

Education



“I used to be really shy, but after I joined the student parliament, I became more confident about myself and others.”

-Sana Qabassi, Yarmouk refugee camp, Syria

Education

UNRWA operates one of the largest school systems in the Middle East and has been the main provider of basic education to Palestine refugees for sixty years. Indeed, UNRWA students are some of the most highly educated in the region. Education is UNRWA's largest area of activity, accounting for nearly 50% of its budget and two-thirds of its staff. For 2008-2009 the programme accounts for \$565 million out of UNRWA's regular budget of \$1.1 billion.



Palestine refugee children, UNRWA elementary school, New camp, Jordan

What education services does UNRWA provide?

- Free basic education to over half a million Palestine refugee children and youth in its five fields of operations¹, using the curriculum of host education authorities.
- Vocational and technical training courses in the nine UNRWA training centres.
- Secondary education to Palestine refugees in Lebanon, most of whom lack access to public schools and cannot afford private education tuition.
- An extensive teacher-training programme.
- University scholarships to qualified refugee youth. In 2006/2007, 361 students across the five fields received scholarships.
- Work placement and career guidance.

How does UNRWA meet the needs of around 500,000 students across five fields?

- UNRWA operates nearly 700 schools employing 22,000 teachers.
- Nearly 78% of UNRWA schools run on a double-shift to accommodate high enrollment.
- UNRWA runs a remedial programme for weak students in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
- Recognising the needs of students with learning disabilities, UNRWA offers treatment to them in 13 of 19 camps in the West Bank.
- In response to 50%-60% failure rates in mathematics and a 40% failure rate in Arabic in Gaza in January 2008, UNRWA created its Schools of Excellence programme. Specific interventions include reducing class sizes, hiring additional teachers and running summer remedial courses.
- In the West Bank, similar assessments will be conducted in the 2008/2009 academic year, focusing on literacy and mathematics.

How have the movement and access restrictions affected UNRWA schools in the West Bank?

- Checkpoints, obstacles and the Barrier hinder students' access to education.

- In 2007/2008 256 work days were lost due to access difficulties affecting teachers and school administrators. To accommodate for the increasing access restraints, UNRWA relocated a number of teachers to schools closer to their homes starting in 2003.

How has the closure impacted UNRWA schools in Gaza?

- \$93 million of UNRWA and other UN-supported building projects, including schools, remain suspended due to a lack of materials.
- The closure delayed for months the import of paper for UNRWA textbooks, chalk and note books; textbooks on human rights were delayed 8 months.
- There is a shortage of uniforms, school bags and school supplies in the market.
- Most significantly the closure has meant that many parents of UNRWA schoolchildren are unemployed, leading to poverty and hungry students in classrooms.

Are UNRWA students involved in human rights issues and school governance?

- In 2005 UNRWA established a human rights, tolerance and conflict resolution programme in its schools. The programme operates in co-operation with other UN agencies, host governments and NGOs.
- The programme features a series of learning tools and activities to make learning about human rights fun, including art and writing competitions, sports events and an interactive CD for the 5th to 8th grades.
- Student parliaments, a feature of the programme, have had a significant impact on school discipline, students' empowerment and awareness as well as parental engagement.
- Young parliamentarians work as leaders to resolve conflicts among students and between teachers and students and participate in various committees such as sports, health, finance and social affairs.

¹ Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territory (West Bank and Gaza Strip)

About UNRWA

Some 4.6 million Palestine refugees in UNRWA's five fields of operations – Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem – are eligible for Agency services, including education, healthcare, social services, shelter, micro-credit loans and emergency aid. UNRWA employs nearly 30,000 staff, the vast majority of whom are Palestine refugees. UNRWA's operations are financed almost entirely by voluntary contributions from donors. The Agency's regular budget for 2008-2009 is \$1.1 billion, which covers the recurrent costs of the Agency's education, health and relief and social services activities. UNRWA's headquarters are in Gaza City and Amman.