

Palestinian Diaspora: Germany



PFBA

إتحاد جمعيات رجال الأعمال الفلسطينيين

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❖ The Germany country profile: Facts:

- **Full name: Federal Republic of Germany**
- **Population: 82 million (UN, 2012)**
- **Capital: Berlin**
- **Area: 357,027 sq km (137,849 sq miles)**
- **Major language: German**
- **Major religion: Christianity**
- **Life expectancy: 78 years (men), 83 years (women) (UN)**
- **Monetary unit: 1 euro = 100 cents**
- **Main exports: Motor vehicles, electrical machinery, metals**
- **GNI per capita: US \$44,230 (World Bank, 2011)**
- **Internet domain: .de**
- **International dialling code: +49**

1. NUMBERS OF PALESTINIANS

➤ **Palestinians in Germany, (Source: Lemen, 2000):**

Palestinians reside mainly in major German cities and suburbs. Most families work hard to earn their living and the majority do not receive government handouts or welfare benefits. Most members of the community work in the medical and engineering sectors, and some in commerce and other fields that do not require special training.

Accurate statistics about the number of Palestinians in Germany do not exist because the term ‘Palestinian nationality’ does not exist in official German records. Most Palestinians, including those seeking to settle in Germany, often hold passports from the countries they come from. According to the figures of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the number of

Palestinians may reach 100,000, with 25,000 of them residing in Berlin.

Palestinian researcher Monica Khadour, who works for the Palestinian Refugee Department in Berlin, says that 72.5% of all Palestinians living in Berlin hail from Palestinian camps in Lebanon, and the rest come from Syrian and West Bank camps. According to official German figures released in 2000, immigrants designated as ‘unknown nationality’ are estimated at 47,439, out of whom 35,579 come from Lebanon. One-third of all Palestinians were born in Germany. Lebanese researcher Ralph Al-Ghadban estimates their number to be around 80,000, with 20,000–25,000 living in Berlin. 60% of all Palestinians are fully naturalized.

2. CONCENTRATION

➤ 72.5% of all Palestinians living in Berlin (*Source: Lemen, 2000*).

3. PALESTINIAN HISTORICAL MIGRATION WAVES

Palestinians arrived in Germany in four different stages (Source: Lemen, 2000).:

✓ The first stage began a few years after the end of the Second World War and consisted mainly of few hundred students. In the early 1960s, another batch of immigrants came to the country, again consisting mainly of students who were seeking higher education. They numbered around 3,000 individuals. Most of them, trained as doctors and engineers, married Germans and settled in the country after graduation, where they fully assimilated into society. Their relations with other community members were limited to personal friends from their school days. The same can be said about Arab immigrants who arrived around the same time. German society was still narrow and new ideas and traditions were not easily accepted. Faced with German indifference, newcomers had no other choice but to merge into German society. The absence of effective organizations to help these newcomers keep and hold on to their original identities facilitated this trend.

✓ The second wave of immigrants came to the country in the late 1960s and early 1970s and was characterized by their diverse composition. While the first newcomers consisted mainly of students, the second, mainly hailing from Palestine and Jordan, came to live and work in the country, often accompanied by their families.

The presence of some Palestinian women had a profound effect and helped preserve Palestinian traditions and customs.

✓ The third wave of immigrants took place during the late 1970s and early 1980s especially after the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war and the fall of the Tel-Al-Za'tar refugee camp in 1976. The influx of immigrants increased after the Israeli invasion of south Lebanon and the demolition of Al-Nabatiyeh refugee camp. Subsequent events accelerated the rate of immigration especially the

invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the Sabra and Shatila massacres in the same year and the ‘war of the refugees’ between 1985-1987. Whole families entered the country and settled mainly in West Berlin. Unlike previous waves, students comprised only a small number.

- ✓ The fourth wave arrived in Germany from Kuwait via Jordan in the early 1990s after the second Gulf war. It consisted predominantly of unskilled youths who were mainly seeking employment.

It’s worth noting here that immigrants in the first wave were not immediately awarded asylum because according to German authorities, prerequisites for asylum were not completely met and hence 95% of all such applications were declined. This policy conforms with a law enacted in 1995 which deals with stateless refugees. In 1985, this law was amended to make it harder for Palestinian refugees to enter and settle in the country. All Palestinians sponsored by UNRWA were denied the right to asylum. This law was adopted by the federal government under items 30, 85 and 9C in accordance with article 16GG of the Republic Law. This law caused a lot of social unrest among Palestinians. Stiff opposition by religious and human rights organizations forced the government to reverse its position. All who had been living in the country for five years or more were granted full citizenship.

4. SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS FOR PALESTINIANS

The greater number of Palestinians in Germany reside in Hanover, Munich, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Essen, Cologne, Bonn, Vupertal and Berlin.

Unlike Palestinians who arrived in Germany in the 1980s when work conditions were difficult and laws were stringent, those who came to Germany in the 1960s easily obtained residency permits. Employment opportunities were abundant and some made good money and returned home; the rest stayed in the country and assimilated

smoothly into society. They were more skilled than the Turks who lived in their ghettos and walled themselves off from the rest.

It is worthy to mention that Arab university graduates, including Palestinian doctors, engineers and lawyers, have exclusively held good positions at hospitals, clinics and governmental departments. Non-graduates have worked as food sellers or in unskilled jobs (Source: Lemen, 2000).

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