Since 1971, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has worked closely with the European Commission (EC), the European External Action Service, the Council of the European Union and its Member States, and the European Parliament to support the development, humanitarian and protection needs of Palestine refugees in an effort to promote stability across the Middle East.

The UNRWA partnership with the EU is probably the most strategic of all, not only for the financial support that it generates but also at the political level. EU support to UNRWA is part of the EU strategy of contributing to the promotion of stability in the Near East. The EU attaches great significance to the link between humanitarian aid and medium and long-term development action. As part of its mandate, UNRWA responds to most pressing humanitarian needs while providing, at the same time, development opportunities through the provision of education and social protection services.

In the course of five decades, the EU and its Member States have become the largest provider of international assistance to Palestine refugees. In 2019, UNRWA was extremely grateful to receive a contribution of EUR 82 million from the EU with a further EUR 21 million contribution at the close of the year - a particularly precarious time for the Agency, due to increased need among the most vulnerable Palestine refugees during winter’s coldest months.

Through multi-annual Joint Declarations, the EU has provided reliable and predictable support to the UNRWA Programme Budget, which covers the Agency’s crucial services in the fields of education, health and relief and social services. In addition, the EU and its Member States collectively are also among the largest contributors to the Agency’s humanitarian emergency appeals in Syria, Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territory, and projects in response to various crises and specific needs across the region, such as the construction of new shelters for poor refugees and the Agency’s renowned Education in Emergencies programme. The various contributions by the EU to the Agency’s operations have consistently come at very critical moments - helping the Agency to respond to emerging needs such as the coronavirus outbreak.
Better skills and increased livelihood opportunities for Palestine refugee youth

Through eight UNRWA Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) centres in the region and targeted projects, such as the scholarship fund in Lebanon and the Engaging Youth project in Syria, UNRWA provides young refugees with opportunities to acquire professional skills, helping them integrate better into the labour market. UNRWA also supports the creation of employment opportunities by supporting the creation of private businesses through its microfinance program and subsidizing short-term jobs in Gaza.

Quality education for half a million children

Every day, over 500,000 children receive an education in 709 UNRWA schools. Over time, UNRWA schools have built a reputation for high academic achievements and low dropout rates, while gender parity has been maintained since the 1960s. Since 2000, UNRWA has been teaching human rights, conflict resolution and tolerance, empowering Palestine refugee students to enjoy and exercise their rights, uphold human rights values, be proud of their Palestinian identity and contribute positively to their society and the global community.

Quality health care for 3.5 million patients

UNRWA operates 144 health centres and delivers comprehensive primary health-care services. Every year, UNRWA medical staff handle 8.5 million patient visits. The Agency also subsidizes access to secondary and tertiary health care for lower-income refugees.

Improved living conditions for the poorest

To help refugees meet their basic human needs of food, shelter and environmental health and achieve a decent standard of living, UNRWA provides welfare support to low-income refugees in the form of cash assistance and shelter rehabilitation. It also improves infrastructure and living conditions in the 58 recognized Palestine refugee camps.

Continued Services and Humanitarian Assistance in Situations of Emergency

In times of crisis, UNRWA provides humanitarian assistance (cash, food, shelter) and adapts its services to continue responding to both the new and existing needs of Palestine refugees. When needed, it deploys mobile health clinics, opens new health points and increases the provision of life-saving secondary and tertiary health care. When conflicts affect children and prevent them from attending class, UNRWA offers the necessary psycho-social support, develops innovative educational tools to allow them to continue their studies – including self-learning materials and television programming on UNRWA YouTube channel – and offers catch-up classes and remedial programmes to ensure they do not fall behind.

Emergency and long-term response to COVID-19

Since the start of the crisis, UNRWA has worked diligently to deliver essential, life-saving services to Palestine refugees throughout the Middle East. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) has been distributed to frontline health staff, triage systems introduced in all health centres and telemedicine and door-to-door delivery of medicine and food were implemented to reduce foot traffic at health clinics and food distribution centres. To ensure the continuity of education, the Agency’s Education in Emergencies (EiE) approach has been adjusted to the COVID-19 crisis and implemented. Sanitation works and solid waste collection have continued in all camps. UNRWA is providing vital food and cash assistance programmes, as the socio-economic consequences of the public health crisis continue to heavily impact Palestine refugee households.

DID YOU KNOW?

UNRWA achievements with European Union support:

UNRWA schools continually and consistently outperform public schools by a margin equivalent to more than one additional year of learning, according to a 2014 World Bank report.

The immunization rate for young Palestine refugee children exceeds immunization targets set by the World Health Organization.

In 2016, UNRWA transitioned from the provision of in-kind food assistance to a more effective and empowering cash-based approach in Jordan, Lebanon and the West Bank.

In 2020, UNRWA maintained and adapted essential healthcare services for 3.5 million Palestine refugees during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since 1950, over 2 million Palestine refugee children have attended UNRWA schools.

“UNRWA provides essential services to millions of refugees. It is a lifeline, especially in Gaza. UNRWA makes a key contribution to the viability of a two state solution, stability and peace. We support UNRWA financially and politically, until a just and lasting solution for Palestine refugees.”

Ms Helga Schmid, Secretary General of the European External Action Service, June 2020

“UNRWA has a crucial stabilising role and delivers vital services. We want to restate the strong EU support for the work of UNRWA.”

Mr Oliver Varhelyi, EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, June 2020
UNRWA at a Glance

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established by the General Assembly in 1949. It is mandated to provide assistance and protection to 5.6 million registered Palestine refugees living in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, inclu-ding East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, pending a just solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance, protection and emergency assistance. The UNRWA mandate has been renewed every three years by the UN General Assembly.

UNRWA is unique as it provides vital services that are akin to those normally provided by governments and does so directly through 30,000 staff members (including teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers and engineers), most of whom are Palestine refugees themselves. The uninterrupted provision of such services requires stable and predictable funding for the Agency’s Programme Budget. However, UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions (up to 95 per cent).

As a UN agency, UNRWA has rigorous processes and mechanisms in place for the implementation and enforcement of its rules, regulations and policies relating to UN neutrality. This includes bi-annual checks of staff names against the relevant UN sanctions list and regular inspections of its installations. Through its education programme, UNRWA also promotes universal values and the principles of the United Nations. A system is in place to ensure that the host governments’ curricula implemented in UNRWA schools reflect these values.

By implementing its activities directly through its own staff, it maintains strong control over the spending of donor funds. UNRWA is also audited by the UN Board of Auditors, and donors, such as the European Union, conduct regular reviews and checks of staff names against the relevant UN sanctions list and regular inspections of its installations. Through its education programme, UNRWA also promotes universal values and the principles of the United Nations. A system is in place to ensure that the host governments’ curricula implemented in UNRWA schools reflect these values.

COVID-19 Support
Since the very start of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic in the region, the EU did not leave Palestine refugees behind. Unwavering support enabled the UNRWA front-line health response across the Middle East. As the largest contributor to UNRWA core programmes, the EU facilitated the distribution of critical medicine and health equipment, ensuring ongoing care for Palestine refugees. UNRWA will continue to work to prevent a disastrous situation that could leave thousands of lives in the balance and will protect against the most severe impacts of the pandemic by providing basic needs such as food, water and life-saving health care and preventing against further deterioration to refugees’ health and socio-economic safety.

Outlook
The past few years have witnessed successive funding shortages that prevented UNRWA from fully addressing the needs of the growing refugee population. The ability of the Agency to provide its services depends on sufficient annual voluntary contributions. Time and again, the EU and EU Member States (EU MS) have been among the first to respond to UNRWA calls for additional financial resources to enable the Agency to operate on a sustainable and cost-effective basis and to ensure adequate quality and level of services for Palestine refugees. As the largest provider of international assistance to Palestine refugees since 2018, EU support has allowed for significant achievements in the areas of humanitarian assistance and human development, which have led to better educated and healthier Palestine refugees, thus contributing to the development of the entire region.

UNRWA and the Sustainable Development Goals
UNRWA strives to achieve gender balance in its own workforce, and is committed to promoting gender equality as part of its support for the human development and protection of refugees. As part of the Agency’s comprehensive approach, targeted interventions are combined with gender mainstreaming to address gender gaps. As such, UNRWA offers:

- Legal counselling and psychosocial support to survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), and partners with external organizations to ensure access to other required services
- Preventative measures such as workshops, trainings and awareness-raising activities on GBV
- Opportunities for women to become economically self-reliant through microfinance opportunities, skills development training and work placements

UNRWA is not in a position to verify or guarantee the veracity of the statements made in the text and does not pursue a specific political agenda. The Agency is an independent body belonging to the UN family and the statements made do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its Member States. This report has been prepared by UNRWA for information purposes only. It is not intended to represent the views of the European Union.

Protecting Palestine Refugees and Advocating for their Rights
For a wide range of reasons, Palestine refugees often do not enjoy basic human rights, and the vulnerability of women and children to violence and abuse is increasing. To safeguard and advance the rights of Palestine refugees under international law, the UNRWA protection strategy includes:

- The provision of protection in and through its service delivery programmes by meeting minimum protection standards
- The follow-up of cases of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of vulnerable groups, including women, children and persons with disabilities
- The promotion of the rights of Palestine refugees under international law, through the monitoring and reporting of alleged violations of international law and by engaging in private and public advocacy
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