

UNRWA health programme hard hit in Syria but the UN agency's work is having an impact

[الأونروا تصدر تقريرها الصحي السنوي لعام 2012 تستعرض فيه إصلاحاتها وعملياتها الصحية في أوقات النزاع](#)

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Today, during the World Health Organization's sixty-sixth's Annual World Health Summit, UNRWA released its Health Department 2012 Annual Report. The publication reflects on the operational challenges, the Agency has faced with rolling out an ongoing health reform and managing regular services during times of conflict.

"This report documents the results of the health staff's hard work including in the conflict affected Syria," said Mr. Filippo Grandi, Commissioner General of UNRWA. "There is no doubt we still have considerable ways to go to realize our ultimate Human Development Goal, "A Long and Healthy Life". Nonetheless, we are moving in the right direction and incremental gains are accruing despite the difficult environments UNRWA operates in."

The Syrian conflict has halted UNRWA's efforts to roll out its health reform in the country. UNRWA has 23 health centers in Syria providing care for 525,000 Palestine refugees. Almost half of the health centers are closed, and access to life-saving medicines, particularly for non-communicable diseases is not fully secured.

"It is a very difficult time for us, yet we are committed to deliver health services to Palestine refugees, stated Dr Akihiro Seita, the director of UNRWA's Health Programme. "While we have some clinic closures, we have responded to changing needs by setting up 6 extra health posts where there are the greatest numbers of internally displaced Palestine refugees. We have been sending medicines via Lebanon. The efforts and dedication of UNRWA staff in Syria are truly commendable. We need continued international support to provide health care for Palestine refugees in Syria," concluded Dr Seita.

In late 2011, UNRWA initiated health reforms introducing the Family Health Team (FHT) model to address growing health disease burden defined by patients suffering from non-communicable diseases. The FHT approach aims at improving quality and efficiency of health service delivery by providing comprehensive and holistic primary health care for the entire family, and by emphasizing long-term provider-patient and family relationships. Other components of Health Reforms introduced include e-Health (Electronic Medical Records, EMR).

The annual report provides evidence that the FHT approach is impactful. Findings reveal a 20% to 30% decrease in the average number of daily medical consultations per doctor. They also show a 50% increase in consultation time, and an overall decrease in the antibiotics prescription rate. The reform has been incorporated and is running in 36 of UNRWA's health centers across the Middle East region.

"These initial results are very promising and the reform appears to be popular", observed Dr. Seita, "All our satisfaction surveys given to Palestine refugees reveal nearly a 100% approval rate."

Through the Agency's network of 139 primary health centres and mobile clinics, refugees can access free services ranging from preventive care to general medicine, specialist care, and referrals to other medical services. The services are guided by World Health Organization (WHO) standards. The annual report provides narratives and quantifiable data on the agency's regular health programs and health trends.

UNRWA has been the largest humanitarian operation in the Middle East for over 60 years. It has also been the main provider of primary health care for up to 5 million Palestine refugees in the region. Over the past decades, in Gaza, West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, UNRWA has succeeded in reducing infant and maternal mortality and the spread of communicable diseases through its different health programs. Yet, as the disease burden is shifting from communicable to non-communicable diseases, UNRWA has had to re-adapt its health program to better address [Palestine refugees contemporary health needs](#).

Read the full report [here](#).

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Background information

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and is mandated to provide assistance and protection to a population of some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip to achieve their full potential in human development, pending a just solution to their plight. UNRWA's services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, and microfinance.

Financial support to UNRWA has not kept pace with an increased demand for services caused by growing numbers of registered refugees, expanding need, and deepening poverty. As a result, the Agency's General Fund (GF), supporting UNRWA's core activities and 97 per cent reliant on voluntary contributions, has begun each year with a large projected deficit. Currently the deficit stands at US\$ 72 million.

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