In December 2019, the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to extend the UNRWA mandate until 2023. The nations of the world once again reaffirmed UNRWA as the organization entrusted with the education, health care, housing, social services, financial assistance, protection, and emergency response of more than five million Palestine refugees 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. In 2019, the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network referred to UNRWA 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.”

Rapid, effective results based on experience. Concerned about the risks the COVID-19 pandemic posed to densely populated Palestine refugee camps, UNRWA began to prepare for and respond to the imminent pandemic in January 2020. The Agency’s breadth of experience delivering humanitarian services in conflict zones allowed it to quickly shift its health services to triage and telemedicine, education to remote learning, and food delivery from pick-up at distribution centres to home delivery. Working in concert with the WHO and host governments, UNRWA efforts resulted in life-saving mitigation in the pandemic’s spread.

Funding an unanticipated requirement. Addressing the funding needs of this global public health crisis began in mid-March when UNRWA launched a US$14 million emergency appeal to cover the Agency’s initial costs. On May 8, a revised US$ 93.4 million appeal was announced to sustain the UNRWA response over the next three months and to address growing and urgent socio-economic needs. The Agency’s call for support was part of the OCHA Global Humanitarian Response Plan.
2020 pb - programme budget

**Education.** UNRWA operates 709 elementary and preparatory schools across the Middle East, including nine secondary schools. Its curriculum provides quality and equitable education to all children, promotes critical thinking skills and the values of human rights and tolerance to 533,000 Palestine refugee students, and offers 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.

**Protection.** UNRWA safeguards and advances the rights of Palestine refugees under international law through targeted interventions and activities addressing the rights of vulnerable groups including women, children and people with disabilities. UNRWA programs in its areas of operation work to prevent violence, including gender-based violence and violence against children, sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment. UNRWA also continues to deliver on its commitment to disability inclusion.

Ein el-Asal UNRWA school in Lebanon offers inclusive education where Khalil is a seventh-grade student. His visual impairment did not stand between him and his academic achievements.

UNRWA cash assistance to the most vulnerable of the vulnerable is often the most predictable support they get, especially in Syria, where over 90 per cent of the population is estimated to be living in absolute poverty due to the conflict and where a quarter of the Palestine refugee families are headed by a female.

**Health.** UNRWA provides comprehensive primary health care at 141 health centres. In 2019, a total of 3.16 million refugees were registered at UNRWA health centres, comprising a total of 8.7 million patient consultations. UNRWA also supports critical hospitalization services. Further, as a result of protracted crises, now including the COVID-19 pandemic, the burden of mental health and psycho-social disorders is high and requires UNRWA to respond adequately.

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**Relief and Social Services.** Some 1.9 million Palestine refugees are estimated to live in poverty. UNRWA social workers support refugees affected by social and economic hardship, strengthening psycho-social resilience and social inclusion. Social work operates complementary to cash-based and in-kind support that in total covers 1.8 million vulnerable persons.

UNRWA developed an innovative mobile application to promote Mother and Child well-being and track family health.
**Microfinance.** The UNRWA microfinance programme is self-sustaining and in 2020 is providing 47,000 microfinance loans valued at US$ 47 million to support sustainable, income-generating 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.

**Infrastructure and Camp Improvement.** Many of the 5.6 million registered Palestine refugees live in 58 camps across the Middle East. To help ensure access to adequate housing, UNRWA provides environmental and waste management services and reconstructs and rehabilitates shelters, schools and health centers. To do this UNRWA mainly relies on a community-driven planning approach that includes refugees throughout the process.

UNRWA works to protect the rights, lives of and to expand choices and opportunities for Palestine refugees, and is delivering on commitments made in the 2030 Agenda. It will continue to find cost-saving measures, as well as 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 pursuing shared goals.

Central to these plans is financial stability and predictable and timely contributions from donors and partners. Diminishing support and unpredictable gaps between donor state pledges and the delivery of contributions limit the Agency’s ability to provide critical lifesaving services to the millions who rely on its assistance. UNRWA is appreciative of donor states that generously pledge millions of dollars for Palestine refugees, but urgently needs a reliable and regular stream of funding to keep its schools open, 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.

**delivering on the 2030 agenda and protecting the rights of palestine refugees**

Poverty eradication and respect for human rights, central pillars of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), are at the core of the Agency’s work. As the largest direct service provider to Palestine refugees, UNRWA provides concrete and sustained results across 11 SDGs.
In 2020, UNRWA requires US$ 270 million for its humanitarian response to the Syria crisis. UNRWA is providing emergency cash assistance to over 450,000 crisis-affected Palestine refugees in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan to 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.

**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 for Palestine refugees in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, 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 is continuing to 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.