

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs – (Danish Representative Office, Ramallah)**

**Meeting in the Council for Development Policy on 22 September 2022**

Agenda Item No. 4

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| <b>1. Overall purpose:</b>                          | For discussion and recommendation to the Minister   |
| <b>2. Title:</b>                                    | Organisation Strategy for Denmark's Engagement with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) 2023-2027.<br>525 mio. DKK |
| <b>3. Presentation for Programme Committee:</b>     | 24 March 2022   |
| <b>4. Previous Danish support presented to UPR:</b> | 2 December 2016<br>Strategy for Denmark's Engagement with UNRWA (2017 – 2021)   |

## Danish Organisation Strategy for UNRWA 2023-2027

<p><b>Introduction:</b> UNRWA has a unique mandate by the UN General Assembly to protect and provide direct services for a young and growing population of currently 5.7m refugees, pending a solution to the protracted political conflict in Israel-Palestine.</p> <p><b>Key results</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stabilising effect in the region by providing health, education and social services to vulnerable refugees, including women and girls, in their region of origin.</li> <li>Migration incentives reduced by ensuring refugees protection under International Humanitarian Law.</li> <li>Reform and innovation of UNRWA's delivery model aligning expenditure to income.</li> </ul> <p><b>Justification for support:</b> As a humanitarian actor, UNRWA is not positioned to prevent or solve conflict. However, in the protracted absence of a political solution, UNRWA is a key actor for the well-being and protection of refugees in the region. UNRWA plays a stabilising role, mitigating risks of migration and radicalisation, not least of youth. UNRWA's operational priorities are in line with Danish policy objectives.</p> <p><b>How we ensure results:</b> Progress against priorities is monitored using a set of payment-linked performance indicators aligned to UNRWA's reporting framework.</p> <p><b>Major risks and challenges:</b> Geopolitics create food insecurity and inflation, challenging protection and service delivery. Increasing global refugee numbers, demographic trends and donor fatigue exacerbate the needs/funding gap and require innovation of UNRWA's delivery models.</p>	<b>File No.</b>	2021 – 39842					
	<b>Responsible</b>	Danish Representative Office in Ramallah					
	<b>Partner</b>	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)					
	<i>DKK million/year</i>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2026</b>	<b>2027</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>Commitment</b>	105	105	105	105	105	525
	<b>Projected disb.</b>	105	105	105	105	105	525
	<b>Duration</b>	January 2023 – December 2027 (five years)					
	<b>Previous grants</b>	2019 grant of DKK 70m raised to 105m in 2020					
	<b>Finance Act</b>	§ 06.39.01.11					
	<b>Head of unit</b>	Ketil Karlsen					
	<b>Desk officer</b>	Khaled Mansour / Kristina Kinch					
	<b>Financial officer</b>	Mads Kofoed-Didrichsen					
	<b>Relevant SDGs (marked in grey)</b>						
<b>Danish involvement in UNRWA governance structure:</b>							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Denmark participates on the Advisory Commission and Sub-Committee.</li> <li>The Danish Representative Office in Ramallah (DRO) is responsible for day-to-day dialogue and progress monitoring.</li> <li>Dialogue through high-level meetings and donor coordination.</li> </ul>							

### Strategic objectives

Contribute to poverty alleviation and regional stabilization objectives of 'The World We Share' (2021) and achievement of Agenda 2030 commitment to 'leave no one behind'. Support contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10 and 16 by delivering services and protection to 5.7 million refugees with complex challenges of forced displacement.

### Priority areas

Danish engagement with UNRWA comprises core support for UNRWA's Strategic Plan 2023-2028 and three priority areas:

- Protecting refugee rights by prioritising services to vulnerable beneficiaries
- Mitigating migration risk by contributing to stability in a fragile region
- Reforming UNRWA to adapt delivery on its mandate with available resources

### Core information:

Established	1949
Headquarters	Amman and Jerusalem
Commissioner-General	Philippe Lazzarini (April 2020)
Mode of implementation	Direct service delivery (education, health, relief)
Annual budget turnover	USD 1.2 billion (average between 2012-2021)
Human resources	Total of 28,460 local and 204 international staff (2021)

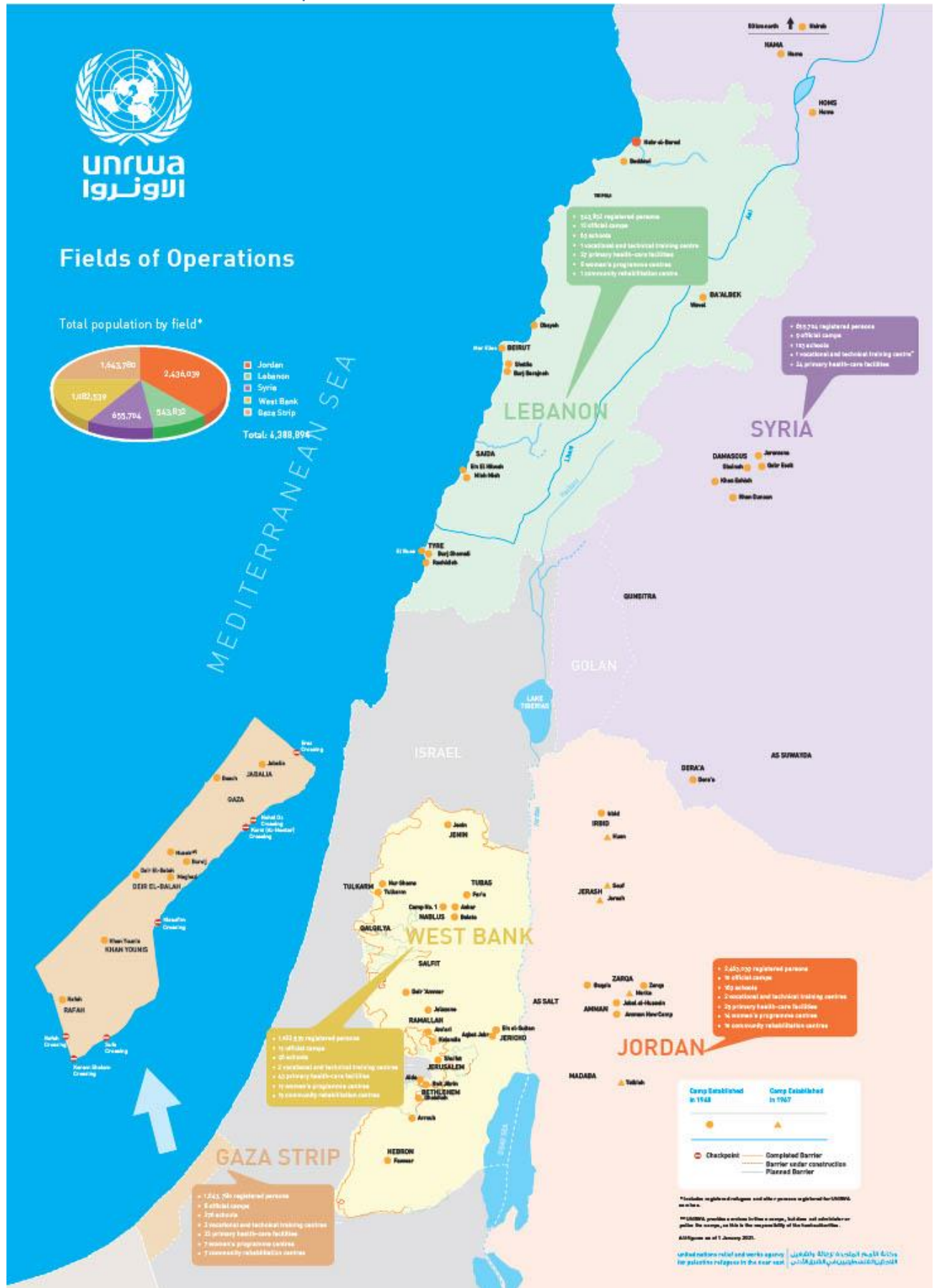
**Danish Organisation Strategy for  
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine  
Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)  
2023 – 2027**

5 September 2022

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# Overview: UNRWA fields of operation



## 1 Objective

This strategy for cooperation between Denmark and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) outlines the overall rationale and priorities for Denmark's contribution to and partnership with UNRWA at global, regional and national level. It identifies three Danish priorities for the partnership and is aligned with operational priorities of the UNRWA's own Strategic Plan for 2023-2028, aiming for better linkages between humanitarian, development and peace efforts in the challenging political and socio-economic context of Palestine<sup>1</sup>. A final version of the strategic plan is expected before the end of 2022.

The overall objective of Denmark's support is to promote and protect the rights and well-being of currently 5.7 million registered Palestine refugees that constitute 21% of the world's 26.6 million refugees (UNHCR 2021). Support enables UNRWA to play a stabilising role in a volatile region and mitigate risks of migration and radicalisation, not least of young people. Danish support contributes to:

- I. Providing health, education and relief services with special efforts to reach the poorest and most vulnerable segments of diverse refugee populations.
- II. Protecting registered refugees in Gaza, West Bank including East Jerusalem, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria with emphasis on the rights of girls and women.
- III. Delivering on reform commitments and innovation of the delivery model to align its expenditure to projected income.

In a challenging political context, support for UNRWA underpins ambitions of the Danish government for a fair and human asylum system within international law. It focuses on protection and self-reliance for refugees in conflict regions by reducing incentives for migration. Support for UNRWA delivers on commitments of the Danish development strategy 'The World We Share' (2021) to provide humanitarian assistance for some of the most vulnerable groups of refugees and internally displaced people in their region of origin.

Denmark will – along with like-minded countries – call on UNRWA to renew its model of delivery and ensure financial sustainability of the Agency by aligning expenditure to income and focusing on basic core services and better targeting of services to the most vulnerable. This includes youth, the Palestinian population being a young one that increasingly feels a sense of despair and hopelessness due to their precarious living conditions deprived of basic human rights. It also includes women and girls that are subject to rising levels of gender-based violence in a context of declining order and security and return to patriarchal ways of domination. Such reforms are critical for UNRWA to continue to contribute to Sustainable Development Goals 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10 and 16. This is recognised by UNRWA and partners to require concerted efforts to improve coordination with other UN agencies.

## 2 Organisation

Denmark is a long-standing supporter of UNRWA, a UN agency established by the General Assembly as early as 1949. UNRWA's mandate is to assist and protect registered Palestine refugees in five specified areas of operation, pending a just and lasting solution

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<sup>1</sup> UNRWA Strategic Plan 2023-2028 (draft June 2022), p.3

to their plight. In the protracted absence of a solution to this plight, the General Assembly has repeatedly renewed UNRWA's mandate, most recently to the end of 2022.

### 2.1 Unique role in a volatile region

The mandate and focus on registered Palestine refugees in five geographies give UNRWA a distinct role in the UN system. While UN agencies often have a global and open-ended mandate of setting and implementing standards in a certain field, UNRWA is tasked with responsibilities in a range of technical fields in its mandated geographies of operation. For a UN agency, this is an unusual long-term role of direct service delivery.

By way of example, in locations such as the West Bank and Lebanon, UN agencies like WHO and UNESCO engage with local government on health and education standards for the population at large while UNRWA is a direct provider of health and education services for those individuals who have status as registered Palestine refugees.

This role of UNRWA is a product of historical circumstances that renders effective coordination of efforts by the UN agencies imperative. A partnership approach offers UNRWA the potential to play a stabilising role in a volatile region near Europe.

UNRWA operates in a challenging political and socio-economic context, yet conditions vary in each field of operation. In Gaza, the blockade severely limits movement and access to work, jobs and public services. On the West Bank, young refugees in particular are exposed to the grinding impact of occupation. In Syria, the war has made conditions even more precarious for refugees while the economic and social crisis in Lebanon pushes living conditions of the Palestinians towards the bottom. In relative terms, Jordan may appear like an oasis but is dependent on import of food and energy and not immune to crises. In all areas, Palestine refugees are assisted with service delivery and protection of rights in spite of challenges.

#### Geopolitical context

Living conditions in the five mandated geographies where Palestine refugees reside vary significantly.

**Gaza** – key UNRWA role in a challenging governance context where up to 80 per cent of the population are registered refugees. Recurring cycles of hostilities lead to tension and radicalisation while restricted mobility mitigates migration risk.

**West Bank, incl. East Jerusalem** – refugees constitute a smaller share than in Gaza but face challenges of unemployment and insecurity in the context of occupation and in relation to the Palestinian Authority.

**Lebanon** – tensions from domestic socio-economic and political crises and renewed influx of regional refugees with limited rights and prospects for integration create risk of radicalisation and migration.

**Syria** – long-standing challenges from civil war include damages to UNRWA facilities in Syria and migration of Palestine refugees to other host countries in the region with ensuing risk of migration.

**Jordan** – host to the largest share of regional refugees, including Palestine refugees from Syria who continue to rely heavily on UNRWA. Limited prospects for local integration create risk of migration.

Jordan is host to the largest number of Palestinesi refugees (2.5m), followed by Gaza (1.7m) West Bank/ East Jerusalem (1.1m), Lebanon (0,5m) and Syria (0,7m). One third of the refugees continue to live in camps, while two-thirds reside outside camps and have rights to UNRWA services though not all make use of these.

UNRWA operates over 700 schools for 540,000 pupils and 140 health centres. Furthermore, UNRWA provide social assistance to some two million people across its five fields of operation, particularly in Gaza and Syria.

As of 2021, UNRWA has 204 international and 28,460 local employees, mostly frontline staff such as teachers, nurses and social workers. The share of local staff is high compared to other UN agencies. Most of them are refugees themselves and hence are both UNRWA employees and beneficiaries. This can pose a particular challenge when considering modernisation measures with implications for staff.

## 2.2 Governance

Due to its temporal mandate, UNRWA does not have a board and is governed instead by the United Nations General Assembly, which has renewed the tri-annual mandate repeatedly since 1949. An Advisory Commission (AdCom) was created along with UNRWA in 1949 to counsel and assist the Commissioner-General. AdCom is made up of

### **Mechanisms for strategic dialogue include:**

Denmark participates actively on the Advisory Commission (principals) and Sub-Committee (desk officers) and also engages in technical and ad hoc working groups. The Danish Representative Office in Ramallah (DRO) is responsible for day-to-day dialogue and monitoring. Finally, dialogue is also facilitated through high-level meetings and secondment of Danish junior and senior advisers.

29 members and four observers and meets twice a year (June and November). Partners meet regularly in UNRWA's Sub-Committee (SubCom) for technical advice,

exchange of ideas and recommendations to AdCom.

## 2.3 Budget and financial situation

UNRWA's funding model is based almost entirely on voluntary contributions making financing unpredictable with the UN Secretariat funding only international staff from its regular budget. Attempts have been made to diversify income and mobilise private sector funding, Islamic philanthropy and Zakat but with limited results. UNRWA has operated without financial reserves since 2012.

Shortage of funding became acute in 2018 when the United States halted its significant share of funding. Yet not even funding to the scope of USD 338.4m in 2021, restoring the United States as the largest donor, brought an end to the chronic funding crisis as it was offset by a disengagement of key Gulf donors seen by some in connection with the normalisation process vis-à-vis Israel. Denmark has increased support and contributed USD 21.1m in 2021, making Denmark the 12<sup>th</sup> largest bilateral donor.

In 2021, Commissioner-General Lazzarini went as far as to warn of an existential crisis with uncertainty of salary payments and service-delivery, short-term loans, payment of teachers on a day-to-day basis and carry-over of liabilities from one year to the other.

By far the largest budget expenditure is education. According to UNRWA's annual report for 2020, 61 per cent of the programming budget of USD 806m is spent on education, 15 per cent on health, 6 per cent to relief

<b>Bilateral donors (USD, million)</b>		
	2020	2021
United States	0	338.4
Germany	210.4	176.9
European Union	157.1	117.7
Sweden	60.4	54.2
Japan	33.1	50.5
United Kingdom	64.1	40.1
Switzerland	29.5	31.6
Norway	27.9	29.9
France	22.9	27.9
Canada	24.1	27.6
Netherlands	22.1	27.0
Denmark	15.7	21.1



and 4 per cent on infrastructure. By contrast, UNRWA's health statistics show a decrease in the number of primary health care consultations. This is reported to be driven by UNRWA's promotion of a family health care approach to reduce the number of visits and, more recently, the impact of Covid-19. Services provided include primary health care as well as hospital services. As in the case of education, it is currently under discussion whether provision of hospital services can be continued unchanged in the present budget circumstances or whether new and leaner models are required to ensure financial sustainability of the services.

### 3 Lessons learned, strategic challenges and opportunities

The conflict between Israel and Palestine is geopolitical. It has immediate implications for refugee host countries in the region and carries potential risks of increased migration and political radicalisation. It is a protracted and deepening conflict focused on territory and in need of a political solution. The past decades have seen a *de facto* absence of a peace process in terms of a trajectory with talks between the parties based on political initiatives. Thus, a belief in a breakthrough to herald a two-state solution has waned and at the same time, the humanitarian imperative to protect and assist refugees remains.

As a humanitarian organisation responding to the effects of the protracted conflict, UNRWA is not positioned to prevent or solve conflict but plays an important stabilizing role mitigating risks of migration and political radicalisation by bringing hope to the disenfranchised and deprived and stability in a region with declining order.

#### 3.1 Evidence of results

An external evaluation commissioned by UNRWA's Evaluation Division in 2021 responds to one of the key findings of the 2017-2018 assessment of UNRWA from the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN)<sup>2</sup>. The assessment report was published in 2019 and identifies a number of strengths of the Agency.

These include that UNRWA is highly knowledgeable about the context in which it operates and the people it serves given its long-standing engagement in the region and the commitment of its workforce. UNRWA is also praised for a well-considered and robust results-based monitoring system, high technical capacity in education and health and a rigorous approach to risk management with an increasingly strategic approach to how and with whom it engages. Despite sobering framework conditions of protracted conflict and chronic funding crisis, tangible results have been – and can be – achieved.

This picture of relative success in providing basic education, health and relief services for registered refugees was confirmed in 2021 by the evaluation of UNRWA's Medium-Term Strategy (2016-2022). An international team of experts was commissioned to conduct the evaluation with the threefold purpose of providing accountability, generate evidence-based insights and inform the successor strategy under finalisation in 2022<sup>3</sup>.

The organisation is recognised by the evaluation for having built up comparative advantage in providing services during the past 75 years, including quality basic education at relatively

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<sup>2</sup> MOPAN 2017-2018 Assessments: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East – OECD 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Evaluation of UNRWA Medium-Term Strategy 2016-2022 – ITAD UNRWA 2021.

low cost and with remarkable human rights-based features such as the unique school parliaments giving UNRWA pupils a democratic voice<sup>4</sup>.

#### **Cost-effectiveness of UNRWA schools**

UNHCR and the World Bank published a report on the ‘Global Cost of Inclusive Refugee Education’, including a case study of performance and cost-effectiveness of UNRWA schools. Despite severe funding shortages and political instability, coupled with refugee students that have suffered trauma, UNRWA schools were found to outperform host country public schools. UNRWA school children in Gaza, Jordan and the West Bank scored an average of a quarter of a standard deviation higher in international assessments than public school children, implying an advantage of almost a year of learning. These outcomes were achieved at relatively lower unit costs. For instance, the cost per student in UNRWA schools in 2009 was 20 percent lower than that in public schools in Jordan. In 2019, the annual cost per UNRWA elementary student was USD 841.50.

*UNHCR/World Bank 2021*

UNRWA’s funding model supporting operations is found to be inadequate. Over 90 per cent of resources are provided voluntarily based on factors largely outside the control of the Agency, as evidenced by the 23 per cent fall in income between 2016 and 2020.

When trying to make decisions about its services, UNRWA is found by the evaluation to be caught between opposing and sometimes entrenched positions of its different stakeholders. For Palestine refugees, UNRWA services

have strong symbolic meaning. Host governments are also found to resist change because they lack financial resources and are also reluctant to take over responsibility for UNRWA activities due to political considerations. Adding to this, UNRWA unionised staff fear loss of jobs on which they and their families rely.

### **3.2 Assessment of challenges and opportunities**

Challenges for Palestine refugees remain significant and require direct service delivery as well as rights protection, not least for vulnerable groups such as girls, young women and people living with disabilities subject to various forms of discrimination and violence.

In the short to medium-term, UNRWA is facing a situation with increasing costs as the refugee population it is mandated to serve is growing. Increased demand for UNRWA services has not been matched by an increase in income. In fact, funding is declining as the attention of the international community is shifting to other priorities and the overall number of global refugees is rising. A chronic funding crisis has created a gap between needs and resources that has moved steadily higher up on the agenda of the Agency.

UNRWA will need to undertake adjustments to scope and scale of its services. Such adjustments will not be easy to carry out as they will have to balance opposing demands from the Palestine refugees, host countries and donors.

While several external assessments have found that UNRWA is already a relatively lean organisation, the Agency will have to look at its scope of services. Issues like a sprawling organisational structure across five areas of operation also need to be looked at.

In response to these challenges, UNRWA itself will need to come up with reform proposals for discussion with development partners and stakeholders. These would

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<sup>4</sup> Participants in the Palestine Youth Advisory Panel convening on 18 February 2022 to reflect on UNRWA youth inclusion called for more interactive learning, life skills and involvement of youth organisations.

include prospects for continued funding of *inter alia* technical and vocational training and tertiary education at university level. In terms of health, UNRWA will also have to take a hard look at future funding models and services offered at tertiary level of hospitals and specialised health clinics.

The scale of UNRWA operations may also be subject to consideration. Education is currently provided up to grade 9 on the West Bank and in Gaza, to grade 10 in Jordan, to grade 12 in Lebanon and to grade 9 in Syria. Perhaps a pragmatic solution could be reached that reduces the scale of this provision of education.

Denmark will – together with like-minded countries – call on UNRWA to take pro-active steps and use its insights, expertise and analytical capacity to prepare realistic proposals for discussion with development partners on how best to adjust and modernise services while taking into consideration the possibility to transfer tasks and responsibilities to other stakeholders, including civil society, private sector and local authorities.

Further reductions may be needed to solve the chronic funding crisis and match funding and expenditures. In its Strategic Plan for 2023-2028, UNRWA commits itself to ‘further efforts to limit the growth in the workforce, as it has done in recent years through reforms in education and health’<sup>5</sup>.

**Growing demand for UNRWA services:**

- As of end-2020, 5.7m women, men and children were registered as Palestine refugees with UNRWA.
- This number is expected to increase to 6.7m by 2023 and could exceed 7.3m by 2028, driven by continued high but decelerating population growth in Gaza and slower rates of increase in other fields of operation.
- Service usage fluctuates as a function of demographic change and prevailing socio-economic conditions.
- By 2020, 540,000 pupils were enrolled in 710 schools across the five fields of operation, 8,000 studied in vocational training centres and 2,000 at university-level, 1.7m used UNRWA health services and 390,000 abject poor received cash or food aid.

## 4 Priority areas and results to be achieved

This section of the organisation strategy identifies three priority areas aligned with UNRWA’s mandate that Denmark will pursue and monitor in dialogue with the Agency. At the same time, the strategy reflects the overall priority of Denmark to stay long-term engaged with UNRWA and its other development partners to explore solutions to the challenges it currently faces in matching mandate and expenditure to available resources and operating conditions on the ground.

The five-year funding horizon of this strategy (2023-2027) also responds to a particular challenge of UNRWA relating to the predictability of funding. The high dependency of the Agency on voluntary contributions combined with political controversy have involved considerable fluctuations over time. The fluctuations associated with short funding horizons have proven burdensome in terms of planning and financial management.

The regular contribution of Denmark of DKK 105m per year is provided as core support for the implementation of UNRWA’s Strategic Plan for 2023-2028. Core funding is

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<sup>5</sup> UNRWA Strategic Plan 2023-2028. Strategic Priorities and programmatic response. (Working draft June22).

intended to reduce transaction costs and enable UNRWA to deliver on its core mandate in a coherent manner<sup>6</sup>.

UNRWA's Strategic Plan refers to programmes as 'daily implementation of the triple nexus' and thus links up with an important ambition of Danish development policy, specifically to ensure better coherence between development, humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts. UNRWA prioritisation of support to primary education can be seen in the nexus context as an emergency measure as well as an essential element underpinning any longer-term development programming regardless of which state solution eventually may materialise in response to the plight of refugees.

Policy objectives to 'help more people better where it is hardest' and link the nexus of development, humanitarian action and peace are addressed in the context of Palestine by coordinating the various programming instruments. Due to its humanitarian mandate and the context in the region, peacebuilding is a challenging area for UNRWA to engage in, but the clear message

**Key results under this organisation strategy include:**

- UNRWA mitigates the risk of migration by providing health, education and social services focusing on gender equality and the most vulnerable refugees.
- International Humanitarian Law protection of Palestine refugees in dialogue with host countries.
- Delivery on commitments to reform by improving UN partnerships and a future UNRWA model of delivery aligning expenditure to projected income.

coming out of the triple nexus ambitions is for development partners to reflect on coherence and synergies between political dialogue with host countries in the region and the diversity of programming instruments. In the case of Denmark, support instruments to include in this agenda on improved coherence include:

- ***Danish Bilateral Development Programme for Palestine*** – synergies include links between support (2021-2025) for sustainable municipal development and UNRWA management of waste and sanitation services for registered refugees.
- ***Danish-Arab Partnership Programme*** – from 2022-2027, *Danish Refugee Council* is part of a *Youth Inclusion and Employment* consortium planning activities targeted at youth in Jordan's large cities in the north meriting coordination of efforts.
- ***Regional Stabilisation Programmes*** – total scope of Danish support for victims of conflict and displacement in the Syria and Iraq neighbourhood area amounted to DKK 700m in 2021, involving country and target group overlap with UNRWA.
- ***Danish Civil Society Organisations*** – strategic partners of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other NGO partners also engage in humanitarian relief and development activities in the region with the same group of beneficiaries in some instances.

Danish support recognises the role of UNRWA in protecting the human rights of Palestine refugees under International Humanitarian Law as well as stabilising the region to mitigate the risk of migration and radicalisation. UNRWA's Strategic Plan outlines an approach to serving the needs of Palestine refugees driven by the following principles:

1. Humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence
2. Advocacy for human rights of Palestine refugees amongst relevant duty bearers

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<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark: 'Guidelines for Management of Danish Core (including soft-earmarked) Support to Multilateral and International Organisations' – December 2020, p.6

3. Provision of universal access to quality basic education and primary health care
4. Access to services such as relief, hospitalisation, vocational training and shelter
5. Promotion of additional services not provided by UNRWA through partnerships
6. Engagement with refugee communities to ensure participation in decision-making
7. Embedding of gender equality across programmes and operations
8. Mainstreaming of environmental sustainability into all operations
9. Mainstreaming of persons with disabilities across programmes and operations

Following a high-level conference in November 2021, UNRWA appealed for political engagement and openness to look for innovative solutions to the recurrent crises of underfunding. This appeal represents an opportunity for Denmark and like-minded partners to engage in sobering and level-headed dialogue on prospects for the future. Denmark will – together with like-minded donors – call for UNRWA to engage pro-actively and prepare specific and operational proposals to address the situation.

#### **4.1 Protecting refugee rights by prioritising services to vulnerable beneficiaries**

In line with the “World We Share”, Denmark will continue to promote rights of Palestine refugees to enjoy a life in dignity. As Palestine refugees are not covered by the UN Refugee Convention of 1951, UNRWA has a particular role in supporting their rights. UNRWA promotes this role by documenting contraventions of international humanitarian law and advocating for rule of law in relevant national and international fora, including the United Nations General Assembly.

The business of UNRWA in terms of delivering education, health and relief services is a priority making it possible to achieve critical SDGs for needy girls, boys, women and men who would not otherwise be able to access these services. Denmark will work with UNRWA to ensure that prioritisation of resources is conducive to gender equality and access to services for the most vulnerable segments such as people with disabilities.

Specifically, where co-payment mechanisms such as private health insurance schemes and modest school fees are required to ensure UNRWA expenditures are aligned to available resources, Denmark will support efforts to innovate service delivery if they can help make operations more durable. At the same time, Denmark will work to ensure that means-testing guarantees access to services for the poorest and most vulnerable refugees.

Emphasis is put on extending service delivery and rights protection to girls, women and youth. Denmark will follow up on recommendations from a session with the Palestinian Youth Advisory Board in February 2022 calling for stronger youth involvement, more interactive teaching methodology, extra-curricular activities involving youth organisations in an active role and particular attention to services for people with disabilities.

#### **4.2 Preventing migration by contributing to stability in a fragile region**

Refugee populations in the Near East are a diverse group. It comprises individuals who have held on to their refugee status without necessarily making use of UNRWA schools and clinics as well as more vulnerable segments of refugees without civil rights to education and formal employment. Disorder and conflict across the region of origin where UNRWA operates has compounded the precarious situation of Palestine refugees some of whom have been forced to move more than once.

A protracted funding crisis with UNRWA could trigger either migration or radicalisation or both. If delivering services at the present scope and scale were significantly reduced or

discontinued it could potentially drive Palestinians to flee and follow migrant routes towards Europe, not least from host countries such as Lebanon and Syria.

Continued promotion of human rights and delivery of basic services are key to preventing such a scenario to unfold. Part of such agendas for dialogue with host countries include some of the thorny but essential issues relating to employment rights and prospects for refugees to become economically self-reliant.

#### 4.3 Reforming UNRWA to deliver on its mandate within available resources

UNRWA has committed itself to a reform process following a number of tracks:

- *Stabilisation of income* through dialogue with the World Bank, IMF and the Islamic Development Bank on funding mechanisms for service delivery provided by UNRWA. The leadership of UNRWA is also reaching out to the wider UN-system to explore if assessed contributions could be an option.
- *Establishing partnerships* for service-delivery with other UN-agencies. UNRWA has traditionally worked with a range of UN-organisations, in particular WFP, WHO and UNICEF, and is currently exploring whether it would be possible to set up agreements that would share the burden of service delivery.
- *Re-invigorating strategic dialogue with donors and host countries*. Meetings of the Advisory Commission, in particular, have become slightly ritualistic relying on read outs of pre-prepared statements repeating known positions. The problems UNRWA face require constructive and informative exchange of views and formulation of novel ideas. UNRWA and donors are therefore taking steps to organise the dialogue in a more modern and inter-active way with thematic discussions, field visits and better-prepared agendas.
- *Modernisation of services*. UNRWA has demonstrated results using telemedicine during the pandemic and reducing the costs of its health component by addressing the number of consultations per doctor. In a similar vein, steps are taken to digitalise education, reducing costs through online learning platforms.
- *Reducing staff numbers*. UNRWA's main asset is its staff that the Agency relies on for service delivery to refugees that would normally be taken care of by government employees. Staff also constitute its most significant cost with 80 per cent of current expenditure. The workforce has been reduced from 31,185 staff in 2016 to 28,460 in 2021.

UNRWA needs to take urgent steps and use its insights, expertise and analytical capacity to prepare realistic proposals for discussion with development partners on how best to adjust capacities and staffing of the Agency and modernise services while taking into consideration the possibility to transfer tasks and responsibilities to other stakeholders, including civil society, private sector and local authorities.

## 5 Budget

This strategy for Denmark's engagement with UNRWA forms the basis of core support to the scope of DKK 105m annually and constitutes the central platform for Ministry of Foreign Affairs dialogue and partnership with the organisation. Legal basis for Danish support is §06.39.01.11 of the Danish Finance Act stipulating explicitly that Danish support to UNRWA is provided as core funding of a strategic partnership.

**Table: Danish contribution to UNRWA**

§06.39.01.11	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2023-27
Core funding	105m	105m	105m	105m	105m	525m
Total	105m	105m	105m	105m	105m	525m

Danish support amounted to DKK 70m in 2019 and saw an increase by 50% in 2020 to DKK 105 million with indicative future allocations of DKK 105m, subject to annual parliamentary approval. The funding level has put UNRWA on equal footing when compared with the Danish Bilateral Development Programme with Palestine.

The regular contribution is performance-linked in such a way that 85 per cent is paid upfront at the beginning of the year while payment of the remaining 15 per cent depends on the satisfactory achievement of set goals, as evidenced by reporting on an agreed subset selected from UNRWA's overall performance indicators.

In addition to the regular contributions to UNRWA under the partnership agreement, UNRWA can also receive extraordinary contributions during the financial year. By way of example, two tranches of extraordinary grants totalling DKK 25 million were provided in 2021 bringing total contributions to DKK 130m. Adding extraordinary grants to regular contributions, total support by Denmark during the decade from 2012 to 2021 amounted to DKK 1.2 billion.

Denmark has been one of the few countries to increase funding during the past few years when UNRWA's funding situation has experienced turbulence. This has moved Denmark up on the list of UNRWA contributors from number 19 in 2019 to number 12 in 2021 and added to the importance of Danish oversight and dialogue on results and reform.

## 6 Risks and assumptions

UNRWA operates in a conflictive reality of risks in different categories. Many of these are externally driven by sobering factors beyond the control of UNRWA and in several cases quite challenging for the Agency to mitigate.

**Contextual risks** include geopolitical implications of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its impact on food security and inflation. Specifically, the severe economic crisis in Lebanon and the risk of renewed conflict in Syria add to the insecurity of Palestinians in the region.

Also, mounting financial pressure due to increasing global numbers of refugees and displaced people competing for the same pot of humanitarian funding seen as unlikely to increase. In the specific case of UNRWA, this risk is exacerbated by a waning belief in a negotiated solution to the plight of Palestine refugees. There is a sense that attention is shifting from the Israel/Palestine conflict, partly in response to the normalisation process whereby a number of countries in the region are establishing diplomatic ties with Israel rather than focusing on pressure for a solution to the plight of Palestine refugees.

Consequences of this defunding include deteriorating prospects for access to services for a needy segment of refugees but also an increased risk that disgruntlement could lead to new waves of migration and radicalisation, especially driven by disappointed youth with limited employment opportunities.

**Institutional risks** are in many cases linked to the interest of stakeholders in maintaining status quo. When trying to make decisions about its services, UNRWA is caught between opposing and sometimes entrenched positions of its different stakeholders. For refugees, UNRWA services have strong symbolic meaning. Changes to services is often seen as relinquishing on the right to return.

Host governments are also found to resist change because they are reluctant to take over responsibility for UNRWA activities seen as a potential burden to already strained national budgets. UNRWA unionised staff often respond to changes based on the fear of loss of jobs on which they and their families rely. Understandable as all these reactions may seem, the sum of them is not conducive to innovation of UNRWA's model of service delivery.

Finally, an institutional risk lies in misconduct and misappropriation of funds, as evidenced by the findings of the report of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Service that led to the resignation of the former Commissioner-General in 2019. UNRWA has mitigated this risk by following up on the recommendations of the report.

**Programmatic risks** are evident in the implications of the current mismatch between UNRWA's income and the expenditure budget. The chronic funding crisis of recent years has led to challenges of long-term planning and in paying salaries of staff. Such crises involve a disproportionate time spent on managing ad hoc cash flow measures and difficulties in retaining qualified staff. This carries the risk of distracting UNRWA from its core business as well as from preparation of modernisation measures. A particular programmatic challenge lies in upholding the humanitarian principle of neutrality in a context of recurrent conflict, not least in the operating areas of Gaza and the West Bank. UNRWA school management is charged with enforcing neutrality on school pupils caught in frequent clashes with security forces on the West Bank and keeping service providers on the narrow path of neutrality in the political and security context of Gaza where conflict cycles are recurring at regular intervals.



**PROCESS ACTION PLAN (PAP)**  
Support to UNRWA (2023-2027)

05-09-2022

Action/Product	Deadlines	Responsible unit
Presenting draft Organisation Strategy to the Programme Committee	24.03.2022	DRO
Editing/redrafting/consultations on draft Organisation Strategy	April – May 2022	DRO/Consultant
Presentation of UNRWA's MTS	19.05.2022	UNRWA
Discussion of UNRWA's MTS	06.06.2022	UNRWA
Discussion of UNRWA's MTS at Ad Com in Lebanon	14-15.06.2022	DRO/UNRWA/Donors/Host Communities
Briefing by UNRWA on MTS	07.07.2022	UNRWA/DRO
Consultant to submit updated version of draft Organisation Strategy	19.08.2022	Consultant
Discussion of updated version of draft Organisation Strategy	29.08.2022	Consultant/DRO
Editing/revising/completing final draft Organisation Strategy	29-31.08.2022	Consultant
Submitting final draft Organisation Strategy to the Secretariat of UPR	05.09.2022	DRO
Presentation of final draft Organisation Strategy to UPR	22.09.2022	DRO/ELK/UPR
UNGA High Level Side Event	22.09.2022	UNRWA/SE/JO
Editing final draft Organisation Strategy in light of comments from UPR	25-29.09.2022	Consultant
Substantial discussion of UNRWA's MTS at Sub Com in Jordan	28-29.09.2022	DRO/UNRWA/Donors/Host Communities
Submitting final version of Organisation Strategy to DRO	30.09.2022	Consultant
Discussion of UNRWA's MTS at Sub Com (tentative)	19-20.10.2022 (tentative)	DRO/UNRWA/Donors/Host Communities
Approval of Organisation Strategy by the Minister for Development Cooperation	October 2022	DRO
Copy of Organisation Strategy to Parliament's Foreign Policy Committee	October 2022	DRO/APD/ELK
Negotiating and signing the MoU	November 2022	DRO/UNRWA
Discussion of UNRWA's MTS at Ad Com in Jordan	14-15.11.2022	DRO/UNRWA/Donors/Host Communities
Final approval of UNRWA's MTS	December 2022 (tentative)	UNRWA

## UNRWA Strategic Plan 2023 – 2028

### Strategic priorities and programmatic response – working draft, June 2022

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## Overview

For more than 70 years, UNRWA has made a singular contribution to the human development and protection of Palestine refugees, fostering human capital and nurturing peaceful development, consistent with UN principles and values. This has been achieved through innovative and ground-breaking programmes which have delivered transformational development outcomes. UNRWA's services are widely acknowledged for their contributions to regional stability and conditions conducive for peace in spite of the failure of successive efforts to find a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Israeli – Palestinian conflict.

Since the Agency's establishment, its services have adjusted and evolved in response to changing needs and circumstances. Recent years have been characterized by extreme turbulence and uncertainty – in the region and beyond – that have had major impacts on Palestine refugees and UNRWA. Amongst other things, these have seen wide fluctuations in funding available to UNRWA at a time of increasing Palestine refugee needs and demands on the Agency.

Despite this uncertainty, under the 2016 – 2022 Medium Term Strategy (MTS), UNRWA was successful in strengthening its service delivery and key management and operational support functions. Important reforms in health and education were completed, further consolidated and embedded whilst new reforms, in the areas of microfinance and relief and social services, were introduced. The Agency advanced its protection agenda significantly, through the development of tools, policies and the establishment of a protection division at HQ, reflecting the centrality of protection to UNRWA's mission and services. Strategic management functions were also bolstered, in the areas of results management, planning, accountability, transparency, governance and safeguarding (protection against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment).

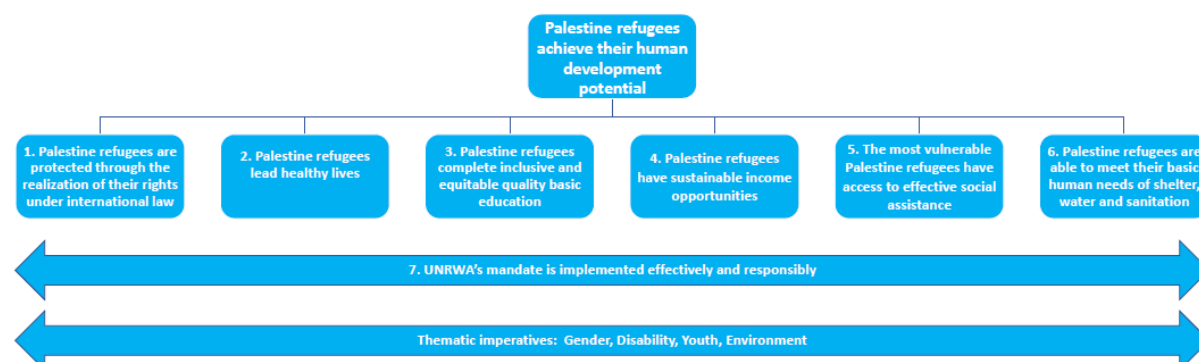
As a result, and despite challenging financial circumstances, UNRWA was able to achieve – and in many cases exceed – targets under its education and health programmes. Progress was anchored in the strong systems that the Agency has developed over several decades, which proved robust in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and – in some fields – ongoing conflict. This came at a cost, however, in terms of ever larger class sizes and increasing numbers of front line personnel on temporary contracts. In a number of other areas, performance fell short, particularly in protection, livelihoods and relief assistance. In part, this was due to an external environment characterized by deteriorating socio-economic conditions, increasing poverty and limited employment creation, alongside continued infringements of multiple economic and social rights. It was also a consequence of the Agency's financial situation, which posed a serious threat to the continuity of vital services.

Despite concerted efforts to stabilize the Agency's finances and some tangible progress, including through the approval of additional international posts funded by the UN Regular Budget in key strategic functions such as fundraising, communications, humanitarian principles and protection, the financial challenges faced in recent years are likely to persist in the coming strategic period at a time of notable instability across the region.

UNRWA’s strategy for the period 2023 – 2028 is grounded in the mandate granted by the UN General Assembly and situated within the global development framework of Agenda 2030 and other UN system wide priorities, including principles of partnership which are designed to reduce needs, risks and vulnerabilities. It is also guided by organisational reflection and learning, particularly in response to performance under the current MTS, changes in the Agency’s operating environment and protracted financial crises.

The objectives below translate the Agency’s mandate into concrete deliverables during the period 2023 – 2028. They reflect a commitment to further strengthen the Agency’s rights based approach to programming and advocacy, emphasizing the shared, mutual responsibilities of the international community to ensure that Palestine refugees are able to fully enjoy universal human rights and are not left behind.

The principle of neutrality, understood as the Agency’s obligation to implement its mandate without “taking sides in hostilities or engaging in controversies of a political, racial, religious, or ideological nature”, will continue to shape every aspect of UNRWA’s operations.<sup>7</sup> It will be practiced as part of a wider and systematic mainstreaming of humanitarian principles by the Agency.



The principle of **universal access** to basic health and education services remains central to UNRWA’s approach, alongside an understanding that the specific needs of some communities requires additional, targeted support, as a result of their ability to enjoy their social and economic rights, or due to vulnerabilities linked to poverty, age, gender or disability. The strategic plan recognizes the interconnectedness of these needs and the interdependencies between many of the SDGs.

This also requires better linkages between the Agency’s **human development and humanitarian programming**. In recent years, the lines between different UNRWA funding portals – programme budget, emergency appeal and projects - have blurred. In 2020 and 2021, around one-third of total Agency expenditure came outside the programme budget, mostly for relief activities in Gaza, Syria and Lebanon.

Regular and emergency services are often being delivered to the same populations using the same systems and assets but under different funding modalities. This is most visible for relief assistance but equally important, in other areas, ranging from mental health

<sup>7</sup> See General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (1991), which spells out that humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality. See also General Assembly Resolution 58/114 (2003) which reaffirms the principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality and recognizes independence as an additional principle of humanitarian assistance.

and psycho-social support and the delivery of education in emergencies (EiE) to the use of UNRWA schools and installations as temporary shelters for refugees fleeing conflict and disaster. Repeated cycles of conflict in Gaza and the experience of COVID-19 have demonstrated that UNRWA's core programme infrastructure – front line staff, installations and management information systems – are absolutely critical for delivery of life saving relief in times of crisis.

A more coherent conceptualization of programming across different funding streams is critical, in view of the high risk of future catastrophic events, the pressures on UNRWA's finances and the increasing complexity of the Agency's operating environment.

In the coming strategic period, UNRWA will **modernize its services and operations**, to ensure it is equipped to meet the evolving needs of refugees and Member State expectations, effectively and efficiently. This will be achieved through and beyond digitalization; digital solutions will be used – where appropriate, for reasons of economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity – to maintain Palestine refugee access to quality services and ensure that young people in particular acquire the skills they need to participate in modern societies and economies. The Agency will also continue to modernize its management practices and culture, with a view to increasing staff participation, notably amongst females and young people, and to strengthen engagement with refugee communities.

**Risk management** will be enhanced, based on a comprehensive and ongoing assessment of risk factors that impact on UNRWA's ability to plan and deliver services and engage with external stakeholders.

The present strategy also reflects the Agency's commitment to **environmental and social sustainability**. It seeks to ensure that UNRWA's operations are delivered in an environmentally sustainable way, recognizing that the Agency has a key role to play in minimizing the negative environmental impact of its operations and in raising awareness within Palestine refugee communities.

Further, UNRWA will intensify efforts to **broaden its donor base** and harness the potential of digital, Islamic philanthropic and individual giving platforms. It will seek to access global, regional and thematic sources of funding from International Financial Institutions, Regional Development Banks and Development Finance Institutions, including through development outcome mechanisms and other innovative instruments already in use in the region.

## **Objective 1: Palestine refugees are protected through the realization of their rights under international law**

### **1. Context**

The protection of Palestine refugees lies at the core of UNRWA's mandate. The Agency recognizes that Palestine refugees are best protected through the realization of their human rights, including their rights to health, education, food, shelter, culture and non-discrimination. While the primary responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil these human rights lies with States, UNRWA serves a key role, both as a provider of core government-like services and as an advocate on behalf of the Palestine refugee population.

For UNRWA, protection is about putting Palestine refugees at the centre of its work and ensuring that no one is left behind, using its mandate, resources and authority to directly support Palestine refugees and to encourage and support others who are responsible for protection to play their part. The Agency acknowledges that the best way to protect Palestine refugees is to prevent the threats they may face at the outset, and to build a better protective environment.

Activities under this objective contribute to the following SDGs:

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

### **2. Current operations**

Under the 2016 - 2022 MTS, UNRWA further strengthened its protection role at field and HQ level. The Agency addressed new and ongoing protection concerns through the mainstreaming of protection across its service provision, the delivery of specific preventative and remedial protection services, and by advocating for the rights of Palestine refugees under international law.

UNRWA promoted the safe, equal and dignified access to services by all Palestine refugees, including men, women, girls, boys and older persons, with and without disabilities. The Agency achieved significant results in relation to UNRWA staff capacity development on key protection issues, including the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, gender-based violence (GBV), child protection, the systematic identification of disability, addressing violence against children (AVAC), and safe identification and referral. A Gender Equality Strategy was implemented in tandem with the MTS 2016-22, promoting a 'dual-track' approach focused on gender mainstreaming at both the organizational and programmatic levels, with a focus on the implementation of individual field office gender action plans. UNRWA also updated its Disability Policy (2022) to align with the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy and recent developments in global disability mainstreaming standards.

In the social services programme, the Agency is completing and consolidating social work reform efforts that began in 2019 in a phased manner across all fields of operation.

The entire UNRWA social services workforce has now been certified as professional social workers, who are trained to carry out case work and case management with individuals as well as families, depending on context and needs. Attention is given to issues of GBV, child protection and disability as well as the management other social issues such as depression, grief and substance abuse, among others. The professionalization of UNRWA social workers has also included the establishment of a case management system and database (PRIMERO) used by social workers, in collaboration with UNICEF, and the consolidation of internal and external referral mechanisms, including partner identification and engagement.

During the 2016 – 2022 MTS, the Agency has been a strong advocate for the rights of Palestine refugees under international law, raising key protection concerns through targeted interventions with duty bearers and other external stakeholders. This has included advocacy related to the impact of conflict, occupation and violence affecting Palestine refugees in many fields; freedom of movement concerns, including issues of humanitarian access; the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, particularly on the most vulnerable Palestine refugees; legal documentation issues and barriers to accessing services; and continued concerns around excessive use of force, evictions and demolitions, and settler violence in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. UNRWA has also consistently engaged with and contributed to UN international human rights mechanisms to provide information and case studies on key protection concerns and human rights violations affecting Palestine refugees in its fields of operation.

UNRWA retains responsibility for registering Palestine refugees and others eligible for its services. Individual registration records are organised under family ledgers and constitute the backbone for the management of all Agency services; the associated documentation materials are also an important archive of Palestine refugee history. At the end of 2021, the Agency was maintaining active files of around 5.8 million registered Palestine refugees and 0.7 million other service eligible persons in its Refugee Registration Information System (RRIS). The registration process is voluntary; life events, such as marriages, births, transfers and deaths, are recorded any time registered persons supply the Agency with relevant proof documents and request to update their family registration card.

In line with the UNRWA Digital Transformation Strategy, the Agency has recently embarked on a modernisation of its RRIS to further safeguard Palestine refugee records and their rights, while also enhancing the effectiveness, efficiency, transparency and accountability of service provision to those eligible and in need of such services.

### **3. Needs**

Palestine refugees are facing a profound human development and protection crisis due to the ongoing occupation in the oPt, the blockade on Gaza, the conflict in Syria, and significant instability, conflict and violence across UNRWA's fields of operation. Palestine refugees represent the largest refugee population in the world, with almost six million registered with UNRWA. Many are unable to live a life in dignity due to their precarious legal status, restricted access to civil documentation, and/or a lack of enjoyment of rights, including in some instances to work and basic services. The vulnerability of women, children and persons with disabilities to abuse, exploitation,

and exclusion is also on the rise; individuals and groups already at risk of exclusion were first and hardest hit by the global economic and social repercussions of COVID-19, forcing many to resort to negative coping mechanisms.

#### 4. Priorities

In 2021, the Agency adopted a new Protection Strategic Framework to inform the design and implementation of its protection function in upcoming years. The Framework reaffirms the Agency's commitment to strengthen protection efforts, using three complementary approaches: (i) protection mainstreaming; (ii) protection programming; and (iii) protection advocacy and engagement with duty bearers. These three pillars of UNRWA's approach to protection are underpinned by a strong data-driven focus.

##### Outcome 1: Palestine refugees have access to UNRWA services in safety and dignity (Protection mainstreaming)

UNRWA will strive to place Palestine refugees at the centre of the decision-making processes that affect their lives so that services are people-centered and are delivered in a manner that promotes and respects their rights and dignity. The Agency will ensure that its services are delivered in a safe, dignified, and accessible manner, through the effective application and mainstreaming of protection and humanitarian principles, and by ensuring that programmes advance the principle of *do no harm*, apply an intersectional lens to vulnerability and risk and ensure that no one is left behind.

The Agency will systematically mainstream cross-cutting protection issues that contribute to risk and vulnerability, including gender, disability, and age, across all Agency systems, processes, methodologies, programming and service delivery. With regard to UNRWA systems and processes, the Agency commits to: (i) improve and harmonize the collection, analysis and use of data to monitor access, identify risk, strengthen vulnerability criteria and inform programming; (ii) enhance the meaningful engagement of typically marginalized groups to capture their interests and barriers; (iii) establish clear mechanisms for accountability to affected populations; and (iv) establish and operationalize safe internal and external referral pathways.

Informed by the regular collection and analysis of disaggregated data across programmes, UNRWA will deepen its understanding of existing and emerging protection risks faced by Palestine refugees and ensure that those who are most at-risk benefit from available services through enhanced targeting; effective communication on services; and the removal of physical, logistical, environmental, social/cultural and attitudinal barriers. UNRWA will expand and strengthen existing protection mainstreaming coordination mechanisms at both Field and HQ levels to ensure challenges identified in service delivery are jointly discussed and effectively addressed. The Agency will conclude the modernization of its RRIS, through:

- (i) an **e-UNRWA platform** which will allow Palestine refugees to register from anywhere, ensuring that the right to register is promoted irrespective of the need for UNRWA services. The platform will facilitate online reporting of life events, both within and outside of UNRWA fields of operation, and will also be used for secure communication and transfer of digital documentation;
- (ii) a **digital identity verification process** to minimize risks of identify fraud and safeguard services to those eligible and in need. This will support better planning and programming, including accurate and accountable distribution lists where large scale assistance programmes are provided or needed. Upon



successful confirmation of identity, an electronic individual service card will be issued with a QR code for easy authentication at service provision points. Verified parents and custodians of children under 18 years will also be automatically issued their children's individual service cards.

- (iii) an **e-archive** for preservation and accessibility of historic Palestine refugee family files. The historic Palestine refugee family files date back to the 1950 UNRWA census across its fields of operation and attest family composition, their place of origin in pre-1948 Palestine, and the circumstances surrounding their displacement. The preservation and accessibility of these files are an integral part of the protection of Palestine refugee rights under international law and may contribute to a constructive engagement towards a just and durable solution to their plight. The establishment of an e-Archive will involve a systematic review and accurate classification of all documents in these files to retrace family trees spanning up to five generations and clearly link currently registered Palestine refugees back to their ancestors who were displaced in 1948. Provision will be made for those Palestine refugees interested in viewing their family trees and digitised documents pertaining to their family history, considering the Agency's ethical responsibilities in addressing implied trauma management requirements on a case-by-case basis, and implementing a firm information security framework.

Outcome 2: The protection needs of vulnerable and at-risk Palestine refugees are met through preventative and remedial action (Protection programming)

A key part of UNRWA's implementation of its Protection Strategic Framework will centre around a strengthened system for monitoring and documentation of incidents and trends at the community level to help identify protection risks, threats and gaps in responses, and to allow for better evidence-based approaches. Analysis of data and information will help to inform UNRWA's programmatic responses, enabling the Agency to effectively engage with duty bearers on matters related to the protection of Palestine refugees. UNRWA will strengthen its community engagement to raise awareness on protection risk factors and promote community-led action to prevent people's exposure to threats and increase self-protection capacities.

Social work reform efforts will be consolidated, notably with regard to certification and skills enhancement among social workers and supervisors by extending coaching and mentoring to address social and psychological protection risks. In support of these priorities, the Agency will consolidate internal and external referral mechanisms, including partner identification and engagement, using the PRIMERO case management system and database.

Further expansion of individual and family-based casework and management to explore opportunities in peer-support and community work will be undertaken in collaboration with partners including community-based organizations. This aims to create spaces for discussing social issues more broadly, raising awareness and creating acceptance in support of further interventions.

Outcome 3: Duty bearers respect, protect and fulfil the rights of Palestine refugees under international law (Advocacy)

UNRWA recognizes its essential role in speaking out on behalf of and providing a voice for Palestine refugees. Relying on a strengthened protection monitoring and documentation system, UNRWA will engage in evidence-based advocacy with duty bearers and relevant external actors, both privately and publicly, directly and indirectly,

to ensure that the rights of Palestine refugees are respected, promoted and fulfilled by duty bearers under international law. The Agency's approach to its engagement with duty bearers will seek to support them in meeting their obligations with the aim of building a stronger protective environment for Palestine refugees at all levels.

UNRWA will continue to engage the international human rights system on key protection issues and trends affecting Palestine refugees, in accordance with UNRWA's 2011 Framework for Effective Engagement with the International Human Rights System, to raise awareness and seek action to effect change. In implementing its protection advocacy work, UNRWA will strive to provide a platform for Palestine refugees to raise their concerns directly with duty bearers and other relevant decision-makers.

## **Objective 2: Palestine refugees lead healthy lives**

### **1. Context**

UNRWA plays a critical role in protecting and promoting the right to health for Palestine refugees, which serves as a pre-requisite for human development. Over the strategic period, the Agency will ensure universal, non-discriminatory access to primary health care (PHC) services for Palestine refugees, and targeted secondary and tertiary care.

The Agency remains focused on the overall health and well-being of Palestine refugees. Key service areas include infant and childcare, maternal care, care of patients suffering from communicable and non-communicable diseases, mental health and psychosocial support, provision of essential medication and life-saving hospitalization coverage. Plans are grounded in recent reforms and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. The family health team (FHT) approach will remain the basis for service delivery, supported by digital transformation initiatives, including a new electronic medical records project, as well as enhanced care for the most vulnerable, such as those with mental health concerns and survivors of gender-based violence. The response also addresses the need for a stable health workforce in UNRWA.

Activities under this objective contribute to the following SDGs:
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Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
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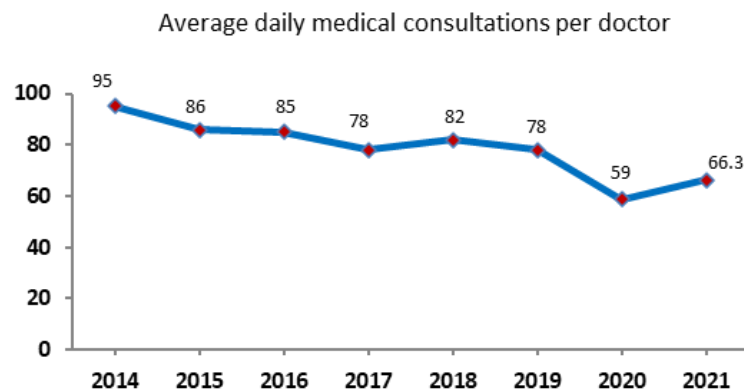
### **2. Current operations**

UNRWA has provided PHC services to Palestine refugees since 1950 through a strategic partnership with WHO. The Agency has made a significant contribution to Palestine refugee health outcomes, particularly in the areas of maternal and child health (MCH) and communicable diseases. Since the 1990s, the burden of disease has shifted to non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including mental health, and UNRWA health services have evolved accordingly. More recently, UNRWA health systems have needed to adjust in response to disruptions associated with numerous financial and non-financial challenges, notably the COVID-19 pandemic, which has added considerable pressure to already overstretched health systems across the region.

Agency services have proven resilient to shocks, through measures to protect high risk patients, including the home delivery of medicines, triage at health centres, the launch of an e-NCD mobile application and the use of telemedicine for remote primary

healthcare consultations. In 2021, seven million medical consultations were provided at 140 health centres with a workforce of over 3,000 staff<sup>8</sup>.

FHT reforms have generated improvements in efficiency and quality, with the average number of daily medical consultations per doctor decreasing from 95.0 in 2014 to 66.3 in 2021.



Technology has played a key role in reforms. A cloud-based electronic medical record (e-health) system is in place in all health centres bar one in Syria and two smartphone applications<sup>9</sup> have been developed, allowing refugees to access relevant health information.

Reflecting changes in the health status of Palestine refugees and aggravated by the difficult conditions in which they live, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) are now at the core of UNRWA health services. The Agency adopted the WHO's mental health strategy (mhGAP) in 2016, with all health centre staff now trained. Medical officers refer patients with more severe mental health issues to Psychosocial Counsellors available in some health centres/fields or to externally contracted specialists.

UNRWA also provides access to hospital care at discounted prices in governmental, private, and NGO hospitals. Eligibility is determined by access to alternative services, the medical urgency of the case and the economic status of patients. To control costs and protect access to hospital care for the most vulnerable, hospitalization reforms were introduced in 2016, including ongoing monitoring of referrals and expenditure and the use of a comprehensive electronic Hospitalization Management System in Lebanon.

During the current MTS, UNRWA strengthened its collaboration with academic and research institutions resulting in dozens of conference abstracts and publications in peer reviewed journals. Introduction of International Classification of Diseases version 11 (ICD-11) in 2020<sup>10</sup> further strengthened the analysis of disease trends among Palestine refugees and understanding of health needs.

### 3. Needs

The main health needs of Palestine refugees are non-communicable diseases (NCD), including mental health. Recent years have seen an alarming rise in NCD prevalence,

<sup>8</sup> The annual number of patient visits averaged around 8.5m until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

<sup>9</sup> E-MCH application for care of mothers during pregnancy and after childbirth and care of newborns, including immunization and follow up appointment. E-NCD application for patients suffering from non-communicable diseases.

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/icd11\\_report.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/icd11_report.pdf)

due to sedentary lifestyle-related factors and behaviours. They are now the main cause of death amongst Palestine refugees. By the end of 2021, almost 300,000 Palestine refugees were reported to have diabetes mellitus, hypertension or both, with prevalence rates of 15.9 per cent and 23.7 per cent respectively amongst patients above 40 years.

Increased burden of NCDs translates into increased health care costs and underscores the need for well-tested and cost-effective prevention services, including health education, health promotion, regular screening for early diagnosis, and high quality treatment and management of diseases.

Mental health is a growing concern globally and there is also a high prevalence of mental health problems and psychological distress among Palestine refugees, aggravated by political instability, ongoing occupation, increased violence and COVID-19. Children, adolescents, and survivors of GBV are particularly vulnerable. The number of GBV cases presenting at health centres and for other services is also rising, with existing gender inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. GBV is often underreported, and therefore the increase in numbers still do not reflect the full extent of the problem.

In 2021, the health department reported screening 76,477 Palestine refugees for mental health related issues of which 15,366 (20.1 percent) were identified as positive according to the WHO standard questionnaire. In other words, almost one in five Palestine refugees assessed needed psychological or mental health assistance, care and follow up.

To ensure high-quality health service provision and to meet the above-mentioned health needs, UNRWA health services must be sufficiently staffed. Analysis of existing health staffing situation using WHO norms has indicated that staff face an extremely high workload, with almost all cadres understaffed. To meet SDGs and Palestine refugees' health needs, a prompt review of staffing policies and adopting workload-based norms is required<sup>11</sup>.

The physical environment in health centres also has an impact on the quality of patient care. Many Agency health centres have suffered due to underfunding, increasing demographic pressures and, in some cases, conflict. In many cases, old, deteriorated buildings are being used which do not comply with protection requirements, including safety, accessibility or gender considerations and do not incorporate environmental or greening practices. UNRWA was able to construct or reconstruct many health centres under the 2016 – 2022 MTS, improving accessibility for refugees and staff, including persons with disability and incorporating safety measures, linked to strengthened structural integrity as well as gender and spatial requirements of the FHT approach. The percentage of UNRWA health centres meeting protection design standards has increased from 30 percent in 2016 to 75 per cent at the end of 2021.

#### **4. Priorities**

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<sup>11</sup> WHO. Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/250368/9789241511131-eng.pdf>

UNRWA will continue to provide universally accessible quality PHC. The Agency will revitalize the FHT approach to maximize its impact and ensure that hospital services are available to those most in need.

#### Outcome 1: Maternal and child health of Palestine refugees is improved

Maternal health needs will be addressed through the systematic delivery of pre-conception, antenatal, and post-natal care and family planning services. In addition to continuing the Family Medicine diploma, the Agency also plans to introduce a professional diploma for nursing staff in PHC.

GBV services will be enhanced through capacity building of staff and screening of patients and referrals. Internal coordination across health, education and protection will be strengthened, as will linkages with external stakeholders such as WHO, UNFPA, host authorities and other service providers for referrals in all fields.

UNRWA will also remain focused on the provision of vaccinations, growth monitoring and nutrition and high quality child healthcare services. Cross programmatic collaboration will be strengthened, particularly in the area of school health as an entry point for screening of childhood diseases and growth-related problems, such as oral health, nutrition, eye care and hearing related problems that adversely affect learning. The Agency will also continue to carry out preventative screenings for vision and hearing to ensure these impediments to full educational and quality of life attainment are addressed.

In addition, UNRWA will train health tutors in schools on key health subjects such as health and hygiene, healthy lifestyles and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), including in relation to GBV. Information materials on SRHR will be developed to improve refugee awareness and monitoring. The Agency will seek enhanced cooperation with host ministries and UN agencies, including WHO and UNFPA, for improving MCH and SRHR service quality. Nurses in all fields will be trained on SRHR and training on GBV will be provided to front line health staff, including field nursing and family health officers and staff in other departments.

#### Outcome 2: Improved status of non-communicable diseases and mental health

UNRWA will apply a three-pronged strategy to target NCDs: disease surveillance, health promotion and prevention interventions and cost-effective interventions for NCD management.

MHPSS programming will be reinforced, particularly in the areas of child and adolescent mental health, suicide prevention and GBV. To enhance mental health reporting and analysis, a fully computerized mental health module will be included in the planned transformation of the UNRWA Electronic Medical Record (EMR) system by 2025.

The Agency will build partnerships with academia and service providers to improve the quality of NCD and MHPSS services and strengthen existing collaborations with the WHO and World Diabetes Foundation.

### Outcome 3: Improved status of communicable diseases and infection prevention and control

A strong surveillance and response capacity is needed to tackle communicable diseases. COVID-19 is an ongoing priority and will be addressed through improved infection prevention and control efforts, provision of personal protective equipment to health service providers, updating guidelines and standard operating procedures (SOP) for UNRWA installations and service providers and awareness raising for beneficiaries and staff.

The Agency will participate in immunization campaigns across all fields, where required, and strengthen surveillance of emerging and re-emerging diseases in close collaboration with the relevant authorities. In coordination with host countries' Ministries of Health, UNRWA will also ensure the continued supply of vaccines and exchange of information.

### Outcome 4: Palestine refugee have improved access to quality health services

Essential medicines will be maintained in all UNRWA health centres. The medical supply chain system will be strengthened through the introduction of revised SOPs and technical instructions (TI), training of pharmacists on good storage and dispensing practices and the introduction of a new SAP-based monitoring mechanism. This will be supported by improvements in the EMR system, with a new system to be in place by the end of 2025.

Health staffing norms and standards will be further rolled out, based on WHO's Workload Indicators of Staffing Need methodology. Norms have already been applied for medical officers, clerks and cleaners and will be expanded to cover all cadres of staff working in UNRWA health centres. This includes nurses, laboratory technicians, pharmacists and dentists, funds permitting, to ensure fully staffed FHT health centres across all fields of operations.

Under its hospitalization programme, the Agency will ensure that limited resources are directed to those most in need. The Hospitalization Management System used in Lebanon will be expanded to all other fields of operation to better monitor and analyze hospitalization data and take timely corrective action where necessary to contain expenditure. UNRWA will also strengthen the management of Qalqilya hospital in the West Bank through training, the revision of SOPs and introduction of the EMR system.

The Agency will continue to reconstruct and upgrade facilities to ensure the efficient and cost-effective delivery of health services for all users, including improvements in physical access for patients with disabilities. Established design standards for gender, safety, and environmental sustainability will be incorporated into all works, reflecting users' needs and preferences to the extent possible.

## **Objective 3: Palestine refugees complete inclusive and equitable quality basic education**

### **1. Context**

Education is central to the human development process. It has personal and interpersonal dimensions, contributing to individual empowerment and the overall good of society. The right to education is a basic element of the international human rights framework and is enshrined in national legislation in almost all nations as well as in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on quality education for all.

UNRWA will continue to provide inclusive and equitable quality education to Palestine refugees in line with four dimensions of quality: (i) relevance, i.e., education in line with the needs of the community; (ii) effectiveness, i.e., education that results in learning; (iii) efficiency, i.e., optimal value for investment; and (iv) well-being and inclusion.

A quality education system is one which is well prepared and more able to respond to - and ultimately recover from - crises. Through innovative approaches with existing and new structures, UNRWA has continued to deliver quality education during times of conflict and COVID-19. This will remain a core operating principle, rooted in the Agency's EiE approach and response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Activities under this objective contribute to the following SDGs:

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

### **2. Current operations**

UNRWA provides free basic education to almost 550,000 Palestine refugee children at 702 schools. The Agency provides nine years of primary and preparatory education in all fields (up to 10<sup>th</sup> grade in Jordan) and secondary schooling in Lebanon only. Students in UNRWA schools follow host authority curricula, which the Agency complements with its own materials on human rights. Education is the Agency's single largest programme, accounting for 46 per cent of total expenditure and 70 per cent of all staff in 2021.<sup>12</sup> Recent years have seen continued increases in pupil enrolment in UNRWA schools, up from 515,000 in 2016 to 545,000 in 2021, driven by continued high - but slowing - fertility rates in Gaza. Other fields have seen stable - and in some cases - reducing pupil numbers in recent years, but trends have reversed since the onset of COVID. This is likely due to difficult prevailing socio-economic conditions, which it is assumed will persist in the coming years.

Due to austerity measures, additional pupils have been absorbed without any overall increase in the number of teachers, resulting in ever larger class sizes: as of the 2021 - 2022 school year, 53 per cent of classes in UNRWA schools accommodated more than 40 pupils, up from 38 per cent in 2015 - 16.

<sup>12</sup> Under all funding streams. See: 2021 Annual Operational Report - publication pending.



Measures have been put in place to further professionalize teachers and enrich curricula to enhance pupils' competences and life skills, ensuring equal opportunities and outcomes for boys and girls and strengthening of disability programming. Through its EiE approach, renowned in the region and beyond, UNRWA helps ensure that Palestine refugee children can continue to access quality education and learning opportunities, even in times of crisis and conflict.

Early in 2020, COVID-19 forced schools to close worldwide and UNRWA schools were no exception. The urgent need to keep students learning remotely required education systems to find alternative delivery modalities to ensure learning continuity despite school closures. The Agency drew on the strong, resilient system it put in place through the 2011 – 2016 education reform, as well as its EiE programming, to ensure learning continuity, including through the provision of tablets and internet bundles to facilitate online learning and the distribution of self-learning materials (SLM).

In April 2021, the Agency-wide [digital learning platform](#) (DLP) was launched, where curated digital resources were uploaded and made accessible to teachers and students. UNRWA subsequently partnered with Microsoft, enabling the education community to benefit from the Microsoft for Education (MS4E) platform and developed an ICT for Education (ICT4E) Strategy that is currently deployed, mainly through pilot components, in select Fields. Its implementation will help to enrich the quality of teaching and learning, strengthen media and information literacy (MIL) and make the UNRWA Education system more resilient to future shocks.

Learning from the COVID-19 crisis, UNRWA has developed additional tools to support education in times of crisis, including a School Health Strategy and expanded provision for psycho-social support, and a focus on safety to ensure that rights of children are respected.

### **3. Needs**

The physical environment in which children learn is an important enabler in ensuring quality, inclusive and equitable education and can have a profound impact on student and educator outcomes. For students, school design can affect health, access for those with disabilities, behaviour and overall learning performance. For educators, the physical environment can affect commitment, motivation and retention rates.

Over the past several years, UNRWA premises have suffered from under-resourcing and increasing demographic pressure. In some fields, they have incurred further deterioration due to conflict. Many school buildings are old and often dilapidated, some are not physically accessible for persons with disabilities and / or lack gender sensitive features. More than half of all schools operate on a double-shift basis and many are not purpose-built. In addition, they often do not incorporate environmental or greening practices, resulting in missed opportunities in water, energy and material conservation, as well as environmental sustainability.

Through gradual, effective and cost-efficient design and upgrades of new and existing UNRWA school premises, the percentage of schools meeting UNRWA facilities protection design standards has increased from 23 per cent in 2016 to around 50 percent

by the end of 2021, with measures to ensure their physical accessibility to all refugees and staff, as well as enhanced safety measures, including strengthened structural integrity and improved fire safety measures. Specific gender-related requirements have also been implemented, including the separation of lower grades from upper grades and the construction of internal toilets.

The Agency has continued to meet, and in many cases exceed, key outcome targets related to repetition and survival rates of students and was performing well on student performance indicators until the onset of COVID-19, with the World Bank concluding in 2014 that pupils in UNRWA schools in Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza were outperforming their peers in host authority schools by more than one year of learning. COVID-19 resulted in major disruption to learning for Palestine refugee pupils, as all UNRWA schools were closed for long periods from March 2020 until the end of the 2020 / 2021 academic year. Data from UNRWA surveys points to significant learning loss in all fields of operation.

Additional specific needs include increased psychosocial support (PSS) services, with over a quarter of students entering Grade 1 in Gaza displaying symptoms of severe trauma, and devices and connectivity to realise the successful implementation of the ICT4E Strategy.

#### **4. Priorities**

During 2023-2028, UNRWA will continue to offer high quality educational services, strengthening the conditions for improved student learning and improving well-being and inclusion, whilst adapting to constraints such as COVID-19 and repeated cycles of conflict and unrest, ensuring that services remain relevant, effective and efficient.

##### Outcome 1: Palestine refugee girls' and boys' learning outcomes and critical thinking skills are improved

The Agency will roll-out its ICT4E Strategy and further focus on establishing a culture of peace in its schools, considering technology-related empowerment and a culture of peace of key relevance to the Palestine refugee community. UNRWA will provide training for teachers to support the integration of ICT in their pedagogical practices. Media and Information Literacy skills will also be developed among teachers and students as part of the digital transformation of education. To build a culture of peace, UNRWA will continue to implement its Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance education programme and strengthen its school parliaments.

The Agency will also strengthen its in-service teacher training programmes,<sup>13</sup> take on board lessons from regular studies of student performance and factors impacting on learning<sup>14</sup> and harness elements of its ICT4E Strategy, for example, through roll out of devices and strengthening connectivity across the five Fields of operation.

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<sup>13</sup> These programmes include the Newly Appointed Teacher programme and the School Based Teacher Development programmes I and II.

<sup>14</sup> An Agency-wide Assessment of Learning Outcomes – Study of Associated Factors was completed in 2021 and is expected to be repeated on two-yearly intervals, i.e., in 2023, 2025 and 2027.

The Education Management Information System (EMIS) will also be updated to further ensure that support evidence-based decision-making is possible and the Class Formation process – a key cost driver - will be reviewed and further strengthened.

Outcome 2: Palestine refugee girls and boys learn in an environment that is safe and inclusive, with their wellbeing ensured

The Agency will support student wellbeing and inclusion, through its school health strategy, continued efforts to address violence in schools and strengthened its psychosocial support (PSS) services. The latter will be supported under all funding streams, with additional counsellors made available in fields with additional needs. Efforts will be made to increase counselling support, from current norms of one counsellor for every 3 – 4,000 children to one counsellor for every 800 children.

The Agency will continue to invest in infrastructure by mobilising resources to reduce the number of schools operating on double-shifts, absorb pupil increases and improve the infrastructure of existing schools. This will help facilitate quality, equity and inclusive education and provide a conducive learning environment with accessibility for all, including those with disabilities. UNRWA commits to ensuring that all new and upgraded schools are physically accessible to all Palestine refugees and staff, including persons with disabilities, considering safety requirements, as well as specific gender requirements. This will help to provide environments that reduce the likelihood of violence affecting children and allow students and staff to participate in curricular and extracurricular activities.

All of these efforts will be underpinned with a renewed drive for establishing and reinvigorating partnerships, with existing partners such as UNESCO, UNICEF and the Norwegian Refugee Council but also new partners, including in the private sector, as well as the World Bank and Global Partnership for Education. Partnerships will be critical to sustain investments in ICT and to support expansion of MHPSS services. The Education Expert Advisory Group (EEAG), which was established in early 2022, will also be used to develop and deepen partnerships.

## Objective 4: Palestine refugees have improved livelihood opportunities

### 1. Context

Livelihoods comprise everything that people need to secure a means of living. This includes their skills, knowledge, health and ability to work, as well as the social, natural, physical and financial resources at their disposal. A person's ability to secure and sustain a livelihood is also shaped by myriad political, social, economic and environmental factors, ranging from macroeconomic policy and labour markets to gender norms, land ownership policies and legal and/or physical constraints to accessing markets. These contextual factors can change over time, either undermining or contributing to an individual's fundamental right to work and engage in productive employment.

Activities under this objective contribute to the following SDGs:

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all

### 2. Current operations

UNRWA promotes livelihoods amongst Palestine refugees in a number of ways: (i) direct interventions through its programmes, including Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Microfinance, temporary cash for work programmes in Gaza and youth and adolescent programming in Lebanon; (ii) indirectly, through its own operations, including UNRWA staff and persons employed in construction and infrastructure projects; and (iii) advocacy with host governments and local economic actors to promote and support Palestine refugee access to employment.

**TVET** aims to empower Palestine refugee youth by providing them with the skills and knowledge needed to find employment. The Agency runs eight TVET centres with around 8,000 students enrolled on an annual basis. They provide a range of different types of courses, from short term to two year semi-professional trade courses for students who have completed preparatory (9 – 10<sup>th</sup> grade) and secondary (12<sup>th</sup> grade) schooling.

UNRWA also runs **two teacher training** faculties – in Jordan and West Bank – which provide degree level training and qualification for Palestine refugee students, with over 2,000 students currently enrolled. Employment rates for both programmes are high, reaching 89.5 percent and 83.6 percent for male and female graduates respectively in 2021.

UNRWA's **microfinance programme** operates in all fields of operation except Lebanon and provides inclusive financial services that help create and sustain jobs, decrease unemployment, reduce poverty, economically empower women and youth and provide income-generating and asset-building opportunities for Palestine refugees and other proximate poor and marginal groups. Women and youth are prioritized as loan recipients.

Reforms introduced under the 2016 – 2022 MTS have resulted in: (i) increased outreach to marginal groups, through the introduction of new business and consumer loan products in Syria; and (ii) the opening of a new branch office in Jordan and new credit

units in Syria, bringing the branch office network to 23 offices.<sup>15</sup> Between 2016 and 2021 the programme issued over 200,000 loans valued at more than US\$ 187 million, fully covering its costs,<sup>16</sup> except in 2020.

The programme's social performance commitments are widely recognized. Microfinanza – a global microfinance authority – has awarded the Agency an A+ rating for its social performance in Palestine, the only microfinance provider to have received this honour in the region.

The UNRWA Job Creation Programme in Gaza, funded under the emergency appeal, will continue to ease the impact of widespread poverty and protracted conflict by providing short-term employment opportunities to Palestine refugees, prioritizing youth, women, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. In addition, through the elaboration of an Agency-wide Adolescent and Youth Strategy, UNRWA will build on “learning to earning” principles and best practice in ensuring that young people have equitable access to the skills, innovative technologies and global networks that allow them to meaningfully participate in social and economic spheres on the local and regional levels, and beyond.

UNRWA construction activities also have important positive impacts on local economies by driving community demand for construction materials while generating employment opportunities for camp residents and reviving local camp economies. Camp improvement interventions have created an estimated 2,500 full-time equivalent jobs each year under the 2016 – 2021 MTS. With positions concentrated in the construction sector, skilled and unskilled opportunities have been primarily provided to men, although the introduction of the self-help approach for shelter rehabilitation has helped address this imbalance.

### 3. Needs

Employment conditions remain extremely difficult for Palestine refugees and have deteriorated over the course of the 2016 – 2021 MTS, particularly in Lebanon, Syria and Gaza. Lebanon and Syria have been beset by deep and protracted economic crises, with Palestine refugees in both fields facing widespread unemployment, the loss of assets and livelihoods, shortages of fuel and electricity and relentless increases in basic living costs. Levels of joblessness in Gaza have exceeded 45 per cent each year since 2018 – amongst the highest recorded anywhere in the world – and have languished at 15 per cent in the West Bank. High unemployment rates have also persisted in Jordan, reaching 23.3 per cent in 2021. This compares to average unemployment rates of 10.5 per cent for the MENA region in 2021.<sup>17</sup>

Across UNRWA fields of operation, different structural barriers inhibit Palestine refugee integration into labour markets, and Palestine refugees are often worse off than their host country peers. Refugees in camps are particularly vulnerable, as are women, youth, persons with disabilities and those with high levels of educational attainment. Mirroring trends across the region, rates of labour force participation amongst women remain extremely low. These trends are likely to persist during the 2023 – 2028 strategic period. Continued high rates of population growth will see large numbers of young people enter labour markets each year, with local economies likely struggling to absorb them.

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<sup>15</sup> The number of branch offices is expected to increase to 26 by the end of 2022, with the opening of three new branches / units planned in West Bank and Jordan.

<sup>16</sup> The operational self-sufficiency rate ranged from 107 – 146 per cent.

<sup>17</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS>

#### 4. Priorities

Under this objective, UNRWA will work towards two outcomes: (i) improving the livelihood capacities of Palestine refugees; and (ii) strengthening Palestine refugee income generation and work opportunities. The Agency will look to strengthen its work on livelihoods and employability, with a focus on youth and women. The UNRWA digital transformation strategy and environmental sustainability commitments provide specific opportunities for employment generation, as do enhanced partnerships with host countries, donors, UN agencies, NGOs, International Financial Institutions and the private sector, for example through the development of new courses at TVET centres and the use of *fintech* innovations for microfinance.

UNRWA's programming will be informed by an organization-wide vision on adolescent and youth programming which will be finalized by the end of 2022, building on the recent experiences of progress made in this area in Lebanon.

The Agency will also strengthen its provision of livelihoods services for disadvantaged groups, including women and persons with disabilities. Support for SSNP will also be expanded, as reported under Objective 6, below.

A dedicated microfinance strategy will be developed for Syria, as a way to maintain programme operations given the collapse in the Syrian currency and its negative impact on programme capital.

##### Outcome 1: Palestine refugees' livelihood capacities improved

The **TVET programme** will enhance the relevance of TVET courses to labour market needs, and develop more market-relevant curricula, which are regularly updated with a strong focus on life and entrepreneurship skills as well as Placement and Career Guidance. Cooperation between training centres and employers will be strengthened to actively involve them in shaping courses and to facilitate the transition of graduates to employment. The Agency will also look to introduce courses in renewable and solar energy in some fields, and others on digital technologies – marketing, e-commerce etc. – alongside a new online learning platform through Microsoft 365. Access for the most vulnerable will also be extended, as reported under Objective 5, below. In the spirit of entrepreneurship, UNRWA will further explore cost-sharing options with potential employers of future graduates, which may be located outside of the region.

UNRWA also has several partnerships in place that provide **scholarships** for UNRWA graduates based on merit and other factors. The Agency intends to continue to provide such scholarships during the period 2023 - 2028.

In the early stages of the next strategic plan, UNRWA will review its teacher training facilities to assess their contribution to the strategic objectives of the Agency and the Agency's wider livelihoods programming. The findings of this review will inform priorities over the coming years.

Through its **microfinance programme**, UNRWA will provide Palestine refugees and other marginal groups with livelihood improvement opportunities that contribute to improved living conditions through consumer and housing loans. These will be available to working class and low income households to help constitute assets or pay for education, health care and unexpected one-time outlays, such as weddings and funerals. Housing loans will be offered to families with no access to mortgage facilities, helping them to improve, expand or acquire housing. Dedicated products will be retained for Palestine refugee families in Syria, including those returning to Husseiniyeh and Sbeineh and Yarmouk camps. The value of these loans is below that used in other fields and interest rates are also lower, through subsidies from other loan products provided by UNRWA.

Skills development for refugees involved in camp improvement plans (CIP) will continue and be expanded, based on the availability of project funding.

Outcome 2: Palestine refugees; income generation and work opportunities improved

UNRWA will offer inclusive business improvement opportunities that contribute to income generation in support of livelihood opportunities for micro-enterprise owners and their households, including youth and women. Such business opportunities will be provided by retail business loans through the following four products:

- Microenterprise credit (MEC) loans, to help small businesses build up and maintain reserves of working capital.
- Microenterprise credit plus (MEC+) loans, for mature microenterprises which are seeking to expand their capital and increase their workforce.
- Women's Household Credit (WHC) loans, to help female entrepreneurs build up businesses and household assets. These loans sustain enterprise as well as household expenditures on education, health and basic needs.
- Palestine Refugee Business Loan Product (REFB) loans to provide start up and business development support to microentrepreneurs in Syria, including returnee families to the areas listed above.

Further job opportunities will be provided through the creation of jobs linked to the Agency's construction and shelter reconstruction / rehabilitation works. Where possible, UNRWA will seek to increase the proportion of Palestine refugees involved in such interventions, which have the potential to generate more than 3,000 full-time equivalent jobs each year, depending on the availability of funds. Cash for work programming will also continue, funded by emergency appeal and project funds, in Gaza and Lebanon respectively, helping to temporarily temper extremely high levels of joblessness in these fields.

## **Objective 5: The most vulnerable Palestine refugees have access to effective social assistance systems**

### **1. Context**

Social assistance systems are critical for helping the most vulnerable individuals and families meet basic needs, manage risks and cope with shocks and crises. They also allow families to support and invest in the health, wellbeing and education of themselves and their children. UNRWA has a critical role to play in providing social assistance to Palestine refugees, particularly in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria, as a result of the significantly depressed economic situation.

Poverty rates exceed 80 per cent in these three fields, suggesting that assistance should be provided to the majority of the population to alleviate severe pressures on household economies. Multiplier effects of providing near universal assistance offer relief for wider populations, including hosts who may be equally affected, and can contribute to providing market stability.

UNRWA will continue to provide predominantly cash based assistance to refugees needing social assistance, with food distribution continuing in Gaza and Syria due to prevailing market conditions, linked to the availability and price of basic commodities.

Activities under this objective contribute to the following SDGs:

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

### **2. Current operations**

Between 2020 – 2022, UNRWA has provided food and cash assistance to more than two million Palestine refugees, or over one in three of all those registered with the Agency. Support has been provided under two interventions: (i) a Social Safety Net Programme (SSNP) that contributes to poverty mitigation, supported by the Programme Budget, which reached almost 400,000 beneficiaries in 2021; and (ii) Emergency Appeal programmes for victims of humanitarian crisis, through which around 1.7m Palestine refugees were assisted in the same year. The vast majority of beneficiaries of emergency assistance are in Gaza and Syria. The SSNP targets Palestine refugees using a proxy-means testing formula (PMTF), which has been in place since 2011. Despite deteriorating socio-economic conditions, persistent resource constraints have prevented the Agency from expanding its support. The SSNP budget has been frozen for several years, and so has its ceiling.

Further, the aspiration of the SSNP to cover a visibly large number of persons has meant that limited resources have been stretched to be able to show coverage. This has come at the detriment of the transfer value that has remained insufficient to address poverty or food insecurity.

The SSNP has also proven to be of limited use in emergency/displacement contexts, which have accounted for the vast majority of Agency expenditure for many years, as noted above. This is due to resource and time intensiveness of the assessment process combined with sometimes inaccessible locations of recipient populations. Meanwhile, the parallel application of the PMTF by host governments in some fields (Jordan and



the West Bank)<sup>18</sup> and UNRWA has created issues of inconsistency in targeting without addressing overlaps in beneficiary lists.

### **3. Needs**

According to the results of rapid surveys conducted by UNRWA in 2021 and 2022,<sup>19</sup> poverty rates amongst Palestine refugees have increased to 81.5 per cent in Gaza, 83 per cent in Syria and 86 per cent in Lebanon.<sup>20</sup> The most recent poverty data for Jordan (15.7 per cent) and West Bank (14 per cent) dates from 2019 and 2016/17 and it is likely that rates have increased considerably since then, primarily as a result of COVID 19.

The impact of rising food and fuel prices – due to global supply chain issues and the 2021 Ukraine crisis – is impacting on all UNRWA fields of operation, which are highly dependent on imports of basic food commodities. The situation is further exacerbated by the high share of disposable income spent on food (32 per cent of total household expenditures in Gaza, 39 per cent in Lebanon and 48 per cent in Syria,<sup>21</sup>) high levels of currency depreciation in Lebanon and Syria and increasing energy prices in all fields. According to UNRWA data, food insecurity levels reached new highs in 2021 / 2022, with 78 per cent of families reducing the number of meals in Gaza, 57 per cent in Syria and 58 per cent in Lebanon. In 2021, the cost of the food basket increased by 351 per cent in Lebanon and 97 per cent in Syria.<sup>22</sup>

Where poverty levels are continuously increasing and reaching near universal levels, the overwhelming majority of the population is impacted by economic and social distress. In Syria, employment is no safeguard from poverty – there is a large contingent of working poor, due to extreme loss in the purchasing power of salaries as a result of the devaluation of the local currency; in Gaza the lack of a productive economic sector and viable market make income generation elusive. Lebanon is on a path towards a similar scenario given the combination of the pandemic and severe economic, financial and political crises, which disproportionately affect Palestine refugees, an already severely marginalized population.

In such contexts, those persons and families that have been experiencing high dependency levels prior to deteriorating situations will be further exposed to hardship as social transfers that may have been made to them through communal or family ties, including remittances, are no longer sustainable. For families in these circumstances, the sustainability and effectiveness of the SSNP becomes even more critical for their survival. At the same time, other populations that had not shown any or low dependency levels are being cast into socio-economic distress and also require assistance.

### **4. Priorities**

#### **Outcome 1: Poverty amongst Palestine refugees is alleviated**

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<sup>18</sup> External evaluation of the SSNP in 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Socio-economic surveys to identify vulnerabilities and high-frequency crisis monitoring of key socio-economic variables for trend analysis are now being carried out in all field offices (in collaboration with the ESCWA statistics division).

<sup>20</sup> UNRWA High frequency crisis monitoring surveys: Lebanon: March 2022 (national poverty line 2011 adjusted for inflation); Syria: May 2021 (below US\$ 1.9 per day); Gaza: November 2021 with Palestine Bureau of Statistics (national poverty line 2011 adjusted for inflation)

<sup>21</sup> UNRWA High frequency crisis monitoring surveys (Lebanon: March 2022; Syria: May 2021; Gaza: November 2021 with PCBS).

<sup>22</sup> [https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000136993/download/?\\_ga=2.86640988.514567755.1649578660-753957072.1649578660](https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000136993/download/?_ga=2.86640988.514567755.1649578660-753957072.1649578660)

Several reform tracks have been initiated during the 2016 – 2021 MTS period and will be completed during 2023 – 2028. These include:

- (i) Further identification and refinement of vulnerability criteria for targeting of cash assistance

In fields with very high poverty levels, the shift away from a poverty-based targeting system for relief interventions, based on identified vulnerable categories amongst the Palestine refugee population (high dependency ratio within a family and long-term support needs), funded through the UNRWA programme budget, will continue.<sup>23</sup> Targeting should ideally be based on demographically available data from UNRWA's registration system, including female headed households, families with disabled members and families with children under five.

- (ii) Better alignment between emergency and SSNP interventions

In contexts with very high vulnerability levels, the SSNP will continue to be accompanied by a universal ultra-basic assistance floor for all registered Palestine refugees. This will be determined by immediate needs triggered by a socio-economic crisis and supported through Emergency Appeal funding (Gaza, Syria and possibly Lebanon). In fields with relatively low and modest poverty levels, the SSNP will be applied with an additional poverty assessment filter. This will ensure the more effective use of resources in addressing the social and economic exclusion of the most vulnerable.

- (iii) Exploration of opportunities for alignment with host government social protection programmes and other UN agencies where and as appropriate in terms of transfer value and targeting approach.

- (iv) Better alignment of UNRWA's cash assistance transfer levels with specific household expenditure needs.

- (v) Alignment of all cash and food beneficiary distribution lists with the registration system and introduction of a compliance framework and review process of beneficiary lists according to eligibility criteria.

A review of cash assistance programmes in light of refugee expenditure patterns on hospitalisation costs will also be undertaken to inform policy directions towards an integrated social protection approach to cash assistance and subsidies. This will be implemented by the relief and social services and health departments and supported by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia social protection division.

The Agency will also continue to expand access to TVET for the most vulnerable Palestine refugees, especially those enrolled on the SSNP programme, to help them gain skills to generate an income, become self reliant and break the cycle of poverty. Around one in three students in UNRWA TVET centres were enrolled on the SSNP

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<sup>23</sup> This shift is designed to ensure more effective and efficient programming in a resource constrained environment where the Agency is unable to adjust its assistance in response to changing needs.

during the 2021 – 2022 academic year, up from one in four in 2015 – 2016. UNRWA will look to increase this proportion further during the period 2023 – 2028.

## **Objective 6: Palestine refugees are able to meet their basic human needs of shelter, water and sanitation**

### **1. Context**

Adequate housing, access to safe water and sanitation are basic human needs and fundamental to human dignity. Adequate housing encompasses individual refugee shelters and homes as well as the overall built environment in which refugees live. This includes basic environmental infrastructure and utilities, such as water supply and sanitation, waste management and electricity services. Actions towards improved housing also support the implementation of environmental sustainability commitments enshrined in other global frameworks, most notably the Paris Agreement to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Activities under this objective contribute to the following SDGs:

Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation to all  
Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all  
Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable  
Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels

### **2. Current operations**

UNRWA contributes to meeting the basic needs of Palestine refugees through its shelter rehabilitation and reconstruction interventions, CIPs and environmental services. These are centred in the 58 official Palestine refugee camps in the five fields of Agency operation, as well as in unofficial camps in Jordan and Syria and in some areas adjacent to camps. In times of conflict, shelter rehabilitation and reconstruction is provided inside and outside camps. UNRWA does not administer or manage these camps but supports public services within them, where needed, appropriate and possible.

At the individual and family level, UNRWA assesses and rehabilitates substandard shelters. This includes homes with asbestos roofing, poor ventilation and dampness and shelters that are overcrowded or unsuitable for persons with special needs. The Agency also repairs and reconstructs homes destroyed during emergencies or in conflict. Between 2016 – 2021, a total of 4,000 homes were rehabilitated with project funds; a further 18,000 homes damaged or destroyed in conflicts – primarily in Gaza and Nahr El-Bared, Lebanon, were also reconstructed or rehabilitated. Across the board, progress has remained slow and challenging due to the limited availability of project funds and the unavailability of or lack of access to construction materials linked to COVID-19 restrictions, as well as lengthy host authority procedures in some fields. As a result, tens of thousands of refugee families continue to live in inadequate homes.

More comprehensive camp improvement planning takes place through a participatory approach whereby community members lead the process and identify priorities. Since 2007, the Agency has completed CIPs in ten camps across four fields of operation. These have resulted in the construction of public spaces and recreational areas, upgrading of environmental infrastructure, greening initiatives and improvements to urban economic space and road networks.

UNRWA's environmental services encompass water, wastewater, storm water and solid waste management (SWM). This includes planning, designing, constructing, and maintaining of water supply networks, with almost all shelters in official camps<sup>24</sup> connected to water supplies and over 90 per cent connected to official sewerage networks. In many camps, the quality and quantity of water remains inadequate, whilst in others, open sewers remain, presenting major public health risks.

The Agency is committed to environmental sustainability and minimizing the risk of negative environmental effects due to its construction and rehabilitation works. The UNRWA Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) establishes clear procedures, methodologies, and systematic processes for the environmental and social management of all construction and maintenance projects. UNRWA also promotes environmentally friendly technologies in its works such as solar panels, water harvesting, energy efficient design etc.

### **3. Needs**

Conditions in the 58 official Palestine refugee camps have deteriorated considerably in recent years. In terms of overall population, density and crowding within buildings, these camps are some of the most congested urban environments anywhere on the planet. Over a period of more than 70 years, they have developed into complex and diverse living environments. They are characterized by high concentrations of poverty, with residents typically enduring higher levels of poverty and worse health and education outcomes than non-camp refugees.

Addressing these needs remains challenging. Urban planning and integrated infrastructure development in camps have largely been non-existent or at best haphazard. Each field of operation and even individual camps hold very specific characteristics such as political contexts, refugees' needs and host authority legal frameworks. With urbanization continuing at a rapid pace, many refugee camps are approaching a tipping point. In the future, any planning or architectural interventions may become increasingly difficult and costly, if not addressed urgently.

There is also a critical need for investment to improve shelters, public spaces, social facilities, environmental infrastructure, sanitation services and SWM across all fields. This includes for the over 40,000 refugee families assessed to be living in sub-standard shelters. Whilst most families made homeless following the destruction of Nahr El Bared have now been rehoused, 959 shelters have yet to be rebuilt. In Gaza, repairs to 59,000 shelters and reconstruction of a further 331 is outstanding pending recent conflicts. No reliable estimates of the extent of shelter damage and destruction in Syria are available.

### **4. Priorities**

#### Outcome 1: Palestine refugees residing in camps live in adequate and safe shelters

UNRWA will continue to target the most vulnerable families for shelter rehabilitation, based on criteria that include safety, health, socioeconomic status, and vulnerability.

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<sup>24</sup> Not including camps damaged during the conflict in Syria.

The Agency will seek funds to rehabilitate around 40,000 substandard shelters and to complete reconstruction of shelters destroyed in Nahr El Bared and recent conflicts in Gaza. The Agency has not yet formulated a strategic response plan for rehabilitation of damaged shelters in Syria but is currently supporting a small number of vulnerable cases on a self-help basis.

Interventions include shelter reconstruction, extension and repair, including adaptation for special needs. The Agency will ensure that the needs of families are considered in design works and implementation, including as relating to privacy, dignity, gender, special needs of persons with disabilities and social concerns.

UNRWA will further extend use of the self-help approach for construction and rehabilitation to all fields, supporting and empowering families to implement the shelter works themselves, enhancing their sense of ownership and building their individual and collective capacities. This approach will typically be used for individual shelter works and not for major rehousing projects.

During the implementation of this strategic plan, special appeals will be issued in relation to any new conflict related shelter damage or destruction.

#### Outcome 2: Palestine refugees residing in camps live in healthy and environmentally sustainable conditions

During the period covered by this plan, UNRWA will target two camps per field for comprehensive improvement through the production of new CIPs. Working in partnership with refugees, the Agency will continue to integrate protection measures such as gender, disability inclusion and child protection across the design, construction and maintenance of facilities and camp improvement works such as the renovation of public spaces. ICIP will continue to build capacity of its staff in such matters. The Agency will also follow up on the sustainable implementation of the current CIPs. Progress in this area will depend on the availability of project funds.

The Agency will explore opportunities for more effective and efficient SWM, including through (i) implementing its SWM Framework and Field SWM strategies developed in line with host government strategies; (ii) adopting SWM best practice at the camp level; and (iii) strengthening Palestine refugee awareness in the aforementioned areas. The Agency will also look to sewage network coverage to 100 per cent of shelters through use of project funds.

UNRWA is committed to mainstreaming and integrating its Environmental Sustainability Policy and ESMF into all its planning, design, environmental infrastructure works and construction and rehabilitation practices, focused on energy efficiency and environmental sustainability. Central to this is the implementation of a wheeling station project which is under discussion in Jordan and which will provide approximately 70 per cent of UNRWA's electricity consumption needs in that field. Depending on the success of this initiative, the Agency will study the feasibility of rolling-out similar projects in other fields, in coordination with host governments. UNRWA will also ensure that new infrastructure initiatives consider ease and access to water and sanitation services. This includes through rehabilitating, upgrading, extending or reconstructing networks and the possible introduction of rainwater harvesting systems and other water saving / collection systems.

UNRWA will prioritize its interventions based on the available project funds and accordingly will implement works in camps that suffer from severe deteriorated

environmental infrastructure conditions. The Agency will also seek to expand partnerships with other agencies to maintain Palestine refugee access to quality services, building on a successful pilot engagement with UN-HABITAT in Syria, focused on training, capacity building and fundraising for camp improvement works.

## **Objective 7: UNRWA's mandate is implemented effectively and responsibly**

UNRWA's management priorities for 2023 – 2028 build on recent reforms, including the 2019 – 2021 Management Initiatives, to make the Agency more accountable, inclusive, transparent and agile, to better support programme delivery and strengthen both strategic and policy functions. This section outlines how the Agency will address some of the key risks it faces, in relation to resource mobilization and accountability to staff, refugees, hosts and donors. It also sets out key elements of the Agency's priorities in the areas of strengthened governance and management structures, adherence to UN values and principles, inclusion and environmental sustainability.

### Outcome 1: UNRWA operations are delivered effectively, efficiently and safely

UNRWA will work towards a predictable, sustainable and diversified funding base that ensures sufficient resources to deliver on the Agency's mandate. In this regard, two dimensions will guide the Agency's approach: (i) deepening and broadening long term public and private partnerships based on trust, mutual accountability and transparency; and (ii) increasing the use of digital tools to develop new partnerships.

With traditional donors, **resource mobilization efforts** will focus on: (i) maintaining and increasing funding; (ii) enhancing predictability through multi-year agreements and the early disbursement of contributions; (iii) pursuing new funding streams and instruments; and (iv) increasing flexibility in donor contributions. New private partnerships and synergies between the public and private sectors will also be explored. Efforts to broaden and deepen the public sector donor base will continue, including in regions such as South East Asia, and through targeted advocacy in Asia and Latin America. Regional partners will remain a priority, especially those that have signaled interest in resuming or increasing support.

UNRWA will also explore global and thematic funds, including the Joint SDG Fund and the UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund, to determine potential returns on investment. In addition, the Agency will expand its outreach to International Financial Institutions, deepening partnership discussions with the World Bank and further engaging the Islamic Development Bank to operationalize the Waqf Fund that was established by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in 2019. In line with best humanitarian and UN industry practice, Agency private sector partnerships will be restructured and pursued along the pillars of: (i) digital fundraising; (ii) Islamic philanthropic giving; and (iii) private sector giving, through foundations, corporations and high net worth individuals. This will require time, specific expertise and dedicated human and financial resources and reliance on innovative digital outreach and communication, the use of online platforms and mobile apps, constant tracking and cultivation. UNRWA will pursue this with the aim of raising US\$ 80 million per year from private entities and individuals by 2027.

The **safety and security** of Agency personnel is critical to UNRWA's ability to operate, particularly in fields impacted by conflict, where many – most notably the Agency's 28,000 area staff - are on the front line of service delivery. To effectively manage security risks and respond to emerging threats over the 2023-28 strategic period, UNRWA will ensure that best practice is integrated into internal security risk management processes, through systematic application of UN security management risk methodologies. This will allow the Agency to ensure that programmes are



delivered within accepted levels of security risk and that senior management are able to make risk informed decisions.

More broadly, to better manage complex geo-political, conflict-related, humanitarian, operational and environmental risks, UNRWA will strengthen its **enterprise risk management** capacity and systems. Guided by the results of a comprehensive maturity assessment of Agency's risk management framework, this will be accomplished through enhanced risk awareness and robust internal controls and decision-making processes that further facilitate the systematic identification, assessment and mitigation of risk.

With 28,000 staff representing UNRWA's primary asset and 80% of its expenditure, it is critical that the Agency has the right talent in the right places and at the right time to achieve its goals and objectives. Throughout the 2023-28 strategic period, the Agency will streamline and reinforce its **human resources** systems, structures and processes, focusing on organizational design, talent acquisition, career development and workforce / succession planning. The human resources policy framework will continue to evolve towards a more flexible, results-based working environment. The introduction, in 2020, of teleworking attests to the Agency's efforts with regard to staff retention and effective talent management, as well as to the desire to be aligned with more progressive UN entities in this area. Similarly, exit surveys, looking into the causes of separation, will incorporate a gender equality perspective to strengthen an enabling work environment and advance the Secretary-General's system-wide Strategy on Gender Parity.

In recent years, the Agency has invested in its workforce and succession planning capacity to help managers proactively plan workforce supply and demand, within available resources. Staff salaries are adjusted in line with UNRWA's pay policy and, in parallel, the Agency is exploring the possibility of adopting further Occupational Salary Scales (in addition to the existing Salary Scales for Health and Microfinance staff), to ensure greater efficiency in compensation management. To further facilitate operational efficiencies and monitoring, personnel dashboards and data analytics will be elaborated and transactions relating to staff allowances will be automated. The progressive, staged implementation of a "fit for purpose" human resources structure review will further enhance the delivery of professional, efficient, and client-oriented services. In an effort to protect services, the Agency commits to further efforts to limit growth in the workforce, as it has done in recent years through reforms in education and health, including through opportunities offered by modernization and digitalization to reduce transaction costs and paper-based functions.

It is imperative that UNRWA achieves best value for money in **procuring goods and services**, and works in a fair, ethical and transparent manner. The Agency will seek to implement these principles through: (i) the institution of sustainable procurement to enhance environmental protection and promote social progress, (e.g., fair labour conditions, workplace safety, gender equality and disability inclusion) economic development and resource efficiency, improving the quality of products and services over their lifecycle. UNRWA will also encourage UN vendors to comply with sustainable procurement requirements as an integral part of bidding processes; (ii) the digitalization of manually implemented procurement actions, to promote sustainability and enhance security while increasing transparency and ensuring value for money; (iii) strengthening internal procurement and stock handling and distribution procedures,

including in the areas of warehousing and property management; and (iv) deepening cooperation with other UN entities to, inter alia, obtain volume discounts and achieve process or operational efficiencies to the greatest extent practicable.

#### Outcome 2: UNRWA operations are transparent and accountable

UNRWA's Department of Internal Oversight Services (DIOS) conducts **independent audit, evaluation and investigation functions** that support enhanced Agency accountability, integrity, transparency and learning.

During the 2023-28 strategic period, DIOS will work in high-risk areas, focusing on: (i) internal audit dedicated to strengthened risk management, governance and internal controls through audit and advisory services in key areas. In addition, audit coverage will be enhanced in key IT areas, including enterprise resource planning, data protection, and information governance and management; (ii) evaluations that strengthen accountability, learning and evidence-based decision making with a focus on improving the coverage and strategic relevance, quality, practice, and methods of evaluation and further enhancing the culture and capacity for independent evaluations; and (iii) fair and objective investigations of serious allegations of misconduct, including in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse, fraud and corruption. This will be coupled with enhanced support for field investigations offices, including through the provision of technical advice and guidance on investigation methodologies, training and the monitoring of field office investigations.

**Accountability to affected populations** is a cornerstone of quality service provision to meet changing Palestine refugee needs and deliver more sustainable development outcomes. At the UNRWA field and programme levels, a number of formal and informal mechanisms, standards and practices are in place to ensure the meaningful participation of Palestine refugees at various stages in the programme management cycle. To further empower Palestine refugee participation in support of enhanced Agency accountability, UNRWA is committed to the further development and use of structures and processes that facilitate: (i) information gathering and sharing, consultation and the participation of the most vulnerable to ensure that the Agency is responsive to all Palestine refugee needs; (ii) safeguarding, including in relation to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse; (iii) the delivery of UNRWA programming in accordance with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence; and (iv) the systematic engagement of Palestine refugee communities at set points during the annual programme management cycle and as part of any change management processes.

UNRWA will continue to engage its inter-governmental **Advisory Commission**, to enhance the ways in which the Agency interacts with this body and its Sub-Committee, with a focus on: (i) enhanced transparency and engagement to better assist UNRWA senior management in delivering on the Agency's mandate; and (ii) engendering a deeper sense collective responsibility and commitment to preserve UNRWA's agility and operational response for continued service delivery to Palestine refugees.

#### Outcome 3: UNRWA operations are socially and environmentally sustainable

UNRWA is committed to **promoting the rights** of all Palestine refugees – women, men, girls and boys – in its services and advocacy interventions, and by ensuring that Agency-wide policies, systems and processes are **gender-sensitive**. Early on in the next strategic period, the Gender Equality Strategy 2016-22 (GES) will be updated to reflect key strategic priorities – within UNRWA and through service delivery - and ensure alignment with international gender frameworks, norms and standards, including the UN System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women that will further gender mainstreaming and measurably into all major institutional functions of the Agency.

Through these efforts, UNRWA will make organisational practices and programme implementation more gender-sensitive, ensure that service provision is equitable and inclusive for all Palestine refugees and promote gender equality through its public and private advocacy with duty bearers and other relevant actors. In doing so, a key priority will be to facilitate the engagement of men and boys on gender equality issues.

The Agency will promote gender equality and women’s empowerment internally through four key drivers: (i) strengthened gender architecture and coordinating mechanisms; (ii) appropriate allocation and monitoring of financial resources for gender mainstreaming; (iii) leadership in bringing about changes to the Agency’s organisational culture and operations; and (iv) enhanced accountability through gender mainstreaming in audit and evaluation. A Women’s Advisory Forum, established in 2022, will be a key body for the Commissioner-General and the Agency as a whole to advance in these areas.

Palestine **refugees with disabilities** form a particularly vulnerable group within the broader population and require specialized attention to ensure their needs are accommodated across the spectrum of Agency programming. Throughout the strategic period, UNRWA will address barriers to the full enjoyment of the rights of Palestine refugees with disabilities, including through advocacy with duty bearers. In line with the UNRWA Disability Inclusion Policy (2022), and with the objective of strengthening systems, structures, methodologies and processes to better mainstream disability inclusion Agency-wide, UNRWA will: (i) work in alignment with the United Nations Disability Strategy (UNDIS) to accelerate disability inclusion.

Agency performance in this regard will be monitored under the UNDIS accountability framework on an annual basis; (ii) upgrade and harmonize its data systems and identification tools regarding disability, in line with global standards; (iii) ensure the systematic identification of disability through outreach and community engagement; (iv) meaningfully consult persons with disabilities; (v) work to strengthen disability inclusion in Agency planning and budgeting cycles, including through dedicated budget lines in support of reasonable accommodation to meet the needs of persons with disabilities; and (v) support adapted service delivery modalities.

UNRWA has a key role to play in addressing **environmental sustainability** within Palestine refugee communities and an obligation to minimize the negative environmental impact of its own operations. UNRWA’s environmental sustainability policy (2022) reflects the commitments, principles, implementation accountabilities and structures for environmental sustainability that will allow the Agency to achieve tangible and measurable results during the 2023-28 strategic period. Throughout,

UNRWA will seek to strengthen environmental sustainability partnerships across Agency fields of operation, including with Palestine refugees themselves, host governments, the donor community, other UN entities, civil society and the private sector. Monitoring of progress will occur on a regular basis against performance indicators to be housed in the Agency's results-based monitoring system. Data collected will be reported to external stakeholders as part of the Annual Operational Report and through UN system-wide reporting mechanisms on environmental sustainability.