



UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (UNRWA)

Good practice

UNRWA was the first to introduce the risk approach in maternal health as a tool to monitor women's health. It has also implemented a programme for the prevention and treatment of iron deficiency anaemia among women of reproductive age and has sponsored the institutional delivery of high-risk pregnancies.

UNRWA
c/o HQ Amman
P.O. Box 140157
Amman 11814
Jordan
Fax: 972-8-677 7707
E-mail: s.lone@unrwa.org
<http://www.un.org/unrwa/>

Operational activities

UNRWA provides a blend of education, health, relief, social, and microcredit services to registered Palestine refugees in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Gender activities are central to each of these programme areas. In education, UNRWA has long placed considerable value on educating females in recognition of the key role and influence of an educated woman in raising an educated family. UNRWA established the first and the only training centre for young Palestinian women in the region with the inauguration of the Ramallah Women's Training Centre in 1962. To date, 10,112 Palestinian women have graduated from the Centre, which maintains a high job placement rate.

In the 2002/2003 academic year 490,949 pupils were enrolled in Agency elementary, preparatory and secondary schools, of whom 245,733, or 50.1 per cent, were female. Women accounted for 67 percent of participants in UNRWA's pre-service teacher training courses, and for 64 percent of trainees in UNRWA's technical/semi professional courses. The UNRWA Education Department started working with UNIFEM in 2001 under the Gender Project through which UNRWA established a regional academy for Cisco Networking Academy Programme (CNAP), which emphasises equal gender access to information and communication technologies (ICTs). It also supports women's organizations so that they can participate more effectively in transformations made possible by ICTs.

In 2002, the UNRWA Health Department continued placing special emphasis on preserving and promoting the health of Palestine refugee women throughout their life span through various means including the provision of integrated prenatal, intra-partum and postnatal maternal health services for women of reproductive age, food aid to pregnant women and nursing mothers and school health services to more than 486,000 children aged 6 to 15 years, almost half of whom are girls. Family planning services were fully integrated within the Agency's maternal health services effective 1994.

The expanded maternal health and family planning strategy was revised in 2001 and implemented in 2002. A new management health information system was developed in order to improve surveillance, monitoring and response and ultimately improve women's health by linking outcomes to risk factors. The research agenda on women's health during 2002 comprised a study on maternal deaths reported during the period 1995-2002 in order to identify areas where action could be taken to prevent deaths from preventable causes. Special attention continued to be placed on prevention and treatment of iron deficiency anaemia by periodic haemoglobin testing of pregnant women and iron supplementation.

UNRWA's Relief and Social Services Department continued its efforts to alleviate the suffering and hardship facing the poorest refugee women by providing them with food support, shelter rehabilitation, and cash assistance. At the end of May 2002, approximately 47 per cent of all families receiving UNRWA assistance, dubbed "special hardship cases", were headed by females. There were a total of 27,288 such families, comprised of 60,950 persons, receiving assistance on a quarterly basis.

In addition, seventy-one community based and self-managed Women's Programme Centres (WPCs) continued to implement a wide variety of awareness, training and credit activities. Such activities included raising awareness on social, health and legal issues; technical skills training such as computer, English language, handicrafts, sewing; hairdressing etc.; group guaranteed lending as well as child care services through kindergarten and nurseries. More than 46,000 refugees benefited directly from WPC activities and outreach.

The mainstreaming of women in credit is a significant element of the development mission of the Agency's Microfinance and Microenterprise Programme (MMP). As well as helping women become economically self-reliant, loans to women helped informal enterprise owners to develop formal enterprises and created a culture where women's economic activity was socially valued. Women's participation in the development process through credit to women microentrepreneurs translated into improved health and educational outcomes for their families and children. However, in the conditions of strife since September 2000, many families succumbed to poverty and the economic gains that women achieved under the Oslo process were eroded. UNRWA's solidarity group lending product was one of the few sources of financial support to economically active women entrepreneurs that helped thousands of women in Gaza to support their families in the face of increasing hardship.

Other recent activities

During the past decade UNRWA provided over 20,500 loans valued at more than \$15.23 million to women microentrepreneurs, the majority of whom eke out a living in the informal enterprises as home-workers, street-traders or in small-animal husbandry. ■