Jerash (Gaza) Refugee Camp

Jerash (Gaza) Refugee Camp in Jordan: History, Origins, Legal Status and Life in Jordan's Poorest Camp

Jerash Camp, known locally as **Gaza Camp**, lies about 5 km from the Roman ruins of Jerash in northern Jordan. It was set up on 3 March 1968 as an emergency camp for about 11,500 Palestinians displaced from the Gaza Strip by the 1967 war, most of them already refugees of 1948 from Beersheba, Gaza and Jaffa. Unlike most Palestinians in Jordan, its people have no Jordanian citizenship, and it is the poorest of the country's ten official camps. Home to about 31,000 people, it has followed the genocide war on Gaza with grief for relatives killed there. This guide

covers its history, origins, legal status, services and its situation today.

Table of Contents

1. Quick Facts About Jerash (Gaza) Camp
2. From the Nakba to the Naksa: Why Jerash Camp Exists
3. The Right of Return
4. History of the Camp (1968–2022)
5. The Current Situation (2023–2026)
6. Legal Status: The "Ex-Gazans"
7. Origin of the Name
8. Location and Geography
9. Area and Layout
10. Origins of the Residents
11. Population and Demographics
12. Housing and Infrastructure
13. Economic Life
14. Health Situation
15. Education
16. Frequently Asked Questions
17. Sources and References

Quick Facts About Jerash (Gaza) Camp

Jerash Refugee Camp at a glance

Arabic names	مخيم جرش / مخيم غزة
Country	Jordan
Location	About 5 km from the Roman ruins of Jerash, Jerash Governorate
Established	3 March 1968, as an UNRWA emergency camp
Area	About 0.75 km²

Population at founding	About 11,500
Population (2023)	About 31,000 (UNRWA)
Origin of residents	Beersheba (45%), Gaza (39%), Ramallah (8%), Jaffa (4.5%), Tulkarm (1.5%)
Legal status	Most residents are "ex-Gazans" without Jordanian citizenship
Poverty	52.7% below the national poverty line (2013), the highest of Jordan's ten camps
Without health insurance	88%, the highest of Jordan's ten camps

From the Nakba to the Naksa: Why Jerash Camp Exists

Most of Jerash's families were first uprooted in the **Nakba** (Arabic for "catastrophe"): the mass expulsion of Palestinians during the occupation of Palestine in 1948, when roughly 750,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes. The Bedouin clans of the Beersheba region and the people of Jaffa and the villages of the Gaza district were driven south into the Gaza Strip, where they lived for nearly twenty years in refugee camps under Egyptian administration.

In June 1967, the occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank displaced them again in what Palestinians call the **Naksa**. Many spent months in camps in the West Bank before crossing into Jordan. On 3 March 1968, UNRWA set up an emergency camp for about 11,500 of them on rented farmland near Jerash, one of six emergency camps established in Jordan that year.

The Right of Return

Many families in Jerash still keep the keys and land titles of the homes they lost, as a pledge of return. Displaced twice, they hold firmly to a right that 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 since the outbreak of hostilities, a call that applies directly to the people of Jerash camp.
- **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 (1968–2022)

From tents to asbestos

Each family received a plot of 96 m² (12 by 8 metres) and one tent for every six people, about 1,500 tents in all. Harsh winters soon made tents unbearable, and between 1968 and 1971 UNRWA built about 2,000 prefabricated shelters of 18 m² with emergency donations. They had no kitchens or toilets, so residents shared latrines and washrooms. Schools and the clinic also began in tents, moved to asbestos buildings around 1971 and to concrete in the 1980s.

Growing out, not up

Families added zinc-roofed rooms facing the street, often used as a مضافة (madafa), a guest room reflecting the community's tradition of hospitality. Because Jordan long allowed only single-storey homes in the camp, houses expanded horizontally around central courtyards, which today make up about a third of each shelter's area and serve as family and social spaces, especially for women. Tribes and families clustered together, and many neighbourhoods have barely changed since

1968.

The Current Situation (2023–2026)

Since October 2023, the genocide war on Gaza has weighed heavily on Jerash camp, where many families have relatives in the Strip. Residents have reported the deaths of relatives, displacement and the loss of family homes, deepening a sense of marginalisation and collective grief while strengthening solidarity.

Daily life remains marked by poverty. Child labour is widespread, and over 70% of school dropouts work or look for work to support their families. Residents rely on their own initiatives to improve services: in June 2026, they began maintaining and rehabilitating the camp's sewage lines through a local contractor. UNRWA's financial crisis adds to the pressure: in 2026 the agency announced cuts of about 20% to service hours and school time across its fields, including Jordan, a heavy blow for a camp whose residents have few other sources of support.

Legal Status: The "Ex-Gazans"

Jerash is the only camp in Jordan whose population is mainly from Gaza. Because the Gaza Strip was under Egyptian administration before 1967, its refugees were not granted Jordanian citizenship, unlike most Palestinians in Jordan. As a result, residents of Jerash camp:

- hold a temporary two-year Jordanian passport but no national ID number;
- have limited access to the formal labour market and many professions;
- are excluded from the National Aid Fund and from university scholarships, with royal grants only partly filling the gap;
- may use, but not own, the land within the camp;
- are treated as foreigners under Jordanian regulations, so about 88% are not entitled to government health services.

All of them retain their status as Palestine refugees and their right of return.

Origin of the Name

UNRWA calls the camp **Jerash Camp** after the nearby city of Jerash, famous for its Roman ruins. Locally it is known as **Gaza Camp** (مخيم غزة), because most of its people came from the Gaza Strip in 1967.

Location and Geography

The camp lies in Jerash Governorate in northern Jordan, about 5 km from the Roman ruins of Jerash. It was built on rented agricultural land, and its western edge is bordered by steep valleys, while it has grown faster to the south and east. Its market draws customers from the surrounding Jordanian villages.

Area and Layout

The camp covers about **0.75 km²**, about 13% of the total area of Palestinian camps in Jordan. Its flat areas follow the original grid, while sloped areas grew organically. Today residential blocks of about 48 by 24 metres hold some 24 shelters in two rows, separated by alleys only 0.6–0.8 metres wide, some of which residents have gated. About a third of the built-up area is commercial.

Origins of the Residents

According to the Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question, the camp's original residents traced their roots to:

Origins of Jerash Camp's residents

Place of origin	Share of residents
Beersheba region	About 45%

Place of origin	Share of residents
Gaza district	About 39%
Ramallah	About 8%
Jaffa	About 4.5%
Tulkarm	About 1.5%

Residents have kept their tribal and village ties, which still shape social bonds and the resolution of disputes in the camp.

Population and Demographics

UNRWA figures count the refugees and displaced persons it serves; they are not identical to a census of everyone living in the camp.

Population of Jerash Camp over time

Year	Population	Source
1968	About 11,500	UNRWA
2010	About 24,000	UNRWA, via WAFA Info
2023	About 31,000, the fifth-largest camp in Jordan	UNRWA, via the Interactive Encyclopedia

Housing and Infrastructure

Many residents have replaced the original prefabricated units with concrete shelters, but many roofs are still made of corrugated zinc and asbestos sheets, which UNRWA warns can cause diseases such as cancer. Alleys are extremely narrow, and the camp's infrastructure, including its sewage lines, needs constant repair. UNRWA handles waste collection and environmental health within the camp, while the Department of Palestinian Affairs manages overall administration.

Economic Life

Jerash is the poorest of Jordan's ten official camps: according to a 2013 survey, 52.7% of its refugees live below the national poverty line. Residents have the lowest share of permanent jobs and the highest share of seasonal, irregular and daily work of any camp, a direct result of their lack of citizenship and restricted access to employment. The camp's market is a commercial hub for nearby villages, and many families depend on small trade, day labour and the earnings of children.

Health Situation

UNRWA's health centre, built in concrete around 1985, provides primary health care, dental care and family planning. Because residents are treated as foreigners, about 88% have no health insurance and no right to government health services, the highest rate among Jordan's camps. The asbestos still found in many roofs poses a long-term health risk.

Education

In 2023, UNRWA ran five schools in the camp, four of them on double shifts, teaching more than 5,900 students in grades 1 to 10, and two government secondary schools serve grades 11 and 12. Exclusion from university scholarships makes higher education hard to afford, and high dropout rates push many boys into work. UNRWA also founded a women's programme centre and a community-based rehabilitation centre in the camp, and a youth and sports club is run by the Department of Palestinian Affairs.

Frequently Asked Questions About Jerash (Gaza)

Camp

Where is Jerash camp located?

In Jerash Governorate in northern Jordan, about 5 km from the Roman ruins of Jerash.

Why is Jerash camp called Gaza Camp?

Because most of its residents came from the Gaza Strip after the 1967 war.

When was Jerash camp established?

On 3 March 1968, as one of six UNRWA emergency camps in Jordan, for about 11,500 Palestinians displaced from Gaza.

Do residents of Jerash camp have Jordanian citizenship?

Most do not. As "ex-Gazans", they hold temporary two-year passports without a national ID number, which limits their access to work, property, aid and health services.

Why is Jerash the poorest camp in Jordan?

Largely because of its residents' lack of citizenship, which restricts employment and access to aid. In 2013, 52.7% of its refugees lived below the poverty line and 88% had no health insurance.

Conclusion

Jerash Camp is home to Palestinians displaced twice, from Beersheba, Jaffa and the villages of Gaza in 1948, and from the Gaza Strip in 1967, and then left without citizenship in the country that sheltered them. In the shadow of Jerash's Roman columns, they built courtyard homes, markets and schools, and kept the keys of their old houses. Today they are the poorest refugees in Jordan, mourning relatives killed in Gaza, but they still hold on to the right to return.

Sources and References

- Our Palestine – Palestinian Refugee Camps
- UNRWA – Jerash Camp profile
- Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question – Jerash (Gaza) Camp
- Palestinian National Information Centre (WAFA Info) – Jerash Camp (Gaza Camp)
- Fafo – Survey of Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan (2013)
- Palestinian Refugees Portal – Sewage maintenance in Gaza Camp, Jordan (June 2026)
- Al-Mamlaka TV – UNRWA service cuts (2026)
- UN Security Council Resolution 237 and UN General Assembly Resolutions 194 (III) and 3236 (XXIX)

Last updated: October 17, 2026