

## Highlights

- The Gaza Strip continues to suffer from the chronic fuel and water crises, the glaring absence of any sustainable socio-economic improvements to the distressed economy, the lack of progress in the reconciliation process as well as the impact of the blockade. The [blockade on Gaza](#), which continues to hamper freedom of movement of people and goods, will enter its 12th year in June 2018. [According to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#), during February 2018, the volume of crossings into Israel through Erez crossing was 7% above the monthly average in 2017 but 44% below the monthly average in 2016. Erez is now the only crossing between Israel and Gaza that is available for the movement of people. The crossing is at the northern end of Gaza. Residents of the Gaza Strip are required to obtain individual exit permits to Israel. The permit is issued by military officials rather than the Ministry of Interior, and Israel's policy is to not permit entry for residents of the Gaza Strip except in exceptional Palestinian medical and humanitarian cases.
- On 8 March, Gisha has released a new publication on the impact of the closure on women in Gaza, entitled "[Dreams Deferred: The impact of the closure on women in the Gaza Strip](#)". The report explains the impact of the blockade on family life, the economy, and civil society from the perspective of women over the past twelve years. Women, who account for 49% of the population of the Strip, are particularly susceptible to the repercussions of the severe limitations imposed by Israel on the movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza. As such, they bear a heavy share of the social and economic costs associated with the tightening of the closure in 2007. Each one of the women interviewed has overcome social obstacles and limitations but is still faced with the severe Israeli restrictions on movement in and out of Gaza.
- UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl visited the Gaza Strip from 27 to 29 March. During his stay, he visited Maghazi Health Centre, meeting with staff and beneficiaries, as well as Khan Younis Elementary Boys School "B", the Khan Younis Distribution centre and the local Relief and Social Services Office where he engaged with school parliamentarians, the parents' council representatives and distribution staff. Mr. Krähenbühl also visited Deir El Balah Camp Improvement Project and met with community representatives. In addition, at a press conference on 28 March, the Commissioner-General warned of a dramatic and unprecedented deterioration of humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip. He spoke about the tremendous psychological pressures that people in Gaza are experiencing and warned of the future of the educational process in UNRWA schools due to the Agency's financial deficit. The Commissioner-General also used the opportunity to hand over a personal medal from His Holiness Pope Francis to UNRWA student Ru'a in recognition of her courage and that of 525,000 Palestine refugee students.
- On 7 April, the UNRWA Health Programme celebrated World Health Day under the global theme "Universal Health Coverage". UNRWA conducted over eight awareness-raising sessions across the Gaza Strip on the topics of non-communicable diseases, dental, post-natal and maternal services offered by UNRWA. During the sessions, the floor was opened for discussion and questions from the participants and information material were distributed. Through 22 health centres, UNRWA in Gaza provides primary health care services to the majority of Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip, including clinical and laboratory services, maternal health and family planning advice, as well as monitoring and treatment of communicable diseases such as diarrhoea, meningitis or mumps. Meanwhile, the critical crisis of shortage of medical supplies in the public health sector continues with about 45 per cent in the drugs and about 27 per cent in the consumables arrived to zero stock by the end of March. These critical shortages have negatively impacted important health services, such as maternal health care, oncology services, renal dialysis, heart and catheterization interventions, as well as eye and orthopaedic surgeries.
- UNRWA continues to implement a total of 13 infrastructure projects worth US\$ 44.87 million, while 22 projects worth US\$ 31.17 million are awaiting implementation. In March, UNRWA imported 27 trucks of construction materials included on the list of dual use items such as cement, white cement, steel pipes, steel reinforcement bars, raw materials and elevators for ongoing UNRWA infrastructure projects.

## The UNRWA Shelter Update

Activities in March 2018:

### Completed cases:

- 154 reconstruction cases have been completed.
- 180 families have received their first instalment to start the reconstruction.

### Disbursement of payments

In total UNRWA disbursed approximately US\$ 4.5 million for shelter assistance:

- For reconstruction: US\$ 4,236,399
- For repair: US\$ 264,945

## Operational Environment

Between 29 March and 6 April, Israeli patrol boats opened fire towards Palestinian boats off the coast of the Gaza Strip on seven occasions, forcing them ashore. Three injuries were reported.

Between 27 March and 9 April, Israeli forces positioned at the fence opened fire towards Palestinian areas on 35 occasions. One injury and three fatalities were reported.

On 28 and 29 March on five occasions, civilians, mostly youth, staged protests against the US President's decision to move the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem near the perimeter fence in different areas of Gaza. When some of them approached the fence and threw stones towards Israeli observation posts, Israeli forces responded with gunfire and teargas. One injury was reported.

Between 30 March and 6 April, civilians, mostly youth, staged a number of protests under the slogan “Great Return March” near the perimeter fence in different areas of Gaza. Israeli forces responded with gunfire and teargas. According to the Ministry of Health, a total of 30 people have been killed and 2,901 people have been injured.

## UNRWA’s Response

“From some plants on a shelf to a plant nursery”



Yousef Abu-Mari, a 51-year-old Palestine refugee from Gaza, owns a plant nursery and has been a client of the UNRWA Microfinance Programme in Gaza for more than two years. © 2018 UNRWA Photo by Khalil Adwan

Yousef Abu-Mari is a 51-year-old Palestine refugee who lives with his family of eleven in Gaza city. He has been a client of the UNRWA Microfinance Programme in Gaza for more than two years. In 2015, he got his first loan to improve his business, a plant nursery, and he has received another two loans to date.

“I started my own business 15 years ago. I used to work as a driver but it’s a tough work with low return, so I decided to start my own business, which became the main source of income to me and my family. Through my project, I can afford my daughters’ tuition and provide for my family,” Yousef said.

Yousef uses the loans from UNRWA mainly in order to buy new plants. Despite the collapsed Gaza economy as well as high unemployment and poverty rates due to the Israeli blockade, his business improved over the years. “At the beginning the project, I had only few plants on a shelf. The loan helped me scale up my project, buy more and new plants and gain new customers. Having my own business makes me feel secure, independent and self-reliant,” Yousef explained.

Through its Microfinance Programme, UNRWA helps address the needs of the entrepreneurial and unbanked sector of the community, including low-income Palestine refugees. In 2017, the MD disbursed almost 4,172 loans worth over US\$ 6.3 million. It also provided fresh graduates, university students and professionals with different technical training, some of which focus on “Job Hunting”, “Project Management” and “Gender Awareness”. In 2017, the Microfinance Programme conducted 106 courses for 1,972 participants. Almost 43 per cent of the programme’s clients are female, and more than 31 per cent are below 30 years old. UNRWA launched the microfinance initiative in the occupied Palestinian territory in the early 1990s and expanded operations to Syria and Jordan in 2003. Since 1991, UNRWA in Gaza has issued almost 121,428 loans worth approximately US\$ 159 million.

## Funding Needs

UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions and financial support has been outpaced by the growth in needs.

UNRWA’s emergency programmes and key projects, also operating with large shortfalls, are funded through separate funding portals. Prioritised needs in Gaza in relation to the [2018 oPt Emergency Appeal](#) include US\$ 80 million for the distribution of emergency food parcels to almost 1 million people, at least US\$ 10 million for creating temporary cash-for-work opportunities through UNRWA’s Job Creation Programme as well as US\$ 7 million for the Agency’s Community Mental Health Programme. Furthermore, following the 2014 conflict, US\$ 316 million has been pledged in support of UNRWA’s emergency shelter programme, for which an estimated US\$ 720 million is required. This leaves a current shortfall of US\$ 404 million. UNRWA urgently appeals to donors to generously contribute to its emergency shelter programme to provide displaced Palestine refugees in Gaza with rental subsidies or cash assistance to undertake reconstruction of their demolished homes.

## Crossings

Longstanding restrictions on the movement of people and goods to and from Gaza have undermined the living conditions of 1.8 million Palestinians in Gaza. [Israel prevents all access to and from the Gaza Strip by sea and air. Movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza](#) is restricted to three crossings: Rafah crossing, Erez crossing and Kerem Shalom crossing. Rafah crossing is controlled by the Egyptian authorities and technically allows

for the movement of a number of authorized travelers, Palestinian medical and humanitarian cases only. Erez crossing is controlled by Israeli authorities and technically allows for the movement of aid workers and limited numbers of authorized travelers, including Palestinian medical and humanitarian cases. Kerem Shalom crossing, also controlled by Israeli authorities, technically allows for the movement of authorized goods only.

Crossing	27 March	28 March	29 March	30 March	31 March	1 April	2 April	3 April	4 April	5 April	6 April	7 April	8 April	9 April
Rafah	Closed.	Closed.	Closed.	Closed.	Closed.	Closed	Closed.	Closed.	Closed.	Closed.	Closed.	Closed.	Closed.	Closed.
Erez	Open.	Open.	Open.	Open for humanitarian cases only	Open for humanitarian cases only	Open.	Open.	Open.	Open.	Open for humanitarian cases only	open for ambulances in emergency cases	Closed.	Open.	Open.
Kerem Shalom	Open.	Open.	Open.	Closed.	Closed.	Open	Open.	Open.	Open.	Closed.	Closed.	Closed.	Open.	Open.