what was evaluated and why?

about unrwa’s emergency appeals

The evaluation assessed the relevance, coherence, coverage, effectiveness, and sustainability of UNRWA’s Emergency Appeals (EAs) for the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and the Syria Regional Crisis (SRC) covering the period between 2016 and 2021. EAs are a funding mechanism to provide UNRWA’s humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees in emergencies. EAs support interventions that target both humanitarian needs resulting from protracted crises as well as sudden needs arising from conflict, economic or health crises and natural disasters. UNRWA’s EAs for the oPt and the SRC support interventions across all five of the Agency’s areas of operation; Gaza, the West Bank including East Jerusalem, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria.

The humanitarian needs facing Palestine refugees across the oPt and the countries affected by the SRC are profound and multidimensional. In the oPt, ongoing humanitarian needs have been exacerbated by Israel’s continued occupation of the West Bank including East Jerusalem and periodic escalations of violence in Gaza, where the economy has been crippled by 15 years of blockade and degrading infrastructure. Levels of poverty rates among Palestine refugees remain high.

In Syria, between 2016 and 2021 95% of the 438,000 registered Palestine refugees were food insecure and in need of cash and in-kind food assistance. Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) who have been displaced to Lebanon and Jordan also face high vulnerability as many of them have a precarious legal status and do not have access to the labour market or national services. Across all areas of operation, the humanitarian needs of Palestine refugees were exacerbated by the devastating socio-economic consequences of COVID-19.

UNRWA’s EAs have sought to respond to the humanitarian needs of Palestine refugees across these areas of operation through several emergency interventions. These include, but are not limited to: the provision of emergency cash assistance, food assistance and non-food items; emergency health and education interventions, including the provision of psychosocial support; and emergency protection interventions.

humanitarian needs (2023)

Gaza
1.2 million Palestine refugees in need of UNRWA food assistance; 45.3% unemployment rate (PCBS, Labour Force Survey 2022).

West Bank including East Jerusalem
38,000 vulnerable individuals from Bedouin and herder communities in area C in need of food assistance; ongoing protection needs caused by occupation policies, including demolition of Palestinian structures.

Jordan
20,000 PRS in need of UNRWA emergency cash assistance; 88.7 per cent PRS youth are unemployed.

Syria
420,000 Palestine refugees in need of UNRWA emergency cash and food assistance; 40 per cent of Palestine refugees in protracted displacement.

Lebanon
301,400 Palestine Refugees in Lebanon (PRL) and PRS in need of UNRWA emergency cash assistance; 86 per cent of Palestine refugees rely on UNRWA cash assistance as main source of income.
Relevance
The evaluation found that EA design and planning aligned with both the evolving humanitarian needs of Palestine refugees across all areas of operations and the wider strategic outcomes of UNRWA’s Medium-Term Strategy 2016-2022. EA interventions respond clearly to emergency needs and are highly valued by affected Palestine refugees. During the period under review, a number of vulnerability assessments were conducted by UNRWA field offices, with support from relevant HQ Departments, to inform EA planning. For example, in Syria and Jordan, in 2018/9 UNRWA introduced a targeted approach to the provision of cash assistance based on vulnerability; in Gaza, the composition of the food basket was reviewed, and the food operation adjusted to the specific challenges and needs caused by the blockade. However, it is unclear to what extent vulnerability assessments are systematically conducted. UNRWA has frameworks in place for ensuring that protection, human rights, gender and disability considerations are well integrated into EA design.

Coherence
EA interventions build on the Agency’s infrastructure and expand its coverage with additional funding, specialized personnel, and interventions specifically designed to meet emergency needs. On some occasions, EA funding has, however, been used to cover critical funding gaps in the Programme Budget, especially in areas where Programme Budget shortfalls were assessed as having a high impact on beneficiary access to essential services and assistance. The evaluation identified that the EAs generally align with the Grand Bargain commitments, against which UNRWA provides yearly self-reports as requested. The Agency also participates in humanitarian mechanisms at country and regional levels; however, the evaluation identified a need to further strengthen this engagement. A more active community engagement through a clearly defined Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) strategy was also identified as one of the recommendations from the evaluation. Though EAs generally aligned with Grand Bargain commitments, the evaluation identified an outstanding need to strengthen community engagement and improve beneficiary satisfaction with feedback and complaints mechanisms. The scope for synergies with other UN agencies is limited by clearly differentiated target groups.

key findings

Purpose:
The evaluation served an accountability and learning purpose, by assessing the design, function of UNRWA’s EAs for the oPt and SRC, as well as their contribution to the needs of Palestine refugees and the Agency’s strategic outcomes.

Scope:
The evaluation covered EAs for both the oPt and the SRC between 2016 and 2021 and focused on interventions funded during the period.

evaluation purpose and scope
Commissioned by the Department of Internal Oversight Services. The evaluation was conducted by IOD PARC.

key EA figures (2016 -2021)

- $1.7 billion received for both EAs out of 3.8 billion required over 2016 - 2021, representing 45% of its funding requirements.
- 458,620 Palestine refugees and PRS provided with emergency cash assistance across Syria, Lebanon and Jordan (annual average 2016 - 2021).
- More than 1 million Palestine refugees provided with emergency food assistance in the oPt, predominantly in Gaza.
- 6,341 PRS enrolled in UNRWA schools in Jordan and Lebanon (annual average 2016 - 2021).
- 24,556 abject poor refugees provided with emergency cash assistance in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem (annual average 2016 - 2021).
- 97,155 healthcare consultations for Palestine refugees in Syria and PRS in Lebanon and Jordan (annual average 2016 - 2021).
- 9,932 Palestine refugees facing protection risks referred for legal advice across Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.
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**Coverage, Inclusion and Equity**

UNRWA’s EAs support both interventions with **universal coverage** as well as interventions that target **groups with specific vulnerabilities**. Though UNRWA has used a wide range of vulnerability assessments to identify specific needs and inform targeting, the frequency of their implementation is influenced by different factors, including availability of resources and community approval. There is concern among donors and some other stakeholders that the universal coverage of some EA-supported interventions do not mirror the purpose of the EA funding instrument. The evaluation found an outstanding need to improve vulnerability assessments and eligibility criteria to strengthen the Agency’s ability to identify needs, and ensure that the wider registration system is responsive to the changing circumstances of refugee households as well as wider contextual developments that can influence vulnerability.

**Effectiveness**

UNRWA’s results reporting for Emergency Appeals remain largely output driven and quantitative. As such, existing reporting mechanisms do not provide a strong basis for assessing the broader outcomes of emergency appeals. Beneficiary inputs to the evaluation, as well as the household survey, found that EA-supported interventions were critical, and often lifesaving. A review of existing data indicates that EA **supported interventions reached significant numbers of refugees** across all areas of operation. That said, for some interventions, annual targets were on some occasions not met due to funding constraints, while for other interventions the targets (e.g. number of people who received assistance) were met, but the value / quantity of assistance was decreased to adjust to limited resources.

**Efficiency**

UNRWA’s chronic funding crisis has forced the Agency to **introduce severe cost saving measures** through staffing cuts and programmatic prioritization. When funding is present, UNRWA is able to deploy its unique expertise, demonstrating that the Agency’s comparative advantage is linked to its unique mandate, knowledge of its beneficiaries, its staff, reach, and trust. The particularly **challenging political and economic situation** faced by the Agency has negatively affected the value, timeliness and modality of assistance provided through EAs. This was felt by refugees, who reported delays or insufficient assistance to meet basic needs.

**Sustainability**

The protracted nature of the humanitarian needs faced by Palestine refugees and the complex political and funding environment in which UNRWA operates, represent a challenge to the sustainability of the EA interventions. The current approach to annual budgeting allows UNRWA to quickly respond to the highly specific and evolving contexts of its areas of operation. However, the annual budgeting approach also affects staff retention and prevents the Agency from planning beyond the EA funded timeline. A multi-year approach to budgeting would facilitate longer term thinking and planning.

**approach and methods used**

The evaluation adopted a **theory-based approach** to ground the enquiry process. The evaluation team reconstructed a unified Theory of Change for both EAs during the inception phase, identifying the key contextual issues, the overall functioning and programmatic scope of the EA mechanism, its strategic priorities, alignment with Humanitarian Response Plans and the Grand Bargain, as well as with identified needs of Palestine refugees. The evaluation process was guided by 13 evaluation questions covering relevance, coherence, coverage, inclusion and equity, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. The evaluation utilised a mix of data collection methods, summarised below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>data collection methods</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Document Review</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>A review of EA design and reporting documentation, monitoring and evaluation material, financial information and other relevant documentation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Key Informant Interviews</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>A total of 107 Interviews with UNRWA staff at HQ and field level, EA donors, host government/authority representatives, other UN agency representatives, NGO partners and refugee community representatives.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Focus Group Discussions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>A total of 9 Focus Group Discussions with UNRWA staff and refugee beneficiaries.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Survey</strong></td>
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<td>A representative household survey of UNRWA beneficiaries with a sample size of 1,725 households.</td>
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[Click here](#) for a dashboard to the survey results.
### recommendations for the way forward

1. Develop and implement a plan to **refine vulnerability criteria and categories** through systematic and regular revision of demographic and socio-economic indicators of populations of concern in UNRWA’s case management system, accounting for the type of assistance required (cash, food, education, health, protection etc.), the type of poverty levels across field offices and introducing measures for identifying intersecting vulnerabilities (see below), to allow systematic identification of changing vulnerabilities and emerging issues/situations.

2. Pilot the introduction of a suite of **qualitative data collection methods** to accompany vulnerability assessments, to support the Agency in assessing the evolving, multiple and intersecting vulnerabilities among the populations of concern, and, more importantly, to demonstrate the impact of the services on people’s resilience and daily lives. This will require an investment in staffing and funding that will require dedicated donor support.

3. Develop and implement a plan to **strengthen the Age, Gender, Diversity processes and criteria** by reflecting intersectionality dimensions in vulnerability assessments:
   - Build on staff’s extensive knowledge of the communities they work with to introduce concepts of intersectionality, what it means in practice and how it would strengthen ongoing work to identify the needs of the most vulnerable and excluded refugees;
   - Consider consistently introducing age dimensions across UNRWA’s interventions.
   - Continue to refine the Agency’s gender approach, wherever possible going beyond binary considerations, or at a minimum ensuring that interventions include channels for active participation of all voices and including women and girls;
   - Continue to refine the introduction of Washington Group criteria to nuance disability identification.

4. Streamline all feedback and community complaint mechanisms in each field office and assign dedicated resources to address and respond to feedback and complaints received at frequent intervals, with clear communication on response times conveyed to beneficiaries.

5. Incorporate processes for using feedback from beneficiaries of EA interventions and frontline staff (e.g., adapting existing tools and/or designing a unified tool) to systematically feed into EA planning, design and implementation, and ensuring that the voices of all refugees are included by introducing gender- and age-sensitive processes to EAs design, monitoring and evaluation.

6. Ensure the process underway to integrate the Agency’s registration and programme management information systems unifies databases so case management and registration data are harmonised and held both comprehensively at both FO level (for field-level beneficiary data) and HQ level (for Agency-wide beneficiary data) to strengthen the design and delivery of tailored EA interventions. This process should be considered a priority for the Agency, including for resource mobilization.

7. Each EA planning cycle should systematically draw on the refined vulnerability assessments to ensure intervention areas covered by the EAs are focused on the most pressing humanitarian needs.

8. Develop and implement plans to strengthen UNRWA’s EA donor engagement approach, including FOs more actively in communication and discussions about the importance of the EAs for refugee populations.

9. Further strengthen participation in interagency humanitarian coordination channels to ensure that UNRWA’s work is communicated so that others can capitalize on the Agency’s presence and reach in refugee communities and vice-versa.

10. Complete a review of how other agencies combine multi-year and yearly planning processes in their budgeting and planning system to strengthen resource mobilization.

11. Leveraging work underway, develop a concept note for introducing Agency-wide multi-year planning for EAs which incorporates yearly review processes to **re-assess needs and requirements** (as already being done in Syria under the two-year HRP and in the oPt and Lebanon).

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