



United Nations

**Report of the
Commissioner-General of the
United Nations Relief and
Works Agency for Palestine
Refugees in the Near East**

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United Nations Relief and Works Agency for
Palestine Refugees in the Near East**

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Note

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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Letters of transmittal	4
Letter dated 27 August 2020 from the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East addressed to the President of the General Assembly	4
Letter dated 2 July 2020 from the Chair of the Advisory Commission of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East addressed to the Commissioner-General of the Agency	6
<i>Chapter</i>	
I. Contextual overview	9
A. Political, economic and security developments	9
B. Operational and organizational developments	13
C. Legal matters	15
D. Financial overview	21
II. Subprogramme review	26
A. Subprogramme 1	26
B. Subprogramme 2	26
C. Subprogramme 3	28
D. Subprogramme 4	29
E. Subprogramme 5	31

Letters of transmittal

Letter dated 27 August 2020 from the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I am pleased to transmit to the General Assembly the report on the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for 2019. It is submitted in compliance with the requests made in paragraph 21 of Assembly resolution [302 \(IV\)](#) of 8 December 1949, as modified by paragraph 11 of Assembly resolution [1018 \(XI\)](#), and in paragraph 8 of Assembly resolution [1315 \(XIII\)](#) of 12 December 1958.

I am deeply honoured to have been appointed Commissioner-General of UNRWA on 18 March 2020, and to have the opportunity to lead the Agency through the simultaneous challenges it faces. I continue to work closely with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that UNRWA is able to implement in full its crucial mandate, which was extended in December 2019 until June 2023 by an overwhelming majority of the members of the General Assembly.

Among my immediate priorities has been the response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has unleashed a sweeping crisis of public health and poverty in the region. Since March, UNRWA front-line staff – doctors, nurses, sanitation labourers, social workers, teachers and many more – have worked relentlessly, in close coordination with local authorities, to prevent and contain an outbreak in the refugee community, including in 58 overcrowded Palestine refugee camps in the Middle East.

UNRWA converted its service delivery model almost overnight, building on its renowned distance learning programme to sustain education to 540,000 students and rolling out telemedicine and home delivery of essential drugs to reduce overcrowding in clinics. In Gaza, the delivery of food to 1 million food insecure refugees substantially reduced the risk of transmission posed by mass distribution centres. Measures taken by the authorities to contain the pandemic are having a dire impact on the most vulnerable, pushing them further into poverty. UNRWA has therefore stepped up its cash support to the most deprived Palestine refugees in all fields of operation.

The pandemic is far from over. As I write, there is a significant upsurge in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, while Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as Gaza, are also seeing increases of serious concern. Your support to sustain our ongoing humanitarian response and address growing poverty and despair in the medium term, particularly in refugee camps, will be paramount to preserving a sense of normalcy and hope. Your support contributes to this volatile region's stability.

The Agency's structural financial challenges continue. Finding a sustainable solution remains my central priority. For an agency providing effective, government-like services on a large scale and in a politically sensitive region, the financial uncertainty is a source of instability felt by the refugee community, host Governments, regional actors and the international community at large. Efficiency and restrictive cost control measures, suspending payment of bills, rolling over debt

and borrowing from the Central Emergency Response Fund have enabled UNRWA to sustain operations from one year to the next, but at a cost. UNRWA key stakeholders agree this is not a viable funding arrangement and solutions are overdue. I cannot stress enough the need for a strategic, forward-looking approach that will put UNRWA on a stable footing and give it predictability.

As I lead the effort to secure unmet needs this year, I am focusing on the Agency's \$375 million core funding shortfall. In addition, UNRWA is seeking \$94 million to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on Palestine refugees from August to December 2020, as well as \$42 million for life-saving assistance, in particular food and cash, for refugees in Gaza and the Syrian Arab Republic.

I continue to engage with all partners on how best to achieve multi-year financial stability. During the Extraordinary Virtual Pledging Conference for UNRWA held on 23 June 2020, which was co-hosted by Jordan and Sweden, I stressed that our structural underfunding and cash-flow crises would effectively be addressed through a basic compact with UNRWA where:

(a) Member States match their strong political support for the UNRWA mandate with adequate resources and responsibility-sharing;

(b) Member States and other partners make contributions that are predictable in timing and amount and based on multi-year commitments covering a two-year UNRWA budget cycle, thus allowing the Agency to deliver predictable, vital services in volatile environments;

(c) UNRWA continues, with the support of its closest partners, to expand its donor base and explore innovative funding arrangements and partnerships.

In the event of a failure to secure the funds necessary to sustain UNRWA mandated services, I will come back to the General Assembly for guidance on those parts of the mandate Member States want the Agency to prioritize.

Strengthening UNRWA management systems has also been a priority for me. From day one of my tenure I have led the Agency in the implementation of initiatives that are raising it to the highest standards of good governance, effectiveness, transparency and accountability.

In joining UNRWA last March I was very concerned about attacks of a politicized nature on its work and mandate. I am committed to shielding UNRWA from the polarizing forces that affect the region. As a humanitarian actor strictly observing humanitarian principles, UNRWA continues to guard its neutrality from attempts to undermine or challenge its independence. I call upon all stakeholders to respect the humanitarian character of the Agency's mandate and operations.

As at August 2020, crises persist and new ones emerge, posing a challenge to the region. Pressure on UNRWA services in East Jerusalem continue, while violence along the Gaza-Israel boundary threatens to escalate. The economy and political system of Lebanon are fractured. The Syrian Arab Republic faces humanitarian and socioeconomic challenges the likes of which have not been seen in nine years of conflict. In this environment, UNRWA remains a pillar of stability, thanks to the strategic investments made by its partners. Its unique ability to provide a robust humanitarian response and contribute to the human development of the region, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, makes it an irreplaceable United Nations agency. I appeal to the States Members of the General Assembly and all our partners to continue to help mobilize support for UNRWA and its services to the community of 5.6 million Palestine refugees it assists.

(Signed) Philippe **Lazzarini**
Commissioner-General

Letter dated 2 July 2020 from the Chair of the Advisory Commission of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East addressed to the Commissioner-General of the Agency*

At its regular session, held virtually on 1 and 2 July 2020, the Advisory Commission of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) considered your annual report on UNRWA activities and operations covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2019, to be submitted to the General Assembly at its forthcoming session.

The Commission warmly welcomes you as the new Commissioner-General of the Agency, following your appointment on 18 March 2020. The Commission will support you and cooperate closely with you in supporting Palestine refugees. The Commission also welcomes the appointment of the new Deputy Commissioner-General, Leni Stenseth.

The Commission wishes to thank Christian Saunders for his leadership and determined action while serving as Acting Commissioner-General during a challenging interim period.

The Commission strongly commends UNRWA and its staff for their determined efforts to deliver essential and necessary services, through its education, health and relief and social services programmes, for Palestine refugees in UNRWA fields of operation, in accordance with its mandate, despite the existential financial crisis it faced in 2019. This has continued to be especially demanding during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic that emerged in 2020 and, while outside the immediate scope of the 2019 annual report, the Commission expresses its concern for the vulnerability and frustration experienced by Palestine refugees at this time. Their exposure to the socioeconomic and other consequences of multiple crises are increasing demands on UNRWA services, while the Agency continues to be constrained by limited resources and lack of predictability on future funding threatening its financial sustainability and medium- and long-term planning.

The Commission also commends UNRWA for the efforts outlined in the Commissioner-General's annual report in respect of health, education, relief and social services, the social safety net, protection services and human rights, including rehabilitation services, psychosocial support, protection and gender-based violence; towards strengthening the livelihood opportunities of Palestine refugees, including through UNRWA programmes on technical and vocational education and training and on microfinance; and towards camp improvement. The Commission recognizes the need to continue to invest in these areas.

In this regard, the Commission reiterates the important role that UNRWA will continue to play in the region until a just and lasting solution for Palestine refugees is reached in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions (General Assembly resolutions [194 \(III\)](#) and [302 \(IV\)](#)). The Commission notes that the number of refugees under the UNRWA mandate is 5.6 million and recognizes the ongoing vulnerability and growing needs of Palestine refugees who have been affected by displacement and its consequences for more than 70 years.

The Commission expresses its sincere gratitude to both donors and hosts for their financial and political support to UNRWA and Palestine refugees. In this respect, and until a just and lasting solution is found, the Commission emphasizes that the

* Brazil and the United States of America do not associate with the text of the present letter.

sustainable human development and humanitarian assistance provided by UNRWA to Palestine refugees in the region are also direct contributions to regional peace, stability and development.

The Commission is seriously concerned about the continued and dramatic deterioration in socioeconomic conditions of Palestine refugees, and the lack of sufficient resources available for UNRWA to invest adequately in the social safety net programme as an important means of mitigating poverty and the economic stress faced by Palestine refugees.

The Commission stresses that violence, forced displacement, destruction of homes, missed economic opportunities, movement restrictions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the blockade on the Gaza strip, continue to negatively affect Palestine refugees' lives.

The Commission expresses its utmost concern regarding the recurring financial deficits and funding shortfalls faced by UNRWA, which have again reached new critical and unprecedented levels. Significant shortfalls in both the programme and emergency appeals budgets compromise the Agency's ability to provide adequate protection, relief, health and educational services for Palestine refugees. This negatively affects the quality of Palestine refugees' lives and increases the risk of young people without hope and opportunity finding non-peaceful solutions through frustration and despair.

The Commission urges all donors to help in contributing towards predictable, sustained and sufficient funding of UNRWA for the human development of Palestine refugees and humanitarian interventions. In this regard, the Commission urges UNRWA to explore innovative funding solutions and donors to pay their pledges on time to ensure predictability of funding, while continuing to deliver services to Palestine refugees efficiently and effectively. The Commission also considers that the Organization of Islamic Cooperation waqf fund in support of Palestine refugees is expected to be a valuable new source of financial support to UNRWA.

The Commission commends and highly appreciates the great support of Member States who on 13 December 2019 voted, during the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly, to extend the UNRWA mandate for three years until 2023. The overwhelming vote in favour of the extension confirms the strong support of Member States for UNRWA, its stabilizing role in the Middle East and the rights of Palestine refugees. It acknowledges the continued need for UNRWA services. Therefore, the Commission urges the international community to align the financial support they provide with the political commitment they have demonstrated.

The investigation of the Agency in 2019 by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) has been a matter of great concern to all members of the Advisory Commission. While the OIOS investigation did not identify instances of fraud or corruption, the Secretary-General has acknowledged the need to strengthen the administration of the Agency to improve governance and management in all areas. The Commission commends and fully supports the efforts of UNRWA management to implement management reforms, while continuing to strengthen the Agency's services to Palestine refugees and rebuild trust following the OIOS investigation, which demonstrates determination and willingness to strengthen the Agency's management and the delivery of its mandate with accountability and transparency. The Commission recalls at the same time the positive findings of the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network. It also recalls the Secretary-General's offer of support and resources by the Secretariat to implement management reforms.

The Commission remains concerned about the level of threats and attacks against UNRWA personnel and structures, and condemns any actions that risk the inviolability and neutrality of UNRWA installations.

The Commission also remains concerned about the restrictions imposed on UNRWA staff within the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. The Commission stresses its deep concern regarding the expressed plans to replace UNRWA services in occupied East Jerusalem and notes that any obstruction of such services would be in breach of the privileges and immunities owed to the Agency under the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations and the Comay-Michelmores Agreement of 1967, including the inviolability of United Nations installations. The Commission takes this opportunity to remind the Israeli authorities of their responsibilities and obligations under international law.

(Signed) Rafiq **Khirfan**
Chair of the Advisory Commission

Chapter I

Contextual overview

A. Political, economic and security developments

1. Within a volatile regional environment in 2019, violence and marginalization continued to affect Palestine refugees, in different ways, across all five fields of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA or the Agency) operation: Jordan; Lebanon; the Syrian Arab Republic; the West Bank, including East Jerusalem; and the Gaza Strip. Within this context and in line with its mandate provided by the General Assembly, the Agency continued to deliver development and humanitarian assistance in the areas of education, health, relief and social services, infrastructure and camp improvement, microfinance and protection.

Gaza Strip

2. In 2019, UNRWA provided assistance to 1,460,315 registered Palestine refugees in Gaza.¹ The population continued to face humanitarian and economic crises driven by the illegal land, air and sea blockade, which entered its thirteenth year in June 2019. This was coupled with cycles of violence, political instability and restricted entry and exit. Limited economic activity, compounded by the effects of the ongoing political divide, the Palestinian Authority's financial crisis, reductions in social assistance and a deteriorating public infrastructure hindered the availability of essential services. In 2019, the average unemployment rate in Gaza was 45.1 per cent² and the severe lack of job opportunities continued to aggravate high levels of despair and frustration among the population, including young people. The availability of electricity improved from four to eight hours per day in 2018 to 10 to 15 hours per day in 2019.³ Access to clean water remained at a crisis level, with over 90 per cent of the water supplied to households being not fit for drinking.⁴

3. On the political level, key steps towards ending the over decade-long political divide between Fatah and Hamas failed to materialize. However, an agreement was reached among Palestinian factions to hold parliamentary and presidential elections in 2020. Sporadic popular protests demanding better living conditions were suppressed.

4. Security conditions in Gaza remained highly unstable. During the reporting period, 33 Palestinians were killed by the Israeli security forces during the Great March of Return demonstrations and 11,523 were injured, bringing the total to 212 fatalities and 36,134 injuries since the demonstrations began on 30 March 2018.⁵ While the general level of violence, including the number of demonstration-related casualties, decreased as part of a fragile and unofficial ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, caring for the injured, many presenting long-term medical care and

¹ It should be noted that some 161,806 "other registered persons" are registered with the Agency in Gaza. "Other registered persons" refer to those who, at the time of original registration, did not satisfy all of the UNRWA Palestine refugee criteria but were determined to have suffered significant loss or endured considerable hardship for reasons related to the conflict of 1948 in Palestine, and those who belong to the families of other registered persons.

² Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Labour force survey results 2019", 13 February 2020.

³ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Monthly humanitarian bulletin: August 2019", 6 September 2019.

⁴ Ibid., "Gaza: water and sanitation services severely disrupted due to the energy crisis".

⁵ Ibid., "Protection of civilians report: 24 December 2019–6 January 2020", 9 January 2020.

rehabilitation needs, continued to put enormous pressure on an already crumbling health system.

5. An additional 75 Palestinians were killed in other circumstances, including through air strikes and tank shelling during temporary escalations of hostilities between Palestinian factions and Israeli forces.⁶ From 25 to 27 March, the Gaza Strip and southern Israel witnessed one of the most significant escalations of hostilities since 2014, after a rocket was fired by Palestinian armed groups from Gaza, severely damaging a house in central Israel and injuring seven Israelis. Following this incident, the Israeli air force struck multiple locations across Gaza, injuring two and displacing 16 families, while projectiles fired by Palestinian armed groups towards southern Israel caused damage.⁷ From 3 to 6 May, four days of intense hostilities resulted in the killing of 25 Palestinians, including three children and two pregnant women, and four Israeli civilians. A further 153 Palestinians and 123 Israelis were also injured.⁸ On 12 November, the Israeli air force killed a senior operative of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's armed wing in Gaza, triggering two days of intense hostilities in which 35 Palestinians were killed, of whom 16 were believed to be civilians, including eight children, and 106 were injured, including 51 children. Seventy-eight Israelis, including children, were also treated for light injuries or shock. UNRWA health centres operated throughout these hostilities, while other services were interrupted for the safety of beneficiaries and staff. A cessation of hostilities came into force on 14 November and has largely held.

6. In a particularly worrying development, three Palestinian policemen were killed and three civilians were injured in two separate suicide explosions targeting police checkpoints in August 2019. Hamas stated on 29 August that its security forces in Gaza had arrested a 10-member cell that was behind the attacks.⁹

West Bank

7. In 2019, the Israeli military occupation continued to affect the daily lives of the 858,758 Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.¹⁰

8. During the reporting period, over 5,600 security-related operations were conducted by the Israeli security forces in which 29 Palestinians, including 11 Palestine refugees, 4 of whom were minors, were killed and 1,582 were injured.¹¹ Five Israeli fatalities and 121 injuries were also recorded. Of the Israeli security forces operations conducted, 540 took place in West Bank refugee camps, averaging almost 1.5 security operations per day.¹² Many involved the use of live ammunition and the deployment of tear gas, often resulting in injuries, property damage and pronounced psychosocial consequences.

9. Israeli settlement expansion continued in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, alongside the destruction of Palestinian homes and property. Palestinian communities, especially those in Area C, routinely faced actual and threatened home demolitions and confiscations, contributing to an overall coercive environment that placed them at risk of forcible transfer. At least 638 Palestinian-owned structures were

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., "Monthly humanitarian bulletin: March 2019", 15 April 2019.

⁸ Ibid., "Protection of civilians report: 23 April–6 May 2019", 9 May 2019.

⁹ Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, *Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee* (New York, 26 September 2019).

¹⁰ An additional 207,014 "other registered persons" are registered with the Agency in the West Bank.

¹¹ UNRWA West Bank Field Office, protection database.

¹² Ibid.

demolished, of which 196 belonged to Palestine refugees. This represents an increase of 34 per cent compared with 2018 (475) and an increase of 41 per cent in demolished structures owned by Palestine refugees.¹³

10. Socioeconomic conditions in the West Bank remained difficult, including for Palestine refugees. In 2019, the overall unemployment rate for Palestine refugees in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, was 13 per cent, with joblessness rising to 17 per cent among those living in camps.¹⁴ This contributed to high levels of poverty and food insecurity in Palestine refugee households.

Syrian Arab Republic

11. Nine years of conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic have had devastating consequences, including for Palestine refugees. Although 2019 saw a reduction in the intensity of conflict in most areas of the country in comparison with previous years, hostilities intensified in the north-west and in areas where Palestine refugees were located, resulting in casualties, the destruction of homes and infrastructure, widespread displacement and mounting humanitarian needs. On 14 May, several rockets struck the densely populated Palestine refugee camp of Neirab in Aleppo, killing at least 11 civilians, including 5 children – 4 of whom were UNRWA students; a further 30 people were wounded. Meanwhile, the renewal of military operations in north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic on 9 October created large-scale humanitarian needs, compounding an already dire humanitarian situation.

12. Across the Syrian Arab Republic, the security situation remained volatile. The threat of asymmetric attacks and the risks posed by explosive remnants of war were high, particularly in newly accessible areas and camps that had witnessed active hostilities in recent years. Several people were killed or injured by explosive remnants of war in 2019, including an 8-year-old Palestine refugee who was playing in an area near Dera'a camp. The security situation was further strained on several occasions following the launch of air strikes by the Israeli air force around Damascus, Homs and Hama, leading to casualties and the destruction of infrastructure. UNRWA estimates that 438,000 Palestine refugees remain in the Syrian Arab Republic, compared with 562,312 refugees registered with the Agency at the end of 2019.¹⁵ An estimated two thirds of Palestine refugees have been displaced from their district of origin since the start of the conflict and approximately 40 per cent remained internally displaced as at the end of 2019; according to UNRWA estimates, more than 180,000 Palestine refugees have had their homes either destroyed or seriously damaged. Those remaining in the country face widespread unemployment, the loss of assets, shortages of fuel and electricity and a sharp increase in commodity prices during 2019 owing to a severe depreciation of the Syrian pound.

Lebanon

13. The crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to have a negative impact on the stability and socioeconomic environment of Lebanon, placing further pressure on already weak public finances, infrastructure and service delivery. By the end of 2019, there were 914,648 refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic registered by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),¹⁶ in addition to

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, “Labour force survey results: fourth quarter 2019”, 13 February 2020. See www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=3662#.

¹⁵ An additional 84,831 “other registered persons” are registered with the Agency in the Syrian Arab Republic. UNRWA, “Syria: UNRWA – humanitarian snapshot, November 2019”, 27 December 2019.

¹⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Syria regional refugee response: operational portal – refugee situations”. See <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>.

the 27,248 Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic recorded by UNRWA.¹⁷ In addition, 476,033 Palestine refugees from Lebanon were registered with the Agency.¹⁸ From mid-May, the Lebanese authorities strengthened their efforts to combat irregular cross-border movement and, as a consequence, refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic not in possession of a valid visa and who entered, or attempted to enter, the country irregularly after 24 April 2019 faced arrest and deportation.

14. On 2 September, the Lebanese authorities declared “a state of economic emergency”, precipitated by structural issues and other factors that resulted in a level of debt equal to an estimated 151 per cent of the gross domestic product.¹⁹ Subsequently, the Government’s plan to impose new taxes sparked nationwide protests that grew into demands for changes in political leadership. Following failed attempts to find a political solution, the Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, resigned on 29 October and a caretaker government was installed. During subsequent political and civil unrest, hundreds of thousands of protesters took to the streets, which resulted in major road obstructions, clashes with the authorities and acts of vandalism, but not in the formation of a government.

15. Meanwhile, the financial crisis in Lebanon deepened, with banks imposing tight restrictions on the withdrawal and transfer of United States dollars following the depreciation of the Lebanese pound by up to 30 per cent on the parallel market and increased prices of basic goods. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the prices of food items increased by at least 20 per cent between September and December 2019.²⁰ The World Bank estimated that the economic crisis could impoverish a further 20 per cent of the population of Lebanon, in addition to the 30 per cent who already lived below the poverty line.²¹

16. Palestine refugees are already among the most vulnerable and marginalized communities in Lebanon and deteriorating conditions have added to their hardship. During the reporting period, they remained barred from 39 professions, while facing a precarious legal status. In June, the Ministry of Labour decided to enforce existing legislation requiring all foreigners, including Palestine refugees from Lebanon and from the Syrian Arab Republic, to obtain work permits, sparking weeks of unrest in Palestine refugee camps. While the then-Government formed a ministerial committee to review the matter, no progress was made by the end of the year.

17. Despite this complex environment, the security situation in most Palestine refugee camps in Lebanon remained relatively stable. Small-scale clashes occurred, however, in Ein el Hilweh camp in early August, resulting in the death of several rival members of Islamist groups, and in Shatila camp in November, causing two fatalities.

¹⁷ UNRWA, “Lebanon: UNRWA – humanitarian snapshot, November/December 2019”, 27 February 2020.

¹⁸ An additional 62,659 “other registered persons” are registered with the Agency in Lebanon. According to an official Lebanese-Palestinian census conducted in 2017, 174,422 “Palestinian refugees” were found to reside in the 12 official Palestine refugee camps and in 156 gatherings across Lebanon (see Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee, *Population and Housing Census in Palestinian Camps and Gathering 2017: Key Findings Report* (February 2018)). That census did not, however, aim to provide a headcount of all Palestine refugees living in the country. Using a different methodology, another survey estimated the number of Palestine refugee residents at between 260,000 and 280,000 (see Jad Chaaban and others, *Survey on the Socioeconomic Status of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon 2015* (American University of Beirut and UNRWA, 2016)).

¹⁹ World Bank, “Lebanon’s economic update: October 2019”, 9 October 2019.

²⁰ See <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/75944-2.pdf>.

²¹ World Bank, “Lebanon in the midst of economic, financial and social hardship: the situation could get worse”, press release, 6 November 2019.

Jordan

18. In Jordan, 2,272,411 Palestine refugees are registered with the Agency, the majority of whom are understood to possess Jordanian citizenship, allowing them to enjoy the same rights as other Jordanian nationals.²² The approximately 158,000 Palestine refugees who fled Gaza in 1967 are barred from obtaining Jordanian nationality under Law No. 6 of 1954 and face restricted access to public services and livelihood opportunities.

19. Throughout the year, Jordan remained a relative beacon of stability within a fragile region, despite protests and the rising cost of living.²³ In addition, refugees from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic have placed considerable pressure on the economy and infrastructure of Jordan, especially in the areas of health and education.

20. Unemployment remained a major challenge and stood at 19 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2019, 0.3 per cent higher than in 2018.²⁴ Young people have been especially affected, with youth unemployment reaching 36.8 per cent in 2019.²⁵ Jordan is pursuing key structural reforms through the introduction of new regulations to strengthen financial governance and a five-year reform plan, launched in 2019, that is designed to ensure sustainable, inclusive growth.

21. The number of Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic recorded by UNRWA in Jordan stood at 17,348 by the end of 2019. Numbers have remained stable in part owing to a government policy of non-admission that was introduced in 2013. The approximately 9.9 per cent²⁶ of Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic without legal status in Jordan are particularly vulnerable as they face restrictions on employment, limited access to the courts, civil status and registration processes and the threat of detention and possible forcible return. Many Palestine refugees also face restrictions on accessing humanitarian assistance available to Syrian refugees. These individuals turn to the Agency as their primary provider of health, education, emergency assistance, social safety net and protection services. UNRWA continued to appeal to the Government of Jordan to uphold the principle of equal treatment for all refugees, in accordance with international law, and to consider allowing temporary access for Palestine refugees fleeing the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, for humanitarian reasons.

B. Operational and organizational developments

22. In 2019, UNRWA maintained the delivery of human development, protection and humanitarian assistance for registered Palestine refugees. This was accomplished through a collective commitment on the part of the Agency, its donors and countries hosting refugees.

23. During the reporting period, UNRWA succeeded in providing 8,723,118 primary health-care consultations, education for 532,857 children (for the 2018/19 school year), social safety net assistance (including cash and food) for 254,927 individuals,²⁷

²² An additional 147,251 “other registered persons” are registered with the Agency in Jordan.

²³ Suleiman Al-Khalidi, “Jordan reaches deal with teachers union to end one-month strike”, *Reuters*, 6 October 2019.

²⁴ Jordan, Department of Statistics, “19.0% the unemployment rate during the fourth quarter of 2019”, press release, 9 March 2020.

²⁵ Statista, “Jordan: youth unemployment rate from 1999 to 2019”, 2020. See www.statista.com/statistics/812127/youth-unemployment-rate-in-jordan.

²⁶ UNRWA vulnerability assessment report (Jordan), May 2017.

²⁷ This programme budget-funded caseload excludes recipients in the Syrian Arab Republic, where an additional 127,357 persons were assisted through the social safety net programme under emergency appeals funding.

technical and vocational education and training for 7,557 young people and microfinance loans for 35,576 clients. In addition, the Agency either constructed, upgraded or reconstructed 3,108 shelters, 12 health centres and 101 schools. Protection assistance was extended across all fields of Agency operation with an emphasis on advocacy and equipping UNRWA personnel to deliver practical protection outcomes for Palestine refugees.

24. In 2019, food assistance remained a priority for UNRWA in Gaza. The Agency supported the food and nutritional needs of 1,036,385 vulnerable Palestine refugees, including in 16,826 female-headed households. UNRWA also provided emergency cash-for-work opportunities for 13,572 refugees, including 5,286 women. Under the education in emergencies programme, 68,007 students received additional learning support. Health services were maintained through 22 health centres and 11,571 children received a comprehensive medical examination.

25. In the West Bank, emergency in-kind food assistance continued to be provided, in partnership with the World Food Programme, to 37,000 individuals from Bedouin and herder communities assessed to be food insecure or vulnerable to various protection threats. In addition, UNRWA distributed emergency cash assistance through the e-card modality to 25,578 abject poor refugees. The Agency also continued to monitor, document, report and provide assistance to Palestine refugees affected by protection threats in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

26. Throughout the reporting period, under its emergency appeal, UNRWA provided vital humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic and to Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic in Lebanon and Jordan.²⁸ In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Agency introduced a new targeted approach to the provision of cash assistance for 410,870 Palestine refugees, focusing on the most vulnerable refugees. In-kind food assistance was also limited to the most vulnerable, targeting 136,074 refugees. In addition, education was extended to 50,143 Palestine refugee students and primary health care was made available through 25 health facilities, including two mobile clinics. Legal counselling and psychosocial support continued to be provided through six family support offices. The Agency focused on the rehabilitation of its installations in newly accessible areas, thus ensuring that Palestine refugees spontaneously returning to the Syrian Arab Republic had safe access to humanitarian assistance and services.

27. In Lebanon, humanitarian support in the form of cash grants was provided for food, housing and winterization to an annual average of 27,987 Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic. During the reporting period, UNRWA continued to provide quality, inclusive and equitable education to 5,254 Palestine refugee children from the Syrian Arab Republic; primary health-care services through 27 health centres; and vital protection and legal aid services to 4,262 Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic. In Jordan, cash grants for basic needs were provided to 16,159 Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic and 695 extremely vulnerable Palestine refugee families from the Syrian Arab Republic were supported through one-off emergency cash grants to help them respond to specific protection concerns. Medical services continued to be extended to Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic through 29 health centres. The Agency also continued to provide basic education to 1,167 Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic and to Syrian children in Jordan enrolled in 133 UNRWA schools.

²⁸ In addition, UNRWA coordinates support to some 3,000 Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic who have migrated to Egypt. These refugees have been provided with health assistance and food vouchers through United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners.

28. The Agency raised \$1 billion across all portals in 2019; however, the 2018 funding crisis persisted throughout the reporting period. Under the programme budget, UNRWA received \$625 million, \$125 million short of total requirements. Although services were maintained and key education and health indicators were largely met, some programmatic adjustments had to be made. The Agency was unable to lift the ceiling on its social safety net programme, despite increasing poverty across many fields of operation. Additional measures taken to manage expenditure included vacancy management, a temporary increase in the retirement age and the increased use of daily paid contracts. Expenditure on maintenance and the replacement of information technology equipment and vehicles was also reduced and a number of unfunded liabilities were carried forward into 2020.

29. Humanitarian operations were the hardest hit by the funding gap. UNRWA received only 34.23 per cent (\$94.81 million) of its funding requirements for the Syrian regional crisis emergency appeal and just 61.57 per cent (\$84.96 million) for the occupied Palestinian territory emergency appeal. The Agency was only able to avoid a suspension of its food aid programme, which reaches over 1 million refugees each quarter, through a loan from the Central Emergency Response Fund and exceptional advances from the programme budget.

30. In addition to financial challenges, the Agency was beset by a serious management and reputational crisis in 2019, following an investigation by the Office of Internal Oversight Services that resulted in the departure of key senior personnel. While reassuring that fraud and/or the misappropriation of funds were not involved, the investigation highlighted certain managerial concerns. Subsequently, under the leadership of the acting Commissioner-General, a series of management initiatives were elaborated, in consultation with Advisory Commission members, Agency partners, staff and other stakeholders. These measures will strengthen UNRWA accountability, management and governance.

31. On 13 December, the General Assembly voted to extend the Agency's mandate until 30 June 2023, reaffirming the vital role that the Agency has played over seven decades in providing essential services for the well-being, human development and protection of more than 5 million registered Palestine refugees, and in the amelioration of their plight and stability in the region, pending the just resolution of the question of Palestine refugees.

C. Legal matters

Agency staff

32. Citing security concerns, in 2019 the Israeli authorities continued to restrict the freedom of movement for UNRWA personnel in the occupied Palestinian territory. Restrictions included: (a) the prohibition of Agency local staff, not resident in Jerusalem, to travel in United Nations vehicles across the Erez border crossing (into and out of Gaza) and Allenby Bridge (into and out of Jordan), or to drive in Israel and East Jerusalem; and (b) time-consuming and cumbersome procedures to obtain permits for local staff not resident in Jerusalem to enter Israel and East Jerusalem. On many occasions, permits were not granted even though procedures had been followed. On average, permits to enter East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank were not issued to 21.75 per cent (135 individuals) of UNRWA area personnel, where required.

33. Israeli procedures at Allenby Bridge continued to require that United Nations vehicles be submitted to a search unless an occupant thereof held an identification card issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, even though such searches represent a violation of United Nations immunity. These procedures restricted the movement of international Agency staff based in Amman, to whom the Ministry does not issue such

cards. According to a new procedure, holders of red United Nations laissez-passer not approved in advance by the Ministry had to obtain clearance from the Israeli border authorities to be exempted from the exit fee when going to Jordan over the Allenby Bridge. This caused additional delays in crossing the border.

34. Citing security concerns, measures introduced by the Israeli authorities in April 2018 requiring the possession of an identification card issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to drive United Nations vehicles through the Erez crossing remained in place. The Israeli authorities continued to require all vehicle doors to be opened for inspection by a sniffer dog and luggage to be removed and subjected to an X-ray. With the exception of senior officials, all passengers were required to walk through a metal detector and, unless in possession of an identification card issued by the Ministry, to undergo a body scan. These procedures effectively erode the exemption of United Nations property and assets from any form of search or interference pursuant to the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. United Nations staff have had no option but to comply with these procedures under protest.

35. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, staff movement continued to be restricted and unpredictable at several checkpoints, notably those controlling access to East Jerusalem or through the West Bank barrier. In 2019, movement restrictions in the West Bank resulted in the loss of at least 86 staff days, an increase from 2018, when at least 62 staff days were lost. On 14 occasions at checkpoints in the West Bank, including for entry into East Jerusalem, the Israeli authorities demanded to search UNRWA vehicles. In addition, on at least five occasions, West Bank Field Office personnel were prevented from attending work because access through checkpoints was denied. While the majority of searches were avoided through Agency interventions, rerouting or turning back, on at least five occasions searches were carried out. On one occasion, the Israeli authorities refused to allow passage of a United Nations vehicle at a checkpoint in the proximity of East Jerusalem and demanded the search of an UNRWA diplomatic pouch in a United Nations vehicle, despite reassurances that the pouch had been properly prepared, processed and documented by duly authorized Agency officials and in accordance with established United Nations procedures. Despite several requests for unimpeded humanitarian access, passage remained difficult; at times, it was operationally not feasible to deliver UNRWA services in some of the West Bank areas in the “seam zone” (areas between the Green Line and the West Bank barrier). The situation regarding requirements for Agency and other United Nations trucks to use specific commercial checkpoints to enter Jerusalem remained unchanged.

36. The aforementioned restrictions are inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations, the 1946 Convention, relevant United Nations resolutions and the Comay-Micheltmore Agreement of 1967, by which the Government of Israel is obligated to facilitate the tasks of the Agency to the best of its ability, subject only to regulations or arrangements that may be necessitated by considerations of military security. UNRWA applied for permits for local staff to enter East Jerusalem to carry out the Agency’s mandated humanitarian operations and without prejudice to relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolutions relating to the status of Jerusalem. Israeli authorities maintained that the restrictions were necessary for security reasons.

37. During the reporting period, for the first time since 2013, the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza was open for public use throughout the year other than on Fridays and holidays, for a total of 277 days, for humanitarian cases, students and holders of visas for a third country. Citing security concerns in the Sinai, the ban imposed by the United Nations on duty travel for staff travelling through Rafah remained in place.

38. In Lebanon, the volatile security situation in Palestine refugee camps in the Sidon and north Lebanon areas resulted, at times, in movement restrictions that affected UNRWA staff and operations. The large-scale demonstrations that erupted on 17 October 2019 increased movement restrictions, adversely affecting operations at various Agency installations. No significant movement restrictions were imposed on UNRWA staff by the Governments of Jordan or the State of Palestine.

39. The de facto authorities in Gaza restricted the movement of Agency staff on three occasions and searched UNRWA vehicles on at least three occasions during the reporting period.

40. The Agency continued to apply for permits from the Israeli authorities for local staff in Gaza to transit through the Erez border crossing. During 2019, out of 781 applications, 630 permits (80.7 per cent) were granted. Compared with 2018, the number of applications increased by 33 per cent and the overall percentage of permit applications not granted decreased from 33 to 19.3 per cent. However, considering that the Department of Safety and Security has not approved travel through Rafah for security reasons, the denial of permits and delays in processing permits to transit through Erez continued to have a negative impact on Agency operations, including in respect of staff attendance at important meetings, training sessions and conferences, therefore hindering staff members' ability to perform their relevant duties outside Gaza. Despite repeated requests, UNRWA has not received a substantive justification as to why permits were not approved.

41. In 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel introduced new visa application procedures and additional requirements for information. In some instances, the issuance of visas was made contingent on the provision of information regarding the nature of the activities to be carried out and contractual details of the personnel concerned. As a result, as at the end of the reporting period, seven visa applications for Agency personnel remained pending. In addition, the visa issuance for one Junior Professional Officer remained pending at the relevant Israeli consulate despite Ministry approval. UNRWA continued to face difficulties securing appropriate visas from the Israeli authorities for Agency internships requiring such visas.

42. Owing to significant delays in processing visa applications, the Board of Auditors was not able to visit the West Bank Field Office or the Gaza Field Office to perform its annual audit of UNRWA financial statements, as planned during the reporting period. Owing to a failure to return an Israeli firearms licence and the identity card of a Close Protection Officer of the Gaza Field Office to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and despite the Agency's efforts to confirm the documents as lost, the Israeli authorities refused to issue a licence to the new incumbent of the post, thereby exposing the Agency to a significant security risk with regard to the safety and security of the UNRWA Director of Operations in Gaza.

43. Since 2017, the Agency has been unable to secure residencies for three expatriate UNRWA area staff members in Jordan, owing to the refusal of the Government to exempt such staff members from the requirement of a labour permit and its associated fees. In 2019, the Agency applied for the permits and paid the associated fees for the staff concerned under protest.

44. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the security situation in the capital and in southern and central areas continued to stabilize. However, armed conflict, asymmetrical attacks and generalized insecurity continued to seriously affect free movement and humanitarian access, particularly in the south, where security incidents were more frequent. While some checkpoints in the capital and in central areas were removed, checkpoints in other areas remained. Movement and humanitarian access in Aleppo remained stable, although the situation was fragile. In 2019, 142 applications for

(residency and visit) visas were submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for international personnel, of which 129 were approved and 13 were rejected. Furthermore, the Syrian authorities searched three UNRWA vehicles at the Naseeb-Jaber crossing between Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

45. As at the end of 2019, 24 Agency staff were missing, detained, kidnapped or presumed detained: 13 were believed to be missing, detained or kidnapped in the Syrian Arab Republic, either by the Syrian authorities or other parties. Of that total, four were detained by the Israeli authorities, two by the de facto authorities in Gaza, four by the Jordanian authorities and one by the Palestinian authorities in the West Bank. Despite requests made in accordance with General Assembly resolution [36/232](#), the Syrian authorities did not provide the Agency with access but provided information about certain staff who remained in their custody. The Israeli authorities provided some information regarding the reasons for detention of all staff in their custody but did not provide access to the staff members. The Jordanian authorities facilitated access to and provided information about one staff member. The Palestinian authorities facilitated access to and provided information about the detained staff member. The de facto authorities in Gaza granted access but did not provide information in writing on the staff in their custody.

Agency services and premises

46. The Israeli authorities continued to impose transit charges on shipments entering Gaza, obliging UNRWA to pay \$0.95 million in 2019. The Agency considers such charges a direct tax from which it ought to be exempt under the 1946 Convention. In the view of Israel, the charges are a fee for service from which there is no exemption. Since November 2016, UNRWA vehicles can only be imported through Erez. For all other Agency imports, Kerem Shalom remains the sole crossing into Gaza. It was fully closed for imports on 33 of 261 scheduled operating days (13 per cent). The continuing closure of the Karni crossing and the prohibition of containerized imports, in place since 2006, contributed to increased UNRWA expenditure resulting from storage, palletization, sterilization and additional mileage and staff, amounting to \$7.5 million. This was in addition to transit charges levied on imports through the Kerem Shalom and Erez crossings.

47. Conditions relating to the Agency's construction projects in Gaza and related approvals remained in place during the reporting period. UNRWA continued to make use of international and local monitoring staff to meet the laborious and time-consuming daily monitoring and coordination requirements previously introduced by the Israeli authorities, owing to the blockade imposed on Gaza, amounting to almost \$0.11 million in extra costs in 2019. The Agency also continued to provide the Israeli authorities with written confirmation of UNRWA monitoring for each project, in addition to requirements predating 2017 for documentary material to facilitate the monitoring, by Israel, of construction projects. Cumbersome clearance procedures and frequent processing delays of import requests for materials, some of which Israel classifies as dual-use items, and equipment, continued to have a negative impact on Agency operations.²⁹

48. In 2019 alone, additional staffing, transit and logistical costs resulting from Israeli requirements regarding access and monitoring of all UNRWA imports into Gaza amounted to \$8.64 million. This does not include similar access costs that private contractors incurred to ship construction materials into Gaza through Kerem Shalom under the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism.

²⁹ In 2019, the Israeli authorities approved the entry of four armoured vehicles into Gaza.

49. In March 2019, the Israeli authorities and the Agency agreed on an arrangement for the entry of 415 tyres into Gaza in return for the same number of used tyres. Under the arrangement, UNRWA imported 300 tyres in 2019 and expects to import another 115 in 2020.

50. The Israeli authorities continued to require standards testing for educational, electronic, medical and other items for official use, and the Standards Institution of Israel inspected an Agency shipment bound for official use in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, on one occasion. UNRWA imports goods for its official use that conform to international standards and the United Nations considers that Israeli requirements are contrary to the exemption from prohibitions and restrictions on imports allowed under the 1946 Convention, in respect of articles imported by the United Nations for official use.

51. Arrears of \$90.9 million accrued as value added tax (VAT) for services and goods procured for the West Bank and Gaza before arrangements were agreed in 2013 with the Palestinian Ministry of Finance remained outstanding. During 2019, the Agency accrued an additional \$0.23 million in VAT. UNRWA did not receive any reimbursement in 2019 and the cumulative total owed to the Agency for the reimbursement of VAT paid for services and goods procured in the West Bank and Gaza amounted to \$100.82 million as at 31 December 2019.³⁰ UNRWA makes periodic claims to the relevant authorities for the outstanding amounts.

52. During the reporting period, the Israeli authorities paid \$1.41 million in VAT reimbursements owed to the Agency. UNRWA continued to engage with the Israeli authorities regarding \$6.64 million³¹ in outstanding VAT reimbursements as at 31 December 2019.

53. UNRWA was required, as in the past, to pay port fees and other charges to the Syrian authorities, in contravention of the Agreement of 1948 between the United Nations and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. In 2019, fees and charges totalling \$93,808.23 were paid.

54. The Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources of Jordan continued to apply the “fuel price difference” charge on electricity consumption, which led to increased Agency costs in excess of 55,000 Jordanian dinars in 2019. The Agency continued to pay for the inspection fees of official UNRWA vehicles under protest.

55. Installation inspections were conducted across all five fields of Agency operation. Owing to the end of the Agency’s operations support officer project, in June 2019, the Agency’s Lebanon Field Office Protection and Neutrality Unit coordinated the transition to a new modality of installation inspections whereby senior UNRWA staff from various programmes assumed responsibility for such inspections. The wave of nationwide protests that commenced in October resulted in a volatile security situation throughout Lebanon, disrupting staff members’ ability to conduct inspections for a number of weeks owing to road blockages and installation closures.

56. The 1946 Convention provides that the premises of the United Nations shall be inviolable. Contrary to this, the Israeli security forces entered UNRWA premises in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, without authorization on four occasions in 2019. On at least 11 occasions, tear gas canisters, stun grenades, plastic-coated metal bullets or live ammunition used by the Israeli security forces landed in Agency premises, including schools, or damaged UNRWA property. On at least four of those occasions, UNRWA staff members and beneficiaries were affected by tear gas. On

³⁰ Reflecting unaudited financial information.

³¹ Ibid.

two occasions, bullets or bullet shells from unknown sources were found on the Agency's school premises. In addition, a family dispute resulted in the fatal shooting of an UNRWA beneficiary. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, an Agency staff member was injured as a result of a physical assault by a beneficiary. In Gaza, UNRWA recorded seven incidents of ammunition fired by the Israeli security forces that landed inside or damaged Agency premises and four incursions by the de facto authorities in UNRWA installations. In addition, on five occasions, bullets from unknown sources hit Agency installations in Gaza.

57. Following the announcement by the Jerusalem municipality of a plan to terminate the Agency's provision of services in East Jerusalem in 2018, municipal representatives and Israeli political figures continued to make public statements in this regard. On 20 January 2019, it was reported in the media that Israeli officials were set to revoke permits for UNRWA schools in East Jerusalem. In September 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel communicated that the policy of the Government was to replace UNRWA services in East Jerusalem. Furthermore, at the end of November 2019, the former Mayor of Jerusalem introduced a draft bill to the Knesset to prevent any Agency activities in the city from the beginning of 2020. During the second half of 2019, the Jerusalem municipality halted the collection of solid waste in Shu'fat camp. Representatives of the Jerusalem municipality attempted to enter an Agency installation, the Kalandia training centre, in August 2019, requesting to take photographs of the installation for the establishment of a recreational area. UNRWA has liaised with the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations in relation to these matters. The various breaches of the Agency's privileges and immunities have been the subject of formal protests to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel.

58. Within the financial constraints resulting from severe funding shortfalls, UNRWA continued to implement the recommendations of the Board of Inquiry resulting from inquiries into the incidents that occurred in Gaza between 8 July and 26 August 2014, as referred to in previous reports. Owing to funding gaps, the Agency operated with a reduced number of personnel assigned to after-hours guarding duties at its installations in Gaza.

59. On 22 March 2018, the United Nations submitted a claim to Israel for the reimbursement of losses sustained as a result of incidents that were the subject of Board of Inquiry investigations and that occurred at the Agency's premises during the 2014 hostilities in Gaza. A claim was also presented to Israel for losses sustained by the dependants of a member of UNRWA personnel who died during the hostilities. According to publicly available information, on 14 August 2018, the Israel Defense Forces reported that the criminal investigation into the incident affecting the Agency's Bayt Hanun Elementary Co-education "A" and "D" School on 24 July 2014, which resulted in the killing of at least 12 people and the injuring of at least 93 individuals, was closed by the Military Advocate General without any further legal proceedings – criminal or disciplinary – to be instigated against those involved. UNRWA remains concerned as to the need for accountability regarding these and other incidents during which Agency installations were directly or indirectly affected, contrary to their inviolability, and as a result of which UNRWA personnel and civilians sheltering in them were killed or injured.

60. In the West Bank, there were no incursions into the Agency's premises by armed Palestinians in 2019. There was one incident of misuse of UNRWA installations for unauthorized events by members of the community. Agency premises and services were disrupted on at least 25 occasions by forced closures or protests, including by members of camp service committees.

61. In Gaza, there were four incursions by the de facto authorities, some involving armed individuals, during the reporting period. UNRWA complained about these incidents with the relevant authorities. Agency facilities continued to be the object of thefts, acts of vandalism and break-ins and UNRWA staff delivering services continued to be exposed to threats, acts of intimidation and physical assaults from disgruntled Palestine refugees. A further 202 incidents disrupted service delivery or the movement of Agency staff in Gaza.

62. In the Syrian Arab Republic, as previously reported, UNRWA has sustained conflict-related property losses in the millions of dollars since hostilities began in 2011. Assessments carried out in late 2018 indicate that almost all Agency installations are in need of major rehabilitation and many have been severely damaged and are in need of reconstruction, especially in Yarmouk, Ein el Tal and Dera'a. The situation regarding installations remained largely unchanged in 2019. During the reporting period, three incidents of unauthorized entry into UNRWA installations by the Syrian authorities were reported. The Agency sanitation office in Khan Dannoun continued to be used by military personnel at the adjacent checkpoint.

63. In 2019, there were closures of UNRWA installations on at least 101 days in Lebanon, mostly as a result of strikes and protests by beneficiaries and the general civil unrest that started on 17 October. No political or armed factions entered Agency premises without authorization. In May, Palestinian factions in Mieh Mieh camp reached an agreement with the Lebanese armed forces stipulating that no one in the camp should carry weapons or wear military uniforms in public.

Other matters

64. The \$680,000 seized by the Government of Lebanon in 2013 has yet to be returned. UNRWA has continued to dispute any liability for payments demanded by the Government of Lebanon in the amount of \$167.1 million for electricity consumed by Palestine refugees outside of Agency installations in camps in Lebanon. In addition, in March 2019, the Government of Lebanon demanded that UNRWA pay over \$1.1 million in fines for the resale of electricity by popular committees in Burj Barajneh and Shatila refugee camps. The Agency disputes that it is responsible for paying these fines and has formally complained about them to the Government of Lebanon.

65. In relation to the internal justice system, the UNRWA Dispute Tribunal operates on a full-time basis and is comprised of one judge and one part-time ad litem judge. During 2019, the Tribunal issued 75 judgments, disposing of 537 cases. As at the end of 2019, 107 cases were pending, including one case on remand, of which 106 had been filed by area staff and one by an international staff member. Thirteen appeals were also pending before the United Nations Appeals Tribunal.

Legal status of Palestine refugees in the Agency area of operations

66. The legal status of Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza remained substantially the same as that described in the report of the Commissioner-General to the General Assembly for 2008 (A/64/13, paras. 52–55).

D. Financial overview

67. With the exception of 158 international staff posts funded by the General Assembly through the regular budget, UNRWA operations are supported through voluntary contributions. The Agency receives funding through: (a) a programme budget fund that supports core operations (including recurrent staff and non-staff

costs), including education, health, camp improvement, relief and social services, protection and support systems and structures; (b) emergency appeals for humanitarian interventions; and (c) specific, time-bound projects that improve services without increasing recurrent costs.

68. In 2019, UNRWA resource mobilization efforts yielded a total pledged amount of \$1 billion (including United Nations Secretariat support for international staff), with part of those funds relating to planned expenditure for projects and emergency appeals in 2019. During the reporting period, planned programme budget (cash view) income was \$625 million under the approved programme budget against a planned expenditure of \$750 million, leading to a deficit of \$125 million. According to unaudited financial statements, in 2019 the Agency spent \$1.17 billion. The largest expenditure was \$762 million, under the unrestricted programme budget, accounting for 65.14 per cent of total expenditure. Emergency activities and projects (including restricted fund activities) accounted for 23.63 per cent and 12.32 per cent respectively.³² Education remained the largest programme funded through the programme budget, expending 60 per cent, or \$454.61 million, of the total unrestricted programme budget.

³² The percentages in this sentence add up to slightly over 100 per cent owing to a negative interfund balance.

Table 1
Expenditure by programme, 2019
 (Thousands of United States dollars and percentage)

<i>Programme budget</i>	<i>Gaza</i>		<i>Lebanon</i>		<i>Syrian Arab Republic</i>		<i>Jordan</i>		<i>West Bank</i>		<i>Headquarters</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Total as percentage</i>
Education	219 600	29	48 472	6	27 323	4	93 792	12	63 381	8	2 043	0	454 611	60
Health	34 278	4	19 528	3	9 174	1	20 278	3	27 155	4	730	0	111 143	15
Relief and social services	13 828	2	12 146	2	1 178	0	9 426	1	9 133	1	826	0	46 537	6
Infrastructure	7 996	1	6 574	1	1 198	0	5 285	1	6 111	1	1 659	0	28 824	4
Executive direction	2 821	0	2 594	0	1 953	0	2 602	0	2 967	0	14 418	2	27 355	4
Protection	77	0	135	0	34	0	1	0	47	0	490	0	786	0
Support	20 404	3	8 472	1	4 221	1	7 530	1	12 607	2	39 597	5	92 830	12
Total	299 005	39	97 921	13	45 081	6	138 914	18	121 402	16	59 763	8	762 085	100

<i>All funding streams</i>	<i>Gaza</i>		<i>Lebanon</i>		<i>Syrian Arab Republic</i>		<i>Jordan</i>		<i>West Bank</i>		<i>Headquarters</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Total as percentage</i>
Education	234 579	20	60 802	5	38 100	3	108 027	9	71 080	6	2 914	0	515 504	44
Health	57 968	5	30 003	3	13 631	1	24 110	2	28 535	2	3 034	0	157 280	13
Relief	128 956	11	37 217	3	69 526	6	16 620	1	13 283	1	1 409	0	267 011	23
Infrastructure	24 418	2	47 230	2	2 436	0	7 425	1	10 490	1	2 068	0	94 066	8
Executive direction	5 320	0	6 406	1	3 637	0	3 369	0	4 371	0	18 223	2	41 326	4
Protection	333	0	994	0	1 026	0	341	0	1 541	0	1 088	0	5 324	0
Support	35 132	3	9 441	1	8 471	1	7 794	1	13 005	1	6 442	1	80 286	7
Microfinance	1 473	0	0	0	876	0	3 463	0	3 275	0	0	0	9 087	1
Total	488 180	42	192 094	15	137 704	12	171 148	15	145 580	12	35 178	3	1 169 884	100

Table 2
Expenditure by medium-term strategic outcome, 2019

(Thousands of United States dollars and percentage)

<i>Programme budget</i>	<i>Gaza</i>	<i>Lebanon</i>	<i>Syrian Arab Republic</i>	<i>Jordan</i>	<i>West Bank</i>	<i>Headquarters</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>percentage</i>						
Refugees' rights under international law are protected and promoted	1 768	0	985	0	432	0	813	0	1 971	0	490	0	6 459	1
Refugees' health is protected and the disease burden is reduced	33 814	3	18 936	2	8 799	1	19 903	2	26 362	2	0	0	107 814	14
School-age children complete quality, equitable and inclusive basic education	212 899	18	43 732	4	25 318	2	85 790	7	55 586	5	0	0	423 325	56
Refugees' capabilities are strengthened for increased livelihood opportunities	5 561	0	4 009	0	1 832	0	6 758	1	7 318	1	381	0	25 858	3
Refugees are able to meet their basic human needs of food, shelter and environmental health	17 601	2	15 639	1	1 239	0	12 715	1	11 305	1	22	0	58 522	8
Management and operational effectiveness	27 362	2	14 620	1	7 461	1	12 935	1	18 859	2	58 869	5	140 108	18
Total	299 005	39	97 921	13	45 081	6	138 914	18	121 402	16	59 763	8	762 085	100

<i>All funding streams</i>	<i>Gaza</i>	<i>Lebanon</i>	<i>Syrian Arab Republic</i>	<i>Jordan</i>	<i>West Bank</i>	<i>Headquarters</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>percentage</i>						
Refugees' rights under international law are protected and promoted	5 092	0	1 965	0	1 571	0	1 472	0	3 733	0	1 581	0	15 414	1
Refugees' health is protected and the disease burden is reduced	57 206	5	29 237	2	11 564	1	23 700	2	27 654	2	227	0	149 588	13
School-age children complete quality, equitable and inclusive basic education	222 635	19	53 594	5	35 224	3	97 594	8	62 371	5	7	0	471 425	40
Refugees' capabilities are strengthened for increased livelihood opportunities	8 091	1	23 378	2	3 443	0	12 461	1	13 101	1	381	0	60 854	5

<i>All funding streams</i>	<i>Gaza</i>	<i>Lebanon</i>	<i>Syrian Arab Republic</i>	<i>Jordan</i>	<i>West Bank</i>	<i>Headquarters</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>percentage</i>						
Refugees are able to meet their basic human needs of food, shelter and environmental health	144 755	12	62 000	5	69 441	6	21 031	2	16 813	1	245	0	314 285	27
Management and operational effectiveness	50 401	4	21 920	2	16 461	1	14 890	1	21 907	2	32 737	3	158 317	14
Total	488 180	42	192 094	16	137 704	12	171 148	15	145 580	12	35 178	3	1 169 884	100

Chapter II

Subprogramme review

A. Subprogramme 1

Refugees' rights under international law are protected and promoted

69. UNRWA aims to ensure that Palestine refugees enjoy human rights to the fullest extent possible by mainstreaming protection into and through its service delivery and by promoting respect for international law with relevant duty bearers. Palestine refugees continue to face protection challenges, owing to the lack of a just and durable solution to their plight, the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, over 50 years of occupation in the occupied Palestinian territory, 13 years of blockade in Gaza and a precarious legal status in some host countries.

70. Throughout 2019, UNRWA continued to address protection concerns faced by Palestine refugees across the Agency's five fields of operation. Protection mainstreaming, in and through UNRWA service delivery, was enhanced, while advocacy efforts were undertaken in relation to Palestine refugee rights.

Expected accomplishment	Indicator of achievement	Measurement	
		Unit of measure	Percentage
(a) Duty bearers are held accountable for violations of international law through monitoring, reporting and advocacy	Number of advocacy interventions, including formal letters, concerning protection issues	Baseline (2019)	480
		Target (2019)	480
		Actual (2019)	507
(b) Vulnerable and at-risk individuals and communities benefit from protection responses	Percentage of students identified as having a disability receiving support meeting their specific needs	Baseline (2019)	37.7
		Target (2019)	48.8
		Actual (2019)	71.7

Outputs

- Access to rehabilitation services and specialized support was facilitated for 26,743 Palestine refugees with disabilities.
- 98,401 Palestine refugees received mental health and psychosocial support.
- Legal counselling, the provision of legal information and referral to legal service providers was extended to 12,593 Palestine refugees on issues including civil status, registration and gender-based violence.
- 14 confidential submissions made and briefings provided by UNRWA to international human rights mechanisms.
- Initiatives were implemented to eliminate violence against children, to promote gender equality, the empowerment of women and the inclusion of persons with disabilities and to address gender-based violence.
- 6,544 UNRWA personnel received protection training.

B. Subprogramme 2

Refugees' health is protected and the disease burden is reduced

71. In 2019, UNRWA continued to deliver comprehensive primary health care to Palestine refugees while supporting the most vulnerable in acquiring access to

secondary and tertiary care. Universal access to primary health care was provided on the basis of the family health team approach, a person-centred platform focused on the provision of comprehensive care for the entire family. Emphasizing long-term relationships between the provider and the patient or family, the approach improves the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of health services.

72. Despite the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, the fragile political and economic environment in Lebanon and the continuing restrictions and political instability in Gaza and the West Bank, the majority of the annual health targets were either met or surpassed. In response to the increasing incidence of non-communicable diseases among the Palestine refugee population, UNRWA continued to introduce new screening, tests, medicines and public awareness-raising campaigns to promote the prevention and management of such diseases. Maternal and child health outcomes, as well as immunization rates, remained positive. The Agency improved services in relation to reproductive health and e-health integration and through the incorporation of mental and school health into the e-health system. In 2019, the e-health system was rolled out in nine additional health centres in the Syrian Arab Republic, a considerable accomplishment in the light of the ongoing conflict and the severe logistical and technological challenges. In addition, 12 health centres were renovated to improve the health-care environment.

<i>Expected accomplishment</i>	<i>Indicator of achievement</i>	<i>Measurement</i>	
		<i>Unit of measure</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
(a) Universal access to quality, comprehensive primary health care	Average number of daily medical consultations per doctor	Baseline (2019)	82.0
		Target (2019)	80.0
		Actual (2019)	78.0
(b) Protection and promotion of family health	(i) Percentage of women in compliance with the minimum four antenatal care visits	Baseline (2019)	91.4
		Target (2019)	85.1
		Actual (2019)	87.0
	(ii) Percentage of targeted population (age 40 and above) screened for diabetes mellitus	Baseline (2019)	21.7
		Target (2019)	21.9
		Actual (2019)	23.6
	(iii) Number of Expanded Programme on Immunization vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks	Baseline (2019)	0
		Target (2019)	0
		Actual (2019)	2
(c) Efficient hospital support services provided	Percentage of UNRWA hospitalization services used by participants in the UNRWA social safety net programme	Baseline (2019)	16.2
		Target (2019)	19.2
		Actual (2019)	23.7

Outputs

- Provision of 8,723,118 medical consultations to Palestine refugees.
- 197,422 Palestine refugees age 40 and above were screened for diabetes.
- Hospital care was extended to 88,075 patients.
- 12 UNRWA health centres were constructed, upgraded or reconstructed to improve patient care; 72 per cent of all Agency health centres now meet enhanced quality care standards.

C. Subprogramme 3 School-age children complete quality, equitable and inclusive basic education

73. Notwithstanding the increasingly challenging context in which the UNRWA education programme was delivered during the reporting period, the programme successfully met the majority of its targets in 2019 and continued to embed, enrich and sustain the education reform implemented between 2011 and 2016.

74. The student survival rate, which represents the proportion of students expected to reach the final grade of basic education, increased from 96.20 per cent in the 2017/18 school year to 96.71 per cent in the 2018/19 school year. However, underlying that positive overall trend was some degree of variation between Agency fields of operation and by gender. UNRWA is monitoring and working to address the increasing dropout rates among boys at the preparatory school level in some fields of operation.

75. The Agency continued to strengthen support for students with additional needs or those who risk losing education opportunities due to conflict. The Education in Emergencies programme continued to facilitate psychosocial support, parental engagement and safety and security efforts to enable access to education in times of crisis. With the notable exception of the increasing dropout rate among boys at the preparatory school level, most gains in key education indicators were reflected among all students.

76. The work of UNRWA to enhance systems for gathering, monitoring and engaging actively with relevant data to improve quality, equity and inclusion at multiple levels continued. In 2019, the student module of the Agency-wide education management information system was enhanced to better meet the data needs of the fields of operation, with considerable progress made in the development of the staff and premises modules. The Agency also strengthened the implementation of its school quality assurance process. The process comprises the rigorous review of a school, the resultant recommendations clearly linked to areas of focus and the subsequent tailored support.

<i>Expected accomplishment</i>	<i>Indicator of achievement</i>	<i>Measurement</i>	
		<i>Unit of measure</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
(a) Inclusive access to basic education	(i) Cumulative drop-out rate (elementary)	Baseline (2019)	0.78
		Target (2019)	1.25
		Actual (2019)	0.64
	(ii) Cumulative drop-out rate (preparatory)	Baseline (2019)	2.34
		Target (2019)	2.84
		Actual (2019)	2.15
(b) Improved educational quality and outcomes	(i) Number of textbooks reviewed using the UNRWA framework for the analysis and quality implementation of the curriculum ^a	Baseline (2019)	465
		Target (2019)	N/A ^b
		Actual (2019)	401

<i>Expected accomplishment</i>	<i>Indicator of achievement</i>	<i>Measurement</i>	
		<i>Unit of measure</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
	(ii) Proportion of classes exceeding thresholds (less than/or equal to 25; more than 40) students	Baseline (2018/19)	48.20 (>40)
			5.54 (≤25)
		Target (2018/19)	38.88 (>40)
			5.97 (≤25)
		Actual (2018/19)	52.66 (>40)
			4.13 (≤25)

^a When new textbooks are issued, their “rapid review” is prioritized by the Agency, focusing on the degree of neutrality, bias, gender-sensitivity and age-appropriateness. Full textbook reviews under the framework for the analysis and quality implementation of the curriculum continue to be undertaken, including of those for which a rapid review has already been completed. The actual number of reviews reported includes both rapid reviews and full reviews under the framework.

^b The target is influenced by the number of new textbooks, including new editions, issued by host countries during the year. As a result, a target cannot be set for this indicator.

Outputs

By embedding, sustaining and building on the education reform programme, in 2019, UNRWA:

- Continued to provide quality, inclusive and equitable education to Palestine refugee children.
- Effectively addressed student drop-out rates, including through identifying at-risk students to prevent them from leaving school.

Through the class formation process:

- The Agency successfully enrolled 532,857 Palestine refugee children for the 2018/19 school year across all five fields of operation.
- The percentage of sections with more than 40 students increased from 48.20 per cent in the 2017/18 school year to 52.66 per cent in the 2018/19 school year. Owing to financial constraints, an ongoing rigorous application of the ceiling of 50 students per class in purpose-built schools was required, and therefore a significant growth in the percentage of classes falling just below that limit was noted.

Through the infrastructure and camp improvement programme:

- The Agency constructed, reconstructed or upgraded 101 schools to meet the Agency’s education reform, protection and safety requirements.

D. Subprogramme 4 Refugees’ capabilities are strengthened for increased livelihood opportunities

77. UNRWA aims to ensure that Palestine refugees have a decent standard of living, through interventions under its education programme, relief and social services programme, microfinance programme and infrastructure and camp improvement programme.

78. UNRWA’s technical and vocational education and training programming has helped to mitigate the effects of economic challenges across the Agency’s fields of operation. Particular focus was directed towards improving access to technical and

vocational education and training courses for the most vulnerable Palestine refugees, enhancing the relevance of those courses to labour market needs and strengthening data management, monitoring and reporting. Those measures contributed to the continued high employment rate among graduates of UNRWA vocational training centres, which is pertinent given the prevailing economic challenges, in particular for young job seekers.

79. Through its microfinance programme, UNRWA disbursed \$32,458,155 to 35,576 clients across Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic in 2019. Of that amount, \$13,748,402 was extended to Palestine refugees through 13,138 loans.

80. The Agency's infrastructure and camp improvement programme also worked towards making a positive impact on local economies by driving community demand for construction materials and generating employment opportunities for camp residents.

81. Twenty-three partnership agreements were concluded in 2019 in support of poverty alleviation and enhanced livelihood opportunities, which benefitted 18,668 Palestine refugees, especially those with disabilities, young people and women, across the West Bank, Gaza, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon.

<i>Expected accomplishment</i>	<i>Indicator of achievement</i>	<i>Measurement</i>		
		<i>Unit of measure</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	
Palestine refugees' capabilities are strengthened	Percentage of graduates of vocational training centres employed	(a) Female	Baseline (2018/19)	74.00
			Target (2018/19)	74.00
			Actual (2018/19)	77.19
	(b) Male	Baseline (2018/19)	83.17	
		Target (2018/19)	83.17	
		Actual (2018/19)	83.17	

Outputs

- Technical and vocational education was provided to 7,557 students in UNRWA vocational training centres during the 2018/19 academic year.
- The employment rate for 2018 graduates of the vocational training centres increased to 80.91 per cent, with 3,128 graduates employed or in further study. In addition, 89.56 per cent of graduates of the faculty of educational sciences and arts and of the faculty of education science were also employed.
- The proportion of beneficiaries of the social safety net programme enrolled in their first year at vocational training centres increased from 29.92 per cent in the 2017/18 academic year to 31.00 per cent of total enrolment in 2018/19.

Expected accomplishment	Indicator of achievement	Measurement	
		Unit of measure	Percentage
Refugees have improved access to livelihood opportunities	(i) Total number of microfinance loans to refugees	Baseline (2019)	13 053
		Target (2019)	17 815
		Actual (2019)	13 138
	(ii) Number of employment opportunities (full-time equivalent) created from interventions of the infrastructure and camp improvement programme ^a	Baseline (2019)	2 411
		Target (2019)	2 150
		Actual (2019)	2 496

^a Excluding the Syrian Arab Republic.

Outputs

- 13,138 loans, valued at \$13,748,402, were extended to Palestine refugees, corresponding to 37 per cent of all clients (35,576) and 42 per cent of the total amount disbursed (\$32,458,155).
- Women were prioritized as loan recipients, with 16,052 loans (\$12,499,404), representing 45 per cent of all loans, disbursed to women, of which 5,619 loans were extended to women refugees (\$4,966,478).
- 9,444 loans were disbursed to young people (\$8,806,956), of which 3,752 loans (\$3,400,157), or 40 per cent, were extended to Palestine refugee young people.
- UNRWA camp improvement works were valued at \$60,000,000 and included a range of interventions, from the planning, design and construction of Agency facilities, shelters, schools and health centres to solid waste management and the repair and reconstruction of camp sewerage and drainage works, water wells and wastewater treatment systems.

E. Subprogramme 5 Refugees are able to meet their basic human needs of food, shelter and environmental health

82. The UNRWA social safety net programme is aimed at mitigating poverty and food insecurity among poor and vulnerable Palestine refugees, with priority given to those in abject poverty.⁶¹ To that end, the social safety net programme provides a range of social transfers, including a basic food basket, cash transfers and/or electronic cash vouchers. By the end of 2019, assistance through electronic cash vouchers served 155,992 beneficiaries of the programme across Lebanon (61,384), Jordan (58,479) and the West Bank (36,129). A depreciation in social transfer purchasing power, attributable to consumer price inflation in Jordan and Lebanon, was addressed by increasing the transfer value by 8 per cent in both fields of operation.

83. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Agency provided emergency cash assistance to 410,870 Palestine refugees, and in Gaza, in-kind food assistance was extended to 1,036,385 Palestine refugees, including 16,826 female-headed households.

84. Overcrowded conditions and makeshift shelters are just some of the challenges facing the 58 official Palestine refugee camps across the Agency's five fields of operation. Evolving from temporary "tent cities", the camps now consist of narrow alleyways and improvised multilevel houses that accommodate growing families. Continued years of underfunding, coupled with depressed economic conditions, have

⁶¹ UNRWA defines abject poverty as not being able to meet basic food needs.

translated into the degradation of living environments. The Agency estimates that over 40,000 substandard shelters, excluding those in the Syrian Arab Republic, are in need of rehabilitation.

<i>Expected accomplishment</i>	<i>Indicator of achievement</i>	<i>Measurement</i>	
		<i>Unit of measure</i>	<i>Percentage^a</i>
(a) Abject poor refugees are better able to meet their food needs	(i) Percentage of beneficiaries of the social safety net programme who are in a state of abject poverty	Baseline (2019)	64.5
		Target (2019)	78.9
		Actual (2019)	75.8
	(ii) Percentage of poor individuals that receive social transfers through the social safety net programme	Baseline (2019)	13.9
		Target (2019)	22.5
		Actual (2019)	13.6
(b) Improved living conditions for poor refugees	Percentage of substandard shelters repaired or reconstructed	Baseline (2019)	9.4
		Target (2019)	10.9
		Actual (2019)	11.3

^a Excluding the Syrian Arab Republic.

Outputs

- In addition to the 254,927 Palestine refugees who received support from the social safety net programme through the UNRWA programme budget, emergency programming supported food and/or cash assistance for 1,036,385 in Gaza, 62,578 in the West Bank, 410,870 in the Syrian Arab Republic, 27,119 in Lebanon and 17,343 in Jordan.
- Temporary job opportunities were provided, benefitting 13,572 refugee households in Gaza.
- Shelters were rehabilitated for 3,056 families.

Endnote

85. UNRWA was established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) of December 1949. The Agency is a subsidiary body of the Assembly and became operational on 1 May 1950, responding to the needs of about 750,000 Palestine refugees. It is one of the largest United Nations programmes, with a population of 5.63 million registered Palestine refugees under its mandate at the end of 2019, and about 28,000 staff. Palestine refugees are defined as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period of 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict” and include descendants through the male line.

86. The mission of the Agency is to assist Palestine refugees in achieving their full potential in human development until a durable and just solution is found to the refugee issue. The Agency fulfils its humanitarian and human development mandate by providing protection and essential services to Palestine refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Its services include basic (and in Lebanon, secondary) education, comprehensive primary health care, emergency relief, social interventions, microfinance, shelter and infrastructural support.

