In December 2019, the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly in support of the extension of the UNRWA mandate until 2023. As long as Palestine refugees remain refugees, UNRWA is the organization that they turn to for education, health care, housing, social services, financial assistance, protection, and emergency response during times of conflict in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

UNRWA is widely recognized as a provider of high quality and cost-effective services and described in a recent assessment by the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) as a “competent, resilient and resolute [organization] achieving humanitarian and development results in a challenging and resource-constrained environment in ways that reflect a well-managed organization”.

Meeting the Human Development and Humanitarian Needs of Palestine Refugees

core unrwa services

US$ 806 million

education

health

relief

icip

executive directive

support

multiple programmes

protection

us$1 m

us$123 m

us$58 m

us$33 m

us$29 m

us$74 m

us$41 m

us$1 m

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Education. UNRWA operates 709 elementary, preparatory and nine secondary schools, providing quality and equitable education to boys and girls, which promotes critical thinking skills and the values of human rights and tolerance to 533,000 Palestine refugee students, and technical and vocational training for nearly 8,000 refugee youth.

UNRWA schools, which reached gender parity in the 1960s, allow girls and boys to organize in school parliaments where they engage in democratic practices, leadership and networking.

Health. UNRWA provides comprehensive primary health care at 144 health centres. In 2019, a total of 3.5 million refugees received health services through 8.4 million annual patient visits that contributed to significant health gains, particularly in the areas of family health, maternal and child health and the control of non-communicable diseases. UNRWA also supports critical hospitalization services. The Agency desperately needs additional medical staff, primarily to enhance the doctor-patient consultation times and allow for improved medical services, and sufficient medicines to avoid shortages. As a result of protracted crises, the burden of mental health and psycho-social disorders is high and requires UNRWA to respond adequately.

Protection. UNRWA seeks to safeguard and advance the rights of Palestine refugees under international law through targeted interventions and activities that specifically address the rights of vulnerable groups and seek to include them at all times - women, children and people with disabilities. Priority areas are: combatting violence, ending sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual harassment, gender-based violence and violence against children. In addition, UNRWA will deliver on its commitment to disability inclusion.

Relief and Social Services. Some 1.9 million Palestine refugees are estimated to live in poverty. In 2020, the UNRWA Social Safety Net programme will expand its coverage to include most vulnerable populations in Lebanon and Jordan that do not have access to alternative services other than UNRWA assistance programmes. Professional social workers support refugees affected by social and economic hardship strengthening psycho-social resilience and social inclusion. The social work interventions operate complementary to cash-based and in-kind support that in total covers 1.6 million vulnerable persons, including those affected by humanitarian crises in Syria and Gaza.
Infrastructure and Camp Improvement. Many of the 5.6 registered Palestine refugees live in 58 camps across the Middle East. Under international law, refugees have - as everyone does - the right to a decent standard of living, including housing, without prejudice to the other rights they enjoy as refugees. In 2020, UNRWA will provide environmental and waste management services, shelter reconstruction/rehabilitation, schools and health centers, many of which are in a poor state and require substantive repairs and maintenance. UNRWA mainly relies on project funding to improve the physical and social environment of the camps through a community-driven planning approach that includes refugees in the planning and design process.

Microfinance. The UNRWA microfinance programme is self-sustaining and greatly benefits those who will receive 47,000 microfinance loans valued at US$ 47 million to support sustainable income-generation opportunities, with an emphasis on supporting the economic self-reliance of refugee women and youth. These investments create and sustain jobs, reduce poverty and empower the refugee community.

Delivering on the 2030 Agenda and Protecting the Rights of Palestine Refugees

In 2020, UNRWA commits to continue its advocacy and activities to protect rights, lives, safeguard the human development of Palestine refugees, and deliver on commitments made in the 2030 Agenda. It will continue to find cost-saving measures, implement a series of organizational reforms to strengthen operations, programme delivery, oversight and transparency. UNRWA aims to contribute directly to reducing poverty and improving the lives and living conditions of Palestine refugees, something that can only happen if the Agency works in partnerships with host countries, donors, the UN, civil society, and other entities that pursue the same goal.

Central to these plans is financial stability and the ability to receive predictable and timely contributions from donors and partners. Each year, the Agency is forced to cut back on critical lifesaving services for millions who rely on its assistance due to unpredictable gaps between donor states pledging money and the Agency receiving that contribution. UNRWA is appreciative of donor states that generously pledge millions of dollars for Palestine refugees and urgently calls for a reliable and regular stream of funding that allows the Agency to keep its schools open throughout the year, purchase essential medical supplies, deliver on social services and emergency response programmes, carry out protection initiatives, and to ensure that its staff - the vast majority of whom are refugees themselves - receive a regular salary.

UNRWA and the SDGs: The Decade of Action

By investing in the human capital of Palestine refugees, UNRWA actively contributes to the realization of the 2030 Agenda. As the largest direct service-provider to Palestine refugees, the impact of UNRWA is concrete and sustained, with the following SDGs central to our work:
Palestine refugees in Syria and the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in Gaza, increasingly face conditions that require additional emergency assistance and funding.

**Syria Regional Crisis**

In 2020, UNRWA will provide emergency cash assistance to over 450,000 crisis-affected Palestine refugees in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, if only to contribute to relieve their suffering and help meet their most basic needs. The Agency will also ensure that Palestine refugees affected by the Syria crisis have continued access to its education, health and environmental health services. In 2020, UNRWA requires US$ 270 million for its humanitarian response to the Syria crisis.

**Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt)**

UNRWA requires US$155 million to address the priority humanitarian needs of Palestine refugees across the occupied Palestinian territory. The occupation, blockade, high levels of violence and repeated violations of human rights have resulted in extremely difficult living conditions of Palestine refugees in the West Bank and Gaza.

In Gaza, monumental unemployment, food insecurity, the weakened health system, casualties from the Great March of Return, chronic electricity outages, and undrinkable water quality have made Gaza ‘unliveable’. In 2020, UNRWA will provide food aid to one million food insecure Palestine refugees in Gaza.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Palestine refugees face difficult socioeconomic conditions and the impact of occupation on their freedom of movement, their access to land, property, essential services and employment, as well as the constant risk of seeing their homes demolished under restrictive and discriminatory planning policies. Despite sustained efforts by the occupying power to have UNRWA services in East Jerusalem replaced, UNRWA will continue its activities in favor of Palestine refugees.