

# **COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)**

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## **Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2025 to implement the outcomes of the WSIS**

### **Submission by**

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 29<sup>th</sup> session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

**DISCLAIMER:** The views presented here are the contributors' and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the UN Trade and Development.

# UNRWA Inputs: Flow of information for the follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society

## Part One: Executive Summary

In 2024–2025, UNRWA advanced a strategic digital transformation to enhance service delivery for Palestine refugees amidst severe operational and funding constraints. Key activities included scaling the Digital Impact Strategy through digital hubs in Gaza and Lebanon and initiating concept development for a Techno Park in Syria (C4). A major €45 million partnership to modernize health and education services, deploying an Electronic Medical Records (EMR) system and improving connectivity and devices across 142 health centres and 650 schools in UNRWA's areas of operations, namely the occupied Palestinian territory (including Gaza and the West Bank), Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The Agency expanded the Job Creation Platform (JCP) for livelihoods support and digitalized core e-government services, including the AI-enhanced Gaza Emergency System (GES) and e-Services Refugee Portal. Significant obstacles include active conflict disrupting operations in Gaza, critical funding shortfalls limiting scalability, and the challenge of ensuring digital inclusion and resilience in fragile contexts.

## Part Two: Analytical Overview of Progress and Trends

UNRWA's implementation of WSIS outcomes demonstrates a commitment to leveraging ICTs for human development and institutional efficiency in one of the world's most challenging humanitarian contexts. This aligns with the 2030 Agenda's principle of leaving no one behind, though extreme volatility tests the limits of digital resilience.

**C4. Capacity Building:** Trends show a shift from ad-hoc training to establishing sustainable digital ecosystems. UNRWA's digital hubs in Lebanon and (pre-conflict) Gaza served as innovation and skilling centres for refugees, directly supporting livelihoods and local capacity. The partnership with KfW Development Bank marked a significant trend in leveraging major investment for foundational capacity, equipping over 3,200 health and education staff with hardware, connectivity, and skills for new digital systems.

**C7. ICT Applications:** The integration of ICTs in core services is a dominant global trend, which UNRWA has adapted for crisis response and long-term institutional modernization.

- **E-government:** The development of GES represents a frontier in crisis informatics, integrating data from aid distribution, shelters, and logistics for real-time, life-saving decision-making during active warfare. The proliferation of AI-powered internal service chatbots (HR, Finance, Procurement) is an innovative trend towards improving the efficiency of administrative functions, freeing capacity for frontline service delivery.
- **E-health & E-learning:** The ongoing deployment of centralized platforms—such as the Electronic Medical Record (EMR) system and the Digital Learning Platform—represents a continuous effort to move beyond basic connectivity (WSIS

Target 5) toward achieving meaningful access to quality services. These evolving initiatives are steadily enhancing the equity and efficiency of essential services, while also requiring sustained investment in skills and infrastructure to ensure long-term sustainability.

- **E-employment:** The JCP digitalizes the cash-for-work programme cycle, enhancing transparency and efficiency in providing critical income support. Its design for replication across fields aligns with trends in developing scalable, modular digital public goods for development.

The primary obstacle remains a dire funding situation, threatening the sustainability of these gains. Furthermore, operating in active conflict zones like Gaza presents unparalleled challenges to infrastructure, access, and the very safety of staff and refugees, severely hampering implementation.

## Part Three: Innovations and Future Actions

### (a) Innovative Policies, Programmes and Projects

- **Crisis-Ready E-government:** The Gaza Emergency System (GES) is an innovative, integrated cloud-based platform for managing multi-sectoral humanitarian response in active conflict settings.
- **AI for Institutional Efficiency:** A suite of internally developed AI assistants (for HR, policy, finance, procurement) using Azure AI and Copilot Studio to streamline administrative processes and improve staff support.
- **Holistic Service Modernization:** The €45 million health and education digital transformation programme is an innovative partnership model for deploying enterprise-level systems like EMR.
- **Data Foundation:** Initial development of a centralized data lake and governance framework to harness AI and analytics for improved planning and decision-making.
- Modernization of the **Loan Management Information System** used by the **Microfinance Department** to efficiently manage microcredit operations across multiple field offices. It helps streamline workflows, improve transparency, and ensure accurate financial reporting.

### (b) Future Actions and Initiatives

To overcome obstacles and ensure full implementation, UNRWA commits to:

1. **Scale Proven Models:** Secure funding to replicate digital hubs in Jordan and Syria and scale the JCP to all fields of operation.
2. **Deepen AI Integration:** Responsibly expands the use of AI and data analytics across programmes for advanced forecasting, resource optimization, and personalized service delivery, adhering to ethical AI standards.
3. **Enhance Digital Resilience:** Fortify digital infrastructure and connectivity against disruptions, including through renewable energy solutions like deployed solar power systems.

4. **Strengthen Partnerships:** Actively seek new multi-year strategic partnerships and funding to ensure the sustainability and scalability of digital initiatives, which are critical for both emergency response and long-term development for Palestine refugees.