

Briefing Paper
**Canada's Support to Policy Research Initiatives on the
Palestinian Refugee Issue**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada's "International Development Research Centre" (IDRC), is a research donor organization which has worked since 1992 to support Canada's role in the Middle East Peace Process and in particular Canada's role as Gavel-holder of the Refugee Working Group (RWG) in the multilateral negotiations. To that end, the "Expert and Advisory Services Fund" (EASF) was set up in IDRC and designed to support the research and development aspects of the multilateral negotiations. In its most recent phase, the EASF has had as its primary objective to produce knowledge and increase capacity for policy planning and coordination by Middle Eastern parties on the refugee issue as they seek to find and implement sustainable solutions to the refugee problem.

The work of the EASF is possible with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and IDRC and in coordination with the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAIT) and CIDA.

The refugee issue remains, and will always remain, a key component of any just and lasting resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli and Arab-Israeli conflicts. Over the years, IDRC programming has strived to adapt to a dynamic (and often deteriorating) situation in the Middle East. IDRC programming complements Canada's work in search of a mutually-acceptable negotiated resolution of the Palestinian refugee issue. Canada heads the RWG, is a major donor to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), and continues to chair meetings of the "No-Name Group" (NNG) of key donor countries.

IDRC works through formal project support and through the networks, informal dialogues, and quiet linkages fostered by IDRC work. IDRC-supported work on refugee compensation has helped shape past negotiations and continues to support an array of research that would likely inform any future negotiations on the topic. IDRC encouraged and supported work undertaken by the World Bank on refugee repatriation and development, as well as later work by international scholars on the same issue. IDRC supported Palestinian policy coordination on the refugee issue prior to the last Palestinian elections as well as efforts to engage Palestinian and Israeli public opinion on this file. IDRC has also supported and continues to support extensive dialogue between Palestinians and host countries and is recently focusing on supporting the momentum of recent breakthroughs in Palestinian-Lebanese relations.

This briefing paper will provide a summary of recent work by the EASF-IDRC on the refugee issue. The summary with an indicative list of projects, is divided in five sections: compensation to Palestinian refugees as part of a comprehensive solution, planning for repatriation of refugees into a Palestinian state, engagement of Palestinian and Israeli public opinion, focus on host country issues and other relevant projects.

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The following is an indicative list of the activities of the EASF-IDRC in the areas of compensation, absorption, public opinion and host country issues.

Compensation and Reparations

1- IDRC Workshop in 1999

In July 1999, IDRC and McGill University organized a taboo-breaking workshop on the issue of compensation to Palestinian refugees as part of a comprehensive solution. Israeli, Palestinian and international experts held discussions on very detailed aspects of compensation, including the legal dimensions of compensation, relevant domestic and international law and precedents, the calculation of Palestinian claims, finding the resources, adjudicating and distributing compensation, eligibility in the Palestinian case and finally the political constraints to compensation. The meeting helped Canada define its research agenda on the subject for the coming years and the theme of compensation and reparations became a focus area for Canada.

<http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/MEPP/PRRN/prcomp.html>

2- Property restitution and compensation mechanisms - IOM

Drawing on its reparation programmes experience, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has prepared a number of comparative studies on legal and technical aspects relating to the planning, design and implementation of property restitution and compensation mechanisms. These studies have analyzed the actual practices of previous and ongoing claims mechanisms and the experiences gained therein, and they have outlined different options that may be considered for the design and implementation of a possible future reparation scheme to address Palestinian refugee issues. In addition, IOM has developed and conducted workshops on different aspects of claims programmes, in particular the management of data and IT support in claims processes in order to enhance preparatory efforts of Palestinian and Israeli interlocutors in this area.

A separate briefing paper on the work of the IOM including proposed future work is provided for the RCF meeting.

3- IDRC Publication on compensation and reparations – in progress

IDRC and Rex Brynen of McGill University plan on collaborating on an edited publication on the issue of compensation and reparations. The objective is to put in the public domain research undertaken to date on various aspects of compensation. The edited volume will include chapters on the UNCCP property archives, the Israeli archives, the Palestinian and Israeli negotiation position, the link between compensation, repatriation and development, valuation issues and role of oral history in claims mechanisms, compensation to host countries and lessons learned from IOM comparative work on mechanisms.

Repatriation and Development

4- World Bank studies

The EASF has contributed to World Bank studies in 2000 and 2002 on the issue of repatriation and development which represented the first attempt at major economic planning in anticipation of permanent status arrangements. The studies aimed to gain a better understanding of the technical issues that would need to be addressed as agreed solutions to the refugees issue are implemented; and to examine the likely costs of different proposals to inform the discussion on what is feasible and over what time frame. The findings from the World Bank paper on infrastructure and housing is available in a recent IDRC publication on the issue of repatriation and development.

http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-107711-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

5- GIS mapping of land ownership in the West Bank – Ministry of Planning

This 2005 project built a comprehensive GIS for land ownership classification in the West Bank in 2004 and was managed by the Ministry of Planning. The product is valuable because of its potential usefulness for the development of a Palestinian land registration system in the West Bank. Such a system can in turn assist with urban development and land use planning at local, regional and national levels, including plans for absorption of refugees in the WBG. The MoP now has a copy of the database and the GIS. The GIS system was also transferred to the Palestinian Land Authority, which was given three workstations and training on management of the system.

6- Absorption/integration framework- Ministry of Planning and Citizenship and Immigration Canada

At the request of the Ministry of Planning, initial support was provided by Citizenship and Immigration Canada in 2006 for the design of a Palestinian absorption/integration framework, involving local authorities and civil society in the absorption of Palestinian returnees. The work was stopped in the wake of the Hamas electoral win.

7- Comparative work on repatriation: Workshop and Publication by Mick Dumper of Exeter University

In June 2004, IDRC and DFID funded an international workshop entitled "Transferring Best Practice: the comparative study of refugee return programmes with reference to the Palestinian context". The workshop was organized by Prof. Mick Dumper at Exeter University in England. The workshop led to a recent publication "Palestinian Refugee Repatriation: Global Perspectives", published by Routledge and which presents a serious analysis of the issues involved in the complex operation of repatriation. It draws on international experience and explores policy options that could be developed and potentially applied to the Palestinian case.

<http://www.huss.exeter.ac.uk/politics/staff/dumper/research.php>

http://www.routledge.com/shopping_cart/products/product_detail.asp?sku=&isbn=9780415385503&parent_id=&pc=/shopping_cart/search/search.asp?search%3Ddumper

8- IDRC Publication on Challenges of Repatriation and Development

IDRC and I.B.Tauris recently published an edited book by Roula El-Rifai (IDRC) and Rex Brynen (McGill University) titled: *Palestinian Refugees: Challenges of Repatriation and Development*. The book was a result of the 2003 IDRC Stocktaking conference on Palestinian refugee research and tackles the challenges of refugee repatriation to the West Bank and Gaza: how it might be done, the potential costs, the possible ways of addressing it, and future areas of research. It explores the potential social and economic effects from refugee repatriation and absorption, and the various policy options that could be adopted in light of such occurrences.

http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-107711-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

9- Research on Israeli settlements and potential for housing refugees by the Foundation for Middle East Peace

The Foundation for Middle East Peace (FMEP) finalized in 2006 research which tried to answer the question: In the event of their evacuation, to what degree are the currently existing housing assets in Israeli settlements suitable for Palestinian use? To that end, a comprehensive database on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories was developed and provided detailed information on assets in all settlements in the West Bank (including Jerusalem) and Gaza. FMEP mapped and described eight scenarios for settlement evacuation in the West Bank (including east Jerusalem); identified and mapped those parts of the WBG that the Palestinian Authority itself believes are most suitable for the contemplated expansion of housing resources for Palestinians and finally examined the degree to which every settlement and each evacuation scenario offer suitable housing opportunities for Palestinians. This analysis on the utility of settlements for Palestinians was based on principles and plans generated by Palestinians. It questioned the assumptions that evacuated settlements represent a natural and self-evident value to the Palestinian community; that the transition from Israeli to Palestinian use would be a natural and seamless one; and that refugees are the most logical inheritors of housing vacated by settlers.

http://www.fmep.org/settlement_info/settlement_database.html

Public opinion engagement

10- Engaging refugees in Al-Jalazone camp on the 'Right of Return' by Panorama

In 2005, by the Ramallah-based Panorama Center managed a project aimed at engaging refugees in Al-Jalazone refugee camp in the Ramallah area in discussion about the detailed aspects of solutions to the refugee issue, including right of return. The project was supervised by a committee which included camp representatives from the West Bank. Educational material was developed and shared with refugees through focus groups and interviews were conducted with refugee leaders. A report on the lessons learned from this exercise was prepared and showed the difficulty in engagement with refugees on final status issues in the absence of a real momentum in the peace process.

http://www.panoramacenter.org/project_details1.asp?data=more

11- PLO Department of Refugee Affairs 'Information Unit'

An „Information Unit’ in the PLO Department of Refugee Affairs (DoRA) was set up and operated for one year in 2005. The purpose of the Unit information was to activate the mandate of DoRA to be the main official link between Palestinian policy-makers and the Palestinian refugee community. It was also meant to help DoRA be a conduit of information about the refugee issue, listen to the views of refugees and convey them to policy-makers and negotiators. The unit produced newsletters, briefs, and held several workshops at DoRA on the issue of participation of refugee camps in municipal elections. The Unit also produced a weekly radio show to discuss various issues, including allowing refugee voices to be heard. A second phase of the information unit was under discussion with IDRC but were not pursued following the 2006 Palestinian elections.

12- Aix Group on refugees: discussing the economic dimensions of a two-state solution by the Peres Center for Peace and the DATA Institute

IDRC will provide partial funding to the Aix Group, a network of working groups comprised of Palestinian, Israeli, and international academics, experts, economists, and policy makers whose purpose is to provide a forum for discussion to share perspectives on economic issues related to future permanent arrangements between the two sides. The group was formed four years ago under the auspices of the Université Paul Cézanne-Aix-Marseille III in France, and in coordination with the Peres Center for Peace in Israel and DATA Center for Studies and Research in the Palestinian Authority, in order to develop a vision of future economic relations between Israelis and Palestinians. The Aix Group is divided into four working groups: (1) Cooperation and Infrastructure; (2) Cooperation in Jerusalem; (3) Refugees; and (4) "Fast Track". These groups will meet in the Middle East and abroad over a two-year period. IDRC will provide funding towards the Refugees group. The EC provides the bulk of the funding for this initiative.

The Aix Group has already published two position papers: „Economic Roadmap’ and „Israel and Palestine: Between Disengagement and the Economic Roadmap”.

<http://www.aixgroup.org/downloads.html>

Host country focus

13- Chatham House regional dialogue on the refugee issue

IDRC and the EC have been funding for the last six years a Chatham House project which stresses the regional approach to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the refugee issue in particular. Through a series of workshops, meetings and scenario-building exercises, Chatham House aims to maintain inter-Arab dialogue on the Palestinian refugee issue in absence of and in preparation for the resumption of formal negotiations and to provide an informal mechanism to bridge some of the communication gaps that exist between parties directly concerned with the refugee issue and between them and international policy players. This project led to the creation of a sustainable network of contacts for participants from the donor community and from the region. It has been an important forum for the Lebanese and the Syrians and refugees from these countries to have their voice heard by Palestinian policy- makers.

14- Capacity-building of the Prime Minister's office in Lebanon on the refugee issue

This project which began in February 2007 aims to assist the Government of Lebanon to develop a coordinated policy on the Palestinian refugee issue with stakeholders in Lebanon and internationally, through the creation and support for a unit to be led by Ambassador Makkawi in the Prime Minister's Office. Ambassador Makkawi was appointed by the Lebanese Prime Minister to head the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC), which is made up of representatives from the various Lebanese ministries working on the Palestinian file. The aim of the Unit is to help the GoL develop a comprehensive policy on the refugee issue and to enhance the Government's ability to consult and coordinate with various stakeholders in Lebanon and internationally with the objective of improving living conditions of Palestinian refugees.

15- Employment study in Lebanon by Norway's Fafo (including a focus on professional associations)

The FAFO Institute of Applied Social Science in Oslo, Norway, has long been a partner to the EASF-IDRC and the Gavel of the RWG through their surveys on Palestinian communities in the West Bank and Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria and their participation in No-Name Group meetings and Chatham House meetings.

The latest collaboration between FAFO and the EASF is a recent study which began in May 2007. The study aims to understand the capacity of Palestinian professionals to enter the Lebanese labour market and assess the obstacles they face. The study had some delays due to the recent crisis in Lebanon but data collection is now completed and analysis of data underway. This study is part of a larger Fafo study on the issue of employability of Palestinians in Lebanon which was requested by the Lebanese Minister of Labour.

16- Legal study on Palestinian refugees in Lebanon by the Human Development Center

The Human Development Center (HDC) in Lebanon is a Palestinian NGO which is producing research on the legal status of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and the impact of their status on living conditions of refugees. The study is now completed in Arabic and is being translated into English and French. The study provides an inventory of Lebanese laws governing refugees since 1948, analysing them from a legal and human rights perspective. It makes recommendations about ways to improve living conditions of refugees. The report will be presented to Lebanese policymakers and civil society in late May.

17- Study on the Palestinian community in Jordan by Al-Quds Centre for Political Studies

This research project, managed by the Al-Quds Centre for Political Studies in Jordan started this summer. The project is examining the modalities of integration of Palestinian refugees and displaced in Jordan through the study of their legal status, the impact of host state policies on their living conditions, and their adaptation methods. The study endeavours to contribute to constructive dialogue between the Palestinian communities, the Jordanian government and civil society. The research is ongoing.

18- Palestinian-Jordanian relations in Jordan – in progress - Jordanian Center for Strategic Studies

This planned study aims to present concrete recommendations and options for the nature of both community and state relations between Jordanians and Palestinians. This will be done through identifying attitudes and perceptions among the citizens of Palestinian and Jordanian origins towards each other. The trends in the levels of integration and polarization in the relationship between the two communities will be studied as well as the political, socio-economic and cultural factors that led to higher levels of integration or polarization. This study also aims to identify the possible scenarios that can take place on the Palestinian-Israeli track and testing the possible impact each scenario may have on Jordan, and in particular on the relationship between the two communities.

Other Relevant Projects

19- Supporting Palestinian policy coordination on refugees – Refugee Coordination Group(RCG)

This capacity-building project which ran from 2001 to 2005 aimed to support policy coordination efforts of the Refugee Coordination Group, a body created by a decree of Abu Mazen in 2001 and comprising the four primary Palestinian institutions working on the refugee file: Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the PLO Department of Refugee Affairs (DORA) and the Negotiation Affairs Department (NAD/Negotiation Support Unit NSU). The objective was to contribute to a more effective Palestinian negotiation position in final status talks and assist the Palestinian Authority to effectively undertake and manage planning on the Palestinian refugee issue. A Secretariat for the RCG was created with three staff with the purpose of managing existing knowledge on refugee issue, facilitating coordination among key stakeholders, liaising with donors, and facilitating future studies. The project closed in 2005.

20- Refugee and Migration Resource Unit at Birzeit University

This is a multi-phased project which began in February 2007 with the establishment of a Refugee and Migration Resource Unit at Birzeit University, with planned activities including the setting up of a resource center and international comparative workshops on the Palestinian refugee issue. A second phase will focus more on developing the research and policy analysis and a third phase aims to establish a forced migration and refugee studies program at the graduate level. The objective is to build local capacity on the refugee issue, encourage policy research and comparative research, as well as to train a generation of young researchers on the refugee question.

21- Study on impact of integration of Hamas in political system on peace process - Palestine Center for Survey and Policy Research (PSR)

IDRC is funding PSR to conduct a study of Hamas' organizational structure, leadership, socio-economic and political activities, decision-making processes and constituency. PSR will examine the new dynamics within Hamas focussing on three areas: domestic politics, social agenda and peace building and how the group approaches the two-state solution, role of violence and Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, including attitudes on the Palestinian refugee issue. The research began in March and the principle question that will be addressed is the extent to which Hamas' integration will lead to moderation in its political and social attitudes and policies.

22- Palestinian Refugee ResearchNet by McGill University

The IDRC-supported Palestinian Refugee ResearchNet (PRRN) project has emerged as a major global resource on the Palestinian refugee issue, with more than 132,000 visitors to its website to date. More than 350 scholars, officials, NGOs, and journalists are members of PRRN “FOFOGNET” and PALDEV email lists, creating a global network of key individuals working on this issue.

<http://www.prrn.org>

23- Scholarship Fund for Palestinian Refugee Women in Lebanon

This Project, an initiative of the Canadian Gavel holder of the RWG, is a multi-donor project that is managed by IDRC and UNRWA in Lebanon and began in 2000. The objective is to support Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon in pursuit of undergraduate university degrees in that country. It aims to ensure that these women, with good academic records and whose social and economic circumstances could compel them to abandon their studies, will instead complete their degrees. To date, 180 Palestinian refugee women have benefited from the Scholarship Fund and many have excelled in their studies and are studying in a variety of fields such as engineering, mathematics, dentistry and computer science. A total of 77 students have now graduated, 33 of them last June, and most are working. To date, a total of US\$2.4 million has been raised. CIDA and The State of Qatar are major donors to the Fund. Other donors include the OPEC Fund for International Development, the United States, France, Spain and IDRC. A committee made up of IDRC and UNRWA staff as well as experts in education from the Palestinian community in Lebanon selects scholars annually and oversees the operation of the Fund. This model has now been emulated by other scholarship programs funded by the EC and Japan.

http://www.idrc.ca/mesi/ev-26771-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

24- Stocktaking conferences on Palestinian refugee research

IDRC has organized two major Stocktaking conferences on Palestinian Refugee Research, one in December 1997 in coordination with Rex Brynen of McGill University and one in 2003. The objectives of these conference were to take stock and critically review the research undertaken on the refugee issue; identify gaps in knowledge and set future research priorities as well as to bring as much research on the Palestinian refugee issue as possible into the public domain. Summary reports on the proceedings are available on IDRC’s website as well as list of participants and discussion papers.

As a result of the 2003 conference, an edited volume on the issue of absorption was published (reference above) and another one on compensation is forthcoming.

http://www.idrc.ca/mesi/ev-32587-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

http://www.idrc.ca/mesi/ev-32588-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

For further information on any of these projects, please contact:

Roula El-Rifai
Senior Program Specialist
Middle East Special Initiatives
International Development Research Center (IDRC)
TEL: 613 - 236-6163 ext. 2330
FAX: 613 - 563-0815
EMAIL: relrifai@idrc.ca
<http://www.idrc.ca/mesi/>

Maurizio Iellina
Program Assistant
Middle East Special Initiatives
International Development Research Center (IDRC)
TEL: 613 - 236-6163 ext. 2041
FAX: 613 - 563-0815
EMAIL: miellina@idrc.ca
<http://www.idrc.ca/mesi/>