of the ten camps in Jordan in which the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) provides services to Palestinian refugees. UNRWA was established by a United Nations General Assembly resolution in 1949 'to carry out direct relief and works programmes for Palestine refugees' (UNRWA, n.d.) in the aftermath of what Palestinians describe as the 1948 Nakba or catastrophe when 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee their homeland (BBC, 2018). Over 70 years after UNRWA began operations in 1950, there are 5.6 million Palestinian refugees eligible for UNRWA services, most of whom are descendants of the 750,000 people who lost their homes and livelihoods in 1948. The 5.6 million refugees registered with UNRWA are located in five fields of operation: the Gaza Strip (8 camps and 1.4 million refugees); The West Bank (19 camps and 871,537 refugees); Jordan (10 camps and 2.3 million refugees); Lebanon (12 camps and 479,537 refugees); and Syria (10 camps and 568,730 refugees) (UNRWA, 2021a).



Hussein Preparatory School for Girls in the Palestinian refugee camp of Jabal El-Hussein, Jordan (November 2021).

As the field with the largest number of registered refugees, the Centre for Global Education (CGE) decided to focus on Jordan for this exploratory visit. An itinerary for the visit was agreed with Dr Sami Siyam and Dr Kawther Marashdeh, Deputy Chief Field Education Programme (Admin and Technical) in Jordan which included four refugee camps - Amman New Camp, Marka, Jabal El-Hussein and Jerash – which are located in four different education areas (North Amman, South Amman, Zarqa and Irbid). This afforded an opportunity to identify issues that cut across all four areas which had impacted on teaching staff and students in the schools visited in each camp. UNRWA provides education services in Jordan for 120,000 students attending 161 schools from grades 1-10 (6-15 years). Students attend Elementary school from

grades 1 - 6 (6-11 years) and then Preparatory school from grades 7-10 (12 – 15 years) (UNRWA, 2020b). At secondary level, students are absorbed into the Jordanian education system. Because of the size of the student population and an inadequate number of school buildings, 83 per cent of schools' double shift (134 out of 161) (Ibid). This means that two school populations use the same building for separate shifts in the morning and afternoon. The majority of students, therefore, receive a part-time education and class sizes range from 40-50 which for teachers represents an enormously challenging workload.

In each field of operation, UNRWA adheres to the national curriculum but has also introduced its own teaching initiatives such as the Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance (HRCRT) programme promoting a rights-based approach to learning in the classroom. Technical and vocational training programmes are provided in the Amman Training Centre and Wadi Seer Training Centre (WSTC) to deliver work-based skills that can support future employment. In 2019, both centres collectively trained 5,600 students who enrolled on a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme (Ibid).

CGE's work with Palestinian refugees

Since 2011, CGE has been supporting education programmes in the Gaza Strip that provide supplementary formal sector learning and psychosocial support to children at Elementary and Preparatory level. These programmes focus on core areas of the schools' curriculum (literacy, numeracy and science) and help to address mental health problems caused by exposure to severe poverty and conflict in Gaza. CGE supports an active learning, participative form of education based on the theory and practice of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator and philosopher (Freire, 1996). Participative learning is used in the delivery of CGE's education programmes in Gaza and informs its training output in the island of Ireland. In 2018, CGE commenced delivery of a second programme for Palestinian refugee children in Burj Barajneh refugee camp in Beirut, which is one of 12 camps operated by UNRWA in Lebanon. This programme also combines psychosocial support with formal education delivered to 100 Palestinian and Syrian children, aged 6-13 years, unable to attend school. The programme was a response to research carried out by CGE in 2018 in three camps in Beirut which revealed over-crowded living conditions, extreme poverty, chronic health problems and an education system under severe pressure from high student numbers and under-resourced school buildings and facilities (McCloskey, 2018).

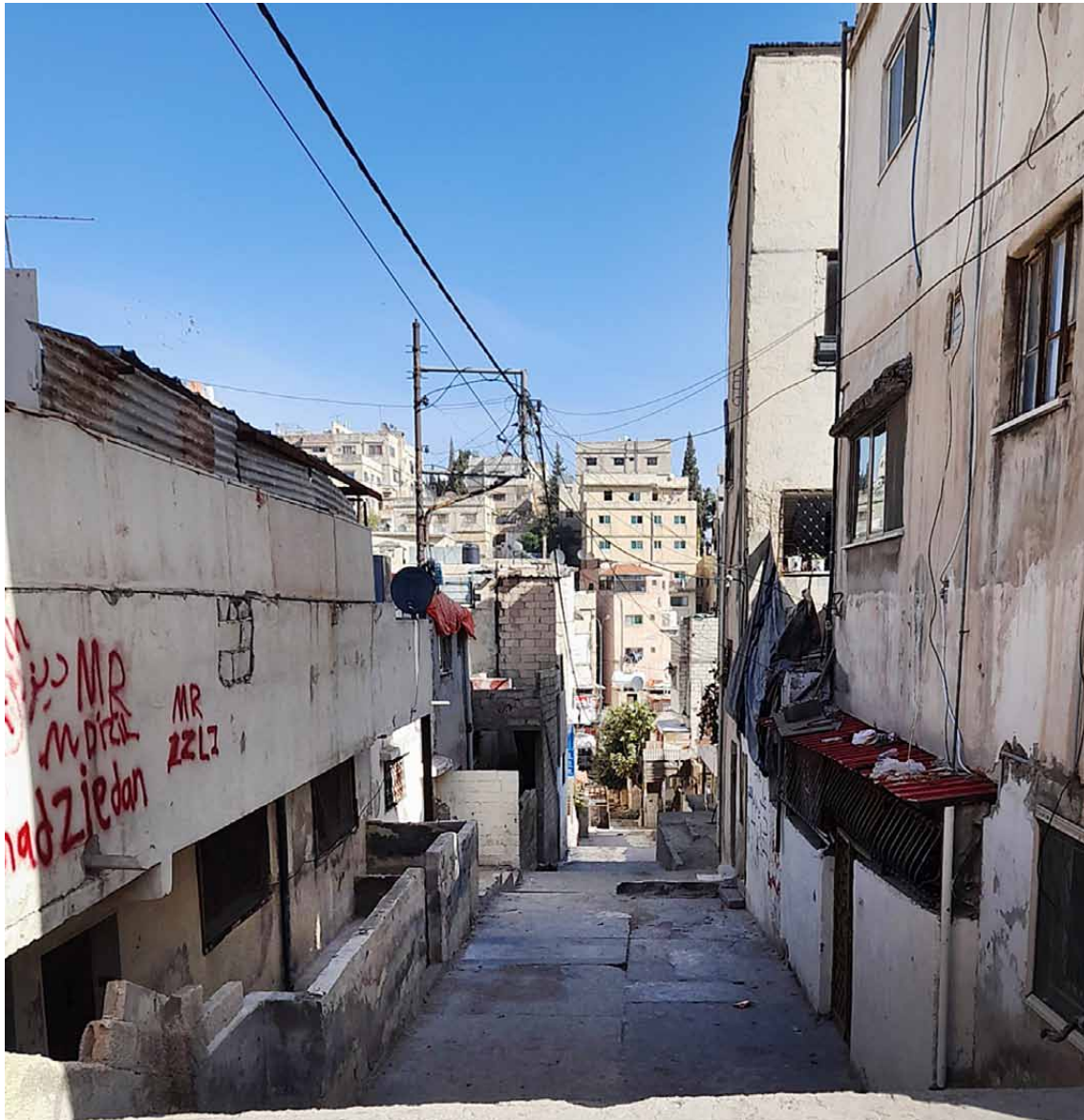
In addition to supporting education practice, CGE aims to enhance its research on education provision for Palestinian refugees both to inform our own work and to increase awareness of the plight of Palestinians in exile from their homeland. We are focusing on education provision as it is central to our activities on behalf of Palestinian refugees and our wider operations at home. In 2020, CGE visited another field of UNRWA operations in Syria, to assess the impact of the war there on Palestinians both in Syria and Lebanon where an estimated 29,000 PRS (Palestinian Refugees from Syria) have fled since the start of the war in 2011 (McCloskey, 2020: 5). The Syrian war has increased pressure on UNRWA services in both countries, including education, which for many Palestinians is their only route out of poverty.

The visit to Jordan in November 2021 was, therefore, part of CGE's engagement with the question of the education of Palestinian refugees in UNRWA fields. It represented an opportunity to take a snapshot of how education staff and young people have been impacted by the pandemic as a way of scoping out the parameters of a more formal research study.

The itinerary

The itinerary for CGE Director, Stephen McCloskey, was a visit to four camps; Amman New Camp, Marka, Jabal El-Hussein and Jerash. In each camp he visited a school, or schools, as the majority of buildings double-shift. He met the principal of each school, some of the teaching staff, the school parliament and toured the school building to get a sense of available facilities for learning and playing. He also met

the UNRWA Area Education Officer to get a broader overview of the situation in the area in which each of the camps is located. Schools were sometimes changing shifts from morning to afternoon during the visits which is a logistical challenge in itself when there are thousands of students arriving and departing just a few minutes apart. Finally, the Camp and Community Services Officer in each camp led a tour to provide an overview of UNRWA services and installations: the shelters (houses), health clinics, refugee collection and sanitation services.



Jabal el-Hussein refugee camp, Jordan (November 2021).

These visits coincided with a financial crisis in UNRWA which is threatening the sustainability of the agency itself. Philippe Lazzarini, UNRWA's Commissioner-General reported in November 2021 that 'UNRWA is on the brink of collapse' and he was 'forced to inform over 28,000 UN personnel' that UNRWA did 'not have sufficient funds to pay their November salaries on time' (Lazzarini, 2021). Tamara Alrifai, an UNRWA spokeswoman has said that a donor conference held for the agency in Brussels in mid-November 2021, left it with around 40 per cent of its required funds (Davis, 2021) with the agency having 'carried over US\$75 million in liabilities into 2021' (Lazzarini, 2021). For Palestinians there is a double jeopardy attached to UNRWA's existential crisis. First, it represents a threat to the range of essential services, including health and education, provided by UNRWA to millions of refugees across

its five fields of operation in the midst of a pandemic which has exacerbated their precarious social and economic conditions. Second, it has jeopardised the employment of UNRWA's 30,000 staff, 90 per cent of whom are Palestinian refugees (Davis, 2021).

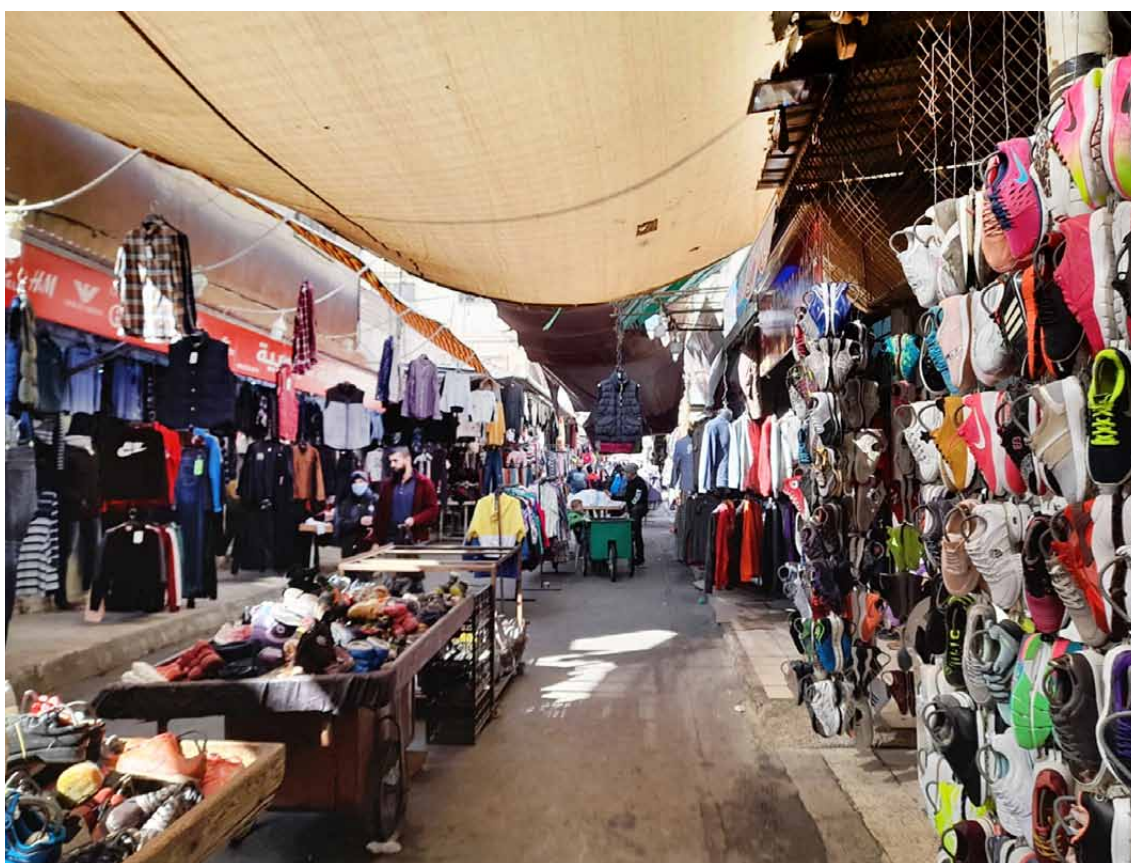
As Tamara Alrifai suggests, 'UNRWA is under intense politically motivated attacks that seek to question its legitimacy and undermine its added value, in an attempt to weaken the rights of Palestinian refugees' (Ibid). In 2018, Donald Trump withdrew United States' funding from UNRWA - one third of the agency's total budget (Beaumont and Holmes, 2018) - and the Biden administration provided only partial restoration of this funding in April 2021 (Hagedorn, 2021). For Palestinian refugees, the financial pressure on UNRWA's services is coinciding with their peak demand during the pandemic. As this report suggests, UNRWA's education services are facing multiple challenges while aiming to meet an essential need for all registered refugees under their care.



3 The Impact of the Pandemic on the Education of Palestinian Refugees in Jordan

3.1 Amman New Camp

Amman New Camp (ANC) is also known as Wihdat and is one of four camps established in Jordan after the Nakba in 1948. Located in south-east Amman, ANC is the second largest camp in Jordan with 57,000 registered refugees living in an area of 0.48 square kilometres (sq. km). Established in 1955 for 5,000 refugees from villages between Jaffa and Jerusalem, ANC has grown into an urban quarter with market stalls and bustling busy streets. The concrete shelters or homes suggest a permanence that the more temporary tents used in the earliest days of the camp may have indicated. UNRWA's data on ANC ranks it second highest in terms of poverty with 34 per cent of Palestine refugees reportedly having an income below the national poverty line of JD 870 per annum (UNRWA, Amman New Camp, n.d.). Like the other camps visited, ANC has a warren of narrow streets with accommodation blocks rising upward as the area of the camp is fixed. The overwhelming concrete environment lacks green spaces and designated play areas for children. The UNRWA camp installations include: one community-based rehabilitation centre, one women's programme centre, one environmental health office, one health centre and one camp services office (Ibid).



Market stalls in Amman New Camp, Jordan (November 2021).

Most health problems in the camp are chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension and cancer. Statistics provided by UNRWA for the total number of chronic cases among Palestinian refugees in Jordan by the end of December 2020 showed that there were 78,827 annual diabetes and hypertension cases (UNRWA, 2021b). ANC 'exhibits the highest incidence of severe chronic health problems' among the ten camps in Jordan and 66 per cent of refugees in the camp do not have health insurance (UNRWA, Amman New Camp, n.d.). These chronic health cases are additional to dental care, ante- and post-natal

care and other primary health care services. Environmental services in the camps try to prevent the spread of health epidemics by monitoring sanitation and the quality of drinking water and ensuring refuse collection.

Education

ANC represents an interesting counter-narrative to the other camps visited insofar as 13 double shifting schools have been reduced to 7 single shift schools as the school population has declined from 15,000 to 7,000. Education staff suggest that this is because increasing numbers of Palestinian refugees are leaving the camp to live outside with UNRWA estimating that 18 per cent of registered refugees live in the ten camps in Jordan (UNRWA, 2021a). The majority of Palestinians in Jordan have full citizenship but a significant number of 'ex-Gazans' (discussed in 3.4) do not. The schools in ANC fall within the south Amman area which has 34,500 students with the total number of Palestinian students in Jordan at 120,000 (UNRWA, 2020a). Many of the 161 schools are in unsuitable rented buildings, many of which are freezing in winter and unbearably hot in summer.



From L to R: Samira Ayyash, Principal, Amman New Camp Preparatory School for Girls, Jordan, Sahira Dwaik, UNRWA Area Education Officer, South Amman and Stephen McCloskey, CGE Director (November 2021).

During the pandemic, all UNRWA education staff remained on full pay. A classroom bubble system was operated when face-to-face teaching resumed in order to mitigate the spread of the virus. The school visited in ANC was Amman New Camp Preparatory School for Girls which has 963 students and an average class size of 42.7 which has declined from 43.8 since the end of double shifting and drop in the school population. Before the pandemic when 13 schools were double shifting, students attended the first shift from 6.45am to 11.30am and the second shift from 11.30am - 4.00pm. The two double-shifting school populations alternated their starting times from month-to-month switching from morning to afternoon. Since the resumption of face-to-face teaching, all schools start at 7.15am and finish at 1.00pm.

The school principal and teaching staff commented on how student behaviour had changed since they returned to face-to-face teaching in August 2021. The children had become more aggressive in their classroom behaviour and struggled to concentrate in class having been out of the school environment for so long. Similarly, some teaching staff struggled to adapt from teaching in double-shifts and home schooling to teaching in longer single-shifts. A recurring outcome of the pandemic in all of the schools visited was a loss in competences in core areas of the schools' curriculum among students as they struggled with home schooling during lockdowns. The reasons for this are explored below.

The school parliament in Amman New Camp Preparatory School for Girls was impressively confident and articulate, some of whom had progressed to excellent standards of English. The aim of the school parliament is to support mediation between students who are in dispute and to raise issues on behalf of the student body with the principal and staff. The children commented on how they missed the interaction with fellow students during school closures forced by pandemic lockdowns.



Student artwork in Amman New Camp Preparatory School for Girls, Jordan (November 2021).

The school's teaching staff monitor the mental health of students and make referrals where necessary to the school Councillor. Normally, there is one UNRWA school Councillor per 3,000 students which creates an enormous workload. Because, three schools collapsed into one in ANC, Amman New Camp Preparatory School for Girls is fortunate to have a councillor three times a week. The causes of mental stress for students can include a pressured domestic environment caused by unemployment and poverty, a lack of safe areas to play and physical isolation during lockdowns.

3.2 Marka Camp



Marka Camp, Jordan (November 2021).

Marka refugee camp is one of six emergency camps established in 1968 in the aftermath of the 1967 six-day war which displaced Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza. The camp has an area of 0.92 sq km and is located 10km north-east of Amman in the educational jurisdiction of Zarqa. The camp population of registered Palestinian refugees is estimated by UNRWA at 44,879 (UNRWA, 'Marka Camp', n.d.) but there are 2,000 additional refugees from Yemen, Syria, Egypt and other parts of the Middle-East also living in the camp.



Marka Preparatory School for Boys, Marka Camp, Jordan (November 2021).

Unlike ANC, all 10 UNRWA schools in Marka camp double-shift with six boys' schools, two girls' Preparatory schools and two co-educational schools. So, there are five school buildings that double-shift and the schools visited by CGE were Marka Camp Preparatory School for Girls 1 and 2. Both schools have populations of 1,020 students, with 23 classes and an average class size of 50. The morning shift starts

at 6.30am and finishes at 11.20am. There are then ten minutes to switch shifts before the afternoon shift starts at 11.30am and ends at 4.50pm. This, of course, means that the school can't be cleaned between shifts to protect staff and students from the COVID-19 virus although sanitation stations and masks are provided in the school building. The school lacks ventilation and adequate heating which means it is cold in winter and extremely hot in summer. Schools alternate between the early and late shift, month by month, which can be a problem for staff in terms of child-care. If they are teaching in the afternoon and their children are at school in the early shift then they will need child-care while they are at work.



Marka Preparatory School for Girls, Marka refugee camp, Jordan (November 2021).

Online support

During the COVID-19 school closures, UNRWA's Jordan Field Office (JFO) developed a substantial number of remote learning materials in-house. This was a large scale, resource-intensive and challenging process, but was needed to ensure the development of quality remote learning materials aligned to United Nations' (UN) values which focused on neutrality, age appropriateness, and gender. The materials also had to be aligned with authorised copyright laws. The JFO assembled a team from experienced staff within its Strategic Support Units to develop, review and finalise the content, and Education Headquarters reviewed and provided feedback. This was achieved through a new UNRWA Digital Learning Platform (DLP), launched in April 2021, with a rigorous Content Management System with transparent and rigorous reviews by the JFO team and Headquarters staff.

An Agency-wide Parent Survey was carried out in May 2020 to determine the level of students' access and the challenges and opportunities regarding technology. The main finding was that the majority of UNRWA students live in a household with at least one internet-capable device, with 83 per cent having some degree of internet access. However, the study also showed that some UNRWA students still do not have the device and internet access required to be able to benefit from online learning resources. An estimated 17 per cent of UNRWA Basic Education students have no form of internet access at home, and more than 20,000 students (around 4 per cent) live in households which lack access to even a single

device capable of accessing the internet. While these students still have access to printed materials, their lack of access to a wider range of digital and interactive learning resources is leading to disparities in educational experiences between these children and their better-off peers, and as in countries around the world, is expected to widen the educational achievement gaps which existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of students who do have device access at home share these with multiple family members, and thus are limited to a few hours per week or less for digital learning.

Wider social and economic problems during the pandemic included job losses among men. Women traditionally don't work but this has changed during the pandemic as male unemployment has increased. Many men working in the informal economy, for example in construction, lost their jobs or had no recourse to employer support during lockdowns making their families entirely dependent on available support from UNRWA. Some local donors provided food and clothing to families in distress, particularly during Ramadan. The vaccination programme was strong but there was some vaccine hesitancy.



This is Fouad Al-Laham with his grandson. He was born in 1942 in Mandate Palestine in the village of Hamama, 24 km north of Gaza. At the start of the Nakba in 1948, the 5,000 residents of Hamama were forced to flee, the village was destroyed and Fouad's family took refuge in Gaza.

In 1967, when Israel seized Gaza in the six-day war, Fouad was forced to flee again, this time to Jordan. As he approaches his 80th birthday, he is one of nearly 45,000 Palestinian refugees living in Marka Camp, north-west of Amman. His home is a rudimentary concrete structure, its walls and ceiling saturated in damp which contributes to Fouad's heart ailment. Palestinian history is a tapestry of these personal stories and injustices.

3.3 Jabal El-Hussein

Jabal el-Hussein is one of four camps established after the 1948 Nakba, initially for 5,000 refugees. It became operational in 1952 and today has a population of 31,883 living in an area of 0.42 sq km (UNRWA, n.d. 'Jabal el-Hussein'). It is located in north-west Amman in the educational area of north Amman. There are 39 schools in north Amman with 31,883 students, 35 of which double-shift and 4 single shift. There are four double-shifting schools in Jabal el-Hussein camp and CGE visited Hussein Preparatory Co-Educational Schools 1 and 2, both of which have 705 students with 24 teachers and an average class size of 49. The school building shared by the schools was built in 1952 and is lacking in adequate classroom space to accommodate such large class sizes. Boys and girls are co-educated in grades 1-3 and then move into single sex schools. The shift timings are similar to other educational

areas: the morning shift is from 6.45am - 11.30am, and the afternoon shift from 11.30am - 5.00pm. The schools have access to one councillor for two days a week, which is not adequate to meet the mental health needs of students.



Jabal el-Hussein Refugee Camp, Jordan (November 2021).

The principals of the two co-educational schools, Randa Zaidan and Amal Hindi, reported pronounced poverty in their schools. There are 240 families living under the poverty line (JD 870 per annum) in Jabal el-Hussein with UNRWA providing JD7 per month in emergency cash support to families in distress. Many parents as a consequence have neither a 'pay-as-you-go' smartphone or Internet connection which made online home schooling impossible. WhatsApp groups were created by teachers to share lessons with members of the group, however, this could mean a lack of privacy for teachers who found themselves contacted at all hours of the day and night. UNRWA kept teachers on salary during lockdowns but didn't pay for teachers' mobile phones or Internet connection. The Area Education Officer stated that UNRWA's home-schooling plan was based initially on using smartphones and Internet to deliver lessons online. However, technology failings meant that recording lessons and sharing them online didn't work and many teachers and students struggled to access UNRWA's online platform. A plan B involved disseminating self-learning materials but in some cases, parents were illiterate and unable to home-school. It was not possible to quantify the number of students unable to home-school for the reasons outlined.

When face-to-face teaching resumed in August 2021, multiple-choice quizzes and exams were used to assess student knowledge. As with other schools and jurisdictions, the principals in Jabal el-Hussein found that children's behaviour was difficult to manage, particularly in a co-educational setting where male behaviour tended to be aggressive and often disrupted girls in class. However, both principals reported classroom behaviour was beginning to settle four months into the new school year. Maintaining social distancing is difficult in classrooms of 45 square metres and average class sizes of 50 students.



A science lab in Hussein Preparatory School for Girls, Jabal el-Hussein Refugee Camp, Jordan (November 2021).



An additional problem for Hussein Preparatory School for Girls 1 and 2 during lockdown was the loss of a major stream of revenue from the canteen which was closed during the pandemic. 60 per cent of canteen revenue went to the schools and 40 per cent went into a central pot for the most impoverished student cases.

In terms of healthcare, in Jabal el-Hussein there is one health centre for the whole camp which, as in other areas, is mostly treating chronic health problems like diabetes and heart disease. There are also 50 Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS) families living in this camp which adds to the pressure on services.

One of the narrow streets in Jabal el-Hussein refugee camp in Jordan. There are 31,883 camp residents living in an area of 0.42 square kilometres many of whom experience severe over-crowding, poor housing and chronic health problems.

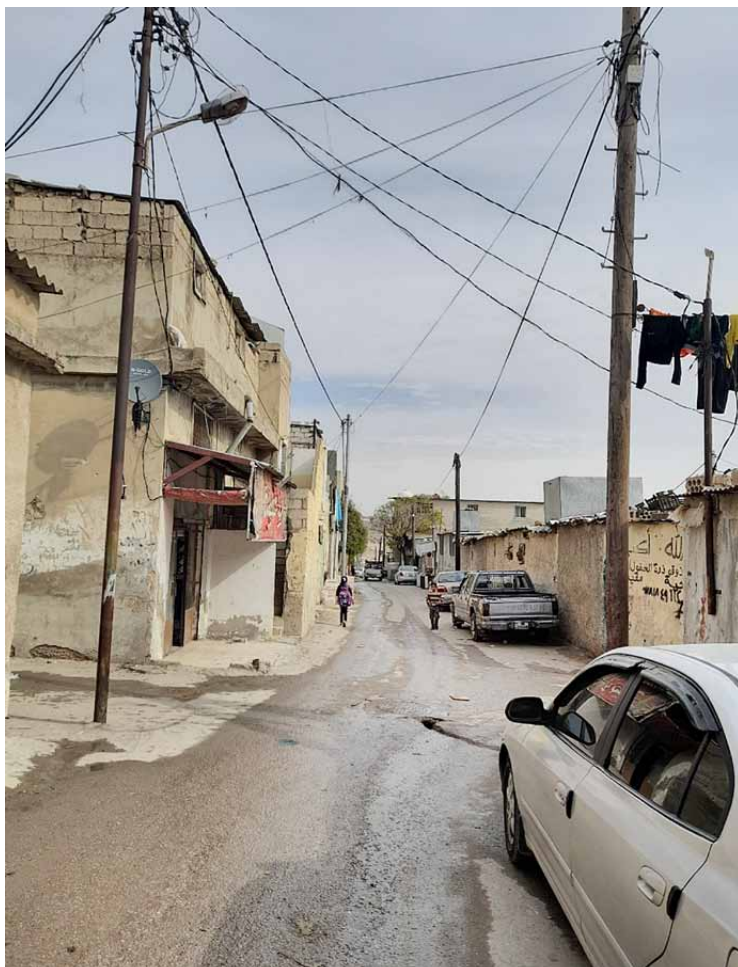
3.4 Jerash

Jerash was established as an emergency camp in 1968 for 11,500 Palestine refugees from the Gaza Strip following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The camp today has a population of 33,000 living in an area of 0.75 sq. km and is located 50 km north of Amman in the city of Irbid, the fourth educational district visited. Jerash is the poorest of the ten Palestinian camps in Jordan with 52 per cent living below the poverty line and 88 per cent without health insurance (UNRWA, n.d. 'Jerash camp'). Although the concrete homes have a more durable appearance, the rooves of many buildings comprised sheets of corrugated iron fastened with nothing more solid than loose bricks. UNRWA claims many rooves are made of corrugated zinc and asbestos sheets, which can cause cancer (Ibid). The tour of this camp revealed many of the same kind of narrow alleyways and streets found in other camps but the dilapidated condition of most of the homes and buildings seemed to reflect the severity of the poverty in Jerash. Many of the houses facing each other in the narrow streets lacked privacy and dignity with hung curtains impersonating front doors. They begged the question how can these concrete shelters retain any heat in winter and what relief is available from Jordan's hot summers?



A washing line hanging from one of the shelters in Jerash refugee camp, Jordan (November 2021).

A significant contributor to the severe poverty in Jerash is that the population is "ex-Gazan" which means they are arbitrarily denied full Jordanian citizenship as they (or their descendants) fled to Jordan from Gaza in the wake of the 1967 war. When the West Bank was placed under Jordanian administrative control in 1950, Palestinians were granted full Jordanian citizenship. Palestinians who fled the West Bank to Jordan after the 1967 war were recognised as citizens of Jordan but the 170,000 refugees who fled Gaza in 1967 were denied citizenship together with 18,000 Palestinian Refugees from Syria (Davis, 2021). Because Gaza was under Egyptian administrative control from 1948-1967, the Palestinian refugees who fled there to Jordan in 1967 have never been granted citizenship and have been living with a perpetual foreigner status ever since. It means that ex-Gazan children lose access to free primary and secondary education, and university education is much more expensive for non-nationals. Services like healthcare are also more expensive and essential documents like residency permits, passports and driver's licences come attached with higher fees and periods of shorter validity (Human Rights Watch, 2010).



One of the narrow streets in Jerash refugee camp which is located 50 km north of Amman in the city of Irbid. Jerash has a population of 33,000 living in an area of 0.75 sq. km. It is the poorest of the ten Palestinian camps in Jordan with 52 per cent living below the poverty line. The Palestinian refugees in Jerash are 'ex-Gazan' which means that they are denied Jordanian citizenship as they (or their descendants) fled to Jordan from Gaza in the wake of the 1967 Arab - Israeli war.

Ex-Gazans cannot be employed by the state, and struggle to find jobs in the private sector as most employers require proof of nationality to hire workers. They are also excluded from organized professions such as law, as they are restricted to Jordanian nationals. The non-national status of ex-Gazans is hereditary which means that their Palestinian children born in Jordan suffer the same exclusions as their parents and grandparents. Davis (2021) suggests that Jordan maintains this cruel and arbitrary practice to ensure it doesn't become an 'alternative homeland' for Palestinians with half of Jordan's population estimated to be of West Bank-Palestinian origin (Ibid). While Amman New Camp had seen a reduction in student numbers as more refugees had left the camp, the numbers were increasing in Jerash as ex-Gazans struggle to find employment and access services beyond UNRWA's support.

Education

There are five schools in Jerash camp in three school buildings. The schools visited were Jerash Preparatory School for Girls 1 and 2. Both schools had 1,500 students and double shifted: the morning shift was from 7.00am -12.00pm and the afternoon shift from 12.00pm to 4.30pm. Both schools had 46 teachers and 34 classrooms with an average class size between 40 and 50. There are three floating classrooms which are classes that are forced to use whatever space is available in the school because there are not enough classrooms. These classes often used the school library or the science labs and this lack of a fixed room can affect student discipline and performance. The school parliament commented on the floating classroom issue as one that was particularly impacting on their education together with a computer suite without sufficient PCs and science labs without adequate equipment. The students much preferred face-to-face interaction to working online at home but some reported that they had enhanced their computer skills during lockdown and become more confident in online learning. The school parliament is elected by peers and focuses on democracy, self-confidence and mediation in

cases of bullying or disputes. The school had provided parent-student workshops to improve school discipline following the lockdown.



Jerash Preparatory School for Girls, Jerash refugee camp, Jordan (November 2021).

The main issues raised by staff in terms of the pandemic echoed those that emerged in other camps such as a lack of online learning devices, students struggling with home schooling, learning deficits created by the long absences from school, and student behavioural problems on returning to the classroom.



Student Artwork in Jerash Preparatory School for Girls, Jerash refugee camp, Jordan (November 2021).

4 Cross-cutting Issues

The following issues were raised in most of the schools visited in regard to the impact of the pandemic on education in the four camps:

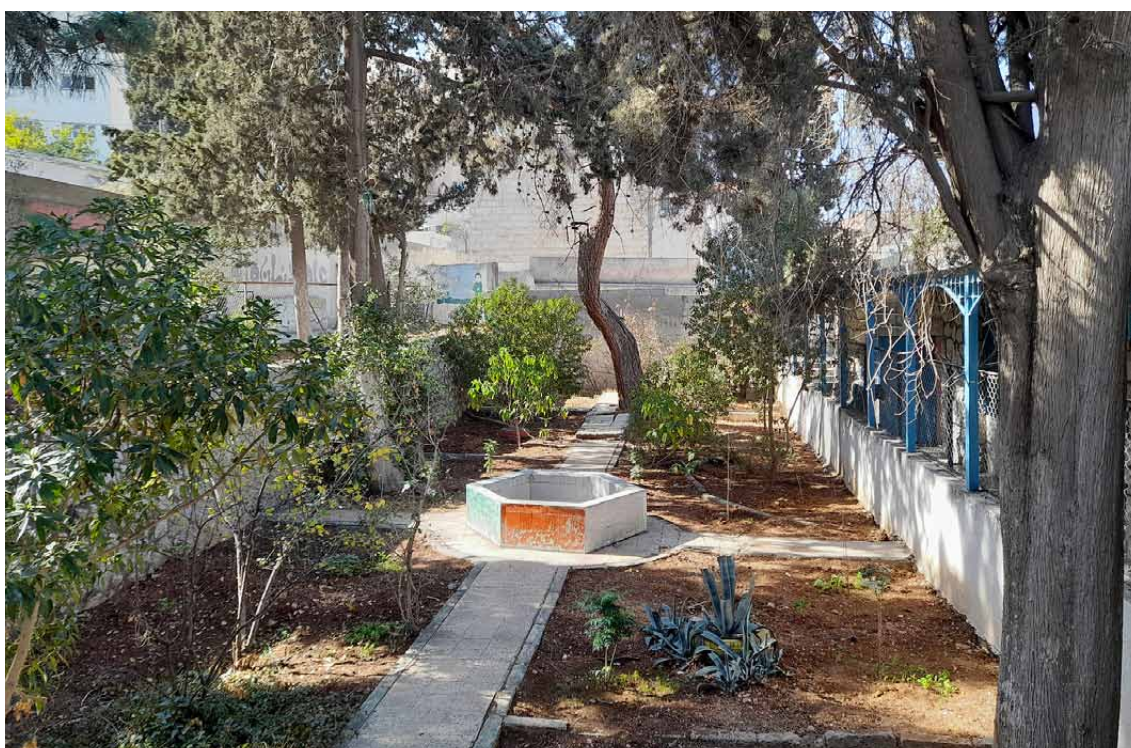
- **Online learning:** During extended lockdowns, students struggled to access online learning services either through UNRWA's online learning platform or WhatsApp groups created by teaching staff. The main reasons for this were lack of access to learning devices, particularly smartphones, and the lack of an Internet connection.
- **Teaching:** teachers created WhatsApp groups to enable students to access lessons and remain in communication with their parents. As a free online platform, WhatsApp can be a useful learning tool for teachers and students alike if students have access to a phone and Internet connection.
- **Home-schooling:** for students that lacked online learning devices and an Internet connection to access lessons online, UNRWA endeavoured to provide hard copies of workbooks for students to complete at home. However, some students lacked parental support in home-schooling because of illiteracy.
- **Student isolation:** students anecdotally suggested that the isolation of lockdowns was difficult for them. They missed the interaction with peers, classroom learning and struggled with home-schooling for a range of reasons. Some students, however, said that they enhanced their online literacy during lockdown.

The following issues were raised in regard to the re-opening of schools and return to face-to-face teaching:

- **Classroom behaviour:** almost every school visited reported that student behaviour in the classroom had deteriorated since the lockdowns. Students found it more difficult to concentrate and settle into the learning environment. This was just beginning to settle four months into term. UNRWA organised workshops with parents to discuss how they could assist children with the transition back to classroom teaching.
- **Physical distancing:** the average size of classes in most schools (40-50) makes physical distancing a real challenge. Teaching staff had created classroom bubbles to try to mitigate the spread of the virus. However, the majority of schools double-shift and it isn't possible to deep clean schools between shifts.
- **Rented buildings:** some UNRWA schools are housed in rented buildings which are not suitable for classroom teaching and not large enough to ensure physical distancing between students.
- **Learning deficits:** examinations have been used to test students on the resumption of school learning in August 2021 and they revealed significant learning deficits caused by the lockdowns and difficulties with home-schooling. Mitigation measures implemented by UNRWA included starting the school year a month early in August and focusing classroom teaching on core competences: Arabic, English, Mathematics and Science.

The following issues preceded the pandemic and continue to represent a significant challenge in the education of Palestinian refugee children in Jordan.

- **Double-shifting:** Aside from Amman New Camp Preparatory School for Girls in Amman New Camp, all of the schools visited double-shifted and had two different school populations using the same building, alternately in the morning and afternoon. This means that students in double-shifting schools (88 per cent of the total number of UNRWA schools in Jordan) have a part-time education. It also compromises the capacity of schools for extra-curricular activities and all of the schools visited were desperately short of playing areas, equipment and fit-for-purposes classrooms with adequate space for the average number of students.
- **The status of 'ex-Gazans':** Palestinian refugees from Gaza who fled to Jordan after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war have not been naturalised and are subjected to a perpetual foreigner status which negatively impacts their prospects for employment and integration into Jordanian society. This status is quite arbitrary and limits the socio-economic advancement of 'ex-Gazans', even if they have been born in Jordan. If some occupations remain closed off to ex-Gazans, it might reduce their appetite for education advancement toward employment.
- **Class sizes:** The average class size of 40-50 in UNRWA schools combined with double-shifting, inadequate classrooms and equipment, and lack of school Councillors for children with mental health problems, contribute to a challenging workload and working environment for teachers, the majority of whom are themselves refugees.
- **UNRWA budgeting crisis:** the shortage of school buildings, teachers, Councillors, classrooms and equipment emanate from a financial crisis in UNRWA itself, following several years of funding cuts. The agency is regularly forced into launching emergency appeals to meet short-term expenditures which makes long-term planning extremely difficult. The rising number of students in most camps in Jordan and across UNRWA fields of operation, mean that the pressure on services in all areas, including education, will continue to grow. As UNRWA Commissioner-General, Philippe Lazzarini (2021) has said 'A continuation of this trend will leave us stagnant and unable to adequately respond to modern demands and grasp new opportunities'.



A garden in Hussein Preparatory School for Girls, Jabal el-Hussein, Jordan (November 2021).

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