

Husseiniyeh Refugee Camp



Husseiniyeh Refugee Camp in Syria: History, Origins, Population and the War Years

Husseiniyeh Camp (also known as the Husseiniyeh Gathering) lies about 13 km south-east of Damascus. It began in 1982 as a housing area for Syrians displaced from the occupied Golan, and grew into one of the largest Palestinian communities in Syria as refugees moved there, many after their homes in Jaramana camp were demolished for road projects. Its Palestinian families come mainly from the Safed

and Tiberias districts and from Haifa and its villages. Unofficial in UNRWA's records, the camp was bombed and emptied in 2013, and its people returned from 2015. This guide covers its history, origins, population, services and its situation today.

Table of Contents

- 1. [Quick Facts About Husseiniyeh Camp](#)
- 2. [The Nakba: Why Husseiniyeh Camp Exists](#)
- 3. [The Right of Return](#)
- 4. [History of the Camp \(1982-2011\)](#)
- 5. [The War Years \(2012-2015\)](#)
- 6. [Return and Recovery \(2015-2024\)](#)
- 7. [The Current Situation \(2025-2026\)](#)
- 8. [Origin of the Name](#)
- 9. [Location and Geography](#)
- 10. [Area and Layout](#)
- 11. [Villages of Origin](#)
- 12. [Population and Demographics](#)
- 13. [Housing and Infrastructure](#)
- 14. [Economic Life](#)
- 15. [Health Situation](#)
- 16. [Education](#)
- 17. [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- 18. [Sources and References](#)

Quick Facts About Husseiniyeh Camp

Husseiniyeh Refugee Camp at a glance

Arabic name	مخيم الحسينية / تجمع الحسينية
Country	Syria
Location	About 13 km south-east of central Damascus, Rif Dimashq Governorate

Year established	1982
Area	About 3–5 km ² (including the wider residential area)
Population	About 22,000 UNRWA-registered refugees; about 90,000 residents in the wider area in 2010
Origin of Palestinian residents	Safed and Tiberias districts, Haifa and its villages
UNRWA status	Unofficial camp; UNRWA provides services
Rank	Among the largest Palestinian communities in Syria

The Nakba: Why Husseinieh Camp Exists

Husseinieh's Palestinian families are refugees of 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. Safed, Tiberias and Haifa and the villages around them were emptied in the spring of 1948, and their people crossed into Syria. Many of them settled first in camps around Damascus, especially Jaramana.

Husseinieh was born much later, from a chain of displacements. In June 1967, the occupation of the Golan Heights uprooted Syrian villagers, among them the people of the village of Husseinieh, who were later housed on land south-east of Damascus. From 1984 onward, Palestinian refugees joined them, many of them moved from Jaramana camp after their homes were demolished. For these families, Husseinieh was a second or third displacement, but never a substitute for Palestine.

The Right of Return

The camp's Palestinian factions still mark Nakba Day on 15 May and Palestinian Prisoners' Day on 17 April, and some of its neighbourhoods carry the names of Palestinian cities, such as Harat Safad and Harat Nablus. 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.
- **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 (1982-2011)

From Golan displaced to Palestinian refugees

Husseiniyeh was established as a residential area in 1982. Its first residents were Syrians displaced from Quneitra and the Golan, along with low-income families from other parts of Syria. In 1983 no more than 200 people lived there. Palestinians were drawn by its closeness to Damascus and by cheap land suitable for building.

The transfers from Jaramana

The largest Palestinian influx came from Jaramana camp, where homes were demolished for the Damascus airport road and other highway projects. Transfers took place in 1984, 1994, 1997 and 2004, and an estimated 8,910 Palestinian refugees were moved from Jaramana to Husseiniyeh. Families from other camps around Damascus also settled there. Electricity arrived in 1985 with the construction of a power station.

Rapid growth

The population grew to about 17,000 by 1995 and about 28,384 at the first official census in 2004. After the Husseiniyeh Suburb Expansion Project, the wider area

held about 90,000 people by 2010, of whom Palestinians made up roughly half or more. Homes were built in stages, close together and often without basic utilities, and responsibility for services was split between the governorates of Quneitra, Rif Dimashq and Damascus, a division that often left services poor.

The War Years (2012-2015)

The Syrian war reached Husseiniyeh in late 2012 and early 2013, as clashes between the former regime's army and armed factions spread through the countryside south of Damascus. On 17 January 2013, regime warplanes fired three rockets at the western side of the camp, killing at least 15 civilians, including seven children, most of them Palestinians, with others buried under the rubble. Further shelling in March 2013 damaged homes, and a mosque in the camp was hit.

During 2013 the camp's residents were forced to leave; sources differ on whether the final displacement came in early or in October 2013. Public institutions and property were damaged, and the nearby Khomeini hospital stopped working for a time. For about two years, the camp's families lived in collective shelters, rented rooms and other areas, or left Syria.

Return and Recovery (2015-2024)

The former regime's army regained control of the area in 2015, and from August 2015 residents began returning. In September 2015 UNRWA reported that more than 4,500 families had returned, about 80% of them Palestine refugees, with up to 300 families arriving each day. Three schools, two of them run by UNRWA, reopened on 13 September 2015 for more than 2,700 students, and UNRWA distributed food parcels, hygiene kits, jerry cans and kitchen sets. In total, about 6,000 Palestinian families returned, in what UNRWA called a rare success story in the Syrian conflict.

Return did not end the camp's hardships. Water, electricity, sewage and roads remained chronic problems, and in 2024 residents were still calling for an electrical transformer to secure drinking water. UNRWA offered microfinance loans for rebuilding and ran youth and women's programmes.

The Current Situation (2025-2026)

With Yarmouk largely destroyed, Husseinieh is now described as the largest Palestinian camp in Syria by population. Since the fall of the former regime in December 2024, its residents have spoken openly of decades of marginalisation, arrests and enforced disappearances, and of hope for reform. But daily life remains hard: in February 2025, electricity came for about an hour in the day and an hour at night, heating fuel was scarce, and a cylinder of cooking gas could cost nearly a month's wages. A local social researcher estimated that 95% of residents live below the poverty line.

Residents also warn of the spread of drug use, especially Captagon, among young people, and call for addiction treatment centres, health centres and paved roads. They want their legal status as refugees preserved to protect their right of return, and the right to own property, which the former regime denied them. Community initiatives continue: in July 2026 the local development committee launched a volunteer campaign called "Let's Leave an Impact".

Origin of the Name

The camp takes its name from the village of **Husseiniyeh** in the occupied Golan, home of many of the Syrians displaced in 1967 who were the area's first residents. The Palestinians who followed adopted the name, calling it "Husseiniyeh Camp" to stress their refugee identity.

Location and Geography

Husseiniyeh lies about 13 km south-east of central Damascus, in the countryside south of the capital. It is bordered by the gathering of al-Dhiyabiyya, home to Syrians displaced from the Golan, to the north; Hosh Qweil, where Damascus's southern cemetery now stands, to the east; residential areas of Najha, beyond the railway, to the south; and the village of Sahiya to the west. Sayyida Zaynab and Qabr Essit camp lie nearby.

Area and Layout

Sources estimate the camp and its surroundings at **3 to 5 km²**, far larger than the official camps. Its streets are narrow and poorly maintained, dusty in summer and muddy in winter. Neighbourhoods include Harat Safad and Harat Nablus, and an older area known as the "old project".

Villages of Origin

According to the Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question, the camp's Palestinian residents trace their origins to:

- The villages of the [Safed](#) district
- The villages of the [Tiberias](#) district
- [Haifa](#) and its surrounding villages
- The village of Sulam

Alongside them live Syrians displaced from the Golan, and the two communities are closely linked by neighbourliness and many mixed marriages.

Population and Demographics

Population figures for Husseiniyeh cover different things: some count only UNRWA-

registered refugees, while others cover all residents of the wider area, Palestinian and Syrian. Registered refugees are not the same as residents.

Population of Husseiniyeh Camp over time

Year	Population	Source
1983	No more than 200	Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question
1995	About 17,000	Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question
2004	About 28,384 (first official census)	Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question
2010	About 90,000 in the wider area; Palestinians about 51–57%	Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question
Before 2013	Nearly 30,000 Palestine refugees and Syrians in the camp	UNRWA
2015	More than 4,500 families returned by September; about 6,000 Palestinian families in total	UNRWA
Current	About 22,000 registered with UNRWA	Encyclopedia of Palestinian Camps

Housing and Infrastructure

Homes were built in stages, crowded together with little privacy. Groundwater is scarce, so families install tanks and pay for costly deliveries. The sewage network has been overhauled, but poor drainage still floods streets in winter. The electricity grid is unreliable, and public transport is lacking, with unstable fares.

Economic Life

Poverty is widespread. Families with a member working for UNRWA are considered the camp's middle class. More than two-thirds of working residents have jobs outside the camp: men mostly as labourers or low-level public employees, and

women often as domestic workers.

Health Situation

The camp has an UNRWA clinic, a state health centre and a paediatric centre that opens once every two weeks, but no hospital nearby: the Khomeini hospital is about 2 km away and the Emirates (Zayed) hospital about 5 km. Sickle cell anaemia, thrombocytopenia, thalassaemia, vitiligo and immune deficiencies are common, and miscarriages and pre-eclampsia are frequent among pregnant women.

Education

UNRWA runs six schools in the camp on a double-shift system, alongside government primary and preparatory schools, one secondary school and several kindergartens. UNRWA's Youth Support Project and women's centre, the Nour Foundation and the Arab Cultural Centre offer educational and social activities.

Frequently Asked Questions About Husseinieh Camp

Where is Husseinieh camp located?

About 13 km south-east of central Damascus, in the countryside south of the capital, near al-Dhiyabiyya and Sayyida Zaynab.

When was Husseinieh camp established?

In 1982, first for Syrians displaced from the Golan; Palestinian refugees began moving there in 1984, many after their homes in Jaramana camp were demolished.

Is Husseinieh an official UNRWA camp?

No. UNRWA does not count it among its official camps, but it runs schools, a clinic and social programmes there.

What happened to Husseinīyeh during the Syrian war?

An airstrike on 17 January 2013 killed at least 15 civilians, most of them Palestinians. Residents were forced out in 2013 and began returning in August 2015; UNRWA called the return a rare success story.

Where do Husseinīyeh's Palestinian refugees come from?

Mainly from the villages of the Safed and Tiberias districts and from Haifa and its surrounding villages.

Conclusion

Husseinīyeh is a camp born of displacement upon displacement: Golan villagers uprooted in 1967, and Palestinian families from Safed, Tiberias and Haifa moved again when their homes in Jaramana were bulldozed. It grew into one of the largest Palestinian communities in Syria, was bombed and emptied in 2013, and came back to life when its people returned in 2015. Today it struggles with poverty, darkness and neglect, but its people still mark Nakba Day each May, and still hold on to the return that no new address can replace.

Sources and References

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- Palestinian Refugees Portal – "Let's Leave an Impact" campaign in Husseinieh (July 2026)
- UN General Assembly Resolutions 194 (III) and 3236 (XXIX)

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