Al-Ramdan Refugee Camp



Al-Ramdan Refugee Camp in Syria: History, Villages of Origin, Population and Life on the Edge of the Badia

Al-Ramdan Camp is a small Palestinian refugee camp near the town of al-Dumayr in the eastern countryside of Damascus, on the edge of the Syrian Badia (desert steppe). It was established in 1953 for refugees of the 1948 Nakba, most of them from Tiberias, Safed and the villages of the Galilee and the Hula Valley, and it grew after 1967 with Palestinians displaced from the Golan. Home to about 4,000 refugees, it is not counted by UNRWA among its official camps, and its isolation and neglect have earned it the nickname "the orphan camp". This guide covers its

history, origins, population, services, the war years and its situation today.

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Quick Facts About al-Ramdan Camp

Al-Ramdan Refugee Camp at a glance

Arabic name	مخيم الرمدان
Nickname	"The orphan camp"
Country	Syria
Location	Near al-Dumayr, eastern Damascus countryside (Rif Dimashq Governorate), about 45–60 km from Damascus depending on the source
Year established	1953

Area	About 2,500 dunums (about 2.5 km²), including former farmland
Population	About 4,000 refugees, plus hundreds of displaced Syrians (2022)
Origin of residents	Tiberias, Safed, villages of the Galilee and the Hula Valley
UNRWA status	Not an official UNRWA camp; the agency provides some services
Main administering body	General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR)

The Nakba: Why al-Ramdan Camp Exists

Al-Ramdan was born from 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. In the north, the Arab population of Tiberias was forced out in April 1948 and that of Safed in May; the villages of Lower and Upper Galilee and the Hula Valley were emptied in the months that followed. Tens of thousands of their people crossed into Syria, where they were scattered among Damascus, its countryside, the south of the country and the Golan.

In 1953, some of these families were settled at al-Ramdan, far from the capital on the road towards the desert. In June 1967, after the occupation of the Golan Heights, the camp received a second wave: Palestinian refugees who had lived in the Golan since 1948 and were displaced for a second time. The UN Security Council, in Resolution 237 (1967), called for the return of those who had fled since the outbreak of hostilities.

The Right of Return

Like every Palestinian camp, al-Ramdan is a temporary home whose people still hold to the **right of return**. Their seven neighbourhoods carry the names of Palestinian towns and villages, a daily reminder of where they come from. The

right 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.

History of the Camp (1953–2011)

The camp was established in 1953 on agricultural land near al-Dumayr, the last inhabited town on the Damascus–Baghdad road before the open desert. Its first residents were refugees from the Tiberias and Safed districts and from Bedouin clans of the Galilee, among them the al-Wuhayb and al-Mawasi. Many families farmed the land around the camp, and family and clan ties became the backbone of its social life.

After 1967 the camp expanded to take in Palestinians displaced from the Golan. Unlike most Palestinian camps in Syria, al-Ramdan was never registered by UNRWA as an official camp. Most of its services have been run by Syria's General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR), while UNRWA provides health, education and water services and some aid to the poorest families. As roads to Damascus improved, some young men found work in the industrial area of Adra, in al-Dumayr and in jobs in the capital.

The War Years (2011–2018)

Compared with Yarmouk, Sbeineh or Khan Eshieh, al-Ramdan saw far less fighting inside the camp. Instead it became a refuge. Thousands of displaced Palestinians and Syrians from the war-torn areas around Damascus arrived, and according to local accounts each home took in one or two families, sharing food with them without distinction. Around 200 families came from Yarmouk camp alone.

The war still reached the camp. In March 2013, warplanes struck the area and several rockets fell on the camp without causing casualties, and many residents fled in panic to al-Dumayr and to al-Wafideen camp. The region around al-Dumayr, with its military airport and the desert routes of the eastern Qalamoun, remained a front line for years. Prices soared, food, fuel and medicine ran short, and getting to work in Damascus became difficult.

Relief barely reached the camp. A report from August 2016 said the first aid convoy since 2011 arrived only on 4 April 2016, a Swedish convoy that distributed about 400 food parcels. In April 2018, an agreement ended the armed opposition's presence in nearby al-Dumayr, and the area returned to relative calm.

The Current Situation (2025–2026)

Al-Ramdan receives very little media attention, and few reports on the camp have been published since the fall of the former regime in December 2024. Its people share the hardships of Palestinian refugees across Syria: a deep economic crisis, high unemployment and shrinking aid. UNRWA's operations in Syria are severely underfunded; in April 2026 its Syria director said the agency had secured only about 10% of the funding needed for its humanitarian programmes in the country, after the halt of US funding.

The camp's long-standing service problems remain its residents' main complaints. In September 2022, the camp was left completely without water when the pumps of its two wells broke down, and residents asked UNRWA to hold a meeting with

them, as it does in other camps, to hear their grievances.

The Name and the Nickname "Orphan Camp"

The available sources do not record the origin of the name al-Ramdan. The camp is often called **"the orphan camp"** (المخيم اليتيم), a name that reflects its isolation in the desert, its lack of official UNRWA status and the weak attention it receives from relief organisations and the media.

Location and Geography

Al-Ramdan lies near the town of **al-Dumayr** in Rif Dimashq Governorate, in an open area on the edge of the Syrian Badia. Sources put its distance from Damascus at between 45 and 60 km. It is the most remote Palestinian camp around the capital, close to the road that leads from Damascus towards Iraq. Its desert setting brings hot, dry summers, and its distance from the city makes transport, work and medical care harder to reach.

Area and Layout

The camp extends over about **2,500 dunums** (about 2.5 km²), much of it once farmland, which makes it far less crowded than Palestinian camps in Damascus. It is divided into **seven neighbourhoods**, most of them named after Palestinian towns and villages, among them a southern neighbourhood known as al-Hara al-Janubiya.

Villages of Origin

Al-Ramdan's families come mostly from the north of Palestine. The sources list:

- **Cities:** Tiberias and Safed
- **Tiberias district:** al-Shajara and Hittin

- **Safed district:** al-Ja'una and Dallata
- **The Hula Valley:** families from the villages of the Hula plain, whose depopulated villages include al-Khalisa, al-Khisas, al-Na'ima and al-Salihiyya
- **Other places:** Shefa-'Amr in the Haifa district, and Ajjur in the Hebron district
- **Clans:** al-Wuhayb and al-Mawasi; the al-Mawasi Bedouin are associated with al-Wa'ra al-Sawda (Arab al-Mawasi) in the Tiberias district

Population and Demographics

Al-Ramdan is one of the smallest Palestinian camps in Syria. Because UNRWA does not list it as an official camp, published figures are estimates from local and media sources, and they describe people living in the camp rather than UNRWA-registered refugees, who are counted differently.

Population of al-Ramdan Camp over time

Year	Population / event	Source
1953	Camp established for 1948 refugees	Encyclopedia of Palestinian Camps
1967	New arrivals displaced from the Golan	Encyclopedia of Palestinian Camps
2012–2013	Thousands of displaced Palestinians and Syrians hosted; about 200 families from Yarmouk	Encyclopedia of Palestinian Camps; Palestinian Refugees Portal
2016	About 4,000 refugees	Palestinian Refugees Portal
2022	About 4,000 refugees, plus hundreds of displaced Syrians	Palestinian Refugees Portal

Housing and Infrastructure

With more space than the urban camps, al-Ramdan's homes are low and spread out, but its infrastructure is weak. Water comes from two wells, known as the tank well and the school well; when their pumps failed in the summer of 2022 the camp

went without water in extreme heat. A sewage rehabilitation project carried out by UNRWA and GAPAR in the southern neighbourhood was described by residents as a failure, with wastewater still collecting in the streets.

Economic Life

Agriculture was the camp's first livelihood. Later, some young men took up casual work in Adra and al-Dumayr or jobs in Damascus. The war disrupted both: transport became difficult, farming supplies could not get through, and most of this work stopped. Unemployment rose, and many families now depend on remittances and limited aid.

Health Situation

Health services are basic. GAPAR runs a clinic that offers some medical services, and UNRWA has a single health point. According to a 2016 report, it opened only one day a week until a nurse from the camp was appointed, after which it received patients almost daily. There are no private clinics and no ambulance service, so emergencies must be taken to neighbouring towns.

Education

The camp has one school covering grades one to nine, with about 250 pupils in 2016, a number that changes from year to year with the cost of schooling. There is also a kindergarten run by GAPAR with UNICEF support. Secondary students must travel to al-Dumayr, and fewer of them go on to finish secondary school or university.

Frequently Asked Questions About al-Ramdan

Camp

Where is al-Ramdan camp located?

Near the town of al-Dumayr in the eastern Damascus countryside, on the edge of the Syrian Badia, about 45–60 km from Damascus depending on the source.

When was al-Ramdan camp established?

In 1953, for Palestinians expelled during the 1948 Nakba. It grew after 1967 with refugees displaced from the Golan.

Is al-Ramdan an official UNRWA camp?

No. UNRWA does not list it among its official camps, although it provides some health, education and water services. Most services are run by Syria's General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees.

How many people live in al-Ramdan camp?

About 4,000 Palestinian refugees, according to reports from 2016 and 2022, along with hundreds of displaced Syrians.

Where do al-Ramdan's refugees come from?

Mainly from Tiberias and Safed, the villages of al-Shajara, Hittin, al-Ja'una and Dallata, the Hula Valley, Shefa-'Amr and Ajjur, and from the al-Wuhayb and al-Mawasi clans.

Conclusion

Al-Ramdan is a camp at the edge of the map: far from Damascus, outside UNRWA's official list and rarely in the news. Yet for seventy years its families from Tiberias, Safed and the Galilee have farmed its land, named its streets after the villages they lost, and opened their homes to others when war came. Its people still ask for water, schools and a clinic that works, and they still hold to their right to return to

Palestine.

Sources and References

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- Al Jazeera – Report on Palestinian camps in Syria and UNRWA funding (April 2026)
- UN Security Council Resolution 237 and UN General Assembly Resolutions 194 (III) and 3236 (XXIX)

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