



update on unrwa operations in gaza

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The blockade on Gaza - about to enter its 13th year in June 2019 - is keeping 1.9 million people isolated and locked into a tiny 365 square kilometres enclave. Years of closures and restrictions on the movement of people and goods, as well as repeated cycles of violence, have had a devastating human and economic impact. The average unemployment rate in 2018 increased to 52 per cent - the highest annual level ever reported - from 43.6 per cent in 2017. Access to clean water and electricity remains at crisis level and impacts nearly every aspect of life in Gaza. Almost 97 per cent of Gaza's domestic groundwater supply is not fit for consumption; for most of 2018, Gaza received 4-5 hours of electricity per day on average which, thanks to a US\$ 60 million grant for fuel for the Gaza Power Plant, improved to 12-15 hours in October and averaged 11 hours/day in Q1/2019. The chronic electricity deficit over the past decade has severely impacted the availability of essential services, particularly health, water and sanitation services, and continues to undermine Gaza's fragile economy. The continued inner-Palestinian political stalemate continues to exacerbate the overall socioeconomic situation and service delivery crisis on the ground. Movement restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities most tragically affect the ability of patients to seek medical care outside of Gaza. On average in Q1/2019, 67 per cent of patients' application to exit Gaza via Israel were approved while 33 per cent were delayed or denied, constituting a slight improvement compared to the average 2018 approval rate of 61 per cent.

In response to the continued deteriorating socio-economic situation in Gaza, the blockade and widespread hopelessness among Gaza's population, tens of thousands of Palestinians have since 30 March 2018 participated in weekly, largely non-violent "Great March of Return and Lifting the Blockade" demonstrations near the perimeter fence separating Gaza and Israel. Until 22 March 2019, 195 Palestinians were reportedly killed in the context of such demonstrations, while almost 30,000 were injured, including 7,246 by live ammunition.¹ Among the injured were 5,778 children. At least 13 children who attended UNRWA schools are among the fatalities. Thousands of casualties have required hospital treatment, exceeding by far the absorption capacity of Gaza's hospitals and resulting in further depletion of medical supplies and severely limited access to health care for non-trauma cases.

In an environment of increasing needs and dependency, UNRWA has for a long time been perceived as a pillar of stability by 1.4 million

Palestine refugees in Gaza. Due to the Agency's critical funding shortfall, UNRWA in Gaza was forced to scale back some of its work in 2018, particularly with regard to its emergency interventions. While the impact on beneficiaries could largely be contained until now, staff funded under the UNRWA Emergency Appeal for the Occupied Palestinian Territory were affected by reductions in the mental health support and job creation programmes.

delivering critical health services and psychosocial support

22 UNRWA health centres in Gaza provide approximately one million primary health care consultations to Palestine refugees each quarter. UNRWA has fully implemented the family health team approach and e-Health system, which have enhanced the efficiency and effectiveness of health care. For example, significant results have been achieved with regard to improving maternal health and on the detection and treatment of non-communicable diseases. Extensive training on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) has also enhanced the skills of UNRWA medical staff to increase the quality of primary health care and psychosocial support for Palestine refugees.

From 30 March 2018 until 31 March 2019, 2,729 patients received 5,593 medical consultations for demonstration-related injuries at UNRWA health centres, 86 per cent for gunshots of varying severity, two-thirds of which were classified as moderate and severe. Most of the patients approach UNRWA health centres for post-operative care, such as surgical dressing of the wounds and/or medical treatment. UNRWA expects that a substantial number of patients will suffer from long-term physical disabilities and require extensive physiotherapy management, as well as psycho-social support over the coming months. As a result of an increasing number of curative consultations, the average number of daily consultations per medical officer has increased to 85.

providing education and counselling support for children

During the 2018-2019 academic year, UNRWA provides primary education (grades 1-9) to almost 279,000 students (50 per cent girls and 50 per cent boys) in 274 elementary and preparatory schools in

¹ An additional 76 Palestinians were killed in other circumstances, including through airstrikes and tank shelling during limited escalation of hostilities.

Gaza (84, 177 and 13 schools operating on single, double, and triple shift, respectively) through a workforce of 8,800 teachers. Compared to the previous school year, the UNRWA student population increased by some 7,000 children. The class size average has increased from 39 to 41 students per class. While education is highly valued, students' performance and motivation are negatively impacted by the wider Gaza context of continuous power outages and electricity rationing, poor shelter and living conditions, and economic deprivation. Children who drop out are at heightened risk of child labour or of participating in life-threatening activities. Within this context, the Agency's Community Mental Health Programme counsellors have in recent years played a critical role in supporting Palestine refugee children through individual and group counselling and also through other structured interventions aimed at enhancing psychosocial resilience and well-being. Due to insufficient emergency appeal funding, this programme unfortunately had to be scaled back by up to 50 per cent in the second half of 2018. In addition, funding constraints impact the Agency's ability to provide students with stationery, to keep up with much needed school maintenance works, to provide specialized support to low-achieving students or students with disabilities, as well as to cover logistic needs such as transportation. After-hour guarding services in schools have stopped across the Gaza Strip resulting in a dramatic increase in incidents of theft and vandalism.

mitigating food insecurity

Years of blockade have decimated the private sector and turned the majority of Gazans from self-sufficiency to an alarming level of aid dependency. On a quarterly basis, UNRWA provides two categories of food baskets to all eligible refugee families to help them meet their basic food requirements: An absolute food ration is distributed to households that are living below US\$ 3.87 per person per day while a Social Safety Net (SSN) ration is allocated to households persisting on less than US\$ 1.74 per person per day. UNRWA distributes in-kind food assistance to about one million beneficiaries on a quarterly basis. In order to define Palestine refugees' eligibility for emergency food assistance, UNRWA social workers assess refugee families' poverty levels on an ongoing basis.

improving livelihoods and creating opportunities

Youth in Gaza are the most susceptible to unemployment. UNRWA therefore aims at enhancing the skills and employability of youth through technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in areas such as plastering, tiling, carpentry, early childhood care, website development, graphic design and photography, and media production. Currently, some 1,900 students are enrolled in these TVET courses including in traineeships to increase their competitiveness for scarce entry-level positions in the local job market.

Despite a severely constrained funding environment in 2018 and an increasing unemployment rate (52 per cent in 2018), the Agency was able to create short-term work opportunities for 10,139 beneficiaries in Gaza - a sharp decrease, due to lack of funding, on the 19,695 work opportunities created in 2017 - thereby injecting roughly US\$ 8 million into the local economy. To address exceptionally high levels of youth unemployment in Gaza, a sub-component of the JCP - the Graduate Training Programme - offered 1,706 (out of the total of 10,139 jobs) opportunities to recent graduates in 2018. In Q1/2019, just over 3,000 individuals were provided with temporary income-

earning opportunities. Currently, approximately 250,000 applicants are included in the UNRWA database, and the average waiting time for a temporary employment opportunity is more than 4 years.

Through its Microfinance Department, UNRWA helps address the needs of low-income Palestine refugees and promotes self-employment and entrepreneurship. However, due to a restrictive economic and political environment, increased credit risks and the financial crisis faced by UNRWA, the issuance of new microfinance loans was curtailed in 2018. As a result, the Agency extended 2,687 loans to Palestine refugees in Gaza during the course of 2018 as compared to 4,172 loans issued in 2017. These loans were worth US\$ 3.36 million as compared to US\$ 6.23 million in 2017.

(re)constructing Gaza and supporting essential infrastructure

Damage assessments following the summer 2014 hostilities confirmed that 142,041 Palestine refugee houses were impacted with 7,445 categorized as totally destroyed and in need for reconstruction. As of April 2019, UNRWA had provided assistance to allow over 89,806 families to repair or reconstruct their homes; of those, 4,457 families had completed or were in the process of rebuilding their totally destroyed homes with support from UNRWA. UNRWA also supports the functioning of water wells, desalination plants and waste management services in Gaza through the provision of fuel and through the removal of thousands of tons of waste.

To provide services to a growing refugee community, UNRWA continues to invest in its educational, health and RSSP infrastructure, as well as water and sanitation facilities. As of April 2019, UNRWA is implementing 12 infrastructure projects worth US\$ 48.7 million, while 16 projects worth US\$ 23.9 million are awaiting implementation. UN imports of construction materials into the Gaza Strip remain subject to a lengthy and cumbersome approvals process imposed by Israeli authorities. In 2018, the associated additional staffing, transit, logistical and monitoring costs for UNRWA amounted to almost US\$ 8.1 million.

Gaza: Facts and Figures

- 1.4 million refugees out of 1.9 million total population (over 70 per cent)
- 8 refugee camps
- 13,212 staff
- 274 schools for over 279,000 students
- 22 health centres with ~1 million consultations per quarter
- 16 relief and social services offices
- 3 microfinance offices issuing 122,711 loans valued at US\$ 160 million since 1991
- 11 food distribution centres for over 1 million refugees
- Living under a tight land, air and sea blockade since 2007
- Long standing restrictions on movement of people and goods has led to a de-development of Gaza



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

www.unrwa.org

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5.4 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA across its five fields of operation. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank, including East Jerusalem 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, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, protection and microfinance.

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