

UNRWA Protection Strategic Framework

Restoring and strengthening the
UNRWA Protection Function
– A way forward

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

Approved by UNRWA in July 2021



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I. Overview

Rationale for the review

In 2020-2021, UNRWA commissioned an external consultancy to design a way forward for restoring and strengthening the UNRWA Protection Function. This Strategic Framework was developed in response to recommendations from previous protection reviews as well as further consultations to inform the protection restructuring. It aims to provide the parameters within which UNRWA will design and implement its protection work across the Agency based on common definitions and guiding principles.

Methodology

The methodology consisted of a systematic review of documentation and extensive consultations with UNRWA staff and headquarter (HQ) level and across the five Field Offices both at the inception phase (27 key informant interviews) and review stage (118 consultations). A participatory and utilization-focused approach was adopted throughout the process to co-create a way forward for protection.

Purpose of the framework

The Protection Strategic Framework takes stock, builds consensus and provides clarity on how UNRWA plans to move forward on delivering its protection mandate. It is designed to guide staff, at all levels and across departments, by providing a clear vision and focus on what UNRWA needs to achieve to fulfil its protection mandate and the core aspects of its protection work. Simultaneously, it is also a reference document for external organisations and individuals requiring an understanding of UNRWA's protection work. It is an evolving document that will be regularly assessed, reviewed and adapted.

II. Key recommendations

The following recommendations are made **to restore and strengthen UNRWA's Protection Function in the first instance**, then **sustainably grow and further improve** to deliver on its protection mandate.

1. UNRWA's understanding and approaches to delivering protection

Foremost, protection reviews highlighted the need to define and clarify protection concepts, objectives, and underlying standards to enable UNRWA staff to better design and operationalize programmes to achieve the desired protection outcomes.

1.1. Protection definition: to safeguard and advance the rights of Palestine refugees, UNRWA will continue to be guided by the definition of protection as adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), paying particular attention to the specific needs of the most vulnerable groups, such as women, children, persons with disability and the elderly:

*'...all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law i.e. International Human Rights Law (IHRL), International Humanitarian Law (IHL), and International Refugee Law.'*¹

¹ IASC Policy Paper (December 1999).

1.2. Centrality of protection: protection is a shared, organization-wide responsibility. It is central to UNRWA's work and a core component in ensuring the rights of Palestine Refugees are upheld. Everyone within UNRWA is responsible for preventing or mitigating protection risks and restoring safety and dignity to lives of Palestine refugees. All of UNRWA's programmes and interventions, irrespective of their technical specialism and formal responsibilities, must have protection at the core. All teams across the organisation must engage collectively to achieve the Agency's protection outcomes:²

- 1) UNRWA service delivery ensures the security and dignity of beneficiaries.
- 2) Palestine refugees more empowered and resilient to protection threats.
- 3) Improved uptake and utilization of UNRWA services and programmes particularly by vulnerable groups.
- 4) Reduction in incidents of violation, abuse, neglect and exploitation amongst Palestine refugees particularly the most vulnerable.
- 5) Duty bearers and third parties (including UNHCR) mobilise, engage with and are responsive to UNRWA's advocacy interventions.

1.3. UNRWA's protection work will continue to be guided by the four protection principles,³ mainstreaming standards⁴ and the humanitarian principles.⁵ These standards guide all UNRWA programming and service delivery and should be understood and respected by all staff. Neutrality-related activities will continue to be closely integrated within the work that UNRWA's protection teams undertake.

1.4. Complementarity, coordination and collaboration is essential across all teams at all levels within UNRWA. The multifaceted nature of protection threats and the needs of Palestine refugees, combined with a complex context in which UNRWA works, necessitates working in a complementary, coordinated and collaborative way. By everyone working together, UNRWA becomes more capable of delivering a comprehensive and effective response with protection at its core.

2. Roles and responsibilities

UNRWA will implement protection activities within a framework of three protection pillars targeting specific outcome areas. The approach and relevant roles and responsibilities are defined in this section.

2.1. Pillars of UNRWA's protection approach

The protection mandate will be delivered using **three different, although interlinking and complementary approaches** to target key protection outcome areas (see Figure 1):

- **Protection mainstreaming:** This approach ensures that a 'protection lens' is incorporated into all UNRWA programmes and services. This is an integral part of ensuring the provision of quality services for Palestine refugees, in accordance with international standards, and requires

² These will be further refined in the UNRWA Strategic Plan for 2023-2028.

³ Set out in the Sphere Standards: <https://higuide.elrha.org/humanitarian-parameters/humanitarian-principles-and-standards/>.

⁴ See Global Protection Cluster: <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/themes/protection-mainstreaming/>.

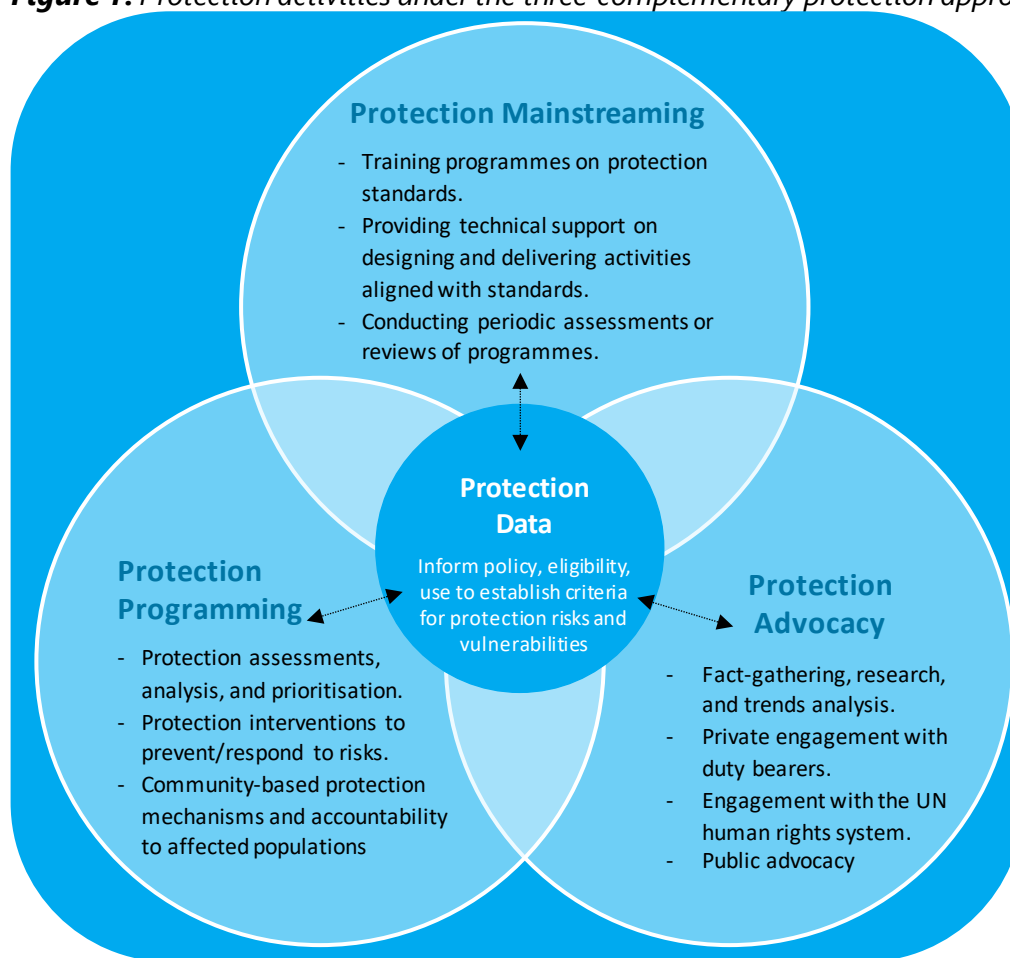
⁵ See <https://higuide.elrha.org/humanitarian-parameters/humanitarian-principles-and-standards/>.

that UNRWA designs and delivers all its services in a manner that promotes and respects the rights and ensures the safety of beneficiaries and of its staff.

- **Protection programming:** This refers to activities undertaken with the specific objective of identifying, preventing, mitigating or responding to protection risks. This involves ensuring that expertise is available for implementation of specialized protection activities and services that aim to meet targeted objectives. Stand-alone protection activities can include protection monitoring and documenting as well as activities at preventing or responding to specific protection risks such as gender-based violence (GBV), apparent violations of international law and needs, including for specific vulnerable groups.
- **Protection advocacy:** This is the externally focused aspect of the Agency's protection work that involves addressing protection risks through advocacy. Protection advocacy addresses human rights issues affecting Palestine refugees, promotes respect for international law, and brings the voices of crisis-affected people to the forefront.

Underlying the three approaches, a **new and stronger 'data-driven protection' approach** is proposed, capable of analysing and monitoring trends, activities and identifying future protection needs across UNRWA. This data will be used for evidence-based prioritization and programming.

Figure 1: Protection activities under the three complementary protection approaches



2.2. Roles and responsibilities

The role of the Protection Division at HQ is to support the Programme Teams to ensure alignment of protection standards within and through service delivery as well as to provide technical support on the core protection thematic areas. Where protection needs fall outside the scope of core services, protection teams take responsibility to design, deliver and monitor these. The Framework sets out the following roles and responsibilities in the Executive Office, Protection Function and UNRWA's Programme Teams.

The Executive Office

- Supporting prioritization of integration of the protection principles across programmes at HQ and field level.
- Accountable for the implementation of mainstreaming throughout programmes.
- Supporting advocacy activity both on an individual case-by-case basis and as a collective issue.
- Supporting international protection and neutrality activities.

The Protection HQ Function

Provides overall UNRWA guidance on protection standards and co-ordination of related activities. Responsible for building and implementing the plan for delivery of the Protection Strategic Framework.

- **Coordination** of priority vulnerability themes, target groups and geographical areas. Developing a common structure across the agency; standardizing and professionalizing the Agency response.
- **Technical expertise** on vulnerability at HQ and Field level; providing oversight to ensure protection elements are included into policies and strategies.
- **Capacity building**: supporting and assessing technical capacities of Field Teams; training, awareness-raising, capacity building and strategic outreach to other departments.
- **Defining registration criteria**: defining eligibility for services criteria and monitoring to ensure vulnerable persons are able to access UNRWA services
- **Needs analysis and reporting**: continuous feedback on beneficiary needs and related reporting to raise awareness of protection needs and inform planning and delivery.
- **Protection programming liaison support**: responsible for the coordination of protection activity across the Fields; support those protection activities which fall outside mainstreaming activity.
- **Research, monitoring, reporting and evaluation**: developing an approach, architecture, M&E framework and performance framework for UNRWA across the five Fields.
- **Supporting Field advocacy activity**: through resource, strategy, and best practice, developing communication products, pathways and escalating issues where appropriate.
- **Building strategic partnerships**: develop strategic and operational links externally.
- **Legal support**: legal coordination on protection activities and facilitate referral to legal assistance.
- **Assisting international protection cases** in conjunction with DLA and RSS.
- **Neutrality**: neutrality-related activities, oversight and coordination.

- **Donor engagement:** supporting Field teams in preparing and developing projects and programmes for funding working with other teams.

Protection Field Teams

- **Provide Field-level technical expertise** to support programme protection mainstreaming activity.
- **Lead in documenting, reporting and communicating protection needs** across the relevant Field, including feeding into the reporting component at HQ.
- **Monitoring of mainstreaming activity across the programmes:** identifying areas of best practice, and areas for improvement and providing required support.
- **Lead in managing advocacy trends:** prioritizing activities and leading the focus, strategy, approach, research, analysis and evidence gathering, and targeted interventions.
- **Maintain strong operational external partnerships** at the Field level.
- **Leading on protection programming activity** in the Fields where the scope falls outside that of the Programming Mainstreaming activity.
- **Area support roles:** responsible for the breadth of Protection and Humanitarian Principles across their areas of operation, supported by thematic leads and complemented by data teams within the Field protection teams.
- **Support humanitarian principles** monitoring, assessment and data collection activity.

UNRWA Programmes

- **Protection mainstreaming:** lead in the implementation of protection mainstreaming.
- **Planning, coordination, and reporting** of protection mainstreaming performance targets.
- **Programme review:** implementation of Protection Alignment Review (PAR) recommendations.
- **Leading specific protection programme activities** supported by the Protection Function.

3. Strengthening and improving UNRWA's protection structures

UNRWA has significant protection ambitions, and to achieve this level of ambition it will **require relevant skills, high-level support and resources** to support it. Foremost, the Protection Function needs sufficient resourcing, with skilled strategic capability to provide the technical guidance, policy, monitoring and evaluation of all UNRWA protection activities.

3.1. Main recommendations and changes on organizational structure

To stabilize and strengthen the Protection Function, the following foundational changes and key recommendations are proposed:

- Build clear structure, mirroring capability in HQ and Fields to ensure clear lines of communication.
- Inclusion of neutrality within the Protection Function.
- Priority roles in HQ Protection Function on advocacy, protection mainstreaming, and protection thematic leads (specifically Child Protection).

- Formal structure of Thematic Leads and Mainstreaming Roles in Field Protection teams.
- Recruitment of a Protection, Research and Evaluation Lead to lead a new data-driven protection capability; leading to data roles both in HQ and Field teams.
- Protection Mainstreaming roles in Programmes (Education, Health, RSSP, and ICIP) at HQ and across the Fields, initially as points of contact but leading to permanent roles.
- Ambition to ensure as many roles as possible will be nationalised for an enduring solution.

3.2. Phases of stabilization and strengthening

Given the current financial constraints on UNRWA and the existing situation of UNRWA's Protection Function, a **two-phase approach** will be undertaken:

Phase 1: Stabilization

A solution within the parameters of the current level and model of funding, with only a limited number of priority roles in position. This phase is about stabilising UNRWA's Protection Function with core roles, at HQ and field level. The solution considers the current level and model of funding, with only a number of priority roles in position. This phase will not fundamentally change the protection structure within UNRWA. It will purely mean a stabilised HQ and field teams, where the HQ is available to support the existing teams across UNRWA, doing the best they can with the resources available. This approach should then support or enable a strong business case for progressively transitioning into Phase 2.

The Protection Function and its linkages across UNRWA require re-building and stabilizing according to the following main priorities:

- **Priority 1:** Recruiting, on an urgent basis, a formal Head of Protection; Protection Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Lead and the Protection Standards & Mainstreaming Lead.
- **Priority 2:** Clarify roles, develop "Ways of Working" to ensure clear lines of accountability, responsibility and day-to-day modes of working.
- **Priority 3:** Protection mainstreaming roles in Health, Education and RSS identified and job descriptions, roles and accountabilities agreed.
- **Priority 4:** Reinforcing advocacy across the agency, through the HQ advocacy role.
- **Priority 5:** Evidence building for developing a business case for increased donor funding that allows expansion of protection services across UNRWA.

Phase 2: Strengthening

An enhanced structure assuming the availability of additional and sustainable funding. This phase is about transitioning to a position whereby UNRWA is able to recruit longer-term permanent roles, professionalising the service by expanding focused protection roles (mainstreaming, child protection, GBV and disability) and minimising the roles where individuals need to act as focal points for multiple protection areas. There is also the need for more operational and technical support roles across the organisation both within protection but also directly within programmes.

The proposed expansion of roles is across key areas:

- **Head of Protection becomes a Director-level post** and the function transitions into reporting to the Deputy Commissioner-General.
- **Embed protection mainstreaming and other specific roles within programmes.** This is critical to institutionalising protection within UNRWA programmes and requires recruitment and expansion of focused protection roles within the programmes. The current model is built around points of contact, with individuals taking on extra responsibilities in addition to their core roles. This is neither best practice, nor sustainable; therefore, more focused specialist roles are proposed.
- **Protection Data – Research, Monitoring and Evaluation:** With more funding this role will be expanded at HQ and the Field level with stronger linkages into UNRWA’s strategy for digitalisation.
- **A more robust field-driven advocacy capability** coordinated by the HQ Advocacy Officer to build capacity across all field teams.
- **Specific Field Protection roles** according to specific local needs.
- **Legal Protection Officer** providing technical guidance in support of international protection cases as well as technical coordination and advice to legal analysts in the Field teams.

4. Theory of Change: Protection in practice

The Protection Strategic Framework is grounded in an explicit and detailed organizational-level theory of change, presented in Figure 2. It provides a summary of the approaches and activities as well as related output level results that should be achieved, serving to guide UNRWA across all its areas of work, technically, thematically and geographically.

Figure 2: UNRWA Protection Theory of Change

CENTRALITY OF PROTECTION						
Approaches	Activities	Outputs	Intermediate Outcomes	Outcome	Impact	
1. Protection Mainstreaming	Train programme staff on protection standards. Support programme teams to design and deliver activities that align with protection standards. Coordinate case referral and tracking system where education, health, RSS teams handle individual cases. Program accountability and resource mobilisation for protection mainstreaming. Develop/revise/undertake Protection Audits, its reporting and follow-up on implementation of recommendations.	Skilled and knowledgeable programme teams able to design and deliver programmes aligned to protection standards. UNRWA delivers quality services in accordance with internationally agreed protection standards. Strong and efficient case tracking and referral mechanism providing integrated services. Recommendations from protection audits are implemented and inform programme adaptations and services delivery.	1. UNRWA service delivery ensures the security and dignity of beneficiaries.	Rights under international law are protected and promoted.	Refugees lead a long and healthy life, are knowledgeable, have a decent standard of living and enjoy human rights.	
	2. Protection Programming	Strengthened coordination mechanisms that respond to and mitigate vulnerabilities. Evidence based protection programmes delivered that provide integrated assistance in response to protection issues affecting individuals, families or communities. AAP mechanisms accessible to Palestine Refugees. Evidence informed and relevant policies, strategies, guidance and tools accessible to and utilised by all UNRWA staff to guide programmes.				2. Palestine refugees more empowered and resilient to protection threats. 3. Improved uptake and utilisation of UNRWA services and programmes particularly by vulnerable groups
		3. Protection Advocacy				Credible evidence and analysis of key issues. Clear, consistent and persuasive messaging on priority advocacy issues with specific asks and outcomes sought, tailored to the audience. Evidence-based products for influence produced by UNRWA or in cooperation with partners. Awareness raising, convening and other activities needed to raise the profile of issues with targeted partners, communities, duty bearers and other third parties. Engagement with target audience for change including duty bearers through private advocacy, official letters of protest and strategic products. Communities and stakeholders engaged in reducing and supporting victims of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation.