

EuropeAid support to Palestine refugees in Syria in 2014



Over half of Palestine refugees in Syria are internally displaced. Families on the move are in critical need of UNRWA services. Yarmouk, May 2014 © Rami el Sayyed/UNRWA Archives

UNRWA and EuropeAid in Syria

UNRWA and the EU have been partners in providing life-saving and developmental services to Palestine refugees in Syria, Lebanon, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Jordan for decades.

Recent EuropeAid support has proved invaluable in maintaining education, healthcare, relief and social services, and—most urgently—direct cash assistance to the most vulnerable Palestine refugees living in Syria during the protracted conflict. With 540,000 Palestine refugees affected by the conflict, UNRWA services are critical.

The crisis in Syria is one of the gravest and most demanding emergencies the Agency has faced in almost 65 years of operation. The vast majority of the 540,000 Palestine refugees registered in Syria are unable to meet their basic food needs without UNRWA assistance. Over half of the Palestine refugee population has experienced internal displacement since the beginning of the conflict (at least 270,000 individuals), while another 70,000 refugees have been forced to flee to Lebanon, Jordan, Gaza, Egypt and other countries.

Today, in spite of considerable challenges, UNRWA continues to provide education, health, relief services and humanitarian assistance across Syria, serving Palestine refugees in Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Latakia and Dera'a. Thanks to generous and continuous EuropeAid funding since 2011, amounting to a total of EUR 15.9 million (US\$ 21.9 million), UNRWA has been able to sustain and adapt its programmes and services to support the resilience of a population exhausted by conflict, displacement and rising poverty.

Programme achievements: Cash assistance

Prior to the crisis, UNRWA provided targeted cash and food assistance to over 30,000 particularly vulnerable Palestine refugees, identified as Special Hardship Cases (SHC). This category recognized the specific vulnerabilities of female-headed households, persons with disabilities and elderly persons living alone. The crisis has threatened the wellbeing and, in many cases survival, of these families, thus increasing their dependence on UNRWA assistance. The cost of food alone has risen by approximately 178 per cent since the start of the crisis, while at the same time, the livelihoods of Palestine refugees in Syria have all but disappeared. However, with EuropeAid funding, UNRWA has increased its support for this vulnerable group from a one-time payment of USD 52 to 14,000 vulnerable people in 2012, to USD 32 per month for all SHC families throughout 2014.



UNRWA runs a targeted cash and food assistance programme for vulnerable Palestine refugees such as women headed households, persons with disabilities and elderly persons living alone. Damascus, July 14 © Taghrid Mohammad/UNRWA Archives

Education programme

Prior to the conflict, UNRWA provided education to more than 66,000 students in Syria, with overall pass rates marginally higher than the national average. Today, only 42 out of 118 UNRWA schools are operational, and a further 43 government schools are being used for afternoon shifts. 30 UNRWA school buildings have been damaged and access to education has decreased in conflict zones. To adjust, UNRWA has created alternative teaching mechanisms: distance-learning materials, remedial classes and alternative learning centres in safe areas.



Palestine refugee students attend remedial classes to prepare for the 2014-2015 school year. Damascus, July 2014 © Taghrid Mohammad/UNRWA Archives

In the first half of 2014, 39,600 Palestine refugee students accessed UNRWA education. Despite the crisis situation, they continued to achieve high pass rates and more than 95 per cent of students progressed to the next grade. UNRWA's innovative use of alternative facilities and distance learning materials have enabled up to 48,299 students to return to education at the start of the 2014/15 school year.

Disability programme

Persons with disabilities are uniquely vulnerable to conflict-related risks. In Syria, Palestine refugees living with disabilities are struggling to access the level of care and services they require. The UNRWA disability programme is two-fold: medical assistance and prosthetic devices are provided directly to beneficiaries through the UNRWA health programme. And, UNRWA community-based organisations provide essential complementary services such as physiotherapy, counseling, and support for home adaptations.

The ability of UNRWA to respond to the needs of persons with disabilities has been severely strained because many rehabilitation centres are inaccessible due to the conflict. With EuropeAid funding, UNRWA has provided rehabilitation services to 2,200 refugees to help them better cope with their disabilities. In 2014, UNRWA will provide prosthetic devices, including wheelchairs and hearing aids to an additional 1,500 Palestine refugees.

Health programme

The healthcare system in Syria has been severely affected by the crisis, with widespread damage to medical infrastructure, displacement of healthcare professionals, death and injury of medical staff and the almost complete destruction of the pharmaceutical industry. As a result, UNRWA healthcare services are more crucial than ever. The Agency has adapted the delivery of its health services by opening 10 new health points, partly to compensate for the loss of nine health centres, and partly to provide closer services to the dispersed population. EuropeAid funding has been crucial in enabling UNRWA to deliver over 650,000 consultations in 2013, and in covering the hospitalization costs of 4,801 people. As of June 2014, more than 371,000 refugees have accessed UNRWA health facilities and continued EuropeAid funding will support the provision of essential medicines to 340,000 refugees.



With EuropeAid funding, UNRWA delivered 650,000 consultations in 2013. Jaramana Health Center, Damascus, July 2014 © Taghrid Mohammad/UNRWA Archives



While living under siege in Yarmouk, Imad, a diabetic amputee, could not access healthcare or medicine. As a result, his second leg was amputated to prevent the spread of infection. Neither Imad nor his wife has a regular source of income and his deteriorating health is a burden on his struggling family. They are just one example of the tens of thousands of Special Hardship Cases to which EuropeAid currently contributes cash assistance. Damascus, July 2014 © Taghrid Mohammad/UNRWA Archives



united nations relief and works agency
for palestine refugees in the near east

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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.