

Neirab Refugee Camp



Neirab Refugee Camp in Aleppo: History, Population, Villages of Origin and the Right

of Return

Neirab Camp is the largest and most densely populated official Palestine refugee camp in Syria, 13 km east of Aleppo, near Aleppo airport. It was established between 1948 and 1950 in and around old military barracks for refugees from the Galilee, driven from Safad, Acre, Haifa, Tiberias and villages such as Lubya, Hittin, Tarshiha and Ayn Ghazal during the occupation of Palestine in 1948. For more than seven decades, families have lived in those barracks in some of the harshest conditions of any camp in Syria. The camp endured a seven-month siege in 2013 and years of shelling during the Syrian war. Today about 18,000 Palestine refugees are registered in Neirab. This guide covers its history, origins, population, living conditions and current situation.

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Quick Facts About Neirab Camp

Neirab Refugee Camp at a glance

Arabic name	مخيم النيرب
Country / Region	Syria, Aleppo Governorate
Location	13 km east of Aleppo, near Aleppo airport and the town of al-Neirab
Year established	Between 1948 and 1950
Area	About 0.15 km ²
Registered refugees	About 18,000 (UNRWA)
Before the Syrian war	More than 20,000 refugees
UNRWA facilities	6 double-shift schools in 3 buildings, 1 health centre, 1 distribution centre, 1 community centre, 1 training centre and 1 sanitation office
Origin of residents	Upper Galilee: Safad, Acre, Haifa and Tiberias districts
Known for	Largest official camp in Syria; families still living in World War II barracks

Note: UNRWA counts refer to refugees *registered* in the camp, not necessarily the number of people living there at any given time.

The Nakba: Why Neirab Camp Exists

Neirab Camp was born from the **Nakba** (Arabic for "catastrophe"): the mass expulsion of Palestinians during the occupation of Palestine in 1948. Roughly 750,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes, and tens of thousands of them, mainly from the Galilee and the north, crossed into Syria.

Many of the refugees from the towns and villages of Upper Galilee were taken north, as far as Aleppo, where they were housed in empty military barracks near

the town of al-Neirab. What was meant to be a temporary shelter became their home for more than seventy years.

The Right of Return

The **right of return** is the central demand of Neirab's refugees. It rests on several foundations in international law:

- **UN General Assembly Resolution 194** (11 December 1948), paragraph 11, resolved that refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid to those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property.
- **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (Article 13) affirms everyone's right to leave any country, including their own, and to return to it.
- **UN General Assembly Resolution 3236** (1974) reaffirmed the "inalienable right" of Palestinians to return to their homes and property.

Hundreds of kilometres from the Galilee, the families of Neirab still name themselves after Lubya, Hittin, Tarshiha and Safsaf, and still hold onto the right to return to them.

History of the Camp

Life in the barracks (1948-1960s)

The camp was set up between 1948 and 1950 in and around army barracks built by the Allied forces during the Second World War. Families divided the long barracks among themselves, first with sheets and later with plywood and hollow bricks, to create a minimum of privacy. As families grew, the camp quickly spread beyond the barracks. Plans by UNRWA in the early 1960s to relocate the camp never materialised.

The largest camp in Syria (1970s-2010)

By the late 1980s, Neirab was already the largest Palestine refugee camp in Syria. UNRWA described its living conditions as among the worst of all the camps in the country. In 2000, UNRWA launched a two-phase improvement plan with the Syrian government: in the first phase, completed in 2010, 300 homes were built in nearby Ein el-Tal (Handarat) camp for families from Neirab, along with water, sewage and road networks. In the second phase, which began in 2007, the barracks area of Neirab was to be rebuilt; the first residential area was completed and handed over to families.

Neirab During the Syrian War (2011-2024)

- **Reconstruction halted (2011):** the conflict stopped the reconstruction project. More than 100 families whose homes had been demolished to make way for new ones were left renting elsewhere, and the new homes in Ein el-Tal were later destroyed.
- **Siege (2013):** the camp spent seven months under siege by armed opposition groups, with no water, food or medicine allowed in and no movement in or out. UNRWA schools largely kept running through the dedication of their staff.
- **Shelling (2013-2018):** because of the camp's location next to the military airport, it was repeatedly hit by mortars and shells.
- **The iftar attack (14 May 2019):** as families gathered to break their Ramadan fast, several projectiles hit the crowded camp, killing at least ten civilians, including eight Palestine refugees and four children, and wounding more than thirty.
- **Displacement:** many young people and families left Syria for safety or work abroad, while displaced Syrians and refugees from the destroyed Ein el-Tal camp moved into Neirab, where rents were lower.
- **Detentions:** human rights monitors documented the arrest and disappearance of camp residents during the war, including by a pro-

government Palestinian militia formed in the camp.

Neirab Today (2025-2026)

After the fall of the former Syrian government in December 2024, Palestine refugees in Syria entered a period of uncertainty. In Neirab, residents complained of insecurity and incidents of theft in early 2025, and families continue to face high unemployment, inflation, poor housing and cuts in services as UNRWA struggles with severe funding shortages. The reconstruction of the barracks, halted in 2011, remains unfinished.

Origin of the Name

The camp takes its name from the nearby Syrian town of **al-Neirab**, on the eastern outskirts of Aleppo. The name is also spelled al-Nayrab or Nairab.

Location and Geography

Neirab Camp lies in the **Aleppo Governorate** in northern Syria, about 13 km east of the city of Aleppo. The nearest landmarks are Aleppo airport and the town of al-Neirab. The region has hot, dry summers and cold winters, which make life in the old barracks especially hard. Aleppo's other Palestinian community, Ein el-Tal (Handarat) camp, lies to the north-east of the city.

Area and Land

The official camp covers only about **0.15 square kilometres**. With thousands of families living on this small area, Neirab is the most densely populated official camp in Syria. Its streets are often no wider than a child's outstretched arms, and they are the only place children have to play.

Villages of Origin

Neirab's refugees come from Upper Galilee and the north of Palestine, from the districts of [Safad](#), [Acre](#), [Haifa](#) and [Tiberias](#). Villages of origin include:

- **Tiberias district:** [Lubya](#), [Hittin](#) and [Al-Shajara](#)
- **Acre district:** [Tarshiha](#) and [Kuwaykat](#)
- **Safad district:** [Safsaf](#)
- **Haifa district:** [Al-Tira](#) and ['Ayn Ghazal](#)

Population and Demographics

Population of Neirab Camp

Period	Population	Source
1988	Largest Palestine refugee camp in Syria	Historical sources
Before 2011	More than 20,000 refugees	UNRWA
2024	About 23,469 people	Zochrot
Latest	About 18,000 registered refugees	UNRWA

Many refugees have left Syria since 2011, while displaced Syrians and refugees from Ein el-Tal have moved into the camp, so the number of residents differs from the number of registered refugees.

Housing and Infrastructure

Housing in Neirab is among the worst in any Palestinian camp. Many families still live in the old barracks, which are scorching in summer and freezing in winter, with leaking roofs and rodent infestation. Overcrowding leaves families with almost no privacy. The reconstruction of the barracks, begun in 2007, was halted in 2011 and remains unfinished, and more than 100 families whose homes were demolished for the project still live in rented housing, about 90 of them with UNRWA rental subsidies.

Health Situation

One UNRWA health centre serves the camp, with another in Aleppo city. Poor housing, overcrowding and damp conditions contribute to illness. Years of war, siege and shelling have increased psychological problems, and UNRWA provides psychosocial support through its schools and community centre.

Economic Situation

Most refugees in Neirab work as casual labourers, and others work informally as street vendors. The war, inflation and the collapse of the Syrian economy have deepened unemployment and poverty, and many families depend on UNRWA cash and food assistance.

Social Situation

The barracks have become, for many refugees, a symbol of their origins and their long struggle. Neirab's families keep strong ties to their villages of origin in the Galilee. The war has brought new pressures: UNRWA has reported an increase in early marriage, child labour, drug use, violence and psychological problems, and works on prevention and awareness. A community centre with a Family Support Office provides social services.

Education

UNRWA runs **six schools** in three buildings in the camp, all on a **double-shift system**, as well as a training centre offering vocational education. During the 2013 siege, UNRWA's schools largely continued to operate.

Frequently Asked Questions About Neirab Camp

Where is Neirab refugee camp located?

It lies 13 km east of the city of Aleppo in northern Syria, near Aleppo airport and the town of al-Neirab.

Is Neirab the largest Palestinian camp in Syria?

Yes. UNRWA describes Neirab as the largest and most densely populated official Palestine refugee camp in Syria.

How many refugees live in Neirab camp?

About 18,000 Palestine refugees are registered in the camp, according to UNRWA. Before the war, more than 20,000 lived there.

Why do refugees in Neirab live in barracks?

The camp was set up in army barracks built by the Allied forces during the Second World War. Refugees divided them into family spaces, and a reconstruction project begun in 2007 was halted by the war in 2011.

Where do Neirab's refugees come from?

From Upper Galilee and northern Palestine, including Safad, Acre, Haifa and Tiberias and villages such as Lubya, Hittin, Tarshiha, Kuwaykat, Safsaf, al-Shajara, al-Tira and 'Ayn Ghazal.

Conclusion

Neirab Camp began as a temporary shelter in wartime barracks far from the Galilee, and became home to the largest Palestinian refugee community in any camp in Syria. Its people have endured some of the worst housing of any camp, a siege, years of shelling and the hardships of the Syrian war. Through it all, they have kept alive the names of Lubya, Hittin, Tarshiha and Safsaf, and the right to

return to them.

Sources and References

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- [Zochrot – Neirab Camp](#)
- Encyclopedia of Palestinian Camps (mokhayyam.com) – Neirab Camp
- Action Group for Palestinians of Syria – reports on Neirab camp
- UN General Assembly Resolutions 194 (III) and 3236 (XXIX)

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