



## 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.

### The UNRWA approach to education

Recognizing that education is fundamental to helping every child achieve their full potential, UNRWA has worked for nearly 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 over 530,000 children in 708 schools. UNRWA also operates eight vocational training centres for 7,700 Palestine refugee youth and two educational science faculties across the Agency's five Fields of operations. 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 Education Reform

Despite its achievements, UNRWA recognized the need to transform its education programme to better respond to the demands of the twenty-first century. Therefore, in 2011, it embarked upon a major reform to further strengthen its education system and develop the capabilities of refugee students so that they can play a positive role as a local, regional and global citizen. The Education Reform has shown impact, with improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, children achieving more academically with more equitable learning outcomes and decreasing dropouts.

### Education in Emergencies

Through its Education in Emergencies (EiE) programme, UNRWA further 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 crisis and conflict. With the increasingly volatile situation in the region – the conflict in Syria, Palestine refugees from Syria fleeing to Jordan and Lebanon, the blockade in Gaza, and ongoing occupation in the West Bank – the delivery of education to Palestine refugees living in times of crisis is a continuous challenge. Here the UNRWA Education in Emergencies approach is to strengthen the UNRWA education programme system, whilst complementing it with innovative approaches to respond to new and challenging contexts. 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 the specific resources developed.

# education in emergencies

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-stranded approach to EiE, to ensure that the response is holistic and meets the needs of children, teachers and parents, this is through:

## 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 specialized 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

If the education of students is disrupted, the UNRWA Self-Learning Programme can be used to facilitate their learning of basic skills and core subject concepts (in Arabic, Mathematics, English, and Science). The programme includes:

- Self-learning materials for Grades 1-9, based on the Syrian curriculum.
- Online Interactive Learning Programme with educational games focusing on literacy and numeracy (<http://ilp.unrwa.org>) for all students in Grades 1-9.
- UNRWA TV educational lessons, broadcast through YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/user/unrwatv>).

### Learning support

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

## 3) Parent and community 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. Similarly, they are key in the preparing of students for emergencies, as well as in helping to support schools in reintegrating and welcoming students back to school after a crisis.

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

The UNRWA EiE programme has benefitted from the generous support of the Government of Belgium, Educate A Child and the European Union.

## For more information

Please contact your Chief Field Education Programme, or UNRWA HQ Education Department on: [info.education@unrwa.org](mailto:info.education@unrwa.org)



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

[www.unrwa.org](http://www.unrwa.org)

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