



Sit-rep/9 COVID-19 24 May 2020

Background

As of 24 May 2020, there were 86 confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported in Syria, including four deaths and forty-one recoveries.

The Government of Syria Arab Republic (GoSAR) has imposed a range of measures aimed at reducing the spread of COVID-19:

- The following measures remain implemented to prevent COVID-19 spread: curfew across the country from 7:30pm to 6am; border crossing points to Lebanon and Jordan remain closed until further notice, except for cargo. Damascus Airport remains closed, except for repatriation flights for citizens abroad. As of 17 April the restrictions on Qabre Essit Palestine refugee camp (Rif Damascus) were lifted.
- As of 23 April, all industrial, retail and service businesses have been allowed to open from 8am to 5pm, however restaurants, cafes and public parks remain closed. On 20 May the Governor of Damascus issued a circular extending the working and opening hours of all commercial and service professions, allowing them to operate until 7pm, effective immediately until the end of Eid el Fitr, including Friday.
- Universities and educational facilities in Syria are set to reopen on 31 May and national exams for grade 9 will be held on 21 June.
- The restriction on traveling between governorates and to and from urban and rural areas is lifted until 30 May.

Movement restrictions to date exclude everything related to ensuring the continuity of the health sector and the production process in all areas and movement of food and supplies.

UNRWA operates in line with the Government of Syria decisions in relation to preventive measures and in line with the wider decisions of the UN system in Syria.

UNRWA operations in Syria

- UNRWA Syria is currently prioritizing the continuation of health services, distribution of emergency cash and food and sanitation services in the camps.
- A gradual return of staff to work from the office is being implemented while ensuring that WHO guidelines and protective and prevention measures are followed. Infrared temperature check devices are now being used on entry to the main UNRWA compounds.

Health

25 UNRWA facilities are operating a triage system, for people with respiratory symptoms, through a dedicated team of health staff. Since the onset of the COVID-19 response 10,790 patients at UNRWA facilities have reported respiratory complaints and have been examined following the triage care and related protocols. No COVID-19 case was detected at UNRWA Health facilities.

Telemedicine support is being provided to refugees. A total of 751 telemedicine calls have been received across UNRWA health facilities during the reporting period. A total of 2,320 calls have been received since the service became available.

Provision of medicines to 8,000 vulnerable NCD patients for a two-month supply continues, through door to door visits. 901 home visits have been conducted, of which 94 were conducted during the reporting period. Patients in Muzeirib and Jillin collect their medicines directly from the UNRWA health facility, as the Agency is not able to conduct door-to-door delivery due to security situation.

Guidelines for a phased approach to service delivery in UNRWA Health facilities have been developed. UNRWA is gradually resuming some of the health services previously suspended. During the reporting period examination services for new identified NCD patients and new pregnant women have started.



Humanitarian Assistance

85% of eligible Palestine refugees have received the in-kind food basket.

For the in-kind food distribution, UNRWA utilized 14 regular distribution centres and 5 mobile centres, and 9 newly established distribution points at UNRWA schools and microfinance offices. 4 of the new distribution points are now closed as distribution is completed in some areas.

UNRWA plans to start the second cash distribution round of 2020 on 27 May 2020. Preparations for cash distribution are ongoing.

Sanitation

Sanitation services in the nine official and one unofficial accessible camps are carried out daily in addition to disinfection activities.

Garbage collection points continue to be sanitized along with larger areas in the camps.

UNRWA installations are being regularly sanitized as necessary.



Sanitation activities in UNRWA schools

Education and TVET

103 schools and 5 Training Centres for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) of UNRWA remain closed until 31 May.

In line with GoSAR decision, UNRWA will reopen the Agency TVET centers as of 31 May. The TVET programme is implementing the necessary preparation for the return of students to ensure necessary preventive measures are in place. Sanitization of workshop spaces, laboratories, classrooms and yards is ongoing. Staff are updating curriculum to help students compensate for study time lost with a focus on second year students who should graduate by the end of July. Sanitizing liquid and face masks are being procured in line with government requirements.

UNRWA PSS counsellors are providing PSS advices to teachers, students and parents via phone, Whatsapp and email both through groups and individual sessions when necessary. PSS counsellors are specifically prioritizing support to Grade 9 students who are preparing for their upcoming examinations.

Microfinance

3 of the 4 UNRWA Microfinance Department offices in the areas opened during the reporting period at 40% capacity, while home visits continue to suspended.

Approximately 2,100 loan payments were received.

Protection and Relief and Social Services

During the reporting period, the Agency registration services (births, deaths, marriages) have restarted following the government's resumption of basic civil registration services.

The opening of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Family Support Offices (for legal and GBV survivor support) is now planned for the week after Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr. Safety measures aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 will be implemented.

A total of 294 calls were received through the 8 established helplines during the reporting period out of a total of 2,314 calls received since the service became available. Helpline data continues to be collected with the vast majority of calls being inquiry for cash and food assistance.

PSS services have been started remotely via phone for some 1,236 refugees with disabilities, older persons and survivors of GBV.

Community Outreach and Awareness

The Agency continues to raise health awareness on COVID-19 in the health centers. Posters and awareness material, with WHO and Ministry of Health guidelines on infection prevention and control, continue to be distributed across UNRWA installations and in the camps. UNRWA Syria continues to disseminate awareness messages to the Palestine refugee community through social media and SMS.

UNRWA Staff

Support of professional psychosocial counsellors continues to be available remotely to all area staff. 15 counsellors are available to provide support. A total of 87 staff members (18 male; 69 female) accessed this service since it was made available.

On 14 May, Mr. Amany Michael-Ebye, Director of UNRWA Affairs in Syria visited the Agency's office in Damascus area. The visit was an opportunity to thank front-line staff who have worked during the past months ensuring the continuation of vital services to Palestine refugees despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. While speaking to medical staff in the UNRWA Damascus polyclinic the Director said 'It is important to acknowledge and recognize the relentless efforts of the courageous health workers who continue to work for the health and safety of Palestine refugees. Your dedication and courage deserve our deepest gratitude and admiration. You are key to UNRWA health services.'



Director of UNRWA Affairs in Syria visiting medical staff at UNRWA Damascus Polyclinic

Fundraising

On 8 May UNRWA launched an updated [COVID-19 Flash Appeal](#) for US\$ 93.4 million, to expand the Agency humanitarian response to the pandemic over the next 3 months. As of 21 May, the Flash Appeal was 35% funded.

On 12 May, Mr. Amany Michael-Ebye, Director of UNRWA Affairs in Syria held a press conference, briefing Damascus based journalists on the Agency's ongoing efforts in preventing the spread of COVID-19 and the steps taken to ensure continuation of services. The press conference also focused on the financial requirements of the Agency to continue support Palestine refugees during the COVID-19 crisis.

On 13 May, UNRWA Syria and Lebanon field offices held a virtual donor briefing to provide an update on the operational and funding situation of the Agency in the two fields. The meeting was attended by 47 partners.