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- ▶ [Articles](#)
- ▶ [Official Statements](#)

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24 September 2012
Damascus, Syria

situational overview

The humanitarian situation in Syria has worsened still further over the past week, with continued and intensified armed conflict in Aleppo; within the immediate vicinity of Ein el Tal and Neirab camps, and in Greater Damascus particularly in the southern district of Yarmouk. A total of 6,304 internally-displaced persons (IDPs) were seeking refuge in UNRWA facilities in Damascus, while 1,132 IDPs sought refuge in UNRWA facilities in Aleppo. Based on earlier assessments, UNRWA estimates that 225,000 Palestine refugees are directly affected by the conflict. To date, the Agency has received first-time requests for assistance from over 42,100 refugee families. There has been further displacement beyond the nation's borders, with approximately 5,000 refugees having fled to Lebanon, and 1,260 having crossed the border into Jordan.

syria

- Palestine refugees and other residents of Yarmouk Camp are experiencing the severe effects of intensified armed conflict in Hajar al Aswad and other areas immediately adjacent to Yarmouk.
- There have been unconfirmed reports of Palestine refugee fatalities and injuries, following sporadic armed clashes occurring within residential areas inside Yarmouk.
- Since 19 July, UNRWA has received reports of the deaths of 60 Palestine refugees throughout Syria.
- The armed conflict continues to cause temporary disruptions to UNRWA's services. In particular, conflict conditions coupled with the presence of displaced persons in UNRWA schools have meant that many of UNRWA's 64 double-shift primary schools were not functional in what should have been the first week of the 2012-2013 school year. To respond to this contingency, the Agency is preparing materials for a home-learning education framework.
- Ongoing violence affecting Sbeineh and Set Zaynab (southern Rif Damascus) resulted in the temporary closure of UNRWA facilities.
- There is reduced access to areas of Husseiniyah and Khan Dannoun.
- Reports of criminal activity are on the rise, with several instances of national UN personnel being abducted for ransom in the area of Rif Damascus.

Exposure to violence and displacement continues to compound the humanitarian needs of conflict-affected populations. Food remains a critical priority for all. There is an urgent need for non-food items, in particular mattresses, blankets, and cooking sets for the displaced. Environmental health and sanitation are growing challenges in conflict-affected areas. Currently, there are 7,436 IDPs sheltering in UNRWA schools, representing a decrease of approximately four per cent since 13 September. The displaced residing in UNRWA schools comprise predominantly women (approximately 33 per cent) and children (approximately 42 per cent).

1. Damascus

Suburbs adjacent to Yarmouk, home to 79 per cent of Syria's

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Palestine refugee population (June 2011 data) have been particularly volatile. 4,533 IDPs continue to be accommodated in ten UNRWA schools in Yarmouk, representing an approximate four-per-cent decrease since 13 September.

With the escalation of the armed conflict in nearby Tadamon and Hajar al Aswad, UNRWA services in and around Yarmouk have been intermittently disrupted. Shelling has increased in adjacent areas, with security forces reportedly entering neighbouring Hajar al Aswad and Tadamon this week. Some residents who had fled the area reportedly returned. Local sources report that Hajar al Aswad residents returning to their homes during a lull on 20 September discovered the remains of those apparently killed during the clashes of recent days. Eleven Palestinians were reported among the dead.

On 19 September, the UNRWA education development centre (EDC) in Hajar al Aswad was damaged by a shell with no casualties. Clashes were reported on the night of 19 September in Jobar (northeastern Damascus) and Sbeineh (Rif Damascus, to the south), with intermittent shelling of the adjacent area of Essali.

An UNRWA guard was injured, apparently by the explosion of a shell, in his home in Sbeineh. Tensions reportedly continue in Set Zaynab (Rif Damascus, to the south, and just east of Sbeineh). Further south, shelling was also reported near the end of the week in the vicinity of Husseiniyah. Clashes took place in the vicinity of Jdeidet Artouz (Rif Damascus, to the southwest). As a result, facilities in Sbeineh, Set Zaynab, Jobar, as well as two health centres in Yarmouk have remained.

IDPs in UNRWA schools in Damascus as of 20 September 2012

Area	Men	Women	Children	Total
Yarmouk	1,154	1,621	1,758	4,533
Khan Eshieh	198	281	407	886
Jaramana	12	35	38	85
Ramadan	158	153	223	534
Ruken Eddin	20	27	58	105
Alliance	31	37	93	161
Total	1,573	2,154	2,577	6,304

2. Aleppo

Clashes have intensified in the town of Aleppo and in the immediate vicinity of Ein el Tal and Neirab camps.

There is growing anxiety amongst refugees that armed conflict continues to prevent the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance to the camps. UNRWA is making renewed efforts to address this urgent problem. There were reports of armed clashes in the area of Souq al Hal, south of the UNRWA area office. Over the course of the last week, clashes, explosions, and shelling continued throughout the city, including in Saif al Dawla, Saleh Eddin, Bustan al Qasr, Midan, Jabriyah, Al Zahra, New Aleppo, and Mansoura. Access to Ein al Tal and Neirab camps is increasingly restricted although UNRWA facilities in both camps remain operational.

IDPs in UNRWA schools in Aleppo as of 20 September 2012

Area	Men	Women	Children	Total
Neirab	221	214	261	696
Ein el Tal	72	85	279	436

Total 293 299 540 1,132

3. Dera'a

Towards the end of the week, UNRWA redoubled its efforts to obtain assurances from the authorities and community that a sufficiently safe environment would be provided to enable Palestine refugee children to attend UNRWA schools. Supported by its government counterpart the General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR), UNRWA held a series of meetings with governorate authorities, parents, and community leaders, in which the Agency stressed the overriding priority of ensuring the safety of refugee children. The result was a consensus that UNRWA schools in Dera'a will now be operational, subject to close monitoring of the security situation. There were reports of clashes on the route between Mzerieb and the town, which prevented staff from commuting between the two locations.

4. Hama

There were reports of intermittent shelling to the north; however, the town reportedly remains calm and the city centre is accessible. UNRWA facilities remained operational throughout the week.

5. Latakia

Despite an increased security presence within the camp, the area remains calm. UNRWA facilities are operational.

6. Homs

Throughout the week, there were reports of intermittent shelling from the city centre. The camp remains calm and UNRWA facilities are operational. The Agency's schools in Homs Camp had previously accommodated displaced persons. However, prior to the commencement of the school year the displaced were voluntarily transferred to another location to ensure that the school year could commence on schedule. This positive outcome is a consequence of UNRWA's concerted advocacy and outreach with displaced persons, local Syrian and Palestinian communities, the Syrian authorities, and GAPAR.

The Homs city centre is inaccessible and the (main) road to Hama is reportedly still blocked, although a side road is accessible. The roads to Damascus and Latakia also remain open.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE: FOCUS ON HEALTH

Emergency health care needs have become acute as UNRWA health centres attempt to meet the needs of conflict-affected refugees. There are 24 UNRWA health centres throughout Syria, of which 16 are currently operational and eight have been temporary closed. Health centres in Douma and one in Yarmouk Camp have remained closed for several weeks due to security concerns. There are 385 staff members working in UNRWA health centres, including 61 doctors and 136 nurses.

Civil strife has deeply affected the livelihoods of the population, which cannot meet its basic needs, including health care. There has been a sharp increase in the number of requests for assistance in tertiary life-saving health care, with the current number of requests peaking at 729 cases. UNRWA has received donor assistance to provide urgent medical supplies in conflict-affected areas through CERF funding and emergency health care training with the support of private donors. The UNRWA Regional Humanitarian Response Plan seeks USD 1.7 million to meet the growing emergency health care needs of Palestine refugees in Syria.

jordan

There are currently 1,260 registered Palestine refugees who have fled Syria for Jordan, representing a five-per-cent increase over the course of this week. Of this total number, 170 are based in Cyber City.

lebanon

Approximately 5,000 displaced Palestine refugees from Syria have approached UNRWA in Lebanon. There is a fairly-even distribution of the location of displacement of Palestine refugees from Syria, contrary to the concentration of Syrian refugees in Bekaa and Northern Lebanon. The plurality of Palestine refugee families reside in the Saida area (28 per cent) while other refugees are located in the North, Beqaa, Beirut and Tyre. Approximately two-thirds of the families are from the Damascus area, mainly from Yarmouk camp.

UNRWA continues to co-ordinate with the Sûreté Générale and the UN Country Team in Lebanon in support of Palestine refugees who have entered Lebanon from Syria. On 18 September, the Sûreté Générale issued a statement which stipulates that Palestine refugees who have surpassed their residency period in Lebanon will not be charged the penalty of LBP 50,000 (USD 33) per person upon their exit. The waiver of fines is in effect from 17 September to 17 October. UNRWA is co-ordinating with relevant authorities on government charges incurred by displaced Palestine refugees for visa costs of USD 17 per person upon arrival in Lebanon.

current funding requirement

As an increased number of Palestine refugees are now directly affected by the current crisis, UNRWA is seeking USD 54 million through a revised Regional Syria Humanitarian Response Plan to ensure the provision of additional humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees in Syria and those who have fled across Syria's borders into neighbouring Lebanon and Jordan.

The focus of UNRWA's response plan is Syria. UNRWA is seeking USD 44 million for the six-month period from September 2012 to February 2013 to address pressing humanitarian needs. The Agency is also requesting over USD 8 million to support Palestine refugees who have fled to Lebanon, and USD 1.5 million for those currently seeking refuge in Jordan. USD 6,830,830 has been pledged and mostly received to date in support of Palestine refugees affected by the Syria crisis. Under the revised plan, USD 8 million from the United States (USD 7.5 million for Syria, USD 500,000 for Lebanon and Jordan), USD 1.88 million (EUR 1.5 million) from ECHO and USD 627,353 (EUR 500,000) from France have been received to date.

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