

GAZA SITUATION REPORT 125

06 January 2016



The title photo shows Fatima al Zaza watering a plant in her newly reconstructed home in eastern Gaza city. More than one year after the devastating conflict, in October 2015 the Zaza refugee family was the first in Gaza to [complete the reconstruction](#) of their totally demolished home, with support from UNRWA.

Special edition: 2015 in reflection | Issue 125

UNRWA starts the beginning of the year 2016 with a reflection on 12 months of intensive efforts to provide Palestine refugees in Gaza with support and assistance. The year 2015 remained overshadowed by the aftermath of the devastating 2014 conflict, an initially slow reconstruction process and the related ongoing displacement crisis. Eight years of the blockade and protracted economic and environmental issues remain or have worsened, having a significant and devastating impact on families. Despite the fact that financial support to the Agency did not keep pace with an increased demand for services caused by growing numbers of registered refugees, deepening poverty and expanding need, UNRWA – the largest United Nations organization in Gaza – has maintained its core operations and quality services. During the first half of the 2015/2016 school year, the Agency continued to provide quality education to over 250,000 students enrolled in 257 UNRWA schools, and 435 refugee youth in its Vocational Training Centres. It distributed food aid on a quarterly basis to almost 900,000 refugees and continued its camp improvement projects in eight refugee camps in Gaza. UNRWA found ways to address the urgent shelter needs of Palestine refugee families through re-housing projects as well as its self-help shelter repair programme through which it has disbursed over US\$ 140.6 million to provide over 13,240 refugee families with rental subsidies, and almost 80,000 families with payments for repair works or reconstruction. Despite obstacles and difficulties throughout 2015, UNRWA remained committed to ensuring continued quality services for Palestine refugees, almost three quarters of the population in Gaza, until a just and fair solution to their plight is found.

JANUARY

2015 commenced with extreme weather conditions in Gaza, with the Storm Huda starting to be felt on the afternoon of 6 January. Winter temperatures dropped to 7-8 degrees Celsius during the day and media reports indicated at least five deaths during this period – two of which were confirmed as being due to [the cold and lack of adequate shelter](#). 23 families, or 151 internally displaced persons (IDPs), were relocated to UNRWA Collective Centres (CCs) after their war damaged homes were affected by the severe wind and rain. In January, UNRWA still hosted a total of 14,422 IDPs in 15 CCs across the Gaza Strip. As a result of the continuing displacement, 90 per cent of the then 252 UNRWA schools in Gaza were running on a double shift basis, and some even on triple shift. As a result, refugee children in Gaza continued to receive a truncated education with little or no opportunity to engage in recreational or creative pursuits. As an innovative measure to address the ongoing displacement crisis and to provide shelter to more families, UNRWA in January piloted a project to complete partially finished buildings in 10 housing units in Beit Hanoun (northern Gaza) for IDP families by offering the owners a payment equivalent to two years of rental subsidy to complete the housing unit. The small initiative served to increase the stock of housing units in Gaza, as well as to reduce the number of IDP families remaining inside CCs and tented camps. As of 22 January, UNRWA had disbursed more than US\$ 77 million in payments to Palestine refugees as part of its self-help shelter repair programme launched after the 2014 conflict. Due to lack of sufficient funding, in the end of January the Agency had to halt its shelter programme after it had spent its last available dollar on repairs and temporary shelter cash assistance, with no new funding pledged or in the bank. UNRWA announced it urgently required US\$ 100 million in the first quarter of 2015 to allow all affected families to finalize repairs to their homes and for TSCA (transitional rental cash assistance) for those with uninhabitable homes.

FEBRUARY

In February the UNRWA Microfinance Department announced that over the course of 2014, it had disbursed 2,967 loans worth approximately US\$ 4,768,590 through its seven credit initiatives. Forty per cent of these were for female entrepreneurs and 13 per cent to clients below the age of 24. The department's programme aims to improve the quality of life of small business owners, micro-entrepreneurs and poor households through the provision of credit and other financial services. In February more than 1,000 UNRWA teachers across the Gaza Strip successfully completed a specialized Risk Education training on how to teach UNRWA students the dangers of explosive remnants of war (ERW), left behind from the July/August 2014 hostilities, in efforts to limit further casualties and raise awareness. The extensive amount of ERW's remained a significant challenge and concern for UNRWA and communities in Gaza; it was estimated that over 60,000 explosive projectiles including grenades and aerial bombs were fired into Gaza during the conflict – one for every six square metres – with a likely failure rate of at least 10 per cent. This posed and still poses a significant risk for the population, particularly children. UNRWA expected some 240,000 children attending the Agency's schools would be reached through the teachers who attended the specialized Risk Education training. A highlight in February was the laying of the cornerstone at the opening of Phase Three of the Saudi Rehousing Project in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip. The Saudi Rehousing Project is UNRWA's largest refugee rehousing project and phase three will include 220 houses accommodating 1,310 Palestine refugees. The project is set for completion in March 2016.

MARCH

In March, UNRWA commenced the provision of hot meals for internally displaced persons (IDPs) [living in its Collective Centres \(CCs\)](#), until their closure in June 2015. The meals were provided on a daily basis in the following rations: rice and lentils, rice and chicken, or rice, vegetables and meat. In total, from October 2014 until June 2015 UNRWA would provide 665,670 food rations, 282,904 hot meals, 78,209 non-food items and 25.2 million cubic metres of potable water to IDPs living in CCs across Gaza. In March, UNRWA was also pleased to announce a new born in the Ibn Khaldoun CC in Rafah. On 8 March [UNRWA celebrated International Women's Day](#) under the theme "Empower Women, Empower Humanity... Picture it!" In celebration of this day, the Agency teamed up with local artists to paint murals across the Gaza Strip. The eye-catching images illustrated women in Gaza working as musicians, judges, engineers, football players and taxi drivers. Three days later, on 11 March, [UNRWA opened a newly constructed Health Centre](#) in Rafah to serve Palestine refugees across the southern Gaza Strip. Also in March, UNRWA opened the last of a total of 83 school buildings impacted by the 2014 summer hostilities, and, as part of its continued early recovery response to the 2014 summer conflict, the Agency commenced an exceptional food distribution for families who were not (yet) receiving the regular quarterly UNRWA food assistance. Another ongoing response to the difficult socio-economic situation in Gaza, and a beacon of hope for young Palestine refugees was and still is the new social enterprise [GGateway](#), an UNRWA pilot project as part of the Agency's ongoing commitment to enhancing employment prospects for young Palestine refugees in Gaza.

The social enterprise leverages the short and medium-term IT needs of UNRWA into a permanent part of the Gaza employment infrastructure. The initiative is designed to help young IT graduates gain work experience and employability training, and create new opportunities within the devastated Gaza economy.

APRIL

In April, 728 women participated in a graduation ceremony for the [UNRWA Young Women Leadership Programme \(YWLP\)](#) in Gaza City. The UNRWA Gender Initiative launched the YWLP in 2011, seeking to better equip fresh graduates from university with skills in leadership, interviewing and negotiation, English language, computer use, and access to three-month intern positions within the private and non-government sectors in Gaza. Over the past three years, 3,124 graduates between 22 and 28 years old have benefited from the programme. UNRWA also [commemorated the Arab Orphans Day on 5 April](#) and distributed clothes and bags to over 2,000 orphans across Gaza. During this month, the Agency also launched a 14-month project that provides [special educational and psychological support](#) – including the provision of assistive devices – to injured refugee students at UNRWA schools, and if necessary at their homes, across the Gaza Strip. UNRWA also continued with its regular Community Mental Health Programme (CMHP) for children in UNRWA schools and Collective Centres. Some 18,700 refugee children received individual counselling and over 21,000 students took part in specialized CMHP group counselling sessions from July 2014 to April 2015. Further, in April UNRWA Regional Youth Ambassador for Palestine Refugees, Mohammed Assaf, performed in an event on the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, held under the theme 'More than Mines'. The last conflict has left an estimated [7,000 Explosive Remnants of War](#) (ERW) and other hazards buried amid the rubble, a significantly higher level of contamination than in previous conflicts. Another highlight in April was a [town hall meeting in Deir El Balah refugee camp](#) on 15 April during which UNRWA announced the commencement of a new and innovative camp improvement pilot project, generously funded in advance of a project design, with a dedicated US\$ 40 million from the Gulf Cooperation Council for the Reconstruction of Gaza through the Islamic Development Bank.

MAY

In May, UNRWA started the process of allocating housing units in the Khan Younis Relocation Project to selected refugee families, [based on its co-signing policy between husbands and wives](#). The project, funded by the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent with US\$ 19.7 million, offers 600 housing units in total. Large numbers of Palestinian shelters in Gaza have been either damaged in repeated armed conflicts or have deteriorated due to widespread poverty and the related limited access to financial means to repair them and the required construction material due to the Israeli imposed blockade on Gaza since 2007. On 19 May was the last school day for UNRWA students prior to the start of the annual exams marking the end of a school year that had started two weeks late due to the 2014 summer conflict. The 2014/2015 school year has been a tough one for students and teachers; overcrowded classrooms and the memories of the unparalleled devastation caused by the July/August 2014 hostilities have affected both students and their teachers. Another important development in May was the resuming of the poverty assessment home visits by UNRWA, implementing an improved and reformed [Poverty Assessment System](#) that ensures that food assistance continues to be delivered to those who need it most. Over a period of one year, the Agency had [engaged in an intensive effort](#) to improve the quality, fairness and rapidity of this process.

JUNE

In the beginning of June, UNRWA started implementing its comprehensive community engagement approach - as the first stage of its [Deir El Balah camp improvement pilot project](#) - with the holding of the first of a [total of 28 focus group meetings](#) with different community groups. On 8 June UNRWA [commenced its Summer Learning Programme \(SLP\)](#) to further support students who have failed Arabic, Mathematics or both in their previous exams in the end of May 2015. The programme ran for 18 days after which the students were able to sit the SLP final exams on 29 and 30 June. UNRWA also started piloting an English Language Speaking and Listening Skills Training for male and female 8th graders in 9 of its schools across the Gaza Strip to support high-achieving students. The training began on 8 June and targeted 300 students across Gaza who wanted to improve their oral skills and gain confidence with English as a foreign language. The participants were tutored by 63 volunteer teachers who worked with the students three times per week for 30 to 35 hours in total. On 17 June, UNRWA closed its [last two remaining Collective Centres in the Gaza Strip](#). This followed a period of nine months, during which UNRWA has supported families who were unable to move to alternative shelter solutions. One day later, the Agency launched its global [#SOS4Gaza](#) campaign that featured [seven children from Beach refugee camp](#) in Gaza city, who put messages expressing their hopes and dreams in bottles, which they sent to sea. The campaign reached out to a global audience with a message of hope and charity during Ramadan, by donating to UNRWA's education programme in Gaza. Also in June the Agency reported that - with secured funding to reconstruct the totally demolished homes of 200 refugee families from the German Government - it had submitted a list with 86 families to the Palestinian Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) to be uploaded to the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism online database (GRAMMS) after UNRWA, in close collaboration with the Shelter Cluster and sister UN agencies, finalized technical developments with Israeli counterparts on a residential stream - serving the reconstruction of fully destroyed homes - under the GRM.

JULY

8 July marked one year since the commencement of the 2014 conflict in Gaza. As a reminder of the continuing dire situation, and in line with the one year anniversary of the escalation of hostilities, UNRWA launched a campaign entitled [50 voices for 50 days of conflict: Gaza in its own words](#) to give voice to displaced mothers, frightened children, frustrated fathers, brave UNRWA staff members, hopeful teenagers, dreaming students, struggling business owners and young talented poets. In July, UNRWA was finally able to assist the first 35 refugee families with the reconstruction of their totally destroyed homes. During July - to support the livelihoods of fishermen in Gaza - the UNRWA Gaza Training Centre (GTC), in agreement with the Gaza Syndicate of Marine Fishers, launched short-term vocational training courses to support young fishermen. Courses were offered in external fishing engine maintenance, electrical networks installation and maintenance and electricity generators maintenance. The Agency also supports the fishermen through its Job Creation Programme (JCP): since 2006, 3,004 unskilled and 46 skilled fishermen have received JCP contracts. In Gaza, due to the blockade and related access restrictions, more than 3,000 fishermen do not have access to 85 per cent of the maritime areas agreed on in the 1995 Oslo Accords; as a result, the fish catch - a principal part of the Gaza diet - has decreased dramatically over the years of closure, as the [UN warned in 2012](#). During July, with UNRWA's support, 16 female over-aged students (those who have previously failed two or more years in school) started a two and a half months apprenticeship in private businesses all across Gaza; prior to the apprenticeships the girls had successfully completed a 6-months vocational training in food processing at the GTC. Besides providing education in food processing, UNRWA also distributed exceptional food assistance in July: to enable poor refugee families to celebrate the end of Ramadan feast (Eid Al Fitr), from 12 to 14 July the Agency distributed over 9,550 hot meals through 20 Community-Based Partner Organizations to approximately 2,860 abject poor refugees across Gaza. In response to the deteriorating situation and the increase in needs during this period, the number of individuals receiving UNRWA food assistance has increased from less than 10 per cent of the refugee population in 2000 to approximately 900,000 individuals in 2015, or 70 per cent of the refugee population. Lastly, another highlight in July was the launch of the Summer Fun Weeks (SFW) in 116 UNRWA installations across Gaza to provide children in Gaza with some fun and an opportunity to enjoy a semblance of normal life. The activities lasted from 25 July until 13 August and in total UNRWA hired approximately 2,500 persons for short-term work opportunities at the SFWs through its Job Creation Programme.

AUGUST

The month of August was overshadowed by the serious financial crisis UNRWA was facing. To further explain the situation of the Agency, UNRWA's Deputy Commissioner-General, Sandra Mitchell, visited Gaza on 2 and 3 August to meet beneficiary representatives as well as UNRWA staff members and personnel, including the Area Staff Union; she also explained the crisis in a [televised interview with UNRWA TV](#). [UNRWA warned in](#) a report to the United Nations Secretary-General, that unless funding for the full amount of the Agency's General Fund shortfall of US\$ 101 million was secured by the middle of August, the financial crisis may force the suspension of services relating to the Agency's education programme. This would have meant a delay in the school year for half a million students attending some 700 schools and 8 vocational training centres across the Middle East. Thanks to an extraordinary fund raising effort to [secure US\\$81.06 million](#) of the US \$101 million General Fund deficit faced by UNRWA, the Agency declared the opening of the school year on time and in Gaza, on 17 August, 8,086 teachers (2,831 males and 5,255 females) returned to 257 UNRWA schools following their summer 2015 vacation period; on 31 August approximately 250,800 students returned and commenced the new school year. Previous to the start of the school year, as part of the Agency's efforts to provide for the health of refugee children, five UNRWA medical school teams had screened new entrance students (grade 1) at various Health Centres across Gaza as a pre-emptive measure to detect diseases and learning impairments. While the medical screening of grade 1 students took place during the summer holidays, the routine screening of students in grade 4 and 7 started in September and would be ongoing during the whole 2015/2016 school year, ending in May 2016. 26 August marked the one year anniversary of an open ended ceasefire after 50 days of conflict between Gaza and Israel. For this purpose UNRWA produced two fact sheets, summarizing the [dismal](#) situation in Gaza at a glance, as well as showing the importance of the [UNRWA response](#) as stabilizing force in Gaza. As another early recovery initiative following the 2014 conflict, in the end of August UNRWA also launched a new Shelter Cash for Work (SCFW) project, designed to offset temporary accommodation costs of refugee families whose homes had been severely damaged or totally destroyed through optional short term employment opportunities. UNRWA created this SCFW project in light of the huge shortfall in its US\$ 720 million required for the Agency's strategic response to the summer 2014 conflict. In addition, as an example of the creativity and talent of refugee youth in Gaza, in August four 16-18-year old refugee students from the UNRWA Gaza Training Centre (GTC) [finished the development of three different samples of solar heating units](#) to provide affordable, safe and environmentally friendly heating solutions for Palestinian families still living in makeshift homes and caravans due to the destruction of their homes during last summer's conflict. The design of the units had been requested by two international organizations, Action Contre la Faim (ACF), Action Against Hunger and Mercy Corps, to be used in small mobile latrines for internally displaced persons in Gaza.

SEPTEMBER

On 1 September, UNRWA welcomed its new Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, Mr. Bo Schack. One week later UNRWA TV, the Agency's satellite television channel, commenced broadcasting a pilot educational season across the region. As the first step towards a new and modernized multimedia television format to enhance refugee students' learning, UNRWA TV completed the production of 144 episodes on English, Arabic, Science and Mathematics. In September, the UNRWA Collective Centre Management Unit (CCMU) organized a four-day training of trainers (TOT) to build the capacity of UNRWA personnel in the management of designated emergency shelters and Collective Centres (CCs) during and post emergencies. To address increasing diabetes rates among Palestine refugee communities in Gaza, UNRWA partnered with the not-for-profit development organization

Microclinic International (MI) to build up the capacity of UNRWA's medical staff through the Microclinic Programme for Diabetes Prevention and Management. From 10 August to 22 September, twice a week UNRWA trained its nursing staff on the prevention of diabetes so they would be equipped to pass their knowledge to patients and the patient's support network such as families and friends. On 9 and 10 September, UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl visited the Gaza Strip to reach out to UNRWA staff members, the Palestine refugee community, local media and Gaza civil society regarding the ongoing financial crisis. The Commissioner General gave a press conference and answered questions from the media; he also gave an exclusive interview to UNRWA TV. Some weeks later, the UNRWA Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme (ICIP) started implementing ten flood prevention infrastructure projects across eight refugee camps. In addition, as part of its regular monthly activities in September, the ICIP Field Sanitation Office pumped a total of 233,450 cubic metres of water from UNRWA water wells to the refugee camps, and removed, transported and disposed of a total of 7,722 tons of solid waste from the camps in its efforts to ensure adequate water supply, refuse disposal and insect/pest control.

OCTOBER

In October, more than one year after the devastating 2014 conflict, the Zaza refugee family was the first in Gaza to complete the reconstruction of their totally demolished home, with support from UNRWA. On 5 October, UNRWA marked and celebrated the UNESCO-led annual World Teachers' Day (WTD). Under the international slogan 'Empowering Teachers, Building Sustainable Societies – Mobilizing for a Roadmap 2030 for Teachers', UNRWA produced a short documentary film to show case the role of teachers in society and in providing quality education. Recognizing the invaluable contribution and expertise of educators, UNRWA was also leading field-specific events to celebrate WTD, showcasing the achievements of UNRWA teachers and of the wider Education Reform. The month of October was also characterized by escalating violence in the West Bank and Gaza. In response to this violence and fear that started taking hold in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), including East Jerusalem, and in Israel, UNRWA issued a statement by Spokesperson Chris Gunness, calling for political action and accountability to stem the spiral of violence and fear, and to highlight the loss of hope amongst youth in the oPt. On a more positive note, in October UNRWA School Parliaments concluded their elections in a structured and democratic election process. School Parliaments in Gaza are responsible for raising concerns, suggestions and problems of students to the School Principal, teachers' councils and the overall UNRWA education team. They also actively promote human rights concepts through school radio programmes or school magazines, the organizing of events or visits to civil society and human rights organizations.

NOVEMBER

In November, UNRWA's Education Department at headquarters launched its first Human Rights Education animated videos on social media and UNRWA TV, specifically tackling gender stereotypes, bullying, and environmental issues. The clips form part of the Agency's Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance Education Programme, through which Palestine refugee students of all ages learn about human rights in their everyday lives. In November, UNRWA also announced that in 2015, the Relief and Social Services Programme (RSSP), through its disability programme, had distributed a total of 252 assistive devices, including wheel chairs and hearing aids, to Palestine refugees in Gaza. As of November 2015, the Agency supported seven Community-Based Rehabilitation Centres across the Gaza Strip, enabling them to provide services to persons with disabilities, including educational services to approximately 800 refugee children with disabilities. UNRWA directly supported 132 visually impaired children through the UNRWA Rehabilitation Centre for Visually Impaired in Gaza city. Following a meeting of the UNRWA Advisory Commission (AdCom) in Jordan, on 18 and 19 November the Agency also conducted a field visit for 26 AdCom members and other donor representatives to the Gaza Strip. The delegation received an overview of the challenges faced by Palestine refugees in Gaza, just over one year after the 2014 conflict. On 22 November the UNRWA Gender Initiative, in partnership with the Bunat Al Ghad Community-Based Organisation and supported through the UNRWA Education Programme, opened its first "Friends Library" in Rafah, southern Gaza. The "Friends Library" contains approximately 1,200 books on various topics – in English and Arabic – targeting students aged between 13 and 16 years, and aims at promoting reading skills among the students and their families. Lastly, 25 November marked the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and the beginning of the annual 16 days of activism against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) campaign, led by UN Women. During the 16 days, through its Relief and Social Services and Education programmes, as well as the Gender Initiative, UNRWA provided a variety of activities. These ranged from awareness sessions and training of human rights teachers and students on early marriage, adolescent health, GBV and women's human rights, to the organization of theatre sketches, exhibitions and open discussion forums on causes and consequences of GBV in Community-Based Organizations and Women Programme Centres across the Gaza Strip.

DECEMBER

In December, UNRWA launched a winterization campaign on social media across all five fields, under the hashtag #ShareyourWarmth. The campaign aims to fundraise US\$ 2 million to provide vulnerable Palestine refugee families with shelter assistance, tarpaulin, warm meals, blankets, mattresses, heaters and other items they need to cope with the harsh conditions. UNRWA in Gaza also announced new opportunities for short-term vocational training courses for approximately 480 male and female over-aged students (those who have previously failed two or more years in school) and those who had not passed Tawjihi (university entrance diploma). 17 different types of competency-based training courses (including plastering, tiling, carpentry, early childhood care, website development/design and photography and media production) will be offered in the Gaza and Khan Younis Vocational Training Centres, followed by a six-month internship in a business in the local market. On 6 December, UNRWA inaugurated Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan City in Khan Younis, as well as four new schools in Gaza. The housing project was funded through a generous contribution from the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent (UAERC). A total of 4,000 Palestine refugee persons will benefit from 600 new housing units prepared to re-house refugee families who were living in poor and inadequate shelters. As of mid-December UNRWA, since the start of the 2014 emergency shelter response, had distributed over US\$ 140.6 million (excluding Programme Support Costs) to Palestine refugee families whose homes were damaged or destroyed during the 2014 summer conflict. While as of December UNRWA had completed the payments to over 66,300 Palestine refugee families – more than half of the caseload – for minor repair works, to 1,993 families to repair their severely damaged shelters, to 12 families for major repair works and to 6 families for reconstruction, funding gaps remained strong: as of mid-December, over 59,900 refugee families had not received any payments to undertake repair works for their minor damaged homes. Over 3,200 families had not received any payments to repair their major damaged homes and over 2,750 families had not received payments to repair their severely damaged homes. Thanks to generous donors, UNRWA has sufficient funding to support the reconstruction of approximately 2,000 refugee homes. Yet, support for the reconstruction of another 5,400 refugee houses remains uncovered.

<http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/emergency-reports/gaza-situation-report-125>