

Gaza crisis:

Joint emergency E-voucher assistance targets 300,000 vulnerable families

Providing food, water, sanitation and hygiene items, and school uniforms

The World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) are preparing to progressively scale up an e-voucher programme which has already delivered lifesaving food, water, sanitation and hygiene assistance to **78,000 displaced people**, half of them children, in Gaza. Once expanded, the joint emergency e-voucher assistance will eventually reach **300,000 people**.

Launched in July 2014, the joint emergency programme focused on conflict-affected families taking shelter in public schools or staying with friends or relatives. The families received electronic vouchers which operate like debit cards, empowering them to purchase locally produced food, safe drinking water and sanitary products at local shops. The emergency voucher system allows families to choose from a list of pre-approved products to get basic, but critically needed commodities. Scarce aid funding is used only for the items the families actually need, while injecting funds into the battered Gaza economy.

300,000 people to be reached

Following the recent ceasefire after 50 days of armed conflict, WFP and UNICEF, together with Oxfam GB, will progressively scale up the programme to meet urgent needs of the most vulnerable families in Gaza,

	Milk Weat flour Olive oil and salt Canned food
	Bottled water Soap, shampoo and washing detergent Sanitary pads and diapers Toothpaste and toobrush
	School uniforms and shoes



Families taking shetler in a school during the 50-day long war in Gaza.

with a focus on those still taking shelter in public schools, who lost their livelihoods or who have not benefited from any other support.

With the school year expected to finally resume on 14 September, the programme will be extended to also provide 100,000 children with school uniforms, and help them resume schooling while bringing back normalcy in their lives.

The e-vouchers distributed had an overall value of approximately \$128 per month, for an average family of six. Although stores’ opening hours were reduced during the conflict, redemption rates for vouchers have been more than 95 per cent on average, and stores are monitored on a daily basis to ensure that sufficient stocks are available and that prices remain in line with market standards.

The one off new e-vouchers, which will include school uniforms and shoes; and water, sanitation and hygiene supplies, will have a value of approximately \$150 per family.

Over \$ 20.7 million are needed to fund the scaling-up of the joint emergency e-voucher programme.

Children taking shetler in a school during the 50-day long war in Gaza.



Joint emergency e-voucher assistance

- To date, WFP and UNICEF have provided emergency vouchers to up to **13,000 families (78,000 people)** who fled their homes and sought refuge at public schools or with host families.
- A Partnership Agreement, signed on 19 July 2014, defines the cooperation between WFP and UNICEF. Under this agreement, **WFP provides the emergency vouchers to the qualifying food insecure families and builds on its existing network of voucher shops** throughout the five governorates of the Gaza Strip. **UNICEF provides WFP with the financial resources for the provision of water, sanitation and hygiene products.** UNICEF also assists WFP in identifying families to be prioritized by this programme, and liaises with the Ministry of Social Affairs to review and refine their eligibility criteria based on vulnerability assessments and field visits.
- Under this programme, families receive voucher rations of 200 NIS for water, sanitation, and 240 NIS for food expenses each month. Water, sanitation and hygiene products include bottled water, soap, shampoo, sanitary pads, washing detergent, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and diapers. Food products include locally produced goods, such as milk, wheat flour, olive oils, salt and canned products.



WFP / Eyad El Baba

- The emergency voucher programme invests in the hard-hit Gaza economy by increasing sales of local goods and by supporting participating voucher shops. When the needs arise, WFP will expand the number of voucher shops in Gaza and will ensure sufficient geographical coverage of the programme.
- Together with Oxfam GB, WFP, UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Affairs are preparing the launch of the first ever tripartite sector package for food, water/sanitation and education.** For a period of four months, between September and December 2014, the e-voucher programme aims to reach 50,000 families (300,000 people) with this special package.
- As part of the tri-package, families will receive voucher ration of 240 NIS per month for food expenses. In addition, they will receive a one-time ration of 200 NIS per family for water, sanitation and hygiene products and 150 NIS per child for school uniforms and shoes. The stores network will be expanded to include retailers that can provide these additional items.
- This package is expected to benefit at least 100,000 basic and secondary school children in government schools.
- More than \$ 20.7 million are urgently needed to fund the scaling-up of the joint emergency e-voucher programme.**

USD 20.7 million
urgently needed
 (\$10.7 m. for WFP and \$10 m. for UNICEF)



WFP / Eyad El Baba

Photos: WFP / Eyad El Baba

For families trapped in shelters, e-vouchers made life easier

Kifah Abu Shanab, husband Nabil and four children have just returned home in the Shujaya neighbourhood, which was partly levelled by 50 days of armed conflict in Gaza.

The family fled heavy fighting in the early days of the war, and spent most of it taking shelter in the crowded Carmel boy's school in Gaza City. These hardships compound painful memories of the fighting. The Abu Shanab family and other relatives huddled at home those first terrifying days as and missiles and shells rained around them.

"We all went downstairs and hid in the basement. Baba said, 'No one is leaving without Auntie Sana'," 10-year-old Aseel tells, referring to her father speaking of his sister, who has a disability. "He even locked the door to make sure no one would try and leave her behind." Only when an ambulance was able to reach the family did they all flee, along with Auntie Sana.

"Being able to buy the items we need to survive, while maintaining freedom and dignity, means a lot to us."

At the shelter, the family joined an estimated 460,000 Gaza residents forced to leave their homes and move to overcrowded schools, or in the homes of friends or relatives. Water and food were scarce, and poor hygiene resulted in diarrhoea, lice and skin diseases.

While seeking shelter in the school for over a month, Kifah and her family received an e-voucher from UNICEF and WFP, enabling them to purchase critically needed food and water, sanitation and hygiene items.

"We left with nothing. Being able to buy the items we needed to survive, while maintaining freedom and dignity, meant a lot to us," Kifah says.

For nine months prior to the escalation, Nabil, a civil servant, had not been paid, meaning the family had no cash reserves. Kifah had to sell her gold dowry – a woman's last reserve in case of hardship – to pay for food for the family.

On August 26, a long-term ceasefire went into effect and many families went back home – provided it was still standing. Up to 70,000 people found themselves without roofs over their heads, as their houses were too damaged to live in.

The Abu Shanab family found their home in ruins – inhabitable, but just barely. A 1.5-metre hole gapes in the wall of the children's room, where a missile tore through it. The water tank on the roof of the two-storey building was destroyed and the windows in the rest of the house blown out. They, like most other families in Gaza, receive electricity only six hours a day.

Now repairing the damage to their home is going to cost NIS 15,000, about \$4,200. The cold rains of winter are just around the corner, and the school year is scheduled to begin with its accompanying costs.

Faced with all this, Kifah is keen to receive a UNICEF e-voucher that includes school uniforms. She plans to take her three school-aged children Aseel, Mohammed and Sally to have them try on their uniforms, a regular task in changed surroundings.

"We have no windows, no doors, no water, no clothes and no salary," she says, gloomily. "But thank god, we are safe."

Kifah, 30, says she is at her wit's end trying to carry out the most basic tasks. "I am very hygienic," she says. "I have a college education. I know how important it is to keep things clean." But obtaining the water for washing her children, ages five to ten, is a back-breaking chore.

A UNICEF-funded community water filling points – one of 14 in all - has been set up 300 metres from their home. After carrying two jugs of water from the only available clean water source nearby, she had to take medicine for the resulting back pain.

The water she transported was just enough to wash her children and then flush the stagnating toilet. Due to damage to the water network and power outages that effect water pumps, only ten per cent of Gaza residents are receiving water once a day for six to eight hours per day, while the rest of the population receive water every four to five days. The road to recovery will be long for Palestinian families in Gaza.

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