

syria regional crisis response update



a biweekly update for unrwa donors

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More than half a million Palestine refugees are affected directly by the conflict in Syria. The UNRWA response to the crisis aims to maintain access to UNRWA services and preserve refugees' resilience through targeted relief. For a more detailed overview, see the Agency's 2014 regional response plan [here](#). This biweekly update covers UNRWA's efforts from 28 April to 18 May.

highlights

The new UNRWA **Commissioner-General, Pierre Krähenbühl, paid his first official visit to Syria**. He said: "As another generation of Palestinians experiences the trauma of displacement, their situation has become, in human terms, nothing short of catastrophic. Yet it is often being overlooked. ... I intend not only to work with you to improve services, but also to speak publicly about the rights of Palestine refugees including their right to a just and lasting solution." Uninterrupted distribution of food, medical and other supplies to civilians in Yarmouk and several other embattled locations is the UNRWA "critical imperative". The full statement can be read [here](#).

After visiting Syria, the **Commissioner-General visited Lebanon**, where he met with PRS families in the camp of Burj Barajneh. The CG also met with Lebanese officials, including the president, the prime minister, the minister of interior and the foreign minister. The CG raised with them the Agency's deep concerns over the increased restrictions on PRS entry to Lebanon that were introduced on the borders on 3 May, and were addressed in the public UNRWA statement issued on 6 May. UNRWA continues to follow up on this issue and the related restrictions on PRS visa renewals with the Lebanese authorities. UNRWA appreciates that a country of just 4 million people taking in a further 1 million people – 52,000 of them Palestinians – in three years is a great burden. We support calls by the Lebanese government on UN Member States to be as generous as possible.

UNRWA is preparing to **restore services in Qabr Essit**, an UNRWA camp 15km from Damascus. The camp has remained relatively calm since October 2013 and is currently accessible. The health centre is operational and UNRWA is repairing the community centre for use. A critical and currently unfunded investment is the

reconstruction of a heavily damaged UNRWA school and repair of a moderately damaged UNRWA school. This semester, classes were given to UNRWA students in three alternative locations. Qabr Essit was established in 1948 and housed around 23,700 Palestine refugees before the camp was emptied as a result of the current crisis.

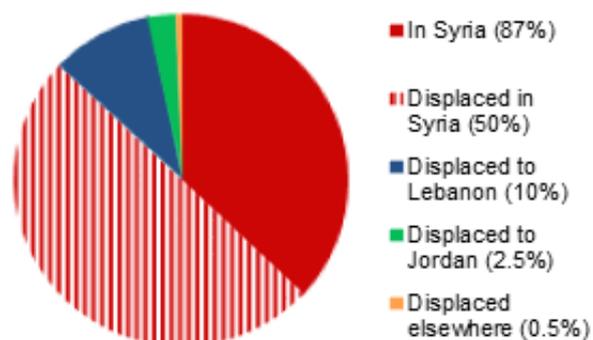
Food distribution in Yarmouk has not been possible since sniper fire killed two government military personnel in Yarmouk on 13 May. UNRWA is urgently seeking permission from the authorities to resume its operations. Before that date, parcels were distributed to 3,875 civilian families. UNRWA estimates that less than 25 per cent of the minimum food needs of civilians in Yarmouk were met since first accessing the area in January. Meanwhile, 120 ninth-grade students were allowed to temporarily leave Yarmouk, and 49 PRS students brought from Lebanon, to participate in Syrian nationwide exams.

regional overview

As a result of the conflict, 12 UNRWA staff have been killed, out of a total 16 UN staff in Syria. Twenty-five UNRWA staff have been detained or missing. Twenty-six UNRWA staff have been injured.

Displacement. Out of approximately 540,000 Palestinians registered with UNRWA in Syria, over 50 per cent are estimated to have been displaced in Syria or in neighbouring countries. In Lebanon, 53,070 Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS) have registered with UNRWA (up by 222 since the last report); in Jordan, 13,836 (up by 75); and in Gaza, 860

refugees from Syria approached UNRWA. The Agency also received reports of around 6,000 Palestine refugees in Egypt and smaller numbers in Libya, Turkey and East Asia.



Funding. To date, US\$ 104.1 million has been pledged in response to the UNRWA regional crisis response appeal for US\$ 417.4 million (24.9 per cent), including US\$ 35.5 million pledged in 2013 for implementation in 2014. Of the total response plan, 74 per cent is budgeted for implementation in Syria, 22 per cent in Lebanon, 3.5 per cent in Jordan and 0.5 per cent for regional coordination.

Inter-Agency. At the same time as providing input for the mid-year review of the UN-wide Regional Response Plan, UNRWA has begun work on its own mid-year review of the 2014 Syria regional appeal. Implementation of the appeal to date and expected further activities will be presented this document, which will be published in July.

Media. Clashes in Yarmouk interrupting the flow of food aid was the focus of the media at the beginning of May. The Huffington Post dedicated [an article](#) to the 120 students allowed to temporary leave Yarmouk for their exams. As news broke of PRS in Lebanon being detained and returned to Syria, the situation and vulnerability of PRS in Lebanon became a focal point. Media quoted the statement by the Lebanese Ministry of the Interior that emphasized this was a temporary measure.

UNRWA serves approximately 540,000 Palestinians registered in Syria. Of these, around 270,000 have been displaced inside Syria, and over 70,000 to other countries. Seventeen UNRWA installations across Syria house 7,910 internally displaced persons (IDPs), 15 per cent of them Syrians, and a further 4,384 Palestinians are sheltered in other installations, an increase of several hundred compared to the previous report.

Yarmouk. UNRWA distributed food parcels to 3,875 civilian families during the reporting period. This is an improvement compared to most of April, when clashes repeatedly disrupted distribution. However, on 8 May clashes prevented distribution, and on 28 and 29 April UNRWA was not authorized to distribute food assistance at all, without apparent justification. Since sniper fire in Yarmouk killed two government military personnel on 13 May, food distribution has not been possible at all. UNRWA hopes food distribution will soon resume and pick up pace, in order to address the desperate humanitarian situation of over 18,000 trapped civilians. UNRWA also reiterates its appeal to concerned parties to authorize the distribution of an expanded range of humanitarian assistance, particularly medicines, medical supplies and hygiene kits.

Access to UNRWA camps. The camp of Khan Eshieh, 27 kilometres south-west of Damascus, is a cause of rising concern. The camp itself is reported to be calm, but hostilities in the surrounding areas have made the camp inaccessible to outside staff. The last distribution inside the camp took place in August 2013. Though residents are allowed out of the camp to receive food distribution, they are not allowed to bring anything back into the camp. Local staff have courageously kept a health centre and health point open, and classes are provided for students in two alternative schools. Of the other camps in the area of Damascus, Jaramana and Khan Dannoun are calm and accessible through the main entrances. Qabr Essit remains calm and accessible through an alternative route. Sbeineh and Ramadan have largely been abandoned and facilities are closed, apart from one school in Ramadan. In other areas of Syria: Homs and Hama camps are calm and accessible. Sporadic hostilities were reported in Dera'a camp. Neirab (close to Aleppo) was relatively calm and all facilities are open. The unofficial camp in Latakia is calm and fully accessible. The unofficial camp of Ein el Tal (close to Aleppo) remains abandoned, since residents were forced out by armed groups in April 2013, and access remains blocked.

UNRWA incidents. On 29 April, a shelling caused casualties and injuries amongst civilians at Palestine School in the Adra area just north of Damascus. Two UNRWA students, one in third and the other in ninth grade, and four refugees died. An UNRWA teacher working in Palestine school was also injured and had to be hospitalized. Fortunately, she has since been released and is in a stable condition. The incident took place during a lull in shelling nearby, just when staff members were in the process of evacuating the school to a nearby shelter.

humanitarian response

Education. Around 39,600 Palestinian children are attending 42 regular UNRWA schools. Forty-three government schools are used as alternative locations for UNRWA students and teachers in areas where Palestinians have sought safety. Sixty-eight schools are closed due to damage or insecurity and 16 schools are doubling as temporary shelters for PR and displaced Syrians. Over 1,870 UNRWA teachers are working, as are 44 psychosocial counsellors. UNRWA has developed an interactive self-learning programme that has been adopted by UNICEF and Syrian authorities. The programme ensures that basic skills and subjects of the curriculum are delivered through self-learning worksheets, television lessons broadcast by UNRWA TV (English, maths, Arabic and science) and interactive, online games that focus on literacy and numeracy for early grades.

Engaging Youth. The successful opening of the Homs branch of the Damascus

Training Centre last October means that 106 trainees now take classes in ICT, welding, air-conditioner repair and business. UNRWA aims to re-establish Engaging Youth activities in all areas of Syria safe enough for regular food distribution, keeping up the resilience of local communities by equipping students with skills crucial to employment and community development.

Health. Nine health centres are operational in Damascus, and one each in Homs, Hama, Latakia, Neirab and Aleppo. In addition, eight health points are operational in Damascus, and one in Aleppo. These health centres have enough medicine and supplies to last until the end of May 2014.

Emergency relief. In April, 36,091 food parcels, 17,176 blankets and 3,312 mattresses were distributed across Syria, along with other vital non-food items. The first round of cash assistance in 2014 was completed in April, reaching 389,000 refugees; a second round is expected to be held pending availability of resources.

Microfinance. In April, the programme financed 923 loans, totalling around US\$ 300,000. Some 36 per cent of these went to women. This brings the total number of active loans in Syria to 4,816, with an outstanding balance of US\$ 900,000. All operational microfinance offices are now fully staffed, including new locations in the safer areas of Tartous, Latakia and Swedta. The portfolio at risk remains very low, at just 0.32 per cent, which is lower than the previous period and is the lowest risk of any field. During the first quarter of 2014, the programme earned a net income of US\$ 49,659. However, the programme is rapidly running short of loan capital and requires US\$ 3.5 million if it is to complete financing through the end of the year. The new report on UNRWA microfinance clients in Syria is published [here](#).

Lebanon

In Lebanon, 53,070 PRS have registered with UNRWA, an increase of 222 since the last report. Just over half reside in established Palestine refugee camps, and the rest reside in private rented accommodation or informal gatherings. Of PRS in Lebanon, 31 per cent are in Saida, 18 per cent in Tyre, 18 per cent in central Lebanon, 17 per cent in Bekaa and 16 per cent in northern Lebanon.

Education. With generous support from UNICEF, UNRWA organized its sixth annual sporting competition, the Palestiniadi, on 25-27 April. Three hundred PRS, PRL and Lebanese students aged 12 to 16 from throughout Lebanon took part in three days of sports, including football, basketball, volleyball, running, table tennis and chess. UNRWA schools are accommodating 7,491 PRS children, of whom 85 per cent attend special classes for PRS to gradually join the 15 per cent of PRS already integrated in regular UNRWA classes. More than 410 additional staff have been recruited, many of them PRS themselves.

Health. In the first quarter of 2014, 82,654 patient consultations took place, 997 patients were hospitalized, 337 patients received out-patient tests and 232 were admitted to the emergency room. Since April 2013, some PRS patients suffering from critical health conditions have been supported in covering their medical bills. Primary and secondary health care and medications are freely available to PRS at the 27 UNRWA health centres located throughout Lebanon.

Emergency relief. UNRWA provides cash assistance by crediting ATM cards issued to beneficiaries. In April, US\$ 2.29 million was credited for food and US\$ 2.19 million for housing assistance. Approximately 94 per cent of the PRS families recorded before April have received an ATM card and have been credited at least once. Assistance for 2014 will be a regular US\$ 30 per person for food and US\$ 100 per family for housing, depending on availability of funds. Unaccompanied and separated minors (fewer than 200) who are not entitled to an ATM card are receiving assistance in cash directly following an assessment by the UNRWA protection

team.

Protection. UNRWA is deeply concerned over border restrictions for PRS introduced on 3 May 2014 and restrictions on PRS visa renewals which could have grave humanitarian implications on PRS freedom of movement, ability to undertake civil procedures on civil registration (birth, death certificates) and eligibility to sit for official exams (Brevet, Baccalaureate). UNRWA continues to follow up and actively engage in constructive dialogue with the Lebanese government and reiterate its calls for the borders to remain open for refugees fleeing the war in Syria (regardless of nationality) and for refugees to maintain legal status in the country.

Jordan

In Jordan, 13,836 PRS and their families have approached UNRWA, an increase of 75 since the last report. These are largely PRS already in Jordan, but only now registering with UNRWA. Most PRS in Jordan live in poverty and their precarious legal status creates difficulties for civil processes, access to services and employment. Along with some 200 Syrians, 188 PRS are held in 'Cyber City', a government-appointed facility near Ramtha.

Education. Admission to UNRWA schools in official and unofficial UNRWA camps is open to PRS and Syrian children; 2,129 PRS and Syrian children are enrolled in UNRWA schools, an estimated enrolment rate of 85 per cent of PRS children, 54 per cent girls. Since the semester started in February, 295 new children have enrolled. The children are integrated in regular and remedial classes and follow the Jordanian curriculum. Fifty-six more teachers have been hired, extra school furniture has been distributed and psychosocial and recreational activities are organized to support children's integration into the new schools. UNRWA monitors drop-outs and offers targeted solutions to encourage families to enrol their children.

Health. UNRWA continues to provide PRS with free primary health care in its 24 clinics across the country, as well as hospital referrals for emergency and life-saving care with almost full coverage. In April 2014, PRS received a total of 1,973 consultations. Overall, PRS have good access to health care, with 98 per cent reporting they receive medical care when they need it.

Emergency relief. The final round of physical cash distributions to all PRS was completed in April, distributing over US\$ 1 million to 13,543 PRS to help them meet their basic needs, particularly for food and non-food items. UNRWA is piloting a new method for home visit-based socioeconomic assessments to prioritize vulnerable families for cash assistance. A specially recruited team of social workers will visit over 3,000 families in the coming months. The first targeted cash distribution is expected to begin at the end of June. Two hundred seventy-seven PRS received emergency cash grants to address an urgent protection or humanitarian need.



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

For more information, please contact: Jaap van Diggele | e: j.van-diggele@unrwa.org