



## education in emergencies: ensuring quality education in times of crisis

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight.

UNRWA services encompass education, health care, camp infrastructure and improvement, relief and social services, protection and microfinance. Throughout the past seven decades, UNRWA has been the main provider of public services to Palestine refugees across the Agency's five Fields of operations and is well regarded as a pioneer in public service delivery in fragile contexts and in emergencies.

Over the decades, UNRWA has made a substantial and unique contribution to the human development of Palestine refugees and earned a reputation for its delivery of, and commitment to, high quality education.

### The UNRWA approach to education

Recognising that education is fundamental to helping every child achieve their full potential, UNRWA has worked for over 70 years to ensure that Palestine refugee children have access to quality education. Since its operations began, UNRWA has educated three generations of refugees, or more than two million refugee children. Currently, UNRWA provides free basic education to some 540,000 children in 710 schools. UNRWA also operates eight vocational training centres for close to 8000 Palestine refugee youth, and two educational science faculties across the Agency's five Fields of operations.

### Education in Emergencies

Through its Education in Emergencies (EiE) programme, UNRWA helps to ensure that Palestine refugee children, across Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank, can continue to access their right to quality, inclusive and equitable education, even in times of emergencies. With the increasingly volatile situation in the region, the delivery of education to Palestine refugees living in times of crisis is a continuous challenge. The UNRWA Education in Emergencies approach is to strengthen the UNRWA education system, whilst complementing it with innovative approaches to respond to new and challenging contexts. The Programme proved to be relevant in the current COVID-19 crisis. The UNRWA EiE programme has become renowned in the region and beyond, with the Host countries and sister UN agencies replicating the approach and using specific resources.

The UNRWA approach to EiE involves 'doing things differently' (delivering education in alternative ways), 'doing more of other things' (more psychosocial support to children) and 'doing things that had not been the focus before' (safety and security training for students, staff and parents).

UNRWA adopts a multi-strand approach to EiE, to ensure that the response is holistic and meets the needs of children, teachers and parents through:

1. Ensuring a safe and secure learning environment for Palestine refugee children and youth, one that supports their physical and emotional wellbeing
2. Sustained quality teaching and learning, including alternative methods of teaching and learning in times of crisis
3. Ensuring parental, community and student engagement to support the quality and continuation of education in emergencies

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## 1) Safe and secure learning environment

### Psychosocial support

In light of the negative psychosocial impact of conflict and crisis on children and education staff, the UNRWA EiE response emphasises the importance of psychosocial support. Here, UNRWA puts additional psychosocial counsellors in place to provide students with individual and group counselling, recreational and learning activities and it works to ensure referral of cases to specialised services if required. UNRWA also facilitates the capacity-development of its teachers in providing psychosocial support for all children in their classrooms. To help facilitate this, UNRWA has developed some key resources, most recently a Recreational Activities Guide.

### Safe and secure delivery of education

UNRWA works to promote the safety and security of its students, education staff and schools. Safety and security training modules have been developed and the capacity of education staff and students built to help them to better respond in emergencies. School risk assessments and evacuation drills are also regularly carried out. Parents are kept informed of the security measures at school and how they can help to keep their children safe in and on their way to school.

### Safe learning and recreational spaces

During emergency situations, education may be interrupted and Palestine refugee children can be unable to access their regular schools. Some children may be living in collective shelters for internally displaced persons and not have a place to study at home. To help address this disruption to learning, UNRWA has set up safe learning and recreational spaces; these provide a safe and child-friendly environment, where children can learn and engage in recreational activities supported by qualified teachers and specialised psychosocial counsellors.

## 2) Quality teaching and learning

### Self-Learning Programme

Self-Learning Programme If the education of students is disrupted, the UNRWA Self-Learning Programme (SLP) can be used to facilitate their learning of basic skills and core subject concepts (in Arabic, Mathematics, English, and Science). The programme includes material in print and an UNRWA YouTube TV channel. Most recently the programme was developed into a Digital Learning Platform (DLP) available at <https://keeplearning.unrwa.org>.

### Learning support

The UNRWA EiE programme also provides specific support to children who need to make up for any lost school time, for example through catch-up classes and summer learning programmes.

## 3) Parent, community and student engagement

The engagement of parents and the wider community is particularly important in times of emergency. When schools cannot operate, parents and the community can ensure the continuation of education at home or encourage children's attendance in alternative spaces.

Regular parents' awareness sessions on a variety of topics, including on psychosocial support, safety and security and the Self-Learning Programme are needed. The Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) can further strengthen the link between the school and the community and support contingency planning at the school level.

Students themselves are of course central to the EiE programme, specifically with regard to safety and security preparation and drills (for example school evacuation) and through the involvement of the elected student School Parliaments in school level planning.

### Monitoring and Evaluation

Working to improve data management and strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of the EiE Programme, UNRWA developed an Agency-wide EiE Bank of Indicators. The Bank builds on existing global and regional EiE indicators and seeks to achieve consistency of measurement across the UNRWA Five Fields of operation, enabling programmatic and Emergency Appeal monitoring and reporting to be more comparable.

The UNRWA EiE programme has benefited to date from the generous support of the Government of Belgium, Educate A Child, the European Union and Education Cannot Wait.

### UNRWA EiE Programme and COVID-19

Within the COVID-19 context, the focus of the EiE programmes was as follows:

- a. **Teaching and learning:** the emphasis on self-learning continued but new modalities for teaching and learning were developed adhering to the need for social distancing. These included remote and hybrid approaches.
- b. **Health and hygiene safety:** safety and security are non-negotiable prerequisites of schooling and this crisis added a clear health dimension.
- c. **Psychosocial support:** the pandemic is not 'merely' a health, educational or economic crisis, it also affects the basic well-being of refugee learners.
- d. **M&E:** to ensure continuous system-level learning.
- e. **TVET:** merits its own domain due to its very specific nature which includes practical learning.

### For more information

Please contact your Chief Field Education Programme or UNRWA HQ Education Department on:

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for palestine refugees in the near east

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UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 with a mandate to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to registered Palestine refugees in the Agency's area of operations, namely the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. Thousands of Palestine refugees who lost both their homes and livelihood because of the 1948 conflict have remained displaced and in need of significant support for over seventy years. UNRWA helps them achieve their full potential in human development through quality services it provides in education, health care, relief and social services, protection, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance and emergency assistance. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions.