

Ein el-Sultan Refugee Camp



Ein el-Sultan Refugee Camp, Jericho: History, Location, Population and Living Conditions

Ein el-Sultan Camp is a Palestine refugee camp on the northwestern edge of Jericho, in the Jordan Valley. Established in 1948 for refugees driven from their homes during the occupation of Palestine, it once sheltered some 20,000 people. Most of them were displaced a second time, across the Jordan River, during the occupation of the West Bank in 1967. Today it is one of the most spacious camps

in the West Bank, located at the foot of ancient Jericho and next to the spring that gave it its name. This guide covers the camp's history, its name, geography, population and living conditions.

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Quick Facts About Ein el-Sultan Camp

Ein el-Sultan Refugee Camp at a glance

Other spellings	Ein es-Sultan, Ain al-Sultan, Ein Sultan
Country / Region	Palestine, Jordan Valley, eastern West Bank
Governorate	Jericho
Year established	1948

Area	About 0.87 km ² (about 870 dunums), one of the largest camps in the West Bank by area
Population before 1967	About 20,000 refugees (UNRWA)
Population after 1967	About 2,000 remained
Registered refugees today	About 3,000–3,500 (UNRWA, recent years)
Population density	About 4,022 people per km ² , among the lowest of any West Bank camp
Elevation	About 198 metres below sea level
Schools	1 UNRWA school with more than 1,000 pupils
Health facilities	1 UNRWA health centre
Origin of residents	Villages and Bedouin communities of the Lydda, Ramla and Hebron districts, and other parts of Palestine

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 Ein el-Sultan Camp Exists

The story of Ein el-Sultan begins with 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 hundreds of towns and villages were emptied and later destroyed or resettled.

Tens of thousands of refugees from Lydda, Ramla, the Hebron hills and other areas fled east toward the Jordan River. In the Jordan Valley, near the bridges linking the two banks, four large camps grew up: **Aqabat Jabr**, **Ein el-Sultan** and **Nuway'ima** near Jericho, and **Abu al-Ajaj** near al-Jiftlik. Ein el-Sultan quickly became one of the biggest, with tens of thousands of residents living in tents and later mud-brick shelters at the foot of the mountains west of Jericho.

The Right of Return

The **right of return** is the central demand of Ein el-Sultan'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.
- **UN Security Council Resolution 237** (14 June 1967) called for facilitating the return of the inhabitants who had fled the areas of military operations in 1967, which applies directly to the tens of thousands who fled Ein el-Sultan that year.
- **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (Article 13) affirms everyone's right to return to their own country.
- **UN General Assembly Resolution 3236** (1974) reaffirmed the "inalienable right" of Palestinians to return to their homes and property.

For the families who once lived in Ein el-Sultan, return therefore has two dimensions: to the camp they were forced to leave in 1967, and to the villages they lost in 1948.

History of the Camp

A large camp in the Jordan Valley (1948-1967)

Ein el-Sultan was established in 1948 and came under the responsibility of UNRWA when the agency began operations in 1950. Before 1967, about **20,000 refugees** lived in the camp, with some sources putting the number at its founding even higher. In addition to 1948 refugees, the Jericho municipality also relocated some residents of the nearby al-Duyuk area into the camp.

The 1967 exodus

During the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, the camp's position next to the bridges over the Jordan River made it one of the most affected places in the West Bank. **Most of its residents fled or were displaced to Jordan**, leaving only about **2,000 people** behind. Many of them ended up in the new emergency camps set up in Jordan in 1968. The homes they left behind stood empty, and many were later demolished by the occupation authorities.

The First Intifada

Nearly all of the original UNRWA shelters in the camp were damaged during the First Intifada (1987–1993). The reconstruction that followed provided larger shelters, wider streets and more public space.

After the Oslo Accords (1994 onward)

Jericho was the first West Bank city handed over to the Palestinian Authority, under the 1994 Gaza–Jericho Agreement. After the Israeli withdrawal from the city, some families returned and the camp's population rose to **more than 3,500 people**. In 1994 a camp committee was set up by the PLO's Department of Refugee Affairs to manage local affairs.

Origin of the Name "Ein el-Sultan"

The camp is named after **Ein el-Sultan** (عين السلطان), meaning "**the Sultan's Spring**", the main spring of Jericho, which flows next to the camp. The spring has watered the Jericho oasis for thousands of years and is the reason that one of the oldest cities in the world grew up beside it. It is also known as **Elisha's Spring** in Christian tradition.

Location and Geography

Ein el-Sultan Camp lies in the **Jericho Governorate** in the Jordan Valley, on the northwestern edge of Jericho city, about 2.5 km from the city centre. Key features of its location:

- It sits at about **198 metres below sea level**, in one of the lowest inhabited areas on earth.
- It lies next to the ancient mound of **Tell es-Sultan** (ancient Jericho) and the Ein el-Sultan spring.
- The **Mount of Temptation** rises to the west, and the village of **al-Nuway'ima** and the Duyuk area are nearby.
- The Jordan River and the bridge crossing to Jordan lie to the east.

The climate is hot and dry, with very warm summers and mild winters, and very little rainfall.

Area and Land

The camp covers about **0.87 square kilometres**, making it one of the largest camps in the West Bank by area, together with Aqabat Jabr. Some local sources give its original area as about 708 dunums. Because most of its original population left in 1967, its density is only about **4,022 people per square kilometre**, far lower than camps such as Balata or Tulkarm. This gives Ein el-Sultan a more open character than most camps, although recent population growth has pushed residents to build upward.

Places of Origin

The camp's original residents came from many parts of historical Palestine. Most of those who remained after 1967 belong to villages and Bedouin communities of the following districts, depopulated during the occupation of Palestine in 1948:

- [Lydda \(al-Lid\)](#) district
- [Ramla](#) district
- [Hebron](#) district (villages west of the Hebron hills)
- And [other areas](#) of historical Palestine

The memory of these places is kept alive through family names, oral history and annual commemorations of **Nakba Day (15 May)**.

Population and Demographics

Ein el-Sultan's population history is unique among West Bank camps: it shrank dramatically after 1967 and has grown only slowly since.

Population of Ein el-Sultan Camp over time

Year	Population	Source
Before 1967	About 20,000 refugees	UNRWA
After 1967	About 2,000	UNRWA
After 1994	More than 3,500	UNRWA
2015	2,227 registered refugees	UNRWA
2017	4,384 residents (including non-refugees)	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)
2019	About 3,039 registered refugees	UNRWA

The camp's population includes some non-refugees; in 1997, refugees made up about 81% of residents.

Housing and Infrastructure

- **More space than most camps:** post-intifada reconstruction left larger shelters, wider streets and more public space, and many homes have outdoor yards used for recreation.

- **Vertical growth:** recent population growth has led residents to add upper floors.
- **No sewage network:** this is one of the camp's most pressing problems. Residents rely on percolation pits, which cause health problems and high maintenance costs. Building a sewage network is one of UNRWA's main priorities in the West Bank.
- **Solid waste:** the camp's large area makes waste collection a challenge.
- **Heat:** extreme summer temperatures put pressure on water and electricity supplies.

Health Situation

The camp has **one UNRWA health centre** providing primary health care, including reproductive health, infant and child care, immunisations, screening, medical check-ups and treatment. Hospital care is available in Jericho.

Key health challenges

- **Health risks from the lack of sewage:** percolation pits can contaminate the environment and attract insects
- **Heat-related illness** during the long, very hot summers
- **Chronic diseases** such as diabetes and hypertension, as across the West Bank

Economic Situation

Jericho's economy is based on **agriculture** (dates, bananas, citrus and vegetables, thanks to its warm climate and spring water) and **tourism** (ancient sites, the cable car to the Mount of Temptation and winter visitors). Many camp residents work in these sectors, in trade and services, or in public-sector jobs with the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA.

Unemployment and seasonal work remain challenges, and tourism-dependent jobs are hit hard during periods of crisis and movement restrictions.

Social Situation

Ein el-Sultan has a calmer and more open character than most West Bank camps, with more space for families and children. Community life is organised around a **camp committee** set up in 1994, along with mosques, youth activities and UNRWA services.

The camp's defining social experience is the **1967 exodus**, which divided families between the West Bank and Jordan. Many residents have close relatives in Jordan's camps, and family ties across the river remain strong.

Education

UNRWA runs **one school** in the camp, serving **more than 1,000 pupils**. In 2002, two floors were added to the school, including a new library. Secondary students attend government schools in Jericho, and graduates continue to universities across the West Bank.

Heritage and Landmarks Near the Camp

- **Tell es-Sultan (Ancient Jericho):** the ancient mound beside the camp, one of the oldest continuously inhabited sites in the world, with remains going back more than 10,000 years. It was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2023 as part of Palestine.
- **Ein el-Sultan spring:** the spring that gave the camp its name and has watered Jericho for millennia.
- **Mount of Temptation:** the mountain west of Jericho, with a monastery built into its cliffs and a cable car from the foot of Tell es-Sultan.
- **Hisham's Palace:** an Umayyad-era palace complex a short distance

north of Jericho, famous for its mosaics.

Frequently Asked Questions About Ein el-Sultan Camp

Where is Ein el-Sultan camp located?

Ein el-Sultan Camp is on the northwestern edge of Jericho in the Jordan Valley, next to Tell es-Sultan and the Ein el-Sultan spring, about 198 metres below sea level.

When was Ein el-Sultan camp established?

It was established in 1948, after the Nakba, and UNRWA took responsibility for it in 1950.

Why did Ein el-Sultan's population fall so sharply?

About 20,000 refugees lived in the camp before 1967. During the occupation of the West Bank that year, most of them fled or were displaced to Jordan, leaving only about 2,000 behind.

What does "Ein el-Sultan" mean?

It means "the Sultan's Spring", the name of Jericho's main spring, which flows beside the camp.

How big is Ein el-Sultan camp?

It covers about 0.87 square kilometres, one of the largest camps in the West Bank by area, with a low density of about 4,022 people per square kilometre.

What is the main problem in Ein el-Sultan camp?

One of the most pressing issues is the lack of a sewage network. Residents rely on percolation pits, which cause health problems and high costs.

Conclusion

Ein el-Sultan is a camp shaped by two exiles. Built in 1948 for refugees from Lydda, Ramla, Hebron and beyond, it grew into one of the largest camps in the West Bank, then lost most of its people in 1967 when they were displaced again across the Jordan River. Today it is a quieter, more spacious community at the foot of ancient Jericho, still facing unmet needs such as a sewage network, and still holding onto the right of return of the families who lived there and of those scattered across the river.

Sources and References

- [UNRWA – Ein el-Sultan Camp profile](#)
- Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ), Ein el-Sultan Camp profile
- Institute for Palestine Studies – history of the Jordan Valley camps
- UN General Assembly Resolutions 194 (III) and 3236 (XXIX); UN Security Council Resolution 237 (1967)

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