



delivering education on the front line: the unrwa approach

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, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, protection and microfinance.

Throughout the past six 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 each and every child achieve their full potential, UNRWA has worked for over 60 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 four million refugee children. Currently, UNRWA provides free basic education to over 500,000 Palestine refugee children and youth in 692 schools, 8 vocational training centres and 2 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 has earned a reputation for both innovation in its approach and its commitment to education.

The Education Reform

Despite its achievements, UNRWA recognized the need to transform its programme to better respond to the demands of the twenty-first century. Therefore, in 2011, UNRWA embarked on a major reform to further strengthen its education system and develop the capabilities of refugee students so that they can contribute positively as local, regional and global citizens. The education reform has resulted in improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, increased efficiency, and a reduction of 'wastage' (i.e. student drop-outs and repetition of school years). The policy and accountability framework that is now in place, built around a clear vision of quality education for Palestine refugees, serves to further strengthen students' resilience and to actively contribute to their development.

Education in Emergencies

With the onset of the Syria crisis, there was a need for a sustained and innovative approach to ensure that the most vulnerable children and youth are not left behind, but given the support they need to continue their education even during times of emergencies. The reform of the UNRWA education system has enabled it to be better prepared, and more able, to respond and ultimately to recover from conflict and crisis; the Education in Emergencies (EiE) response builds on the reform. The approach is renowned in the region and beyond, with host countries and other UN agencies replicating its approaches and utilizing the specific resources developed.



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The key dimensions of the UNRWA approach to education are:

- **Safe and secure learning environments**, which address both the physical and emotional needs of children. The capacity of education personnel and communities is also being built to respond to insecurity, provide safe learning spaces and psychosocial support to help students deal with trauma and support their recovery.
- **Quality teaching and learning**, including the provision of alternative learning modalities and the professional development of teachers on these modalities and resources.
- **Student, parent and community engagement and participation**, which involves identifying and mobilizing available resources within the community and building consensus and support for EiE programming. During emergencies, UNRWA increasingly relies on communities to manage and deliver essential education services. As such, building active community participation from the onset through to recovery is key in an EiE response.

Through these innovative approaches, including safe learning and recreational spaces, interactive self-learning materials, learning support activities, and safety and security training, the Agency's EiE response helps ensure that Palestine refugee children can continue to access quality education and learning opportunities, even in times of crisis and conflict.

Safe Learning and Recreational Spaces

During emergencies, many Palestine refugee children live in shelters or far away from schools and are therefore unable to access their regular schools. To support these children, UNRWA establishes safe learning spaces to ensure a protected and child-friendly environment for children to learn and to also engage in recreational activities, supported by qualified supervisors and specialized psychosocial counsellors.

The Agency's safe learning spaces are key to providing:

- A 'safe haven' for children: a safe and secure space which is spacious enough for activities to be organized that promote children's right to protection, psychosocial well-being and education needs;
- An 'intersectoral' space in which different UNRWA programmes and departments can collectively provide a holistic response to the needs of children and parents living in the shelter and beyond; and
- An inclusive and non-discriminatory space that can be utilized by local communities for meetings and gatherings.

Interactive Self-Learning Programme and Learning Support Activities

The UNRWA Department of Education has also developed self-learning materials (Grades 1-9) in line with the basic skills and concepts of core subjects. These were designed to support children

who cannot regularly access school and include the following:

- Self-learning education materials (in hard copy) for Grades 1-9;
- Online Interactive Learning Programme and educational games focusing on literacy and numeracy (<http://slp-syria.unrwa.org>);
- DVDs for Grades 1-9; and
- ED TV lessons broadcast on UNRWA TV covering the core subjects of English, maths, Arabic and science for Grades 4-9.

In addition, through organized summer activities in several fields, the UNRWA education programme provides extra classes for some children who are lagging behind or who have dropped out and recreational activities.

Safe and Secure Delivery of Education

Finally, in order to deliver safe and secure quality education services to Palestine refugees from Syria, the UNRWA EiE team has developed a safety and security component. This promotes safety and resilience in UNRWA school communities, protects children and education staff, and strengthens conflict prevention and disaster resilience. The programme is in line with the Education Technical Instruction (ETI) on Safety and Security Procedures in UNRWA educational institutions and reflects the strong cooperation with the UNRWA Safety and Security Division.

A number of activities have been organized to develop awareness and capacity on safety and security, ranging from training and workshops to the development of risk management plans and security drills in schools. In Syria, an SMS notification system for staff and parents has been established, while in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, a mapping of the education facilities and of related incidents has further helped enhance the Agency's capacity to safely deliver its programmes.

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for palestine refugees in the near east

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