

IRREGULAR MIGRATION FROM PALESTINE

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PalThink
FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES
بال تينك للدراسات الإستراتيجية
مؤسسة تفكير وعمل فلسطينية
A Gaza-Based Palestinian Think and Do Tank

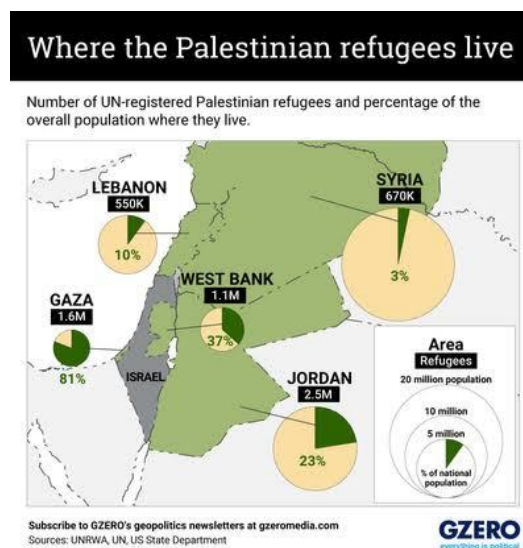


1. Status Quo and Nature of Irregular Migration from Palestine

This paper aims to highlight the reality of Palestinian migrants and the challenges of exile under the prevailing circumstances faced by Palestinians amidst multiple crises, including political, economic, and deteriorating social conditions, leading to a fundamental deterioration of humanitarian situations, forcing them to leave their homeland due to difficult living conditions they cannot cope with. This paper also seeks to provide a broader perspective by shedding light on the phenomenon of migration in the Gaza Strip, which reports indicate is steadily increasing, not only in exploring the causes and motives but also by discussing its repercussions on the migrants themselves, attempting to address the risks associated with migration by tracing the reality of migrants and highlighting the challenges and crises they face from the moment they decide to leave the country and what they endure in their exile. In addition, the paper aims to provide recommendations, the most important of which is the creation of national plans aimed at enhancing national belonging among youth and promoting citizenship concepts, in addition to creating job opportunities and establishing a conducive environment that aligns with the aspirations of young people.

Migration from Palestine to Europe has been a complex phenomenon resulted by political, economic, and social factors. Palestinians have been migrating to Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, and other countries around Europe for decades. They have been seeking refuge from conflict, political instability, and economic hardship in their homeland. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ongoing since the mid-20th century, has contributed significantly to displacement and irregular migration patterns. Due to the current war on Gaza, almost 1.3m people from Gaza city - northern part of the Gaza Strip have been displaced to the southern part of the Gaza Strip, where the Egyptian Rafah crossing border is located. The displacement and the ongoing harsh repercussions of the war have coerced thousands of Gaza citizens to migrate to Egypt, seeking safety and security. Palestinians also sought refuge and immigrated to Syria, Jordan, and other Arab nations. The following map illustrates where Palestinian refugees live.

Image: Palestinian diaspora in the Middle East

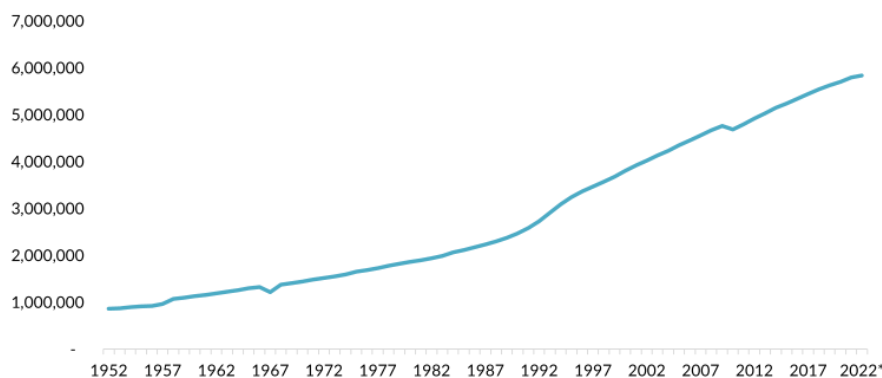


Source: Gzero

Currently, Egypt is inhabited by thousands of people who have evacuated the Gaza Strip. Years ago, Europe has been an attractive destination for Palestinian migrants due to perceived opportunities for better living standards, education, employment, and healthcare. However, the journey of irregular migration is often perilous, involving risky sea crossings, human trafficking, and exploitation by smugglers. Additionally, irregular migration routes present legal challenges and uncertainties regarding asylum and residency status. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

— As to countries of destination to which Palestinians emigrate, the results showed that 23.5% of emigrants left in Jordan, 20.4% to Gulf States, and more than fifth of emigrants (21.6%) settled in the United States of America. Reports show the increase of Palestinian refugees in neighboring countries, which pushed other thousands to migrate from those countries to Europe. Below is a figure illustrating the surge of Palestinian refugees over the years.

Graphic: Palestinians under the mandate of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

Note: Data for 2022 are as of the middle of the year.

2. Socio Economic Problems

The socioeconomic implications of Palestinian migration to Europe are multifaceted. On one hand, migrants may contribute to host economies through labor force participation and entrepreneurship. They also enrich cultural diversity and bring unique perspectives to their new communities. However, irregular migration can strain social services, infrastructure, and public resources in destination countries. Integration challenges, including language barriers, cultural differences, and discrimination, further complicate the socioeconomic situation.

The migration of young people and Palestinian minds from the Gaza Strip to abroad is no longer just a superficial problem that can be addressed by traditional solutions alone, but this problem has evolved into a serious phenomenon. According to a survey conducted by Al-Aqsa

University in 2018, it was found that 92.2% of the respondents believe that youth migration has become a phenomenon in the Gaza Strip.

The spread of the migration phenomenon in Gaza in recent times can be attributed to several reasons, including the widespread unemployment and the lack of basic services, of which 83.7% confirm its economic impact. Irregular immigration amongst youth is the highest due to the high percentage of youth in the Palestinian population, comprising 30% of it.

Moreover, the political context surrounding Palestinian migration adds another layer of complexity. Asylum policies, geopolitical dynamics, and international relations shape migration flows and influence migrants' experiences and outcomes in host countries. The lack of a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict also contributes to ongoing displacement and migration, perpetuating the cycle of uncertainty and instability for Palestinian migrants.

3. The consequences of migration

Migration affects the demographic reality of the population in the Gaza Strip, who are already suffering from various crises that have damaged their social, economic, political, and cultural realities. Occasionally, residents of the Gaza Strip are saddened by the news of the loss and drowning of young people in the prime of their lives, as they meet their fate in international waters or while attempting smuggling operations off the shores of host countries in search of a better life.

Migrants are subjected to restrictions on their freedoms and the absence of suitable job opportunities with decent incomes, compounded by the challenges they face in obtaining residency in these countries or even identification cards. They travel to Europe with hopes and dreams that were lost in their own country, only to be confronted with a harsh reality they endure, struggling to find opportunities that suit them or at least match their academic specialization, which has become an ineffective means of securing employment amidst the available scientific materials that may not benefit them in their professional lives.

4. Challenges and Risks Faced by Migrants

The paper traces an initial trajectory of how immigration works for the young people in Palestine, and what, thus, can be the risks imposed. The challenges faced by migrants are manifold, beginning with the idea of migration and starting from the moment they exit through the Rafah crossing and gather the high expenses required by immigration and travel agencies, culminating in the risks of the journey where young people are compelled to resort to irregular migration routes. This exposes them to multiple crises, including:

1. **Difficulty in leaving the Gaza Strip:** One of the primary challenges they face begins with the registration point for travel. Not to mention the complexities associated with the usual travel procedures required for exiting the Gaza Strip initially, which necessitate specific reasons for travel, registration, waiting for lists, permits,

which may require waiting for several months. Since the eruption of the ongoing war on Gaza, the number of Gazan civilians willing to leave Gaza has exponentially surged. However, the waiting time is constantly rising; for several months again. The ordeals that emerge after departing the crossing are unimaginable as travelers face the obstacle of checkpoints, inspections, and traveling for an average of 10 hours over a distance of no more than 400 kilometers due to the security situation in Sinai. Despite calls for establishing a safe passage to shorten the traveler's time, migrants take various migration routes through land and sea, considering them the least costly and the riskiest. These routes vary, often starting from obtaining a visa to Turkey, for example, then crossing through daunting forests to Greece, and from there to Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia, then to any European country by train, which is the most commonly followed route by Palestinians traveling from Egypt to Mauritania. The latter does not require specific conditions for Palestinian travel, then to Mali, Algeria, and finally embarking towards European shores. The paper seeks to trace migration routes commonly taken by Palestinian migrants in the Gaza Strip, often resorting to illegal migration means fraught with risks and death.

2. **Refusal of Permanent Residency:** Some countries have refused to grant asylum and permanent residency to Palestinians due to increasing numbers of migrants. For example, Belgium has begun rejecting most residency requests, increasing the waiting period for court decisions from three months to one or even three years. Last year, Belgium accepted only 161 out of 675 residency applications, part of Minister Maggie De Block's immigration and asylum plan. Previously, Palestinian refugees in Belgium received residency within four months and housing, but the rejection rate reached 93% in November 2020, prompting protests and legal challenges. Belgium and Sweden have deemed Gaza safe, denying residency to Palestinians, despite risks and lack of access to healthcare. Palestinians continue their protests in Sweden for asylum rights and civil and social rights they've been denied. Additionally, irregular Palestinian migrants faced real risks, especially when the COVID-19 transmitted, lacked healthcare access, and were forced to pay for medical care as foreign tourists.
3. **Language Barriers:** Language is one of the major obstacles facing irregular migrants from Palestine to Europe. The language barrier has become the biggest challenge for expatriates, whether seeking employment or studying. For example, students traveling on scholarships may find it difficult to complete their university studies, as many universities in Turkey conduct classes in Turkish. Despite having approximately 747 common words with Arabic, it's not sufficient for constructing coherent sentences, as some words are used differently. Moreover, most universities in Turkey require students to pass a language year before continuing their studies, making their first year challenging and necessitating daily language practice not only with Turks but also among fellow Arab expatriates in public places, transportation, and social interactions. Norwegian is considered one of the most difficult languages, with approximately 5 million speakers, who constitute the majority of the population there.
4. **Integration and adaptation to the customs and culture of the host country by immigrants.** The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) notes in its report "New Beginning" on refugee integration in Europe the lack of consensus on defining the concept of refugee or expatriate integration in host countries. However, it specifies that the process of refugee integration into a new society is an interactive process involving both the refugee and the host country.

Integration occurs along three main dimensions: •Legal dimension: Refugees should enjoy rights that make them equal to other citizens, including freedom of movement, education, access to the job market, and healthcare services, enabling them to obtain permanent residency. •Economic dimension: Individuals should become financially self-reliant and contribute to the economic life of the host country. •Cultural and societal dimension: Refugees should strive to adapt to the new environment, while local communities should embrace refugees to prevent discrimination or racism. Unfortunately, many migrants face challenges in integrating into new lifestyles, encountering discrimination and racism. For example, in Turkey, refugees face significant challenges despite its reputation for immigrant integration. While many refugees do not live in camps but rather in cities, they lack the means to earn their livelihoods due to difficulties in obtaining work permits. Additionally, Turkish authorities do not effectively combat child labor among refugees. The desire for integration varies depending on the country of residence. For instance, refugees in the Netherlands show a strong desire for integration into Dutch society, unlike in France, where most refugees aspire to move to Britain despite the services and benefits provided by the French state. Greece faces a similar situation, with refugees showing little interest in integration as they view it as a transit point to Western European countries. Migrants are torn between adapting to Greece and its system or starting anew in a neighboring country. Rama Arifat also emphasizes that language is a crucial factor in integration. Communicating with someone who differs vastly in language, customs, and even interpersonal interaction styles poses challenges. Furthermore, climate differences, especially in Scandinavian countries, greatly impact adaptation, especially due to their harsh nature. Even in summer, the weather can be rainy and cloudy, discouraging outdoor activities unlike the Norwegian people who are accustomed to such conditions.

5. Findings

Most literature focuses on the reasons behind Palestinian youth migration and proposes reasonable solutions to reduce the phenomenon. However, there is little discussion on the situation of migrants after their arrival and solutions to alleviate their suffering, especially after the ongoing war on Gaza and the regional political and security instability. The Palestinian diplomatic representations worldwide and Palestinian communities in Europe should assume responsibility for Palestinians wherever they are and whatever their means of transportation are.

The paper concludes by highlighting the absence of a national action strategy aimed at considering youth as an important and active element that cannot be ignored. It seeks to strengthen their national identity by reinforcing concepts of citizenship and social participation and addressing the punishments and challenges that primarily drive migration, especially concerning the ongoing political crisis in Palestine and the lack of any tangible political solution on the ground.

6. Recommendations

To address the situation faced by thousands of Palestinians that need to irregularly move to other neighboring countries, Pal-Think Strategic Studies recommends:

- 1) Addressing the political crisis's impact on Palestinian youth and protecting them from assaults, both externally and internally, which would encourage their presence in the country and reduce the number of migrants.
- 2) Implementing a governmental and social program, through civil society institutions, to educate and raise awareness among youth about the dangers of migration and its impact on Palestinian society and its infrastructure, especially given the data indicating the migration of numerous talents.
- 3) Providing job opportunities for youth and a conducive environment to achieve their goals to minimize the spread of migration.
- 4) Enhancing the role of Palestinian diplomacy and Palestinian communities worldwide in addressing migrant issues by first monitoring and tracking the phenomenon, providing data and statistics to develop appropriate solutions and interventions that correspond to the seriousness of the phenomenon for its treatment.

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