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**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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Letters of transmittal

Letter dated 16 August 2021 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 annual report on the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for 2020. 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.

UNRWA continues to operate in an extremely volatile region, in which the living conditions of Palestine refugees deteriorated in 2020 and 2021, primarily as a consequence of the closures and restrictions engendered by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Poverty, despair and hopelessness have risen sharply, particularly among young people living in camps. Challenges have increased in every field of UNRWA operations: Lebanon faces an unprecedented financial and economic collapse on top of its political crisis; the Syrian Arab Republic is grappling with the effects of 10 years of conflict that have shattered its economy; Gaza has just survived a fourth conflict in 13 years; in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Palestinians live with daily threats of evictions, demolitions and settler violence; and Jordan struggles with dramatic economic challenges. These upheavals and recent regional changes make a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestine refugee seem further away than ever, and fuel a deep sense of abandonment that refugees, especially young ones, express very strongly.

Throughout these multiple crises, a collective commitment by UNRWA, host countries and the international community allowed the continuation of critical human development and the provision of protection and humanitarian services to Palestine refugees. These services were often the last reminder of normality in the lives of Palestine refugees. UNRWA personnel showed dedication and innovation in their ability to continuously adapt to the changes imposed by the pandemic: an almost overnight switch to telemedicine, home delivery of food and medicines and online learning through a digital learning platform are a few of many changes that the Agency implemented in 2020. In response to the deepening poverty among this vulnerable community, UNRWA stepped up its humanitarian assistance programme, providing food or cash assistance to all registered Palestine refugees in three out of its five fields of operations, namely, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Gaza.

UNRWA services are not only a lifeline for millions of Palestine refugees, they also contribute to regional stability and to the promotion of peace by instilling a sense of normality and dignity in the lives of Palestine refugees. The UNRWA education programme, rooted in United Nations purposes and values and in human rights, is an antidote to hatred and intolerance in the region. The teacher-centred approach in which UNRWA teachers are trained enables them to keep United Nations standards

and values at the centre of classroom discussions. Through this approach, students learn to look critically at sensitive issues. UNRWA quality education is also often the only chance for a better future for the half a million Palestine refugee children attending its schools and the 8,000 students attending its technical and vocational education centres.

UNRWA cash and food assistance helps 2.4 million Palestine refugees across the region meet their most basic needs, including food and shelter, and helps prevent them slipping further into poverty, which often comes with negative coping mechanisms such as child labour, early marriage or migration through dangerous routes. UNRWA health centres and sanitation services continue to support local authorities in containing the spread of COVID-19 and rolling out vaccination campaigns. In times of armed conflict, such as in Gaza in May 2021, UNRWA schools become the refuge of those who are running for their lives. In May 2021, over 77,000 Gazans found protection in UNRWA schools that served as shelters.

The irreplaceable role of UNRWA in the life journey of a Palestine refugee in the region remains relevant and unquestionable. The Agency is determined to continuously modernize its services and modes of operation to ensure that they are in line with the times. These modernization plans involve the updating and upgrading of all UNRWA programmes and services, and will come together in a blueprint, developed in close consultation with host countries and donors, that will be presented at the international conference on UNRWA that is planned for later this year, to be convened by Jordan and Sweden.

A strong and modern UNRWA is one that is able to uphold the rights and well-being of Palestine refugees and bring a sense of stability and security to their lives. A strong and modern UNRWA requires adequate and predictable resources to help plan, improve, evaluate and adapt, without constantly being cash-strapped. In 2020, UNRWA structural financial problems reached a new peak, and I had to announce in November that the Agency had run out of cash to pay the salaries of over 28,000 staff, the vast majority of whom are Palestine refugees living among the disenfranchised community we serve. While UNRWA continued to improve efficiency and introduced additional cost-control measures, donor funding dropped to 2013 levels. The Agency narrowly avoided a financial collapse and a suspension of all services thanks to additional funds from some committed donors, \$30 million in loans from the Central Emergency Response Fund, the deferral of salaries to staff and the carry-over of \$75 million in liabilities into 2021.

This year, I presented a zero-growth budget, the third over the last six years, despite growing needs among the Palestine refugee community. I also informed our Advisory Commission that, contrary to previous years, it was not possible to adopt additional cost-control and austerity measures without seriously affecting the quality and scope of services to Palestine refugees and consequently affecting the Agency's ability to deliver on its mandate. My priority has remained to sustain all services and jobs at a time of regional instability. I did decide, however, to freeze the salary increment of staff for a year.

Turning to the external political environment, I wish to reiterate that, in 2020 and 2021, UNRWA faced intense politically motivated attacks that sought to question its mandate, its relevance and the integrity of its staff, primarily through attacks on the quality of the education that Palestine refugee children receive. These attacks are also aimed at tarnishing the Agency's reputation and weakening its funding base. Such attacks usually start by singling out actual incidents, before taking them out of context to generalize them. In all proven incidents, UNRWA has taken administrative or disciplinary action.

I have repeatedly stated that, while we are operating in a highly divided environment with important risks of incidents, UNRWA has a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to breaching United Nations values and standards of conduct, including those of non-discrimination and equality with regard to race, gender, language and religion. UNRWA has continuously improved its monitoring systems to reduce the risk of violation of United Nations purposes and values to a minimum while it continues to act decisively with regard to any breaches. I can assure you that the Agency is fully committed to upholding United Nations values and standards at all times and hence strongly rejects blanket claims about UNRWA personnel.

The Agency's mandate remains essential from a human development and humanitarian perspective. The solution to the Palestine refugee problem and the obligation to find a politically negotiated, just and lasting solution to their plight rest with the parties to the conflict.

The return of the United States of America as a strategic partner of UNRWA has been a source of hope for Palestine refugees. The generous contributions from the United States this year have unfortunately been offset by the changed behaviour of and decreases in levels of contributions from other donors. As of August 2021, UNRWA still faces a projected shortfall of \$100 million. We are also facing an immediate cash-flow crisis over the next few months. To ensure the smooth opening of the new school year in August for half a million girls and boys across the region, the provision of social welfare for over 390,000 abject poor and the continuation of vaccination in our health centres across the region, I was left with no choice other than to request another loan from the Central Emergency Response Fund, of \$15 million, to manage the cash flow. As experienced repeatedly over the past year, the Central Emergency Response Fund is an indispensable mechanism for an Agency such as UNRWA to sustain essential human development and humanitarian services.

UNRWA emergency appeals for the occupied Palestinian territory and the regional crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic also continue to be severely underfunded. Let me also stress that a fully funded programme budget – the backbone of the Agency – is crucial to sustaining our humanitarian and life-saving operations, including early recovery and reconstruction in response to the recent conflict in Gaza. My senior staff and I are relentlessly encouraging all donors to increase, frontload or redirect planned funding to the programme budget to manage the cash flow in the next few months. We also continue to explore innovative funding mechanisms and broadening private funding.

The international conference convened under the leadership of Jordan and Sweden, which is planned for later this year, will be a unique opportunity for a compact based on an agreed level of sustainable and predictable funding needed for a modernized UNRWA to deliver on its mandated responsibilities and on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ensuring that no Palestine refugee is left behind.

I appeal to the members of the General Assembly to continue to help mobilize sufficient, predictable and sustained support for UNRWA and its services until a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestine refugees is found. I also appeal to all to help shield the Agency and its humanitarian mandate from political considerations aimed at undermining Palestine refugees' rights under international law.

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

Letter dated 1 July 2021 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 July 2021, 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 2020, to be submitted to the General Assembly at its forthcoming session.

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. UNRWA was able to maintain essential services to Palestine refugees despite a still-worsening funding crisis during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

The Commission is concerned that the funding crisis in 2020 reached such levels as to necessitate the carry-over of \$75 million of deferred expenses into 2021, and that acute cash-flow problems in November and December 2020 resulted in delays to the payment of salaries of about 28,000 UNRWA staff, in addition to strict financial control measures. This only served to increase worries and concerns in the Palestine refugee communities, which is not conducive to the Agency's essential contributions to peace and stability.

The Commission is also concerned that such a situation could arise at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when UNRWA services and the stability that they bring were fully stretched. The Commission recognizes in this regard that Palestine refugees, being among the most marginalized of populations, experienced heightened vulnerability to the effects of the pandemic in terms of loss to livelihoods, increased exposure to health concerns in crowded camp conditions, increased protection threats and increasing incidence of poverty as a direct consequence of the pandemic.

At the same time, the Commission is seriously concerned about the long-term impact on the well-being and development of Palestine refugees caused by the new challenges to health, education and social services across all fields of Agency operation, in tandem with the extreme deterioration in the socioeconomic conditions of Palestine refugees as a consequence of the pandemic, while the Agency had insufficient resources available to invest adequately in the social safety net programme as an important avenue for mitigating poverty and the economic stress faced by Palestine refugees.

The Commission strongly commends UNRWA for the innovative ways in which it rose to the challenges posed by COVID-19, as outlined in the Commissioner-General's annual report, thus showcasing the Agency's strength as a front-line service provider. The Commission highly commends the rapid adjustments to service delivery to maintain core service provision in the fields of health, education, relief and social services, the social safety net, protection services and human rights. This includes the transition to distance learning in education, the adaptation of essential health services to ensure the safety of staff and patients and the scaling up of food and cash distribution for the most vulnerable. It also includes important services recognizing the increased needs of refugees during the pandemic relating to psychosocial support, protection, gender-based violence and the cash and food needs of the most vulnerable.

The Commission calls upon the international community to provide adequate and sustainable financial support to the Agency, in accordance with the capacity of each country, commensurate with the political support expressed by the overwhelming majority of nations that voted, during the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly, in 2019, to extend the UNRWA mandate. Limited resources and a lack of predictability are threats to the Agency's financial sustainability, efficiency and short- to medium-term planning capability. The Commission urges UNRWA to explore all innovative means, with the support of Commission members, to ensure that adequate funding solutions are found, and encourages the donor community to make multi-year pledges wherever possible and to fulfil those pledges in a timely manner, to ensure predictability of funding. The perpetual funding crises that undermine UNRWA and its contributions to peace and stability must be resolved. At the same time, the Commission would like to express its sincere appreciation to the donors that have continued to support the Agency financially and politically, as well as to the hosts for their steadfast support to the Agency and to Palestine refugees.

The Commission is concerned about the increasing levels of violence in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as well as the continuing forced displacements, destruction of homes, missed economic opportunities, movement restrictions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and ongoing restrictions on the movement of goods and persons into and out of the Gaza Strip, which continue to negatively affect Palestine refugees' lives. The continuing socioeconomic and political crisis in Lebanon, exacerbated by the port of Beirut explosion, and the ongoing conflict and protracted displacement in limited areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, are equally concerning to the Commission at a time when the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded economic frailties, led to a spike in unemployment and increased political, economic and security concerns. The Commission remains concerned about instability in many parts of the region and its impact on Palestine refugees in the UNRWA fields of operation.

The Commission remains concerned about the level of threats and attacks against UNRWA personnel and structures, and about the status of agency staff who are missing, detained, kidnapped or presumed detained. Restrictions are inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations, the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations and related United Nations resolutions and agreements with relevant countries. The Commission is concerned by the restrictions and neutrality violations of UNRWA installations mentioned in the report of the Commissioner-General and calls upon all parties to respect the inviolability and neutrality of UNRWA installations.

The Commission reiterates the important role that UNRWA will continue to play in the region until a just, lasting and sustainable solution for Palestine refugees is reached in accordance with 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 5.7 million, and accordingly recognizes the ongoing vulnerability and growing needs of Palestine refugees affected by displacement and its consequences for more than 73 years.

(Signed) Sultan **Al Shamsi**

Chapter I

Contextual overview

A. Political, economic and security developments

1. In 2020, an unstable regional environment, violence and marginalization, exacerbated by the onset of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, deepened the vulnerability of Palestine refugees across the five fields of operation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA): Gaza; the West Bank, including East Jerusalem; the Syrian Arab Republic; Lebanon and Jordan. In this context, and in line with its mandate as provided by the United Nations General Assembly to support up to 5.8 million registered Palestine refugees, 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 a highly volatile political, security and socioeconomic environment, UNRWA provided assistance to 1,476,706 registered Palestine refugees in Gaza.¹ In 2020, steps to end the long-standing political divide between Fatah and Hamas failed to materialize, and parliamentary and presidential elections, agreed between factions for 2020, were deferred to 2021. Between May and November, Palestinian authorities suspended all bilateral contact with the Israeli authorities in response to West Bank annexation plans,² which deepened the economic crisis across the occupied Palestinian territory and further constrained movement from Gaza to Israel through the Erez crossing.³

3. Security conditions in Gaza remained volatile. During the first quarter of 2020, demonstrations were organized against the “Peace to Prosperity” initiative of the Government of the United States of America. An escalation of hostilities occurred on 23 and 24 February in response to the killing of a member of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad who was allegedly placing an explosive device along the perimeter fence with Israel. In an incident caught on camera, his body was retrieved by an Israeli bulldozer in a manner that triggered outrage. Subsequently, Hamas or other Palestinian armed groups fired approximately 80 rockets and mortars towards Israel, and over 20 Israelis were reportedly injured. The Israeli military responded with multiple airstrikes, reportedly injuring 12 Palestinians.⁴

4. COVID-19 placed a further burden on the already degraded health system in Gaza. On 5 March, a state of emergency was declared, and public health efforts were

¹ An additional 166,845 “other registered persons” are registered with the Agency in Gaza. “Other registered persons” refers 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 United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “End of Palestinian Authority coordination with Israel in response to annexation threat: decision already impacting medical referrals”, 20 July 2020.

³ Ibid., “Overview: August–September 2020”, 12 October 2020.

⁴ Ibid., “Overview: January–February 2020”, 3 March 2020.

refocused to respond to the pandemic.⁵ The number of cases remained relatively low until the first instances of local transmission were recorded, on 24 August, but rose rapidly thereafter. In response, the de facto authorities enacted a series of restrictions, including periodic lockdowns. As at 31 December 2020, 40,575 cases, including 356 deaths, had been recorded.⁶

5. In June, the blockade of Gaza entered its fourteenth year, aggravating an already dire humanitarian and economic crisis. Limited economic activity, compounded by the ongoing political divide, Palestine's worsening financial situation, its severing of ties with Israel for some seven months, a reduction in social assistance, deteriorating public infrastructure and the impact of COVID-19, hindered the delivery of essential services. The unemployment rate reached 43.1 per cent.⁷ A chronic electricity shortage continued to disrupt the daily lives of residents, inhibiting access to health care, water and sanitation, and economic opportunities. Access to clean water remained at a critically low level, with over 90 per cent of the household supply being non-potable.⁸

West Bank

6. Throughout 2020, the daily lives of 871,537 Palestine refugees⁹ registered with UNRWA in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, remained heavily affected by the Israeli occupation. The first months of the year were dominated by the "Peace to Prosperity" initiative of the Government of the United States and plans by the Government of Israel to annex areas of the West Bank,¹⁰ triggering demonstrations and a decision by Palestine to suspend all cooperation with Israel and sever ties with the United States.¹¹ After a brief lull following the onset of COVID-19, Israeli military operations and security incidents, including settler violence, increased. In 2020, the Israeli security forces conducted more than 5,800 operations, in which 27 Palestinians, including 3 Palestine refugees, were killed and a further 1,842 Palestinians were injured. During the same period, three fatalities and 131 injuries were recorded among Israelis. Of the operations conducted by the Israeli security forces, 568 occurred in Palestine refugee camps in the West Bank. In the Arroub and Shu'fat camps, the Israeli security forces conducted, on average, nearly three operations each week, many of which involved the use of live ammunition and tear gas and resulted in injuries, property damage and pronounced psychosocial consequences.¹²

7. In 2020, the Israeli authorities increased the rate of demolition of Palestinian homes and businesses, leading to a sharp increase in displacement. Palestinian communities, especially 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. The United Nations has noted that, owing to the Israeli zoning and planning regime, as well as charges levied on construction, which may lead to discrimination, it is almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain

⁵ Mussa Qawasma, "Palestinians declare coronavirus emergency as Church of the Nativity closed", *Reuters*, 5 March 2020.

⁶ World Health Organization (WHO), Coronavirus Disease Dashboard. Available at <https://covid19.who.int/>.

⁷ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Labour force survey (October–December 2020) round (Q4/2020)", Press Report Labour Force Survey (Ramallah, State of Palestine, 2021).

⁸ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Gaza: water and sanitation services severely disrupted due to the energy crisis", 24 November 2015.

⁹ An additional 211,116 other registered persons are registered with the Agency in the West Bank.

¹⁰ United Nations, "UN chief urges Israel to abandon annexation plans", UN News, 24 June 2020.

¹¹ Omar Fahmy and Ulf Laessing, "Palestinians cut ties with Israel, U.S. after rejecting peace plan", *Reuters*, 1 February 2020.

¹² UNRWA West Bank Field Office, protection database.

building permits. The Israeli authorities maintain that building permits are a matter of law and order. At least 847 Palestinian-owned structures were demolished in 2020, of which 218 belonged to Palestine refugees, representing a 34 per cent increase in Palestinian-owned structures demolished and a 10 per cent increase in demolished structures owned by Palestine refugees compared with 2019.¹³

8. On 5 March 2020, Palestine declared a state of emergency and imposed a 30-day national lockdown to counter the spread of COVID-19.¹⁴ Schools and non-essential businesses were closed, and subsequent lockdowns were introduced throughout the remainder of the year. As at 31 December 2020, 96,869 confirmed cases, including 1,015 deaths, had been recorded in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.¹⁵ The pandemic compounded an already difficult socioeconomic situation; the economy contracted by 11.5 per cent,¹⁶ and the unemployment rate increased to 14.9 per cent.¹⁷ The temporary suspension by the Palestinian leadership of ties with Israel following the announcement of plans to annex parts of the West Bank and the refusal to accept tax revenues collected by the Government of Israel on behalf of the Palestinian Authority contributed to the worsening economic situation. In December, \$1.14 billion of those revenues were released.¹⁸

Syrian Arab Republic

9. The crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to pose severe challenges for the population, including the estimated 438,000 Palestine refugees who remain in the country.¹⁹ In 2020, approximately 40 per cent of that population remained in a state of protracted displacement, with the combined impact of the conflict, COVID-19 and an economic crisis reinforcing an already dire humanitarian situation.

10. While active conflict subsided in large areas of the Syrian Arab Republic, fighting continued in Idlib Governorate and the surrounding areas. In Dar'a Governorate, reconciliation agreements became increasingly fragile and tensions mounted between government and non-State armed groups. Explosive remnants of war continued to claim the lives of civilians, including one death and one injury among Palestine refugees,²⁰ and the threat posed by improvised explosive devices remained a concern. The situation was further inflamed by regional tensions.

11. The first case of COVID-19 in the Syrian Arab Republic was announced on 22 March, leading to the suspension of all non-essential business, public transport and social and cultural activities. The pandemic stretched the resources of the health system, and the actual number of cases was unknown owing to limited testing capacity, in particular in remote areas.²¹ As at 31 December 2020, the country had registered 11,344 cases, including 704 deaths.²²

¹³ Ibid. In 2019, 196 demolished structures were owned by Palestine refugees.

¹⁴ Qawasma, "Palestinians declare coronavirus emergency" (see footnote 5).

¹⁵ WHO, Coronavirus Disease Dashboard.

¹⁶ World Bank, "Palestinian territories' economic update: April 2021", 2 April 2021.

¹⁷ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Labour force survey (October–December 2020)" (see footnote 7).

¹⁸ Reuters, "Israel hands over \$1 billion in Palestinian tax backlog in sign of warming ties", 2 December 2020.

¹⁹ Some 568,730 Palestine refugees and an additional 86,999 other registered persons are registered with the Agency in the Syrian Arab Republic.

²⁰ On 26 September 2020, a boy was killed and another injured (both Palestine refugees) as a result of a reported detonation of unexploded ordnance in the vicinity of Dar'a camp.

²¹ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and WHO, "Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 response update, No. 14, 12 January 2021.

²² WHO, Coronavirus Dashboard.

12. The pandemic increased socioeconomic pressures on Syrians and Palestine refugees alike. According to an assessment by UNRWA in July 2020, almost 80 per cent of surveyed refugees stated that their food consumption had decreased, and over 90 per cent had resorted to cheaper and less nutritious food since the onset of the pandemic. Those hardships were amplified under a rapidly deteriorating economy. Palestine refugees faced widespread unemployment, loss of assets and livelihoods, shortages of fuel and electricity and a sharp increase in commodity prices. As of December 2020, the average cost of the standard reference food basket²³ had increased by 236 per cent during the year,²⁴ while the value of the Syrian pound against the United States dollar declined, reaching a low of 3,200 Syrian pounds to 1 United States dollar in June 2020.²⁵ The economic situation was exacerbated by the crisis in Lebanon, a nation that had served as a source of hard currency and remittances and as a destination for deposits.²⁶ Despite the economic climate, massive destruction and depleted infrastructure and services, UNRWA recorded 1,383 Palestine refugee returns to the Syrian Arab Republic, mostly from Lebanon and Jordan.

Lebanon

13. In 2020, Lebanon grappled with three overlapping crises: (a) the tenth year of the Syrian refugee crisis; (b) the impact of COVID-19; and (c) the socioeconomic and political crisis that had begun in 2019. The Government of Lebanon estimates that the country hosts 1.5 million persons who fled the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic,²⁷ of whom 865,531 are registered as refugees with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees²⁸ and 27,803 are registered as Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic with UNRWA. In addition, 479,537 Palestine refugees in Lebanon are registered with the Agency, but it is estimated that less than half remain in the country.²⁹

14. Despite the formation of a new government on 21 January 2020,³⁰ civil unrest in response to the economic situation and political inability to enact reforms

²³ Consisting of dry goods that provide 1,930 kcal per day for five family members during a month. The basket includes bread (37 kg), rice (19 kg), lentils (19 kg), sugar (5 kg) and vegetable oil (7 litres).

²⁴ World Food Programme, "Syria country office", *Market Price Watch Bulletin*, No. 73 (December 2020).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 67 (June 2020). In June 2019, the national average informal exchange rate was 589 Syrian pounds to 1 United States dollar. Inflation spiked in June 2020 owing to political tensions among the ruling elite of the Syrian Arab Republic and trader uncertainty surrounding the likely impact of further United States sanctions that came into force that month. The economic outlook fuelled currency speculation, causing volatility in the informal exchange rate, which jumped from 1,800 Syrian pounds to 3,200 Syrian pounds against the United States dollar in June before stabilizing around 2,500 Syrian pounds to 1 United States dollar.

²⁶ Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Syria's Assad says billions locked in troubled Lebanese banks behind economic crisis", *Reuters*, 5 November 2020.

²⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Global Focus, "Lebanon". Available at <https://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2520?y=2020#year>.

²⁸ UNHCR, Operational Data Portal, "Syria regional refugee response". Available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71> (last updated 31 May 2021).

²⁹ UNRWA, Refugee Registration Information System, Quarter 4, 2020. In addition, 64,287 other registered persons are registered with the Agency in Lebanon. According to an official Lebanese-Palestinian census conducted in 2017, some 174,422 "Palestinian refugees" were found to reside in the 12 official Palestine refugee camps and 156 gatherings across Lebanon. The census counted Palestine refugees physically present in those locations at midnight on 17 July 2017 and did not aim to provide a headcount of all Palestine refugees living in the country (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee and Central Administration of Statistics of Lebanon, "Population and housing census in Palestinian camps and gatherings, 2017: key findings report" (Beirut, 2018)).

³⁰ Reuters, "Lebanon forms government with backing of Hezbollah and allies", 21 January 2020.

continued throughout the year, leading to casualties among demonstrators and law enforcement personnel. Enmity towards the Government increased further on 4 August, when a fire in the port of Beirut ignited 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate.³¹ The subsequent explosion killed 190 people, injured some 6,500 and left an estimated 300,000 homeless. The damage was estimated at \$15 billion.³² The explosion led to the resignation of the Government, and Saad Hariri was reappointed as Prime Minister on 22 October 2020.³³

15. In February, the first cases of COVID-19 were recorded in Lebanon, leading to a nationwide lockdown from 15 March to 24 May that included the closure of the border, airports, schools and non-essential businesses. Subsequent nationwide and localized lockdowns were imposed in August, October and November. As at 31 December 2020, Lebanon had recorded 177,996 cases, including 1,443 deaths.³⁴ The pandemic worsened an already dire economic situation. In March, the Government defaulted on its sovereign debt for the first time,³⁵ and in July, negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for financial assistance broke down.³⁶ According to the World Bank, inflation hit 120 per cent in August, severely affecting the ability of the population to fulfil their basic food needs and increasing malnutrition.³⁷ The country's economy shrank by 20.3 per cent during the reporting period, and amidst the unfolding crisis the poverty rate rose from 28 per cent in 2019 to 55 per cent in 2020, with 23.2 per cent of the population estimated to live in extreme poverty.³⁸

16. Palestine refugees were already among the most vulnerable and marginalized communities in Lebanon, with deteriorating conditions adding to their hardship. They remained barred from 39 professions and endured a precarious legal status. As a result, Palestine refugees faced high rates of poverty and unemployment. Despite such a complex environment, the overall security situation in most Palestine refugee camps in Lebanon remained stable.

Jordan

17. In Jordan, 2,307,011 Palestine refugees are registered with the Agency, the majority of whom possess Jordanian citizenship, which allows them to enjoy the same rights as other Jordanian citizens.³⁹ The approximately 171,616 Palestine refugees who fled from Gaza to Jordan in 1967 stand as an exception, as those individuals do not have Jordanian citizenship and face restricted access to some public services and livelihood opportunities, although their rights and privileges have been expanded in recent years.⁴⁰ In addition, 17,343 Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic

³¹ Samia Nakhoul and Laila Bassam, "Lebanon's leaders were warned in July about explosives at port: documents", *Reuters*, 10 August 2020.

³² Reuters, "Beirut port blast death toll rises to 190", 30 August 2020.

³³ Ellen Francis and Maha El Dahan, "In his comeback as Lebanon's PM, Hariri vows to halt collapse", *Reuters*, 22 October 2020.

³⁴ WHO, Coronavirus Disease Dashboard.

³⁵ World Bank, Middle East and North Africa Region, *Lebanon Economic Monitor: The Deliberate Depression* (2020).

³⁶ Reuters, "Lebanon's IMF talks on hold, finance minister says", 3 July 2020.

³⁷ Lebanon Nutrition Task Force and Lebanon Food Security Sector, "Call for action on infant and young child feeding and nutrition in the response to the Beirut port explosion" (September 2020).

³⁸ Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), "Poverty in Lebanon: solidarity is vital to address the impact of multiple overlapping shocks", ESCWA Policy Brief, No. 15 (August 2020).

³⁹ An additional 156,119 other registered persons are registered with the Agency in Jordan.

⁴⁰ Expanded rights and privileges include: (a) an exemption from work permit fees and other stamps and service fees for ex-Gazans with permanent residency in Jordan; (b) the right to obtain a driving licence and to own up to two vehicles; (c) the right to obtain a temporary passport for two or five years; and (d) the right for ex-Gazans with permanent residency in Jordan to own property on land not exceeding 1,000 square metres.

in Jordan were registered with UNRWA as at the end of 2020. The estimated 9.9 per cent of those refugees without legal status in the country remained particularly vulnerable given their restricted access to the labour market, courts, civil status and registration, and the humanitarian assistance available to other refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic in Jordan. Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic also faced the constant threat of detention and possible forcible return. 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 temporary access to State services for Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic fleeing the conflict in that country for humanitarian reasons.

18. In response to the onset of COVID-19, the Government of Jordan declared a state of emergency, including a nationwide lockdown from 13 March to 1 June 2020. During that period, the border, airports, schools and non-essential businesses were closed. Despite the initial success of those measures, by 31 December, Jordan had recorded 294,494 cases, including 3,834 deaths.⁴¹ Unemployment rose by 5.7 percentage points to 24.7 per cent,⁴² with youth unemployment projected to reach almost 35 per cent.⁴³ To mitigate pandemic-related hardship, the Government introduced stimulus measures, including loan repayment deferrals and a reduction in the ratio of compulsory reserves to be held by banks.⁴⁴ In May, IMF provided \$396 million in emergency financial assistance.⁴⁵ Despite those measures, the economy of Jordan contracted by 2.2 per cent,⁴⁶ and the poverty rate increased by 11 percentage points to 26.7 per cent.⁴⁷

B. Operational and organizational developments

19. In an operating environment that was heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and had disproportionate effects on the poorest and most vulnerable, UNRWA maintained the delivery of human development, protection and humanitarian assistance through a collective commitment by the Agency, host countries and the international community. In this regard, UNRWA provided 5,798,904 primary health-care consultations in its five fields of operation.⁴⁸ General education of widely acclaimed quality was made available for 533,342 children enrolled in UNRWA schools, under the Agency's curriculum framework, which emphasizes critical thinking skills and is aligned with United Nations values.⁴⁹ Social safety net assistance, including cash and food, was delivered to 390,443 vulnerable beneficiaries, technical and vocational education and training was provided for 8,270 young people, and microfinance loans were granted to 21,339 clients.⁵⁰ In addition, 1,082 shelters, three health centres and 13 schools were either constructed, upgraded or rehabilitated. Protection assistance extended across all UNRWA fields of operation,

⁴¹ WHO, Coronavirus Disease Dashboard.

⁴² Jordan, Department of Statistics, "24.7% unemployment rate during the fourth quarter of 2020", 9 March 2021.

⁴³ Statista, "Jordan: youth unemployment rate from 1999 to 2020", June 2021.

⁴⁴ Central Bank of Jordan, "The Central Bank of Jordan announces a set of procedures aimed to contain the repercussions of the emerging corona virus impact on the national economy", press release, March 2020.

⁴⁵ International Monetary Fund, "IMF Executive Board approves US\$396 million in emergency assistance to Jordan to address the COVID-19 pandemic", press release No. 20/222, 21 May 2020.

⁴⁶ Jordan, Department of Statistics, "-2.2 per cent GDP decrease rate at constant prices in the third quarter of 2020 compared with the same period of 2019", 4 January 2021.

⁴⁷ World Bank, "Jordan's economic update: October 2020", 19 October 2020.

⁴⁸ An additional 325,811 telemedicine consultations were provided in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

⁴⁹ See www.unrwa.org/what-we-do/education.

⁵⁰ Of those clients, 8,200 were Palestine refugees.

with an emphasis on advocacy and equipping Agency personnel to deliver practical protection outcomes for Palestine refugees.

20. The UNRWA response to the pandemic showcased the Agency's strength as an innovative front-line service provider. In this regard, UNRWA: (a) maintained core primary health-care, education, sanitation and social protection services; (b) adapted working modalities, including through the introduction of telemedicine and staggered health centre appointment and triage protocols, the home delivery of essential medicines and the use of remote learning to minimize the spread of the virus; and (c) scaled up cash and food distributions for the most vulnerable. This response was facilitated through dedicated COVID-19 flash appeals, underpinned by the Agency's core infrastructure and staff.

21. The provision of food assistance remained a priority in Gaza. Using emergency funds, the Agency supported the nutritional needs of 1,043,173 vulnerable Palestine refugees. UNRWA also provided temporary cash-for-work opportunities for 8,105 refugees, including 2,400 women. Health services were maintained through 22 health centres. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, emergency in-kind food assistance continued to be provided, in partnership with the World Food Programme, to 37,000 food-insecure or vulnerable individuals from Bedouin and herder communities, and 24,218 abject poor Palestine refugees received emergency cash assistance. The Agency also continued to monitor, document, report and provide emergency assistance to those affected by protection threats.

22. In 2020, UNRWA provided vital humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic and Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic in Lebanon and Jordan.⁵¹ In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Agency distributed emergency cash assistance to 415,781 Palestine refugees and additional in-kind food assistance to 145,365 of the most vulnerable. Some 49,145 Palestine refugee students in the Syrian Arab Republic were educated in Agency schools, and primary health care was maintained through 25 health facilities. In Lebanon, cash grants served the food, housing and winterization needs of 27,398 Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic, and 4,935 Palestine refugee children from the Syrian Arab Republic benefited from quality, inclusive and equitable education. Primary health care was provided through 27 health centres, and 5,218 Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic received vital protection services. In Jordan, 16,571 Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic received cash assistance to support their basic needs. A further 1,063 Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic and Syrian children received education in 131 UNRWA schools in Jordan.

23. During the reporting period, significant progress was achieved in the implementation of a set of management reforms (management initiatives), developed in 2019 and 2020, to strengthen the accountability, transparency, management and governance of UNRWA and to facilitate renewed stakeholder confidence and support. Key highlights of the measures taken in 2020 include: (a) enhanced reporting and interaction with the Advisory Commission; (b) the review of the charter of the Department of Internal Oversight Services and the terms of reference of the Advisory Committee on Internal Oversight, both of which reinforced those bodies' robust oversight and reporting functions; and (c) the approval of new terms of reference that strengthened the institutional independence of the Ethics Office. With regard to transparency, UNRWA began to publish its financial data on the International Aid Transparency Initiative portal. In addition, inclusive and enhanced management was promoted through: (a) the establishment of an executive committee as the chief

⁵¹ UNRWA also coordinates support for some 3,000 Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic in Egypt. In 2020, those refugees were provided with health and food assistance by United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners.

mechanism for decision-making on issues of Agency-wide significance; and (b) reviews of the protection function and the External Relations and Communications Department. Measures were also taken to streamline and revitalize human resources and recruitment processes at UNRWA, including the adoption of Inspira, the recruitment platform of the Secretariat, the approval of an international staff selection policy and the provision of staff counselling.

24. In 2020, UNRWA neared financial collapse and a suspension of all critical services, as voluntary donor contributions dropped to the same level as in 2013. Critical operations were sustained only through the additional support of donors and \$30 million in loans from the Central Emergency Response Fund. That situation arose even though the Agency continued its cost-control and austerity measures, including a 90 per cent allocation against the approved programme budget, strict vacancy management and reductions in non-staff costs. Since 2015, those measures have reduced expenditure by over \$500 million and resulted in a further reduction of the programme budget by \$85 million in 2020. However, austerity and cost control have reached their limits, and further slashing of the UNRWA budget will not only come at a further cost to Palestine refugees but, as from now, to the core of the Agency's mandate.

C. Legal matters

Agency staff

25. The Israeli authorities continued to restrict freedom of movement for UNRWA personnel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, on the basis of the authorities' broad security concerns in the territory. Restrictions included: (a) the prohibition of local Agency staff not resident in Jerusalem from travelling in United Nations vehicles through the Erez crossing (into and out of Gaza) and over the Allenby Bridge (into and out of Jordan), or from driving 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, required permits to enter East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank were not issued to 20 per cent (122 individuals) of UNRWA area personnel.

26. Israeli procedures at the Allenby Bridge continued to require that United Nations vehicles undergo searches 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. Those procedures restricted the movement of international Agency staff based in Amman, to whom the Ministry does not issue such cards. On the basis of new procedures introduced in 2019, the Israeli authorities continued to insist that holders of a red United Nations laissez-passer without an identification card issued by the Ministry obtain clearance from the Ministry in advance in order to be exempted from the exit fee when travelling to Jordan across the Allenby Bridge, thus causing additional delays.

27. Measures introduced by the Israeli authorities in 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 X-ray inspections. With the exception of senior officials, all passengers were required to walk through a metal detector and, unless they held an identification card issued by the Ministry, undergo a body scan. Those 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, and staff complied with the procedures under protest.

28. 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 2020, those movement restrictions resulted in the loss of at least 27 staff-days, a substantial decrease from 2019, when at least 86 staff days were lost. In this context, it is worth noting that overall staff movement was significantly reduced in 2020 owing to COVID-19-related restrictions. On two occasions at checkpoints in the West Bank, including for entry into East Jerusalem, the Israeli authorities demanded to search UNRWA vehicles. Although a search was avoided during both incidents, the authorities refused to allow the vehicles to pass. In addition, on at least three other occasions, personnel assigned to the UNRWA West Bank Field Office were prevented from going to work because access through checkpoints was denied. Searches were avoided through UNRWA interventions, rerouting or turning back. Despite several requests for unimpeded humanitarian access, it remained difficult and, at times, operationally unfeasible to deliver Agency services in some areas in the “seam zone” (between the Green Line and the West Bank barrier). The situation regarding requirements for UNRWA and other United Nations trucks to use specific commercial checkpoints to enter Jerusalem remained unchanged.

29. The aforementioned restrictions are inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations, the 1946 Convention, relevant United Nations resolutions and the Comay-Michelmores Agreement of 1967, by which the Government of Israel is obligated to facilitate the task 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.

30. In 2020, the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza was open for humanitarian cases, students and holders of visas for a third country for 126 days. The ban imposed by the United Nations on duty travel for staff travelling through Rafah remained in place owing to the security situation in the Sinai.

31. In Lebanon, the volatile security situation in Palestine refugee camps in the Saida and north Lebanon areas resulted, at times, in movement restrictions that affected UNRWA staff and operations. No significant movement restrictions were imposed on Agency staff by the Governments of Jordan or the State of Palestine; however, the Jordanian authorities at the Nasib border crossing searched UNRWA vehicles on two occasions in 2020. In addition, on one occasion, a staff member travelling on mission was denied entry into Jordan at the Nasib crossing. The de facto authorities in Gaza restricted the movement of Agency staff on three occasions and searched UNRWA vehicles on at least two occasions in 2020.

32. The Agency protested these incidents with the relevant authorities as breaches of its privileges and immunities.

33. The Agency continued to apply for permits from the Israeli authorities for local staff in Gaza to transit the Erez crossing. In 2020, 136 applications were submitted and 28 permits were granted, bearing in mind movement restrictions and the closure of the Erez crossing from March 2020 onward as a result of COVID-19. Compared with 2019, the number of applications increased by 60 per cent, and the overall percentage of permit applications that were not granted increased from 19.3 to 79.5 per cent. Considering that the Department of Safety and Security has not approved travel through Rafah for security reasons, the denial of permits to transit

through Erez and delays in processing such permits continued to have a negative impact on Agency operations, including by preventing staff from attending important meetings, training courses and conferences and from performing their relevant duties outside Gaza. Despite repeated requests, UNRWA has not received a substantive justification as to why permits were not approved.

34. The visa application procedures introduced by Israel in 2019 remained in place. As at the end of 2020, no visa applications for Agency personnel or Junior Professional Officers were pending with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel.

35. Since 2017, UNRWA has been unable to secure residence permits for three expatriate UNRWA area staff members in Jordan owing to the refusal by the Government to exempt such staff members from the requirement of a labour permit and the associated fees. In 2020, the Agency continued to pay those fees under protest.

36. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the security situation in the capital, north and central areas continued to stabilize during the reporting period. The security situation in the south deteriorated, and there were frequent reports of kidnappings and targeted killings, including of civilians, in Dar'ā. Armed conflict, asymmetric attacks, terrorist attacks and generalized insecurity continued to seriously affect free movement and humanitarian access, in particular in the south, where security incidents were more frequent. While some checkpoints in the capital and central areas were removed, checkpoints in other areas remained. In 2020, 89 visa applications (for residency and visits) were submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for international personnel, of which 84 were approved and 5 rejected, including in relation to one international staff member who was declared *persona non grata*.

37. At the end of 2020, 17 Agency staff were missing, detained, kidnapped or presumed detained: 9 were believed to be missing, detained or kidnapped in the Syrian Arab Republic, either by the Syrian authorities or other parties,⁵² 5 were believed to have been detained by the Israeli authorities, 2 by the de facto authorities in Gaza⁵³ and 1 by the Palestinian authorities. Despite requests in accordance with General Assembly resolution 36/232, the Syrian authorities did not provide the Agency with access but provided information about certain staff members who remained in their custody during the year. The Israeli authorities provided some information regarding the reasons for the detention of some staff members in their custody throughout 2020 but did not provide access to those staff members. 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 regarding the staff in their custody.

Agency services and premises

38. The Israeli authorities continued to impose transit charges on shipments entering Gaza, requiring UNRWA to pay \$1.36 million in 2020. 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 a service, from which there is no exemption. From November 2016 onward, UNRWA vehicles could only be imported through the Erez crossing. For all other Agency imports, Kerem Shalom remained the sole crossing for imports into Gaza. It was fully open for imports of all goods and construction materials on 242 of 261 scheduled operating days and closed only for construction materials on 58 out of 261 scheduled operating days. The continued

⁵² In addition, as at the end of 2020, 10 non-staff personnel in the Syrian Arab Republic were also believed to be missing, detained or kidnapped, either by the Syrian authorities or other parties.

⁵³ This does not include two staff members who were on temporary release from detention by the de facto authorities in Gaza as at 31 December 2020 owing to the COVID-19 situation, but who will be returned to detention once the situation is under control.

closure of the Karni crossing and the prohibition of containerized imports, in place since 2006, contributed to the increase in UNRWA expenditure by \$10.6 million resulting from storage, palletization, sterilization and additional mileage and staff, in addition to transit charges levied on imports through the Kerem Shalom and Erez crossings.

39. Conditions relating to Agency construction projects in Gaza and related approvals remained in place in 2020. 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 their security concerns, incurring almost \$95,000 in extra costs in 2020. 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 delays in the processing of import requests for materials and equipment, some of which Israel classifies as dual-use items, continued to have a negative impact on Agency operations.

40. In 2020 alone, additional staffing, transit and logistical costs resulting from Israeli requirements regarding access and the monitoring of all UNRWA imports into Gaza amounted to \$12.023 million. That figure does not include similar access costs incurred by private contractors shipping construction materials into Gaza through Kerem Shalom under the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism.

41. In August 2020, the Israeli authorities requested that UNRWA install a GPS tracking system and provide the Agency's electronic credentials to access the system, as a condition for approving the shipment of a generator for official use by the Agency in Gaza. The Agency protested the requirement as contrary to its privileges and immunities pursuant to the 1946 Convention. The matter had not been resolved by the end of 2020.

42. The Israeli authorities continued to require standards testing for educational, electronic, medical and other items for official use, and on one occasion the Standards Institution of Israel inspected an UNRWA shipment intended for official use in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. 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 under the 1946 Convention in respect of articles imported by the United Nations for official use.

43. Arrears of \$90.9 million accrued as value-added tax reimbursements 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 2020, the Agency accrued an additional \$0.32 million in value-added tax. In 2020, UNRWA received reimbursement of \$0.31 million, and the cumulative total owed to the Agency for the reimbursement of value-added tax paid for services and goods procured in the West Bank and Gaza amounted to \$100.88 million as at 31 December 2020.⁵⁴ UNRWA makes periodic claims to the relevant authorities for the outstanding amounts.

44. During the reporting period, the Israeli authorities paid \$1.06 million in value-added tax reimbursements owed to the Agency. As at 31 December 2020, \$7.39 million in value-added tax reimbursements remained outstanding.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Based on unaudited financial information.

⁵⁵ Based on unaudited financial information.

45. 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 2020, fees and charges totalling \$103,366.80 were paid.

46. With regard to the “fuel price charge” that had been levied against electricity consumption by the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources of Jordan in 2018 and 2019, the Agency was unable to secure an exemption from the charge nor reimbursement of all payments, which were made under protest, on the basis of the argument that the charge amounts to a tax from which UNRWA is exempt pursuant to the 1946 Convention. The position of the Jordanian authorities – namely, that the charge was a fee for services rendered in connection with provision of electricity – remained unchanged. The Agency continued to pay fees for the inspection of official UNRWA vehicles under protest. In addition, contrary to the Agency’s immunity from import restrictions and customs fees, the Jordanian authorities levied customs duties against the Agency’s two shipments of spare car parts for official UNRWA vehicles.

47. During 2020, neutrality inspections of installations were conducted across all five fields of Agency operation. The inspections were carried out to promote compliance with United Nations values and humanitarian principles, including the principles of humanity, neutrality and operational independence, and to promote the elimination of discrimination in all its forms.

48. The 1946 Convention provides that the premises of the United Nations are to be inviolable. Contrary to that provision, on one occasion the Israeli security forces entered UNRWA premises in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, without authorization in 2020. On at least eight occasions during the reporting period, tear gas canisters, stun grenades, plastic-coated metal bullets or live ammunition used by the Israeli security forces landed on Agency premises, including schools, or damaged UNRWA property. During at least three of those incidents, UNRWA staff members and beneficiaries were affected by tear gas. In Gaza, ammunition fired by the Israeli security forces landed inside or damaged Agency premises on at least two occasions.

49. Following the communication sent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel to the Agency in September 2019 confirming an official government policy aimed at outcompeting and making UNRWA redundant in East Jerusalem, municipal representatives and other Israeli government officials continued to express support for, and implement, that government policy. A representative of the Jerusalem municipality visited an Agency school in East Jerusalem and indicated that the municipality intended to use the installation as a compound for its schools in the area. In addition, on 18 February 2020, UNRWA received a letter from the Jerusalem municipality regarding Sur Baher Girls’ School, requesting the Agency to allow the inspection and measurement of the premises to verify billing information. UNRWA confirmed that the Agency had no intention of changing its service provision and would continue to meet the needs of the Palestine refugee population in the camp in accordance with its mandate. UNRWA has liaised with the Office of Legal Affairs and discussed its concerns relating to these matters.

50. During 2020, and within financial and COVID-19-related constraints, UNRWA continued to implement the recommendations of the United Nations Headquarters Board of Inquiry into certain incidents that occurred in the Gaza Strip between 8 July 2014 and 26 August 2014, referred to in previous reports.

51. The two claims submitted to Israel by the United Nations on 22 March 2018 for the reimbursement of losses sustained as a result of incidents that occurred at the Agency’s premises in Gaza during the 2014 hostilities, and that were the subject of the Board of Inquiry investigations, remained unsatisfied at the end of 2020. To date, the Agency is not aware of any further legal proceedings – criminal or disciplinary – instigated against those involved in the incidents that were the subject of those investigations. UNRWA remains concerned as to the need for accountability regarding

those and other incidents in which Agency installations were affected, contrary to their inviolability, and as a result of which UNRWA personnel and civilians sheltering in those installations were killed.

52. In the West Bank, there were no incursions into the Agency's premises by armed Palestinians in 2020. 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 28 occasions by forced closures or protests, including by members of camp service committees, during the reporting period.

53. There was one incursion into UNRWA premises by the de facto authorities in Gaza. In addition, shrapnel fell inside Agency installations on two occasions as a result of activities by Hamas or other Palestinian armed groups at a nearby military site. On one occasion during 2020, a hand grenade and a military vest were found inside the perimeter of an UNRWA school, and on two occasions, bullets from unknown sources hit Agency installations in Gaza. In addition, on two occasions, an improvised explosive device was detonated by unknown actors near a school in Gaza. The Agency protested any breaches of its privileges and immunities with the relevant authorities.

54. During 2020, Jordanian authorities entered an UNRWA installation and carried out an inspection without authorization on one occasion. UNRWA protested the incident with the Jordanian authorities, and they confirmed that appropriate measures would be taken to address the incident.

55. In the Syrian Arab Republic, as previously reported, UNRWA has sustained conflict-related property losses amounting to millions of United States 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 are severely damaged and in need of reconstruction, especially in Yarmouk, Ein el Tal and Dar'a. The situation of installations remained similar in 2020. During the reporting period, four incidents of unauthorized entry into UNRWA installations by the Syrian authorities or third parties were reported, including an incursion involving an armed group. In addition, on one occasion, the laptop of an UNRWA staff member was searched by Syrian authorities, in contravention of the 1946 Convention. The Agency sanitation office in Khan Dunoun continued to be used by military personnel at the adjacent checkpoint.

56. In 2020, there were closures of UNRWA installations on at least 40 days in Lebanon. Closures were mostly the result of strikes and protests by beneficiaries and general civil unrest. On one occasion, shots were fired into the air inside an Agency installation during the distribution of cash assistance. Palestinian factions closed UNRWA installations on several occasions to demand further support in view of the growing vulnerability and socioeconomic challenges faced by Palestine refugees in Lebanon, according to the organizers.

Other matters

57. 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 more than \$1.1 million in fines for the resale of electricity by popular committees in the Burj Barajneh and Shatila refugee camps. The Agency disputes its responsibility to pay those fines and formally protested against them to the Government of Lebanon.

58. In relation to the internal justice system, the UNRWA Dispute Tribunal, established in 2010, operates on a full-time basis and comprises one judge and a part-time ad litem judge. During 2020, the Tribunal issued 73 judgments, disposing of

92 cases. As at the end of 2020, 295 cases were pending (including 1 case on remand), of which 289 had been filed by area staff and 6 by international staff. There were also 10 appeals pending before the United Nations Appeals Tribunal.

Legal status of Palestine refugees in the Agency area of operations

59. The legal status of Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank 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

60. With the exception of 158 international staff posts funded by the General Assembly through the regular budget of the United Nations, 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.

61. In 2020, UNRWA resource mobilization efforts yielded a total pledged amount of \$587 million⁵⁶ for the Agency's core programme budget, against planned expenditure of \$806 million. In addition to donor contributions, the Agency's programme budget received income from other sources, such as indirect support costs, receipts from pledges made in previous years, foreign exchange gains, value-added tax reimbursements and the repayment of advances. After adopting several cost-control measures during the year, the agency still fell short of requirements and carried over liabilities of \$75 million to 2021.

62. UNRWA also budgeted \$155 million for the occupied Palestinian territory emergency appeal and \$270 million for the emergency appeal for the Syrian Arab Republic regional crisis. The 2020 emergency appeals for the occupied Palestinian territory and the Syrian Arab Republic were funded at 54 per cent and 41 per cent, respectively. UNRWA also announced a \$152 million flash appeal to cope with the additional humanitarian demands arising from the COVID-19 pandemic in the region, under which the Agency received 49.6 per cent of total requirements for the period March–December 2020.⁵⁶

63. Total donor contributions in 2020 across all funding portals (programme budget, emergency appeals and projects) amounted to \$957 million, including \$75.6 million under the COVID-19 flash appeal.⁵⁶ Those contributions fell short of the \$969 million realized in 2019 and were \$596 million short of the Agency's total requirements of \$1.383 billion across all portals in 2020.

64. The largest expenditure was under the unrestricted programme budget, accounting for 68.6 per cent of total expenditure. Emergency activities and projects (including restricted fund activities) accounted for 23.2 per cent and 8.2 per cent, respectively. Education remained the largest programme funded through the programme budget, expending 61 per cent, or \$472.41 million, of the total unrestricted programme budget.

⁵⁶ The data represent audited income received in 2020 through: (a) cash and in-kind contributions from donors and other United Nations entities; and (b) the regular budget of the United Nations.

Table 1
Expenditure by programme, 2020
 (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	231 458	30 49 290	6 25 996	3 100 142	13 63 320	8 2 200	– 472 406	61
Health	36 079	5 22 660	3 8 747	1 21 071	3 26 347	3 1 018	– 115 922	15
Relief and social services	11 762	2 12 176	2 3 748	– 9 746	1 9 485	1 840	– 47 757	6
Infrastructure	9 216	1 6 593	1 1 127	– 5 524	1 6 075	1 1 591	– 30 126	4
Executive direction	3 241	– 2 648	– 2 231	– 2 747	– 3 640	– 15 843	2 30 350	4
Protection	51	– 148	– 68	– 1	– 79	– 402	– 749	–
Support	19 523	3 8 172	1 4 399	1 6 179	1 10 602	1 28 856	4 77 731	10
Total	311 330	40 101 687	13 46 316	6 145 410	19 119 548	15 50 750^a	7 775 041	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	241 901	21 59 829	5 36 642	3 106 647	9 67 841	6 3 494	– 516 354	46
Health	47 872	4 29 205	3 13 953	1 25 675	2 31 439	3 3 757	– 151 901	13
Relief and social services	90 505	8 48 360	4 66 506	6 28 792	3 16 411	1 1 223	– 251 797	22
Infrastructure	32 100	3 16 903	1 1 986	– 6 991	1 13 200	1 2 548	– 73 728	7
Executive direction	4 378	– 6 009	1 3 599	– 3 408	– 5 415	– 19 608	2 42 417	4
Protection	276	– 1 040	– 1 065	– 533	– 1 230	– 1 064	– 5 208	–
Support	38 704	3 9 364	1 6 678	1 6 473	1 11 100	1 4 453	– 76 772	7
Microfinance	1 835	–	– 740	– 3 197	– 4 133	– -5	– 9 900	1
Total	457 571	41 170 710	15 131 169	12 181 716	16 150 769	13 36 142	3 1 128 077	100

^a The Headquarters expenditure under the programme budget includes programme support costs.

Table 2
Expenditure by medium-term strategic outcome, 2020

(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>
Refugees' rights under international law are protected and promoted	692	– 544	– 256	– 480	– 946	– 403	– 3 321	–
Refugees' health is protected and the disease burden is reduced	35 634	5 22 047	3 8 394	1 20 612	3 25 563	3 –	– 112 250	14
School-age children complete quality, equitable and inclusive basic education	224 560	29 44 812	6 24 198	3 91 788	12 55 380	7 –	– 440 738	57
Refugees' capabilities are strengthened for increased livelihood opportunities	7 272	1 4 183	1 1 846	– 7 303	1 8 457	1 440	– 29 501	4
Refugees are able to meet their basic human needs of food, shelter and environmental health	15 857	2 15 629	2 3 761	– 13 677	2 12 007	2 28	– 60 959	8
Management and operational effectiveness	27 315	4 14 472	2 7 861	1 11 550	1 17 195	2 49 879	6 128 272	17
Total	311 330	40 101 687	13 46 316	6 145 410	19 119 548	15 50 750^a	7 775 041	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>
Refugees' rights under international law are protected and promoted	916	– 1 436	– 1 285	– 1 013	– 2 101	– 1 064	– 7 815	1
Refugees' health is protected and the disease burden is reduced	46 901	4 28 393	3 12 630	1 25 061	2 30 417	3 44	– 143 446	13
School-age children complete quality, equitable and inclusive basic education	233 829	21 52 742	5 33 405	3 96 079	9 58 663	5 38	– 474 756	42
Refugees' capabilities are strengthened for increased livelihood opportunities	11 988	1 10 919	1 3 941	– 12 509	1 15 043	1 792	– 55 192	5
Refugees are able to meet their basic human needs of food, shelter and environmental health	114 163	10 55 856	5 66 246	6 33 322	3 20 624	2 931	– 291 142	26
Management and operational effectiveness	49 774	4 21 364	2 13 662	1 13 732	1 23 921	2 33 273	3 155 726	14
Total	457 571	41 170 710	15 131 169	12 181 716	16 150 769	13 36 142	3 1 128 077	100

^a The Headquarters expenditure under the programme budget includes programme support costs.

Chapter II

Subprogramme review

A. Subprogramme 1

Refugees' rights under international law are protected and promoted

65. 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. In 2020, Palestine refugees continued 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, 14 years of blockade in Gaza and a precarious legal status in some host countries. The onset of COVID-19 also exacerbated protection threats experienced by Palestine refugees, including gender-based violence and violence against children.

66. The Agency adapted its service delivery model to continue to address protection concerns faced by Palestine refugees across its five fields of operation. Protection mainstreaming, in and through UNRWA service delivery, was enhanced, while advocacy efforts were undertaken in relation to Palestine refugees' rights.

<i>Expected accomplishment</i>	<i>Indicator of achievement</i>	<i>Measurement</i>	
		<i>Unit of measure</i>	<i>Number/percentage</i>
(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 (2020)	507
		Target (2020)	507
		Actual (2020)	642
(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 (2020)	71.7
		Target (2020)	71.7
		Actual (2020)	60.5

Outputs

- Access to rehabilitation services and specialized support was extended to 7,045 Palestine refugees with disabilities.
- 130,486 Palestine refugees received psychosocial support.
- Legal counselling and referrals to legal service providers were provided for 8,039 Palestine refugees on issues including civil status, registration and gender-based violence.
- UNRWA made seven confidential submissions/briefings to international human rights mechanisms.
- Initiatives were implemented to address violence against children, to promote gender equality, the empowerment of women and the inclusion of persons with disabilities and to address gender-based violence.
- 4,549 UNRWA personnel received protection training.

B. Subprogramme 2 Refugees' health is protected and the disease burden is reduced

67. Throughout 2020, UNRWA focused on ensuring the continuity of health services to Palestine refugees despite the considerable challenges posed by COVID-19, the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, the fragile political and economic situation in Lebanon and ongoing restrictions and political instability in Gaza and the West Bank. The Agency initially responded to the pandemic by temporarily suspending the family health team approach to free up staff for a triage-based consultation system whereby patients with respiratory symptoms were segregated from other patients. In addition, health centres in four fields of UNRWA operation launched telemedicine hotlines, and home delivery of medicines was provided to patients with non-communicable diseases in order to limit their exposure to the virus. Enhanced cleaning of health centres and the distribution of personal protective equipment contributed to the safety of UNRWA health workers and patients, and the introduction of emergency teams and staff rotation served to maintain critical service provision.

68. A decline in the use of health services was recorded across all fields of Agency operation for different reasons: some patients sought to minimize their exposure to COVID-19 or were affected by restrictions on movement, and UNRWA prioritized direct access to health centres for life-saving and critical care to ensure the continuity of care and to avoid congestion at health centres. Some health indicators, in particular those related to the intake of new patients in the fields of maternal and child health, non-communicable diseases and mental health and psychosocial support, showed a decrease in performance. Nonetheless, UNRWA maintained the quality of its services with regard to reproductive health, the antibiotic prescription rate and the percentage of social safety net programme beneficiaries using hospitalization services. The integration of the e-health system also progressed, with only one health centre remaining unconnected to the system. In addition, three 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>Number/percentage</i>
(a) Universal access to quality, comprehensive primary health care	Average number of daily medical consultations per doctor	Baseline (2020)	78.0
		Target (2020)	74.9
		Actual (2020)	58.8
(b) Protection and promotion of family health	(i) Percentage of women in compliance with the minimum four antenatal care visits	Baseline (2020)	87.0
		Target (2020)	87.0
		Actual (2020)	75.5
	(ii) Percentage of targeted population (aged 40 years and above) screened for diabetes mellitus	Baseline (2020)	23.6
		Target (2020)	23.6
		Actual (2020)	9.1
	(iii) Number of Expanded Programme on Immunization vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks	Baseline (2020)	2
		Target (2020)	–
		Actual (2020)	–
(c) Efficient hospital support services provided	Percentage of UNRWA hospitalization services used by participants in the UNRWA social safety net programme	Baseline (2020)	23.7
		Target (2020)	23.7
		Actual (2020)	24.6

Outputs

- 5,798,904 medical consultations were provided to Palestine refugees.
- 69,207 Palestine refugees aged 40 years and older were screened for diabetes.
- Hospital care was provided for 77,324 patients.
- Three UNRWA health centres were constructed, upgraded or reconstructed to improve patient care. Some 73 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

69. Although the UNRWA education programme has navigated conflict-related emergencies since its establishment, COVID-19 posed unprecedented challenges. In line with host government decisions, all 709 Agency schools across the five fields of operation closed in March 2020, and students and teachers completed the 2019/20 academic year from home. Despite this significant setback, the education programme drew on the strong, resilient system put in place through the education reform undertaken in the period 2011–2016 and on its renowned education in emergencies programme.

70. Education retention indicators improved slightly, with the survival rate to the end of basic education increasing from 96.71 per cent in the 2018/19 school year to 97.25 per cent in 2019/20. Automatic grade promotion may have provided students who would have otherwise dropped out with motivation to stay in school, as repetition rates decreased to 0.09 and 0.57 per cent at the elementary and preparatory levels, respectively. Efforts to ensure access to remote learning and provide psychosocial support may have also helped to retain some of the most vulnerable learners. Those positive results were not observed among all students. Dropout rates increased in Lebanon, with the impact of political unrest and the pandemic as likely factors. Dropout rates also increased for female students Agency-wide, although those rates remain significantly lower than for male students.

<i>Expected accomplishment</i>	<i>Indicator of achievement</i>	<i>Measurement</i>	
		<i>Unit of measure</i>	<i>Number/percentage</i>
(a) Inclusive access to basic education	(i) Cumulative dropout rate (elementary)	Baseline (2019/20)	0.64
		Target (2019/20)	1.25
		Actual (2019/20)	0.61
	(ii) Cumulative dropout rate (preparatory)	Baseline (2019/20)	2.15
		Target (2019/20)	2.84
		Actual (2019/20)	1.71
(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 (2020)	401
		Target (2020)	N/A ^b
		Actual (2020)	435

<i>Expected accomplishment</i>	<i>Indicator of achievement</i>	<i>Measurement</i>	
		<i>Unit of measure</i>	<i>Number/percentage</i>
	(ii) Proportion of classes exceeding thresholds (25 or fewer; more than 40 students)	Baseline (2019/20)	52.66 (>40) 4.13 (≤25)
		Target (2019/20)	38.88 (>40) 5.97 (≤25)
		Actual (2019/20)	52.60 (>40) 5.12 (≤25)

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

^b A target is not set for this indicator as the result is influenced by the number of new textbooks, including new editions, issued by host countries during the year.

Outputs

In 2020, UNRWA:

- Continued to provide quality, inclusive and equitable education to Palestine refugee children.
- Effectively addressed student dropout rates, including through identifying students at risk of dropping out and working to prevent them from doing so.

Through the class formation process:

- The Agency successfully enrolled 533,342 Palestine refugee children for the 2019/20 academic year across all five fields of UNRWA operation.
- The percentage of sections with more than 40 students remained stable at 52.6 per cent during the 2019/20 academic year. Financial constraints required rigorous ongoing application of the ceiling of 50 students per class in purpose-built schools and growth in the percentage of classes falling just below that limit.

Through the infrastructure and camp improvement programme:

- The Agency constructed, reconstructed or upgraded 13 schools to meet UNRWA education reform, protection and safety requirements.

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

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

72. In March 2020, COVID-19 forced the closure of the eight UNRWA vocational training centres, the Education Science Faculty in the West Bank and the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts in Jordan. Learning for 8,270 students in technical and vocational education and training continued through online classes, facilitated by improved Internet connectivity and access to devices for students and by building the capacity of staff in online teaching approaches. The technical and vocational

education and training system was also strengthened by: (a) enhancing the relevance and responsiveness of courses to labour market needs; (b) developing a competency-based training framework; (c) improving access to technical and vocational education and training for the most vulnerable Palestine refugees; and (d) strengthening the student registration system to facilitate the tracking and analysis of students' academic progress.

73. Livelihood opportunities were promoted through the provision of microfinance loans in the West Bank, the Syrian Arab Republic, Gaza and Jordan. UNRWA disbursed \$16,463,292 in loan capital to 21,339 clients, of which \$8,107,440 was extended to 8,200 Palestine refugees. Agency microfinance offices closed at the onset of the pandemic, and loan repayments were deferred from April to June 2020. Following the resumption of operations, a conservative lending approach was adopted.

74. Under its infrastructure and camp improvement programme, the Agency worked to make a positive impact on local economies by driving community demand for construction materials and generating employment opportunities for camp residents.

75. Thirty partnership agreements were concluded in 2020 in support of poverty alleviation and enhanced livelihood opportunities that benefited 8,257 Palestine refugees, especially those with disabilities, young people and women, across all UNRWA fields of operation.

<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 (2019/20)	77.19
			Target (2019/20)	77.19
			Actual (2019/20)	68.30
	(b) Male	Baseline (2019/20)	83.17	
		Target (2019/20)	83.17	
		Actual (2019/20)	78.76	

Outputs

- Technical and vocational education was provided to 8,270 students in UNRWA vocational training centres during the 2019/20 academic year.
- The employment rate among graduates from vocational training centres (for 2019 graduates) decreased to 74.4 per cent, with 2,771 graduates employed or in further study. In addition, 82.6 per cent of graduates from the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts (Jordan) and the Education Science Faculty (West Bank) were employed.
- The proportion of social safety net programme beneficiaries enrolled in the first year at vocational training centres increased from 31 per cent in the 2018/19 academic year to 34.14 per cent of total enrolment in 2019/20.

<i>Expected accomplishment</i>	<i>Indicator of achievement</i>	<i>Measurement</i>	
		<i>Unit of measure</i>	<i>Number</i>
Refugees have improved access to livelihood opportunities	Total number of microfinance loans to refugees	Baseline (2020)	13 138
		Target (2020)	9 064
		Actual (2020)	8 200
	Number of employment opportunities (full-time equivalents) created from interventions of the infrastructure and camp improvement programme ^a	Baseline (2020)	2 595
		Target (2020)	2 095
		Actual (2020)	1 359

^a Excluding the Syrian Arab Republic.

Outputs

- 8,200 loans valued at \$8,107,440 were extended to Palestine refugees, corresponding to 38 per cent of all clients with loans and 49 per cent of the total disbursed value.
- Women were prioritized as loan recipients, and 9,865 loans (\$6,637,056), representing 46 per cent of all loans, were disbursed to women; 3,492 loans were extended to female refugees (\$2,925,030).
- 4,950 loans were disbursed to young people (\$4,011,311), of which 2,074 loans (\$1,756,434, or 44 per cent) were extended to young Palestine refugees.
- Camp improvement works were valued at \$32,000,000 and included the planning, design and construction of Agency facilities, shelters, schools and health centres, 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

76. The UNRWA social safety net programme is aimed at mitigating poverty and food insecurity among poor and vulnerable Palestine refugees, with priority assistance given to those in abject poverty⁵⁷ and vulnerable persons. To this end, the programme provides social transfers, including a basic food basket, cash transfers and/or electronic cash vouchers. In 2020, UNRWA served 390,443 beneficiaries of the programme in the Syrian Arab Republic (134,995),⁵⁸ Gaza (98,935), Lebanon (61,076), Jordan (59,308) and the West Bank (36,129). Although the value of Agency social transfers does not cover all basic needs, they represent a lifeline for those in greatest need.

77. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Agency provided emergency cash assistance to 415,781 Palestine refugees, and in Gaza, in-kind food assistance was extended to 1,043,173 Palestine refugees, including 16,399 female-headed households.

⁵⁷ UNRWA defines those in a state of abject poverty as individuals who cannot meet their basic food needs.

⁵⁸ Of the 415,781 Palestine refugees provided with cash grants under the emergency appeal for the Syrian Arab Republic regional crisis, some 134,995 also received a supplementary cash transfer of \$5 per person per month through the programme budget-funded social safety net programme.

78. 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", those camps now consist of narrow alleyways and improvised multilevel houses that accommodate growing families. Years of continued underfunding, coupled with depressed economic conditions, have translated into the degradation of living environments. The Agency estimates that over 40,000 substandard shelters, not including 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</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 (2020)	75.8
		Target (2020)	75.5
		Actual (2020)	74.4
	(ii) Percentage of poor individuals who receive social transfers through the social safety net programme	Baseline (2020)	13.6
		Target (2020)	13.6
		Actual (2020)	16.1
(b) Improved living conditions for poor refugees	Percentage of substandard shelters repaired or reconstructed	Baseline (2020)	12.0 ^a
		Target (2020)	13.5 ^a
		Actual (2020)	13.2 ^a

^a Excluding the Syrian Arab Republic.

Outputs

- In addition to the 390,443 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 1,043,173 in Gaza, 257,228 in the West Bank, 415,781 in the Syrian Arab Republic, 334,812 in Lebanon and 146,153 in Jordan.
- Temporary job opportunities were provided, benefiting 8,105 refugee households in Gaza.
- Shelters were rehabilitated for 1,086 families.

Endnote

79. 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 5.7 million registered Palestine refugees under its mandate at the end of 2020, and approximately 28,750 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.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ UNRWA does not formally register persons displaced and in need of continued assistance as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities (in the aftermath of the Six-Day War). Accordingly, the Agency does not have an official record of the number of those persons. Those eligible to receive UNRWA services in accordance with the Agency's mandate, including the former, may benefit from the full range of humanitarian and development assistance provided, including education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, protection and microfinance, as well as emergency assistance in times of crisis.

80. 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, primary health care, emergency relief, social interventions, microfinance, shelter and infrastructural support.

