

## **Palestinian refugee camps: Reality, Need and Opportunities**

### **Policy Paper**

#### **Summary**

This paper, prepared by the Executive Office for Refugees and the Palestinian Institution for Empowerment and Local Development – REFORM, presents a vision for the development of policies to enhance and develop services provided to Palestinians living in refugee camps in the West Bank, and to expand local participation in administering these camp, in addition to contribute to responding to the needs of the camps in the Palestinian National Development Plan (PNP) in order to advance the economic and social conditions in the camps, for their effect on the social stability and security, without affecting the unique identity of the camp as the first witness on the Nakba, and the UN responsibility toward the Palestinians.

#### ***Palestinian refugee camps***

The number of Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank is 19 camps, recognized by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA), in addition to 5 not recognized refugee camps, all were established following the Nakba in 1948, while the number Palestinian refugees in the camps is nearly a quarter of the total refugee population in the West Bank, representing 30% of the population in the West Bank of almost 2.5 million, making the camps' population almost 8% of the total population of the West Bank.

Since their establishment, the camps live in difficult economic situations in the absence of clear government policies towards its residents, regardless of the density of this "massive overcrowded" areas and limited geographical borders, in addition to the continuous decrease of UNRWA services and development of infrastructure.

#### ***The economic situation in the camps***

Statistical data of the Central Bureau of statistics indicates that the population of refugees in the Palestinian territories reaches 44% of the total Palestinian population, 30% of them in West Bank, while a quarter live in the camps, and 67% in the Gaza Strip, and that the poverty rate among refugees in the Palestinian territories, according to real monthly household consumption pattern is 31% in 2011, suggesting that the refugee situation is worse than the others. Figures show that the refugee camps in the Palestinian territories are poorer compared to rural and urban area, with 35.4% of the individuals in the camps suffer from poverty, compared with 19.4% in rural areas and 26.1% in urban areas.

***Needs of the camps and the 2014-2016 PNP***

President Mahmoud Abbas' decision on 30/11/2013 for the formation of a Committee to follow up on projects in refugee camps under the chairmanship of the head of DORA (Department of Refugees Affairs) in the Palestine Liberation Organization - PLO, is qualitative change in the perception of camps in the West Bank. It also represents an important opportunity to review the PNP and policy agenda for the years 2014-2016, this step needs the development of working tools and methods, and deepening the involvement in necessary and possible areas of work in the camps.

***The possible areas of development based on the needs of the camps, which can be referenced in the Palestinian development plan, are as follows:***

1. Strengthen the refugees' confidence in the Popular Committees through holding elections according to system that determines the election mechanism, and ensures the participation of the camps' residents, and identifies the responsible party for these elections ratified by the Palestine Liberation Organization.
2. Increase participation of women and youth in the camps' institutions, including the Popular Committees and centers.
3. Developing the capacity of institutions, centers and public clubs operating in camps and upgrading their services, especially in the field of preservation of the cultural identity of refugees and promoting the right of return concept.
4. Enhancing the quality of health and education services through coordination between competent authorities, primarily the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees.
5. Provide high-quality professional training through establishing training centers and expand such existing centers, to commensurate with the population growth to enable youths in the camps to compete in the labor market.
6. Encourage investment in small income-generating projects in the camps to improve the economic situation and reduce unemployment.
7. Provide public spaces such as parks and playgrounds, especially since camps spaces are cramped and crowded.
8. Develop community contribution to policies of the Palestinian authority.
9. Reactivate volunteerism and strengthen social cohesion in the camps.
10. Create an environment conducive to freedom of expression, especially among children, youth and women inside the camps, to ensure tolerance, dialogue and acceptance of others, in order to create an open pluralistic society.
11. Provide protection to women in the camp of violence and marginalization, and facilitate their access to the judiciary system, as well as increasing participation of women in public life, including societal and cultural activities in the camp.