



Saima Mohammad (centre) is working as an Associate Public Health Officer with UNHCR in Rukban camp, in the North-East of Jordan (UNV, 2017).

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Meeting the basic needs of refugees in the Middle East

In countries neighbouring Syria, UN Volunteers have been mobilized to provide emergency assistance to internally displaced people. Saima Mohammad and Bashar Shehadeh - respectively based in Lebanon and Jordan - are providing medical services and food to people in need despite logistical and geographical constraints.

Saima Mohammad works as an Associate Public Health Officer for UNHCR in the North-East of Jordan, near the Syrian border. Approximately 50,000 refugees, mostly women and children, are residing in Rukban camp without access to any other health facility than the local clinic.

Every morning, Saima travels almost three hours from her office in Ruwashed to Rukban, driving through sensitive military posts on a partially-paved road. In this desert area, no facility or shop are to be seen for kilometres.

“ Life in the Rukban camp is extremely difficult for refugees. The place has no social amenities to offer and residents are exposed to numerous illnesses. At the arrival of the medical team, patients approach the clinic in a military escort in dire need of medical attention.

Saima and her team are able to deal with basic health needs, but complicated cases require urgent referrals to tertiary hospitals. As the logistical needs are limited, only a few of these urgent cases can be dealt with. “In case of emergencies, I recommend for the immediate evacuation of patients. However, the inability to address the needs of the larger population is very frustrating for me, and I am usually confronted with patients in need of medical attention, but cannot provide what they require,” explains Saima.

As a health officer, Saima advocates for the refugees’ entry into the clinic, and provides training and guidance to other health workers. She is also responsible for providing guidance and solutions to patients by calling the UNHCR health hotline.

“ Dealing with refugees and alleviating some of their health problems encourages me every day to continue working for them. This experience as a UN Volunteer has changed my perception about life and has made me a humbler human being,” says Saima.

Bashar Shehadeh, on the other hand, is serving the Beirut country office of the World Food Programme in Lebanon. His main role is to support the procurement unit to buy food commodities from the Lebanese suppliers to be sent to Syria. He is responsible for ensuring the smooth pipeline of supplies into Syria by streamlining the shipping documentation process and making sure that suppliers finalize the customs clearance process.



Bashar, working for the World Food Programme in Lebanon, is leading a training for NGOs (2017).



“ My job is to ensure that the right quantities of supplies arrive in the right place. Any delay or mistake in my work will have a negative effect on the supply chain cycle, and will impose more delay on food distribution. I have to always be very attentive in all aspects of my work in order to ensure a smooth pipeline of food commodities into Syria,” explains Bashar.

“The main challenges I encounter have to do with the sensitive nature of food commodities, huge amounts of unpackaged food, the long shipping period for certain countries and the regulations of both humanitarian aid and Syrian customs,” he adds.

More recently, Bashar started to explore the Lebanese market in search of prominent Lebanese traders. This project could make Lebanon a major hub for food supplies needed by UN agencies to be brought into Syria.

This story is published as part of the campaign for [International Volunteer Day 2017: Volunteers Act First. Here. Everywhere.](#)

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