

Syria: UNRWA Operations and Achievements in 2015



In 2015, UNRWA operations continued to be impacted by unpredictable and devastating armed violence and increasingly complex and deepening humanitarian needs. In response, the Agency continued to prioritize the provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance to support the 450,000 Palestine refugees estimated to remain in Syria, as they live through one of the worst humanitarian crises in decades. The year was marked by a severe escalation of violence in Yarmouk in April 2015, further compounding the extreme hardships of civilians trapped there, and suspending the Agency's access to the area. In contrast, the return of some 7,200 Palestine refugee families to the town of Husseiniyeh after having been displaced for over two years was a welcome positive development. UNRWA was swiftly able to resume its services in Husseiniyeh and to support the returning refugees.

UNRWA Innovations

Self-Learning Materials

Building on the successful first phase of the roll-out of self-learning materials (SLM) for students in conflict-affected areas, UNRWA, in partnership with UNICEF, expanded the outreach and impact of the initiative throughout the country, distributing a total of 10,619 SLM sets for Palestinian students in 2015. Self-learning materials continue to play an important role in supporting formal education services and have provided useful resources both to students attending regular classes and to those who only have limited access to schools. The SLM covers core Arabic, mathematics, English and science subjects from grades 1-9, while the interactive learning programme provides basic numeracy and literacy for grades 1-3 and additional Arabic and mathematics for grades 4-5.

Cash Assistance

The UNRWA emergency cash assistance programme provided critical support to 430,000 conflict-affected Palestine refugees in Syria and helped them meet their food and NFI needs. In 2015, UNRWA distributed US\$ 78,589,274 over three rounds of cash assistance to at least 413,745 Palestine refugees covering six months of assistance. The UNRWA cash assistance programme is implemented through a network of partners, including two banks, a money transfer company, as well as an UNRWA office in Damascus. Cash assistance is distributed in rounds covering two months each in order to provide greater predictability to refugees who require the cash to procure basic food and household items.

Prosthetics

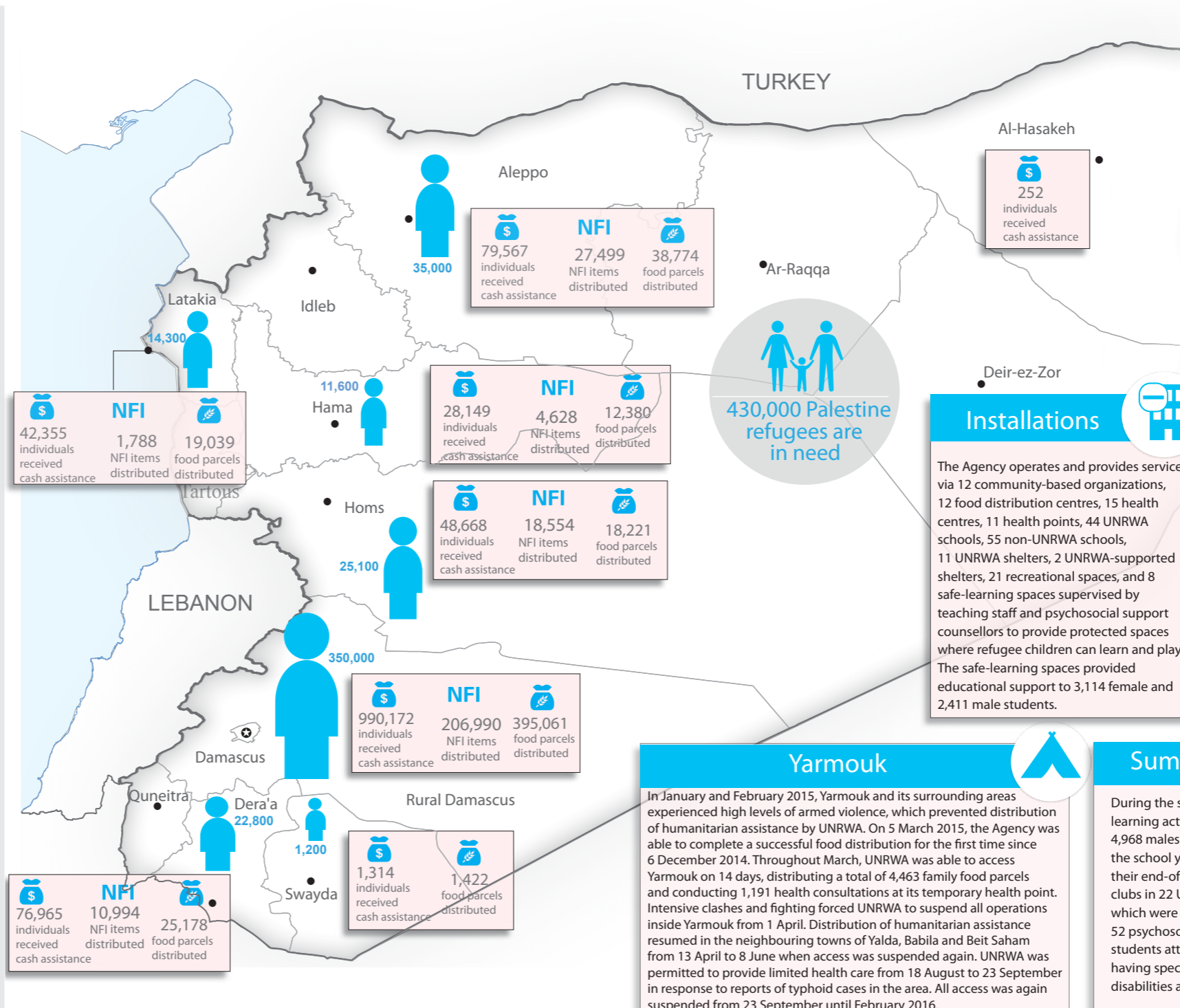
UNRWA provided 2,932 refugees with prosthetics and other assistive devices, including wheelchairs, hearing aids and walking sticks, throughout the year. In total, 166 refugees have received artificial limbs, followed by rehabilitation and physiotherapy (46 female, 120 male), and 2,369 beneficiaries have received wheelchairs; hearing aids; and walking frames, walking sticks or crutches.

Vocational Training & E-Learning

UNRWA helped 375 graduates find employment this year, and 69 young trainees started their own businesses following entrepreneurship training by UNRWA. In total, 5,788 students took part in English, French and computer literacy skills courses over 2015. Short-term vocational training courses have proved to be extremely popular, offering skills and starter kits for 2,131 students in hairdressing, mechanics, electrical repair, graphic design, accountancy, mobile and computer maintenance. A further 827 students graduated from long-term courses. Sixty-three courses are provided at 10 UNRWA training centres in Damascus, Hama, Latakia, Aleppo and Dera'a and seven partner centres in Damascus. At the end of the 2015 academic year, 305 students were enrolled on the e-portal.

My Voice My School

The UNRWA project #myvoicemyschool enabled conflict-affected Palestine refugee youth in Syria and their peers in the UK to discuss the meaning of education in their lives and futures. Running for a second year, the project connects students and teachers through live video conversations and customized teaching materials, allowing them to explore how education can help them meet their future aspirations. Each class defines and develops an advocacy project to promote and share their ideas. Children commented on being excited to meet students from another country to develop their conversation skills. #myvoicemyschool



Protection

The Agency operates three Family Support Offices (FSOs), which provides specific detection and referral services to GBV survivors, in addition to legal and psychosocial support (PSS) services. Staff participated in ongoing awareness training in GBV, early marriage, human rights, child rights, PSS and protection courses in order to be better equipped to respond to a range of protection issues, such as gender-based and domestic violence.

Vaccinations

In cooperation with WHO, UNRWA vaccinated 2,237 children with the first dose of oral polio vaccine in 2015 and more than 12,000 refugees were reached in polio awareness campaigns. UNRWA also developed and implemented frequent nationwide hygiene awareness campaigns to reduce the risks of communicable disease outbreaks, particularly those related to poor access to water and sanitation.

Installations

The Agency operates and provides services via 12 community-based organizations, 12 food distribution centres, 15 health centres, 11 health points, 44 UNRWA schools, 55 non-UNRWA schools, 11 UNRWA shelters, 2 UNRWA-supported shelters, 21 recreational spaces, and 8 safe-learning spaces supervised by teaching staff and psychosocial support counsellors to provide protected spaces where refugee children can learn and play. The safe-learning spaces provided educational support to 3,114 female and 2,411 male students.

Yarmouk

In January and February 2015, Yarmouk and its surrounding areas experienced high levels of armed violence, which prevented distribution of humanitarian assistance by UNRWA. On 5 March 2015, the Agency was able to complete a successful food distribution for the first time since 6 December 2014. Throughout March, UNRWA was able to access Yarmouk on 14 days, distributing a total of 4,463 family food parcels and conducting 1,191 health consultations at its temporary health point. Intensive clashes and fighting forced UNRWA to suspend all operations inside Yarmouk from 1 April. Distribution of humanitarian assistance resumed in the neighbouring towns of Yalda, Babila and Beit Saham from 13 April to 8 June when access was suspended again. UNRWA was permitted to provide limited health care from 18 August to 23 September in response to reports of typhoid cases in the area. All access was again suspended from 23 September until February 2016.

Summer learning

During the summer months, the Agency provided summer learning activities and catch-up classes to 5,032 female and 4,968 males students who had missed out on classes during the school year and who required additional support to pass their end-of-year exams. UNRWA offered 53 summer learning clubs in 22 UNRWA schools and 31 UNRWA-managed schools, which were staffed by 359 teachers, 53 supervisors and 52 psychosocial supports. Approximately 10.4 per cent of students attending the summer classes were identified as having special learning needs, with learning difficulties, disabilities and severe psychosocial problems.



Jan-Feb-March: On 7 January, a heavy winter storm hit the Middle East, bringing sub-zero temperatures, rain and snow. The first round of cash assistance distributions in 2015 started on 18 January, providing 466,473 Palestine refugees (116,618 families) with two months of cash assistance through 31 distribution points throughout Syria. UNRWA transported 67 students out of Yarmouk to sit for their national school exams. The Agency provided health check-ups, accommodation and a small stipend to support the students while they were away from home. Students were also provided with warm clothing for winter. During January and February, Yarmouk and its surrounding areas experienced high levels of armed violence, which prevented UNRWA from distributing humanitarian assistance. In February, access to Husseiniyeh was permissible for the first time since the summer of 2013. The Agency immediately began the planning process for the return of Palestine refugees. On 10 March, the UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl visited Yarmouk to visit some of the 18,000 Palestine refugees in the area. As part of its winterization programme, the UNRWA Engineering Department raised all remaining tents in collective shelters off the ground by 15-20 cm during March to ensure adequate drainage in the event of further rainwater and snow.

April-May-June: Between April and June, UNRWA conducted 26 cross-line missions to Yalda, Babila and Beit Saham, distributing 12,119 food parcels, 36,900 packs of bread, 120,000 litres of potable water, and fresh food to communal kitchens. Mobile health and dental units provided 4,900 patient consultations. UNRWA doctors records cases of suspected malnutrition affecting children from Yarmouk, a result of limited food and contaminated water. UNRWA distributed food parcels and specialized nutritional supplements, contributed by WFP. On 14 and 30 May, 127 preparatory students and 66 secondary students from Lebanon were provided with transportation by UNRWA to sit for their school exams. On 31 May, the second cash assistance round commenced, reaching 415,972 beneficiaries (116,124 families). In June, the summer learning programme commenced, offering classes in psychosocial activities and support in mathematics, languages, music, sports and art to 10,000 students who missed out on school during the year. A verification exercise began to ascertain the current population and caseload of Palestine refugees in need remaining in Syria.

July-Aug-Sept: Dera'a witnessed a significant escalation of violence in late June 2015, followed by sporadic clashes throughout July. UNRWA was forced to temporarily suspend operations and services in Dera'a City. In August, around 4,500 Palestine refugee families returned to Husseiniyeh following their displacement by armed conflict two years prior. The return to Husseiniyeh constitutes the first large-scale return of Palestine refugee families within Syria. Following initial assessments, UNRWA was able to resume most services and provide humanitarian assistance in the area. As a result, there has been a 28 per cent reduction in the collective shelter population over the second half of 2015, from 10,927 to 8,710 Palestine refugees (2,253 families). This is also reflected in the closure of 10 shelters. On 18 August, UNRWA was authorized to provide limited humanitarian services to civilians in Yalda, Babila and Beit Saham to address a suspected typhoid outbreak. UNRWA conducted 10 cross-line missions, treating 2,891 patients, including 87 suspected cases of typhoid. In September, after much uncertainty about the Agency's financial situation, UNRWA opens 99 schools to serve over 45,000 Palestine refugee children for the new academic year in Syria. Two UNRWA schools reopened in Husseiniyeh, following the return of refugees to the area.

Oct-Nov-Dec: During October, UNRWA provided vocational training to more than 1,130 students in 12 training centres in Aleppo, Damascus, Latakia and Hama. The centres provide short- and long-term vocational training courses to young Palestine refugees aged between 18 and 33 to develop vocational skills to increase their employability. The latest round of the country-wide polio campaign began, with 12,619 Palestine refugee children receiving immunization vaccinations. To help families brave the onset of winter, 2,878 clothing kits were distributed to families from Khan Dunoun camp. Each kit included winter jackets, sweaters, hats, vests, scarves, socks and underpants for two adults and two children. From 8-9 November, UNRWA programmes were featured at the Resilience Development Forum held in Amman. The Forum was an opportunity for various actors to discuss resilience programming in the region and inside Syria and share key lessons learned and innovations. On 1 December, UNRWA launched the #shareyourwarmth winterization campaign, with a target of raising US\$ 2 million to ensure that the most vulnerable Palestine refugees have enough food and shelter they need to prepare them for and cope during the winter months. The campaign has received widespread media coverage and reached close to 6.2 million people on social media.