



**UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS  
AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN  
THE NEAR EAST**

**ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY  
POLICY**

**25 May 2022**

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# Rationale

1. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (hereinafter, “UNRWA” or “the Agency”) recognizes that environmental sustainability should form an intrinsic element of overall service provision in support of the health and well-being of millions of Palestine refugees and over Agency 30,000 personnel.
2. UNRWA appreciates that a disproportionate burden of the negative consequences of environmental degradation is borne by populations already in situations of extreme vulnerability due to multiple factors including, but not limited to, gender, disability, age, socio-economic status and/or legal status.
3. Sustainable development is inextricably linked to the right to a healthy environment. As UNRWA is mandated to help Palestine refugees achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight, enhancing environmental sustainability in Agency operations and the broader Palestine refugee community is a paramount consideration.
4. UNRWA also recognizes that the nature and scope of its operations have both direct and indirect environmental impacts that it is obligated to minimize. To this end, through the implementation of the below listed environmental sustainability principles across the Agency’s fields of operation, UNRWA can make a meaningful contribution to the health and wellbeing of Palestine refugees, protecting them from future environmental hazards and serving as an example throughout the region.
5. UNRWA also appreciates that improving environmental sustainability in the Palestine refugee community will require a range of partnerships with members of United Nations Country Teams, civil society organizations, host authorities, the donor community and, most importantly, Palestine refugees themselves. In this regard, the Agency cannot address environmental sustainability alone as it is not simply a service that can be “delivered”. Instead, realizing environmental sustainability will require a combination of philosophy, attitudes, technical approaches and the implementation of good practice predicated on behavioural and lifestyle changes, all of which require teamwork amongst all stakeholders.
6. The sustainable development goals and UN development system reform efforts,<sup>1</sup> coupled with grassroots demand and Host Government and other Member State priorities, present the opportunity for an enhanced UNRWA programme of work that promotes environmental sustainability through a series of tailored interventions and mainstreamed efforts that satisfy the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.
7. UNRWA will endeavour to align its environmental sustainability efforts with the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,<sup>2</sup> the Paris Agreement to the United Nations

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<sup>1</sup> The sustainable development agenda includes the “Strategy for sustainability management in the United Nations system, 2020 – 2030 - Phase I”, UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, May 2019, CEB/2019/1/Add.1, [https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/imported\\_files/CEB.2019.1.Add.1%20-%20Sustainability%20Management%202020-2030\\_Phase%20I\\_0.pdf](https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/imported_files/CEB.2019.1.Add.1%20-%20Sustainability%20Management%202020-2030_Phase%20I_0.pdf). UN development system reform includes the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, UN General Assembly, September 2015, A/RES/70/1, <https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1>.

<sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/57b6e3e44.html>

Framework Convention on Climate Change<sup>3</sup> and other international agreements on climate change and environmental protection.<sup>4</sup>

## Purpose

8. The purpose of the UNRWA Environmental Sustainability Policy is to articulate the Agency's commitment to environmental sustainability while providing the framework and overarching principles to guide the mainstreaming of environmental sustainability considerations into UNRWA interventions at Agency Headquarters and five fields of operation.
9. The UNRWA Environmental Sustainability Policy was developed through a consultative process and is aligned with the United Nations system-wide strategic direction, requirements and best practices on environmental sustainability management provided by the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Environment Management Group.<sup>5</sup> It was also developed in alignment with the Environmental Policy for the UN Secretariat,<sup>6</sup> and the Secretary-General's action plan for integrating sustainable development practices into Secretariat-wide operations and facilities management.<sup>7</sup> It is ultimately intended to ensure that, where feasible, all UNRWA interventions contribute to protecting the environment and do not have a negative impact on the climate.

## Scope

10. In recognition of the fact that environmental sustainability can only be achieved through collective action, all UNRWA staff, personnel and organizational units will strive to apply the below listed guiding principles to all aspects of Agency operations and management, irrespective of location or funding source, including:
  - a. executive functions, including leadership, representation, resource mobilisation, communication, policy development, strategic planning, co-ordination, enterprise risk management, performance management, reporting and internal oversight;
  - b. programme functions, including the planning, delivery, and monitoring and evaluation of protection, health, education, relief and social services, microfinance, infrastructure and camp improvement services and emergency assistance to Palestine refugees; and
  - c. support functions, including financial services, including in relation to the Provident Fund investment portfolio, human resources, asset and facilities management, procurement, information technology and travel.

<sup>3</sup> 12 December 2015, T.I.A.S. No. 16-1104, available at [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english\\_paris\\_agreement.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> For example, please see the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992), available at <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-convention/what-is-the-united-nations-framework-convention-on-climate-change> and the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1997), available at <https://unfccc.int/documents/2409>

<sup>5</sup> Please see <https://www.unep.org/> and <https://unemg.org/>

<sup>6</sup> UN Secretariat, Secretary-General's bulletin, Environmental policy for the United Nations Secretariat, ST/SGB/2019/7, 4 September 2019, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3827063/files/ST\\_SGB\\_2019\\_7-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3827063/files/ST_SGB_2019_7-EN.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> UN General Assembly, Action plan for integrating sustainable development practices into Secretariat-wide operations and facilities management, 27 April 2017, A/72/82, available at <https://undocs.org/en/A/72/82>

In paragraph 19 of resolution 72/219 of 20 December 2017, available at <https://undocs.org/A/RES/72/219>, the General Assembly endorsed the Secretary-General's action plan for integrating sustainable development practices into Secretariat-wide operations and facilities management and requested the Secretary-General to implement his relevant recommendations within existing resources.

11. The implementation of the UNRWA Environmental Sustainability Policy will: (i) respect all Agency regulations, rules and organisational directives, and the primacy of service provision; and (ii) require UNRWA to apply the policy to interventions carried out by any third party on its behalf.

## Principles

12. Through the present policy, UNRWA commits itself to the below listed seven principles with the purpose of enhancing environmental sustainability through systematic and continuous improvements that take into account the specific operating conditions in each of the five fields of Agency operation, at UNRWA Headquarters locations and at Representative Offices:

### **Principle 1: Sound environmental stewardship**

UNRWA will seek to minimize the harm its operations cause to the environment and observe, on a voluntary basis, the highest environmental standards. Opportunities to contribute positively to the environment will be maximized by seeking to prevent pollution to water, land and air and provide healthy workplaces.

### **Principle 2: Efficient use of resources**

The Agency will exert all efforts to conserve natural resources, optimize sustainable energy consumption, reduce the generation of waste and greenhouse gas emissions, and aim for zero waste, including through: (i) a reduction in the wasteful consumption of water, energy and other resources; (ii) an increase in the recycling and reuse of materials; and (iii) conversion to renewable sources of energy. As a matter of priority, UNRWA will be responsive to the most pressing negative environmental conditions in all of its installations inside and outside of Palestine refugee camps, mobilizing resources, people, technology and learning/awareness materials as rapidly as possible to address these conditions.

### **Principle 3: Stakeholder participation**

The Agency will communicate the UNRWA Environmental Sustainability Policy to Palestine refugees and other internal and external stakeholders, promoting environmental awareness and accountability to affected populations, present and future. In addition, UNRWA will consult with Palestine refugees and Agency personnel during the planning, design and implementation of major environmental sustainability initiatives at the camp level, endeavouring to facilitate the establishment of partnerships with, participation of and ownership by Palestine refugees for the implementation of such initiatives. Consistent with its gender equality and disability policy and supplementary guidance in these areas, UNRWA will promote the increased and meaningful participation of women, youth, older persons and children, with and without disabilities, and other vulnerable or marginalized persons in camp initiatives designed to enhance environmental sustainability.

**Principle 4: Catalytic approach**

UNRWA will provide Palestine refugee communities with technical and other information and guidance on environmental sustainability/environmental management and alternatives to current practice that can be implemented by Palestine refugees themselves. The Agency will also explore options to develop community-based environmental projects, promote the creation of circular economy / green employment / training courses for youth and provide credit for entrepreneurial activities (e.g., the local provision of sustainable environmental services and/or the development of alternative energy devices and novel materials to help reduce the consumption of energy in Palestine refugee camps). The intention here is to mobilize significant human resources in the Palestine refugee community, helping them to assume environmental management responsibilities.

**Principle 5: Environmental sustainability and UNRWA programming**

The Agency will marshal the strength of its protection, health, education, relief and social services, microfinance infrastructure and camp improvement and emergency programming to advance environmental sustainability, establishing approaches and mechanisms to identify, internalize and mainstream environmental best practice in and through UNRWA service delivery. The Agency will also encourage its staff and personnel to set an example in their own actions and, through frontline service provision, will promote sound environmental sustainability principles within the Palestine refugee community.

**Principle 6: Innovation**

UNRWA will encourage Palestine refugees and Agency staff and personnel to develop innovative approaches to environmental sustainability at the camp level and in UNRWA installations. Agency staff and personnel responsible for furthering environmental sustainability will have adequate opportunities to develop individual and organizational capacity to stay abreast of current “green” approaches, best practice and innovation.

**Principle 7: Modelling best practice**

UNRWA will endeavour to model best practice in its environmental sustainability efforts, as informed by monitoring and reporting systems on material, water, and energy conservation and biodiversity schemes to be developed and implemented across UNRWA Headquarters and the five fields of Agency operation.

## Implementation

### Entry into Force

13. This policy will enter into force on 25 May 2022 until further notice.

### Responsibilities

14. Advancing environmental sustainability will require the collective efforts of all executive, programme and support functions across UNRWA Headquarters and the fields of Agency operation, within their respective areas of competence. The UNRWA Chief of Staff will be

- responsible for coordinating the implementation of and monitoring and reporting against this policy.
15. The Chief of Staff will designate responsibility/accountability lines for environmental sustainability in Headquarters and Field Offices as, at this point in time, a new environmental sustainability unit with a significant number of new personnel is not envisioned.
  16. UNRWA will provide the necessary skills/capacity development required for Agency staff and personnel to implement new responsibilities associated with the implementation of this policy.
  17. UNRWA will progressively elaborate guidelines, tools, information, and processes that support further Palestine refugee and UNRWA staff and personnel understanding on environmental sustainability and opportunities to become agents of change. In addition, the Agency will use all available means to enhance funding in support of environmental sustainability, including through tailored projects and possibly, on the basis of the results of a feasibility study, the establishment of an environmental trust fund that can be accessed to design and implement innovative environmental initiatives, including in Palestine refugee camps.

## Monitoring and Reporting

18. Monitoring UNRWA environmental sustainability progress will occur on a regular basis against select 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. Five years after the UNRWA Environmental Sustainability Policy comes into force, the Department of Internal Oversight Services will evaluate the impact of the policy in ensuring that environmental sustainability forms an intrinsic element of overall Agency service provision.

## Implementation Arrangements

19. Detailed guidance on implementing the UNRWA Environmental Sustainability Policy will be issued separately. In this regard, an environmental sustainability implementation plan will be elaborated for each Agency organizational unit, detailing the area of improvement, actions to be undertaken, accountability lines, implementation timelines and resource requirements, if any. UNRWA Advisory Commission Member guidance on establishing clear environmental sustainability priorities will be both solicited and welcomed, noting also that while many measures will be cost neutral, some extremely important interventions will come with cost implications in terms of initial investment, though they may lead to direct and/or indirect cost-savings in the medium to long-term.

## Policy Revision

20. The UNRWA Chief of Staff is responsible for coordinating the review and revision of this policy every five years. This review will identify the continued relevance of the principles outlined in the policy in light of: (i) the development of UN system-wide environmental sustainability frameworks, strategies and policies; and (ii) the Agency's fulfillment of the current policy.