about unrwa
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The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established as a subsidiary organ of the United Nations General Assembly on 8 December 1949 and became operational on 1 May 1950. It is one of the largest United Nations programmes, with a population of some five million Palestine refugees covered by its mandate in 2012. The Agency has played an essential role for over 60 years since its establishment in providing vital services for the well-being, human development and protection of Palestine refugees and the amelioration of their plight, pending the just resolution of the question of the Palestine refugees.

The operational definition of Palestine refugees is people whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict.

Our mission at UNRWA is to help Palestine refugees achieve their full potential in human development under the difficult circumstances in which they live, consistent with internationally-agreed goals and standards. We fulfill this mission by providing a variety of essential services within the framework of international standards to Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Among UN agencies, we are unique in delivering services directly to beneficiaries. Our Agency’s mandate has evolved over time in response to developments in the operational context, and extends at present to providing education, health, relief and social services, microfinance and emergency assistance to refugees and infrastructure and camp improvement within refugee camps.

Protecting the rights of those we serve

We believe that the best way to protect the basic human rights of those we serve is to invest in the human development of Palestine refugees.

The UN describes human development as the process of enlarging people’s choices by expanding their capabilities. In the absence of a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestine refugees, our Agency seeks to expand their capabilities and help them achieve their full potential. We do this by creating the necessary conditions for refugees to acquire knowledge and skills, to lead long and healthy lives, to achieve a decent standard of living, and to enjoy human rights to the fullest.

We at UNRWA have fostered partnerships among refugees, our donors, and host authorities, ensuring that standards of living for Palestine refugees compare favourably with their neighbours. Despite very challenging operating conditions, our Agency has maintained these partnerships for over 60 years in the absence of a political solution.

At a glance:

- 58 official refugee camps
- 1.5 million Palestine refugees in camps
- 5 million refugees and other persons registered for services
- 5 fields of operation
- 5 main programmes
- 2 emergency programmes in the West Bank and Gaza (in addition to the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon)
- 31,000 staff

All figures as of January 2012. Where appropriate, figures are approximated to the nearest hundred. As of January 2012, 5,115,755 persons were registered with UNRWA.
Today, we at UNRWA maintain operations in five fields – Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank – and employ close to 31,000 people. The vast majority of Agency staff (approximately 30,000) are refugees themselves, contributing directly to the betterment of their families and communities.

UNRWA’s services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, infrastructure and camp improvement, microfinance, and emergency response programming, including in times of armed conflict. Investments in one programming field lead to benefits in all the others. Educated students make wiser decisions about their health; healthier people are more employable; employed parents are able to provide for their children.

Our services are available to all those living in our areas of operation who meet the definition of a Palestine refugee, who are registered with the Agency, and who need assistance.

Engaging Palestinian youth

As youth-driven political turmoil in the Middle East enters its second year, few can predict where the momentum in the region will lead. After witnessing the influence youth can have on political outcomes within their countries, it is now clear how important it is to listen to the voices of Palestinian youth, defined here as individuals between 15 and 29 years of age, to engage them in shaping their own future and defining its direction, and to continue to invest in this source of human capital.
At a glance:

- 487,000 students
- 19,000 teachers
- 700 schools
- 50 per cent female pupils
- 6,652 training places
- 891 teachers-in-training
- 1,700 student teachers

Access to an education that helps each and every child achieve his or her full potential is a basic human right, and is central to human development. We at UNRWA have recognised this through the emphasis we have placed on the provision of quality education to Palestine refugees for over 60 years.

Our education programme provides Palestine refugee children and youth with access to quality education and training through 700 schools, ten technical vocational colleges, and two teacher training institutes across five fields of operation. We run one of the largest school systems in the Middle East, with some half a million children enrolled. Ensuring refugees have access to education is one of our main priorities and as such, we provide nine to ten years of free basic education to refugee children.

Our vision

The vision of our education programming is to provide quality education for Palestine refugees to achieve their full potential, individually, as a member of a local and global community towards active and productive participation in social, political, economic, and cultural life.

As part of ongoing efforts to improve the quality of our service delivery towards greater effectiveness and efficiency, we launched a comprehensive reform strategy on World Teachers’ Day, 2011. The strategy aims to ensure that the education programme reflects the new demands of the 21st century and thus equips children and youth acquired knowledge and skills

“Everyone has the right to education... Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.” Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26
to take their place in a changing world. The strategy builds upon the good practices of the last 60 years, by focusing primarily on the learners, and ensuring that our teachers have the qualifications and motivation to support the learning of each and every one of them. It further contributes to the systems and structures of the education system to ensure equity, evidence-based policies, good governance, and partnership.

**Equipping youth for the world of work**
As well as supporting the youth of tomorrow, we also address some of the needs of the youth of today. We do this by providing vocational training through our ten vocational training centres which offer a diverse range of courses to address the needs of students and employees: architecture and surveying, business and computing, pharmacy, fashion, graphic design, carpentry, plumbing, and more. The centres develop market-relevant skills to help Palestine refugee youth find employment and to have a positive impact on their employment opportunities.

**Higher education**
Our education programme focuses on formal schooling (Grades 1 to 9/10, and secondary education in Lebanon) and vocational training. We also seek support from our partners to provide scholarships for Palestine refugee youth who want to access higher education. Young refugees who excel academically, but would otherwise be unable to afford post-secondary education, are eligible.

**Professional training**
We provide continuous training for thousands of teachers, head teachers, and supervisors through pre-service and in-service training, as well as ongoing professional development.

### acquired knowledge and skills in USD millions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget Category</th>
<th>Amount in USD millions</th>
</tr>
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<td>Total human development budget</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquired knowledge and skills</td>
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Good health is a cornerstone for a good quality of life, and access to quality healthcare is a universal right.

Our health programming protects this right by giving Palestine refugees access to a network of health care facilities and mobile clinics, offering services tailored to each stage of life — from prenatal to palliative care. Guided by the standards of the World Health Organisation, we are also responsible for providing a healthy living environment for Palestinian refugees.

**Caring for the most vulnerable**

Our Agency’s health services focus on delivering preventive as well as curative health care. We provide primary healthcare, and we help refugees access secondary and tertiary care services. Our mobile clinics serve more than 13,000 refugees per month in over 150 remote communities in the West Bank.

For over 60 years, UNRWA has significantly improved the health of Palestine refugees. Diseases preventable by vaccines and other communicable diseases have been almost eradicated, and infant, child and maternal mortality rates have declined.

**New challenges**

Despite these achievements, we remain continuously challenged by outbreaks of conflict, notably in Lebanon, Syria, and the occupied Palestinian territory. The context in which we work is also changing on a daily basis: global healthcare costs continue to rise, Palestinian refugee populations continue to grow, and the burden of non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and cancer, is expanding.

UNRWA is reforming our health care system to meet these challenges, starting with the introduction of a holistic family health team approach.

**Family health teams**

A family health team is a small group of doctors, nurses, and midwives who work together for all the health needs of a specific family. Instead of visiting one doctor for a headache, another for treatment of diabetes, and another for prenatal care, a family can access health care from one team, regardless of the illness. Family health teams place the patient at the centre of his or her primary care — not the illness.

This new approach promotes comprehensive care for the whole family, focusing on improving health over the long term by building doctor-patient relationships, and with that, trust.

**At a glance:**

- **138** primary health care facilities
- **3,600** health staff
- **11 million** annual patient visits
- **117** dental clinics
- **7** family health teams
Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family—this is a tenet of basic human dignity.

Our Agency’s relief and social services programming protects this right by ensuring that refugees have—among other things—the shelter of a safe place to live, clean drinking water, adequate food, and a chance to escape poverty. We protect the right to a decent standard of living through a range of direct and indirect social protection services, concentrating our efforts on the very poorest refugees.

Caring for the poorest of the poor

We provide a social safety-net for Palestine refugees: assistance that includes basic food support, cash subsidies, and an additional supplement to family income for the poorest of the poor—the “abject poor.” We also provide individual need-based cash grants on a case-by-case basis for household basics or family emergencies.

Sustainable change

We promote community-based action, integrating marginalised communities within the refugee population: women, children, youth, people with disabilities, and seniors. By empowering vulnerable refugees and providing access to specialised services, we encourage independence, social cohesion, and self-reliance.

Partnership with the community is a vital aspect of our approach to protection. Since 1989, we have partnered with 99 community-based organisations to promote a wide range of social, cultural, and recreational activities, as well as skills training and rehabilitation services.

At a glance:
- **294,000** refugees supported by social safety-net
- **99** community-based organisations
- **49** women’s programme centres
- **35** community rehabilitation centres
- **15** community development centres
Of the nearly five million Palestine refugees registered with our Agency, roughly one-third live in 58 recognised refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Over the years, these camps have transformed from temporary “tent cities” into hyper-congested masses of multi-storey buildings with narrow alleys, characterised by high concentrations of poverty and extreme overcrowding. The camps are considered to be among the densest urban environments in the world.

As camp structures were built for temporary use, over the decades the buildings have fallen into ruin and disrepair. Under international law, refugees have—as does everyone—a human right to an adequate standard of living, including housing, without prejudice to other rights they enjoy as refugees. Our infrastructure and camp improvement programme was launched in 2006 to address the deteriorating environments of the camps.

**Improving conditions**

Standards of living and socioeconomic development cannot be separated from the living conditions of refugees—the quality of the camp’s physical environment has a direct bearing on the quality of everyday life.

As each camp is unique, we tailor camp improvement plans to the needs of residents. In addition to houses, we rehabilitate public spaces, schools, and clinics. Recognizing the special needs of people with disabilities, our improvements include accessible roads and pathways throughout camps.

In addition to proactive improvements, our infrastructure and camp improvement programme rebuilds camps that have been destroyed or damaged through armed conflict and natural disasters. In these times of emergency, UNRWA also provides immediate temporary housing and direct assistance such as water, sanitation, and electricity.

**Community involvement**

Recognising the invaluable knowledge of refugees about their own local environments, all camp improvement plans call for the full participation of camp residents. Before improvements are carried out, we organise working groups with various stakeholders within the community, with a special emphasis on its most vulnerable members: women, children, and refugees with disabilities. The needs identified by these working groups are then formulated into action plans, designed and implemented in a participatory method.
Refugees are involved at every stage of the process — providing input through working groups, assessing the impact of projects on their lives, and actually carrying out the improvements through employment in construction.

**Neirab refugee camp:**

Until 2006, over 10,000 refugees in Neirab, Syria, were living in unsafe and overcrowded army barracks from the Second World War. Over the years, the deteriorating conditions, poor infrastructure, and extreme overcrowding culminated in substandard living conditions and high poverty levels in the camp.

In 2006, we initiated improvements to the physical environment of the shelters through a combination of reconstruction and repair as well as the replacement of UNRWA schools and a health centre built over 40 years ago. From start to finish, the process took a community-driven approach, and long-term and self-sufficient solutions for the newly rehabilitated camp will last beyond the lifespan of the rehabilitation project.

**Aftermath of the recent Gaza conflict**

During the Gaza conflict from December 2008 to January 2009, Israeli military actions resulted in the damage or complete destruction of 60,000 shelters. To address these needs, as well as the needs of thousands of other refugees living in substandard conditions, UNRWA initiated in 2010 a recovery and reconstruction plan to construct 100 schools and 10,000 refugee shelters over a three-year period.

From June 2007 to early 2010, we were unable to implement any construction projects because of the strict prohibition on imports of construction materials from Israel. Following an adjustment to the blockade in June 2010, Israel undertook to approve the entry of construction materials for UNRWA on a project-by-project basis. While some progress had been made by early 2012, the amount approved still falls well short of refugees’ needs.

As our camp improvement programme is not funded by UNRWA’s core programme budget, it is dependent on specific grants from donors to continue its work.
UNRWA’s microfinance department provides sustainable income generation opportunities for Palestine refugees, as well as other poor or marginalised groups who live and work near them.

It extends credit and complementary financial services to small-business owners, entrepreneurs, and households. These investments create and sustain jobs, reduce poverty, and empower our clients -- particularly women.

Many of the microfinance programme’s clients operate small and often informal businesses on the margins of the economy. These include vegetable-stall owners, at-home seamstresses, garage owners, and fishermen. Poor urban areas where refugees live, which also tend to be centres of commercial and industrial activity, are the focus of our microfinance operations.

To create self-employment opportunities for youth between 18 and 30 years of age, our microfinance programme also provides start-up loans for youth looking to start their own businesses.

At a glance:

- **265,500** small loans awarded since 1991
- **Over 53,000** refugees benefited from a loan
- **18,100** entrepreneurs have participated in over 824 courses since 1995
- **USD 301,996,000** worth of loans awarded since 1991

“Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.” Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 23

**a decent standard of living**
More than simply providing essential services to those in need, UNRWA—through service delivery and advocacy—protects the basic right of Palestine refugees to acquire knowledge and skills, to lead long and healthy lives, to maintain a decent standard of living, and to enjoy human rights to the fullest possible extent.

Protection is an integral part of UNRWA's holistic approach to meeting refugee needs in education, health, relief and social services, microfinance, and infrastructure and camp improvement, and to obtaining full respect for the rights of refugees which are granted to them under international law. More simply, protection is what we do to safeguard and advance the rights of Palestine refugees.

By ensuring that quality services reach vulnerable communities and individuals, UNRWA provides essential support where these needs may otherwise not be met. There are two main components of UNRWA's protection framework:

**Protection through programming and service delivery**

- Ensuring that protection needs are addressed in all aspects of the Agency's programming;
- Delivering services in a manner that promotes and respects the rights of beneficiaries and ensures the security and dignity of beneficiaries and of UNRWA personnel;
- Delivering core services like access to medical care and educational opportunities, inclusion in job creation programmes, financial assistance, and psychological counselling;
- Delivering targeted assistance to address specific vulnerabilities of individuals and groups.

**Protection through advocacy**

- Promoting respect for Palestine refugee rights by monitoring, reporting, and intervening with authorities and other stakeholders on incidents where rights have been infringed;
- Highlighting to the international community the urgent need for a just and durable solution to the plight of the Palestinian people as a whole, and helping to ensure that in its elaboration the rights and interests of the refugees are safeguarded.

In addition to this, we also work hard to ensure that the manner in which we deliver our services protects the safety and dignity of both refugees and staff. We take steps to ensure a violence-free environment in all our learning facilities and we promote knowledge of and respect for individual rights through a human rights and tolerance programme in our schools. We also take steps to prevent and respond to incidents of gender-based violence and child abuse, and our staff have a responsibility to report any relevant problems they may encounter.

Partnership with the community is a vital aspect of our approach to protection and the perspective of UNRWA beneficiaries is taken into account in the planning and implementation of all of our services.

![Human rights enjoyed to the fullest](chart.png)
emergency response
In addition to our core service work towards reaching the four human development goals (enjoying human rights to the fullest; acquired knowledge and skills; long and healthy lives; and a decent standard of living), UNRWA responds to emergencies.

Throughout every conflict within our fields of operation, UNRWA has always taken action to mitigate their effects on the lives of refugees. Since the outbreak of the second intifada in late 2000, our current emergency programming has focused on the rapidly deteriorating political, socio-economic and security situation in Gaza and the West Bank. Since 2007, we have worked with donors to address the emergency in Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon.

Gaza
The socio-economic situation in Gaza has steadily deteriorated since the onset of the second intifada in September 2000. The subsequent policy of blockade imposed on Gaza since June 2007 has prompted unprecedented poverty levels. On top of this, the conflict in Gaza in December 2008-January 2009 left large-scale destruction in its wake.

Every aspect of people’s daily lives is affected. Of the refugee population in the Gaza Strip, 70 per cent are now dependent on some form of UNRWA emergency assistance: 59 per cent are classified as “food-insecure”. The accompanying loss of dignity has a devastating impact on families.

Our emergency activities in Gaza support both individual and community coping strategies in the midst of protracted conflict. Our humanitarian assistance in the Gaza Strip includes emergency food aid and cash assistance, a temporary job creation programme, community health, mental health, water and sanitation support, protection services, and temporary shelter. This vital assistance gives special attention to those who are most vulnerable in times of emergency, especially children and the poorest of the poor. Unfortunately, due to a lack of funding, many of these services have either been reduced or eliminated, leaving the poorest even more vulnerable and negatively impacting UNRWA’s credibility in the community.

West Bank
Access and movement restrictions along with persistent violations of international law have exacerbated the vulnerability of Palestinian population in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Occupation policies such as confiscation and annexation of land, house demolitions and evictions, the continued construction of the Barrier and illegal settlements, and a sharp increase in settler-related violence continue to have a devastating impact of the lives of many Palestinians, especially Palestine refugees.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), there has been a 165 per cent increase in settler violence between 2009 and the end of 2011, and 90 per cent of complaints filed by Palestinians related to settler violence were closed by Israeli authorities with no indictment. The access and permit regime has also created a food security crisis in the West Bank. The greatest impact is felt by Palestine refugees: 29 per cent of residents in West Bank refugee camps are classified as “food-insecure”.

Moreover, the situation of Palestinian Bedouin and other herding communities currently living in Israeli-controlled Area C, over 50 per cent of whom are Palestine refugees, raises cause for concern. The Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) has expressed intentions to displace all of these communities living in this area, insisting that affected Palestinians have built communities without permits in an area not zoned for their residential use. However, unlike the hundreds of Israeli settlements that dot the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the ICA has not provided these communities with land use plans, making
it virtually impossible for them to obtain building permits. If implemented, any further displacement of these communities will not only hinder Palestinian growth, but will disrupt the territorial contiguity of the occupied Palestinian territory.

Our emergency relief work in the West Bank focuses on the specific needs of particularly vulnerable groups like those who are food-insecure or at risk of displacement. Special attention is given to those living in Area C, so-called “seam zones” cut off from the rest of the West Bank by the Barrier, and East Jerusalem. Targeted food assistance is delivered to over 67,000 refugees in need, specifically Bedouin and herding communities in Area C. Our job creation programme directly enhanced access to food and livelihoods for vulnerable and protection-threatened households through the creation of more than 75,000 job opportunities in 2011-2012. Furthermore, targeted cash assistance is delivered to refugees eligible for cash-for-work, but who cannot participate due to age, disability, or other limitation. In order to mitigate the negative impact of the many movement restrictions on the health status of refugees, UNRWA also facilitates access to health care through a network of fixed and mobile clinics which serve impoverished and remote communities.

In partnership with local and international organisations working in the West Bank, we also raise awareness about evictions, displacement, and access restrictions, with a view to mitigating infringements on the human rights of those who are affected. We do this by documenting these infringements, intervening with relevant authorities, and developing a comprehensive communications strategy for the general public.

**Lebanon**

In Lebanon, we were called into action in the summer of 2007 following the near-total destruction of Nahr el-Bared Camp during the conflict between the Lebanese armed forces and the extremist Fatah Al-Islam group. The conflict left over 95 per cent of camp infrastructure destroyed or damaged beyond repair with nearly 27,000 refugees displaced for a second time. Five years later, the population of Nahr el-Bared remains mostly reliant on UNRWA’s assistance with most of the displaced families still residing in temporary accommodations in Beddawi camp near Tripoli, the areas adjacent to Nahr el-Bared and other locations in the vicinity. Since the outbreak of the crisis, UNRWA has been providing emergency and relief assistance to over 5,000 displaced families and will continue to do so until the camp is fully rebuilt.

The reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared Camp is the largest project UNRWA has ever implemented in any of its five fields of operations. The project includes the reconstruction of 5,223 homes, 1696 commercial units, the UNRWA compound which will house six schools and a health centre, and all camp infrastructure. In April 2011, an important milestone was achieved with the first residents moving into their new housing. As of early 2012, over half of the camp remains to be funded and reconstructed and USD 180 million is needed to complete the project.

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**emergency appeal 2012 budget (gaza and west bank) in USD millions**

- job creation programme: 102
- emergency cash assistance: 56
- food assistance: 82
- emergency education: 11
- emergency health: 8
- water and sanitation: 13
- community mental health: 10
- protection: 5
- operations support office: 4
- temporary shelter and shelter repair: 4
- coordination and management: 8

**total: USD 301 million**
Jordan
Jordan hosts more than two million Palestine refugees, most of whom have been granted citizenship. Because we believe that education is one of the most powerful vehicles for human development, we have worked hard to make tremendous strides in this area in Jordan. Education remains the largest programme in Jordan with just under 120,000 students enrolled in 172 primary schools and another 3,000 enrolled in vocational institutes. In 2011, UNRWA schools outperformed both private and government schools in Jordan in three out of four subjects used to measure school performance in the tenth-grade national examination. Twenty-five learning support centres were established to improve the math, reading, and writing skills of under-achieving students from Grades 2 to 4.

Graduates of our vocational institutes continue to achieve the highest scores in national exams and their employment rates remain in excess of 80 per cent. Our primary health care centres provide over two million consultations every year. Services are now being reformed towards a family health approach that will be fully rolled out by 2015. An e-health system and electronic queue system have already been successfully implemented in five health centres benefiting over 250,000 patients per year and resulting in more efficient service and shorter waiting time for patients.

Over 56,000 families are enrolled in the social safety-net programme and receive food and cash assistance. Social workers are piloting a new approach that is based on case management of complex family problems. In 2011, microfinance loans are increasingly targeted to young people and women: nearly 40 per cent of clients are youth, while women constitute over one third of total programme clients.

Despite these successes, we do face some serious challenges in Jordan as well. Approximately 132,000 registered Palestine refugees and an unknown number of unregistered refugees who were displaced to Jordan from Gaza in 1967 (ex-Gazans) do not have citizenship. They face a number of legal restrictions that limit access to higher education, secondary health care, and employment opportunities. Their socio-economic situation therefore presents significantly more challenges compared to other Palestine refugees in Jordan.

Lebanon
Approximately 466,000 persons are registered with UNRWA in Lebanon, with over 60 per cent living in camps. Palestine refugees in Lebanon face a number of specific challenges, including a lack of social and civil rights, no access to public social services, and very limited access to public health and educational facilities. High levels of poverty are a major concern, with more than two-thirds of the population living on less than six dollars a day. In 2011, 56 per cent of Palestine refugees in Lebanon were jobless. Palestinians in Lebanon who do not hold refugee identification cards issued by the Lebanese authorities (referred to as “non-IDs”) are particularly disadvantaged. Most Palestine refugees in Lebanon depend on UNRWA as the sole provider of education, health, relief and social services. The most vulnerable refugees are those Palestinian patients living with chronic illnesses, who receive limited assistance by UNRWA, and almost no coverage from the Ministry of Public Health. UNRWA launched a specific programme called CARE to look after their specific needs.

Despite legislative amendments to labour and social security laws in the summer of 2010 to ease employment restrictions on Palestine refugees, they continue to lack full employment rights, affecting many other aspects of life. Palestine refugees are highly dependent on UNRWA services, and the work available to them is often seasonal or casual, with low wages and few benefits. To address this and to facilitate the employment of Palestinians in Lebanon, UNRWA developed a multi-year strategy...
focusing on three main pillars: enhancing the provision of vocational skills to unskilled Palestinians; increasing the provision of placement and referral services to the Lebanese job market through the employment services centres; and increasing advocacy efforts at a policy level to improve the legal employment status of Palestinians.

To address the needs of the most vulnerable Palestine refugees in Lebanon, the Agency designed specific interventions to be implemented between 2012 and 2016 as part of our “Restoring Dignity” relief programme UNRWA has appealed to the international community to mobilise sufficient resources to implement projects in the areas of education, health care, infrastructure, employment, and relief assistance for displaced families from Nahr el-Bared and all impoverished Palestine refugees living throughout Lebanon. For 2012, only USD 43.2 million was requested for these purposes.

Gaza

There are approximately 1.2 million Palestine refugees in Gaza, comprising 83 per cent of the total population. For the last decade, the socio-economic situation of the refugees has been in steady decline. Years of occupation, conflict, and the ongoing blockade have left the vast majority of the population dependent on international assistance. Enforcement of the blockade has negatively affected key sectors of society: health care, education, trade, and employment. The community continues to experience rising levels of food insecurity, poverty, and one of the highest unemployment rates in the world.

Increasing imports of critical building materials from Egypt through an extensive network of tunnels led to a growth in employment in 2011. However, as the informal economy allows more imports, the blockade continues to restrict exports. With exports at only 3 per cent of pre-blockade levels, economic growth and development have been stunted in the Gaza Strip. Strict limits on the import of raw materials and a near ban on exports has decimated the private sector; today, for example, 83 per cent of factories in Gaza are working at half capacity or less. Prospects for economic development remain bleak.

In our unique position as a direct service provider in the Gaza Strip, we continue to advocate at international, national, and local levels on the issues affecting our ability to maintain core services, including in times of armed conflict.

The programmatic priority in Gaza is the education of 220,000 children in our 234 schools. Education reforms over the last few years have not only increased academic achievement levels but also addressed behavior and values. Through a dedicated human rights curriculum based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the practical application of these concepts through the Respect and Discipline Initiative, children in UNRWA schools acquire not only the knowledge of their rights and responsibilities in a global community but also practice them on a daily basis.

To promote the psychological and physical health of children and youth in Gaza, every summer, we stage Summer Games which provides a rare opportunity for 250,000 children to play, make friends, learn, and express themselves freely. Through art, sports, and games, refugee children participate in camps across the Gaza Strip in our schools, in orphanages, in hospitals, in community-based rehabilitation centres, and on the beach.

Following the devastation of the Gaza War of 2008-2009, we continue to rebuild homes and facilities with funds raised through our Emergency Appeal. By promoting economic recovery, reconstructing educational infrastructure, and addressing the long-term development needs of Palestine refugees, we are working to rebuild the Gaza Strip.
West Bank

Nearly 875,000 Palestinians are registered with UNRWA in the West Bank. Palestine refugees in this field face a protracted crisis with profound civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian consequences. Palestine refugees encounter rights violations on a daily basis, including through continued confiscation and appropriation of land, settler violence, home and livelihood structure demolitions, forced displacement, and systematic and comprehensive restrictions on freedom of movement.

Within the last year, displacement in the West Bank has increased dramatically as a result of both home demolitions and settler violence. Home demolitions have mostly occurred in Israeli-controlled Area C, which comprises 60 per cent of the West Bank. Bedouin and herding communities have been particularly affected, and thousands more living in Area C and occupied East Jerusalem have received notices that their homes will be demolished, evicted, or seized.

Demolitions and the displacements that follow devastate families and communities and increase poverty and instability. Facilities such as schools and water cisterns have also been targeted for demolitions, destroying access to basic services such as education, health care, water, and sanitation. In response, UNRWA launched the “Don’t demolish my future” campaign, an effort to mobilise the global community to help stop the devastating practice of house, school, and other property demolitions in the West Bank. The campaign took a multi-pronged approach, employing social media, proactive media statements, tours for international stakeholders of communities targeted for demolition, and partnerships between schools under threat and schools abroad. In February 2011, Israeli authorities called off plans to demolish a school in Khan al-Ahmar that was the subject of our awareness campaign.

Syria

More than 510,000 persons are registered with UNRWA in Syria. While Palestine refugees enjoy many of the rights of Syrian citizens, including access to social services provided by the Syrian government, development indicators reveal that they lag behind the host population in key areas, such as a higher infant mortality rate and lower school enrollment figures. Thus, Palestine refugees in Syria remain a vulnerable population and, like all Palestine refugees, live in uncertainty with regard to their long-term future.

The challenges facing the refugees are particularly manifested in high unemployment rates, especially among youth, of whom more than 50 per cent are jobless. “Engaging Youth”, a groundbreaking employability and youth empowerment project, was launched by UNRWA in Syria to better prepare youth for the job market and to strengthen positive contributions to their communities and local economies. Assisting young people in the transition from school to work, the project builds on the Agency’s considerable experience in vocational training, career guidance, and youth leadership development.

The ongoing political situation in Syria has affected the economy. The consequent decrease in value of the Syrian pound, increase in cost of basic commodities, and shrinking job market have impacted the Palestinian refugee community. As the UN agency responsible for their welfare, UNRWA is doing everything within its means to strengthen refugees’ ability to cope with the prevailing circumstances and eventually to achieve sustainable livelihoods.