Souf Refugee Camp

Souf Refugee Camp in Jordan: History, Villages of Origin, Population and Life Today

Souf Camp is one of six emergency camps set up in Jordan after the 1967 Naksa, on the hills near the Roman ruins of Jerash, about 50 km north of Amman. Its first tents were abandoned in a harsh autumn, its people were moved to the Jordan Valley and back, and in 1968 they were given prefabricated shelters. Many of its families had already been driven out in 1948 from the villages of the Hebron hills, among them Bayt Jibrin, Ajjur and al-Dawayima, and were displaced a second time in 1967. Today about 20,000–22,000 people live in the camp. This guide covers its history, origins, population, services and situation today.

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Quick Facts About Souf Camp

Souf Refugee Camp at a glance

Arabic name	مخيم سوف
Country	Jordan
Governorate	Jerash
Location	About 3 km from Jerash and about 50 km north of Amman
Established	1967 (emergency camp)
Area	About 0.5 km² (500–550 dunums)
Population	About 20,000–22,400 depending on the source

Origin of residents	Hebron-district villages (1948) and the West Bank (1967)
Shelters built 1968	1,650 prefabricated units
Status	Official UNRWA camp; administered by Jordan's Department of Palestinian Affairs

The Naksa: Why Souf Camp Exists

Souf Camp is a product of two displacements. The first was the **Nakba**: the mass expulsion of Palestinians during the occupation of Palestine in 1948, when roughly 750,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes. Many of Souf's families come from the villages of the western Hebron hills, such as Bayt Jibrin, Ajjur and al-Dawayima, which were occupied in October 1948. In al-Dawayima, Israeli forces committed one of the worst massacres of the Nakba. Many of their people took refuge in the West Bank.

The second was the **Naksa** ("setback") of June 1967, when Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip and about 300,000 Palestinians fled east across the Jordan River, many of them refugees for the second time. Jordan and UNRWA set up six emergency camps for them, and Souf was one of these.

The Right of Return

Souf's families hold two claims of return: to the villages they lost in 1948 and to the West Bank homes they fled in 1967. The right of return 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.
- **UN Security Council Resolution 237** (14 June 1967) called on Israel

to facilitate the return of those who had fled the areas of military operations since the outbreak of hostilities.

- **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.

History of the Camp

The first tents went up at Souf in the summer of 1967. In October 1967 harsh weather and heavy rain forced the camp to be abandoned, and its people were moved to a temporary tent camp in the Jordan Valley. In 1968, as military operations escalated in the valley, that camp was abandoned too, and the refugees returned to Souf. UNRWA dropped its plan for sturdier winter tents and instead built **1,650 prefabricated shelters**, funded by the Near East Council of Churches and the Federal Republic of Germany. Over the decades, families replaced or extended the prefabricated units with concrete rooms and upper floors.

The Current Situation (2026)

Like Jordan's other camps, Souf depends heavily on UNRWA, whose funding crisis deepened after 2024. In 2026 the agency cut service hours and school time in Jordan by about 20%, according to Al-Mamlaka TV, reducing clinic hours and teaching time in the camp's schools. Residents have also called for better municipal services, including the daily removal of waste from a nearby Jerash municipal slaughterhouse. Hundreds of families depend on aid from UNRWA, Jordan's National Aid Fund and local charities.

Origin of the Name

The camp takes its name from the neighbouring Jordanian town of **Souf**, in the hills north-west of Jerash, near which it was built.

Location and Geography

The camp lies in the hills of Jerash Governorate in northern Jordan, about 3 km from the city of Jerash and its Roman ruins and about 50 km north of Amman, near the town of Souf. Its winters are cold and rainy, the conditions that forced the first tents to be abandoned in 1967. It is one of two camps in the governorate, alongside Jerash (Gaza) Camp.

Area and Layout

UNRWA puts the camp's area at **0.5 km²**, while Jordan's Department of Palestinian Affairs lists 550 dunums (0.55 km²). Its road network covers about 35,000 m². The camp is laid out on the grid of the 1968 prefabricated shelters, now mostly rebuilt in concrete, with about 135 shops along its streets, bakeries, pharmacies and seven mosques.

Villages and Towns of Origin

Most residents are 1948 refugees from the Hebron district and nearby villages of the Gaza district, joined by people displaced in 1967 from the West Bank. Among the places named in the sources:

- **Hebron district (1948):** Bayt Jibrin, Ajjur, al-Dawayima and Dhikrin
- **Gaza district (1948):** Iraq al-Manshiyya
- **West Bank (1967):** Tubas and Burin, near Nablus

The people of Ajjur maintain a village society in the camp, the Ajjur Society.

Population and Demographics

Figures vary by source and year, and distinguish **registered refugees** from all residents, who include unregistered Palestinians and non-refugees.

Population of Souf Camp

Year	Population	Source
1968	1,650 prefabricated shelters built	UNRWA
2005	21,900 residents, of whom 20,530 registered refugees	UNRWA, via Wikipedia
Undated	About 20,000 registered refugees; 4,029 families in 1,179 housing units	UNRWA, via Mokhayyam
Undated	22,420	Zochrot (UNRWA data)
Recent	21,263 people in 4,842 families and about 3,000 housing units	Department of Palestinian Affairs, Jordan

A 2013 Fafo survey found an average household size of 5.3, the second highest among Jordan's ten camps.

Housing and Infrastructure

The 1968 prefabricated units have largely been replaced or enlarged with concrete rooms. About 98% of residents have access to water. Jordan's Department of Palestinian Affairs and the local Camp Services Committee manage the camp, UNRWA collects waste, and the government runs a post office and police station.

Economic Life

According to the 2013 Fafo survey, unemployment in Souf was 17%, the second highest among Jordan's camps, and 24% among women. About 23% of refugees lived below the national poverty line, placing the camp eighth of ten. Many families rely on aid: according to Mokhayyam, about 330 families received help from

UNRWA, 468 from the National Aid Fund and 300 from charities, while 315 were in UNRWA's special hardship programme.

Health Services

UNRWA runs one health centre with general, child, dental and women's clinics, which in 2003 served about 370 patients a day. There is also a charitable medical centre and private clinics. A Community Rehabilitation Centre for people with disabilities, founded in 1983 with Oxfam support, serves about 250 people. The 2013 Fafo survey found the lowest rate of severe chronic illness among Jordan's camps (3%), but 27% of refugees had no health insurance.

Education and Community

UNRWA runs schools for boys and girls on double shifts (sources list two to four schools), and the Jordanian government runs two secondary schools. In 2003–2004 UNRWA's schools had about 2,750 pupils and 92 teachers. Kindergartens, nurseries and a play centre run by the Arab Fund for Children Care serve younger children. Community groups include the UNRWA-supported Women's Programme Centre, Al-Aqsa Youth Club, a zakat committee, a Qur'an society, the Souf Camp Charitable Society (founded 2006) and several cooperatives.

Frequently Asked Questions About Souf Camp

Where is Souf camp located?

In Jerash Governorate, northern Jordan, about 3 km from Jerash and about 50 km north of Amman, near the town of Souf.

When was Souf camp established?

In 1967, as one of six emergency camps for Palestinians displaced by the Naksa. It was abandoned in October 1967 and reoccupied in 1968, when UNRWA built 1,650

prefabricated shelters.

Where do Souf camp's residents come from?

Mostly from Hebron-district villages lost in 1948, such as Bayt Jibrin, Ajjur and al-Dawayima, who were displaced again from the West Bank in 1967, along with people from Tubas and other West Bank areas.

How many people live in Souf camp?

About 20,000–22,400, depending on the source. UNRWA counted 21,900 residents in 2005, including 20,530 registered refugees.

Who runs Souf camp?

Jordan's Department of Palestinian Affairs and a local Camp Services Committee administer the camp, while UNRWA provides education, health, relief and sanitation services.

Conclusion

Souf is a camp of people uprooted twice: from Bayt Jibrin, Ajjur and al-Dawayima in 1948, and from the West Bank in 1967. Its first tents could not survive a Jerash winter, and its prefabricated huts have become a crowded town of concrete. Facing unemployment, poverty and UNRWA's shrinking services, its people keep the names of their villages alive in its societies and its streets.

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