

UNRWA Medium Term Plan

1. Introduction

1.1 This Medium Term Plan (MTP) outlines UNRWA's strategic vision for the coming five years, as the Agency seeks to raise the standards of the services it provides to the Palestine refugee population and ensure that it is well-equipped to meet their immediate and longer-term humanitarian and developmental needs. These needs are by no means homogenous; the 4.1 million refugees registered with the Agency live in a variety of settings and contexts, each of which presents specific constraints and opportunities - socio-economic, human, political and developmental. The Agency has focussed its response on these specificities, following an in-depth review of its major programme activities at field and HQ level and building on ongoing achievements and reform initiatives. The objectives outlined in this plan embrace broader development targets, in the context of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which include targeting hunger and poverty, ensuring universal education, empowering women and promoting environmental sustainability.

1.2 UNRWA has made a significant contribution to Palestinian human development over the past half century, in spite of the complexities of the geo-political environment in which the Agency operates and the uncertainties, upheavals and crises which have faced the Palestine refugee population and the region during this period. Achievements and outcomes of UNRWA's two main programmes – education and health – as measured by universally accepted performance indicators, have been favourable, spurred on by innovative and pioneering UNRWA initiatives and often with only modest financial and human input. Agency services have consistently matched or even outperformed those of host authorities. Literacy rates for Palestine refugees are higher than those of non-refugees in most of the areas where UNRWA operates and are also higher than for the MENA region. Likewise, infant mortality rates are lower amongst refugees than for the region as a whole. Beyond this, UNRWA has looked to foster self-reliance amongst refugees in various ways, including through technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes, community based organizations (CBOs) and microfinance and microenterprise (MMP) opportunities. The Agency has also tackled issues of female empowerment, with education facilities showing optimal female enrollment rates and networks of camp-based women's programme centres offering specialized services to females.

1.3 However, faced with high population growth rates, worsening socio-economic conditions in the region, several years of (inflation adjusted) negative-growth in the Agency's General Fund budget and - in some fields - military blockades and restrictions on movement and access to labour markets, standards have started to slip. Those same indicators which once documented UNRWA's successes are in decline, showing not only inconsistency with host authority services but also with UN international standards. Schools in many areas are overcrowded and under-equipped, facilities in urgent need of renovation and/or reconstruction, and staff training requirements left unmet. Demand for services is often crippling, and conditions in many refugee camps – where almost one

third of all refugees (1.3 million persons) live – are squalid. There are also concerns that increasing numbers of refugees are falling through the gaps, either because they do not meet eligibility criteria for certain services, or live in rural areas where access is restricted.

1.4 Any further decline in services could have grave consequences on both a local and regional level. Thus, UNRWA is calling on the international community to renew and expand its commitments, to enable the Agency to restore its high standards of service and ensure that the population it is mandated to serve is able to make further contributions to local and regional economic and social development. The financial implications of such a commitment – slightly in excess of **USD1,000,000,000 over a five year period** – are, in the Agency’s view, modest and could be expanded considerably in the appropriate political environment. This amount is the minimum required to achieve the strategic goals of this plan, through which the Agency aims to bridge the gaps between its services and those provided by host authorities and ensure the best possible future for the refugee population.

2. The MTP planning process and guiding principles

2.1 The planning process for the MTP began in mid-2003 and was prompted by the need to support the implementation of the Quartet’s Roadmap for Peace. As such, UNRWA limited the scope of the plan to the Gaza Strip and West Bank, developing it in close coordination with the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the World Bank in preparation for a meeting of the Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) in December 2003 at which the PA presented their Socio-Economic Stabilization Plan 2004-5. Subsequently, the initiative was extended to the Agency’s other areas of operation and the planning process was harmonized with preparations for the Geneva Conference (GC), to be held on 7-8 June. This plan represents part of the Agency’s formal input to the conference; it has also contributed to discussions and final papers prepared by each of the GC Working Groups for use at the conference. It should be stressed that the MTP is a working document and will be finalized based on conclusions and recommendations drawn from the GC and further internal discussions. It is presented here in draft form.

2.2 Whilst the document does not make any predictions about possible developments in the Palestine refugee issue, the context in which it has been developed - on both a local and regional level - cannot be overlooked, as events within UNRWA’s areas of operation and beyond have a clear and direct bearing on the needs of the refugee population as well as the Agency’s ability to mobilize resources and develop planning frameworks. As detailed above, in recent years, these factors have led to a decline in the quality of services provided. This plan is the Agency’s response – an assessment of the real humanitarian and development needs of the population which it is mandated to serve.

2.3 The plan is presented *by programme* for ease of reference, and separate chapters on education, health, relief and social services, microfinance and microenterprise and improving housing conditions follow. The response was developed on a thematic basis, according to the following three broad concepts, aimed at improving individual

programme responses whilst also fostering synergies and strengthening linkages between programmes:

- The rehabilitation of services provided to the refugee population
- Upgrading physical infrastructure
- Preparing the groundwork for economic development

2.4 It should be stressed that the plan does not envisage major readjustments in the scope of the services which UNRWA provides. Basic education and primary health care will remain the main focus, reflecting the Agency's view that investment in these key areas is the most effective means of addressing refugee needs, especially given the demographic profile of the population and the prevailing socio-economic conditions in the region. The Agency will also continue to provide a social safety net for the most vulnerable refugees through its relief and social services programmes, including the Special Hardship Case programme (SHC) and engage in microfinance and shelter rehabilitation initiatives. Using existing programme activities and concepts as a starting point, the Agency has developed a wide range of proposals, which will go beyond the restoration of former standards and recast UNRWA as a regional pioneer and innovator.

2.5 *The rehabilitation of services* will see a number of quantitative and qualitative improvements to schools, health centres and relief services, as the Agency seeks to upgrade its services to match those provided by the host authorities. This initiative will incorporate a human resource development component, including the implementation of a broad and well-structured staff training programme, the renovation and expansion of facilities and a strengthening of the Agency's current administrative capacity. Under *upgrading infrastructure*, the Agency will focus on the refugee camp communities, improving road, sewage and water networks and also ameliorating living conditions through house renovation and reconstruction. The latter will be achieved, in part, through the establishment of a new *Urban Planning Unit*, a tool for addressing deteriorating camp living conditions in a systematic and holistic manner. In the sphere of *economic development*, the Agency will expand its microfinance and microenterprise programmes and restructure and rehabilitate its TVET programmes, based on assessed market needs.

2.6 More details on specific MTP objectives and planned activities are available in the chapters which follow. Focus below is given some of the highlights of the plan.

- Upgrading basic service infrastructure

UNRWA's basic service infrastructure is no longer equipped to meet refugee needs. Schools and classrooms are overcrowded, buildings and facilities often in need of major repair and basic resources old and dilapidated. Class sizes, doctor-patient ratios and social worker caseloads are crippling. Due to limited resources, the Agency is not always able to address changing realities on the ground, whether in the sphere of education (introducing new subjects to the curriculum in response to host authority changes), health (ensuring that the programme meets the prevailing needs of the population, who are passing through an epidemiological transition towards increased morbidity and mortality

from non-communicable diseases) or relief (maintaining the relevance of the Agency's welfare activities). Investment in vital programme infrastructure is a priority – a solid foundation on which further improvements can be made.

- Vulnerable groups and camp communities

The Agency wishes to further integrate its provision of services to vulnerable groups, in particular women, children and youth and camp residents, and has developed a range of targeted interventions across its main programmes. Remedial and special learning programmes at UNRWA schools will be strengthened and supplemented with health department interventions aimed at early identification and management of disabilities. Furthermore, a psycho-social counseling programme, introduced as part of the Agency's emergency response in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, will be expanded to all fields of operations as the Agency looks to maximize opportunities for healthy living amongst refugees.

In order to improve its social service outreach assistance, the Agency is seeking to bolster the technical support which it provides to the network of 108 CBOs scattered across the region. These centres provide legal aid, health awareness, child care, rehabilitation services, social, sports and cultural activities as well as skills training, and currently provide services for around 70,000 persons per year. Increased funding will allow for the establishment of similar centres in more remote rural areas where, in particular, women and the disabled do not have ready access to such services. It will also allow for an expanded programme of subsidized credit opportunities for SHC.

Camp residence is a determinant of poverty amongst Palestine refugees, with around half of all Special Hardship Cases residing in the 59 officially recognized camps across UNRWA's areas of operation. Living conditions in camps must be addressed as a matter of urgency as part of an integrated strategy to improve the lives of the most vulnerable. In order to develop a comprehensive shelter and rehousing strategy which is adapted to the specific needs of different locations, the Agency is proposing to establish an Urban Planning Unit, which will be responsible for preparing urban development policies and a comprehensive camp upgrading strategy¹. This will include increased targeting of shelters belonging to SHC families, around 25 percent of whom (60,000 families) are living in homes assessed to require some form of rehabilitation, ranging from minor repairs to major structural work. The homes of the poorest refugees are usually overcrowded, with several persons to one room, and the rooms often lack proper space, ventilation or light. Others are structurally unsafe and judged unfit for human habitation, with decaying walls and roofs made from corrugated iron sheets which leak during winter. The unit will also focus on larger scale interventions, building on the success of recent rehousing schemes such as the Neirab project in Syria others in Tel es-Sultan and Khan Younis in Gaza. This component of the MTP could be expanded in the context of a regional peace settlement or an Israeli withdrawal from (parts of) the oPt.

¹ Where feasible, the work of the Urban Planning Unit will not be restricted to refugee camps but will also address housing needs outside camps, in coordination with host authorities.

Considerable investment is also required to improve environmental conditions inside camps in many of UNRWA's fields, especially in Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank and with particular emphasis on wastewater disposal and solid waste management.

- Maximizing the economic potential of refugees

UNRWA's MMP and TVET programmes are important poverty alleviation instruments which can have considerable impact on refugee livelihoods on the micro-economic level. Given the socio-economic and demographic profile of the refugee population, they are a vital component of the Agency's investment in Palestinian human development.

So as to improve and optimize its provision of TVET and education science facilities, UNRWA is looking to embark on a major modernization programme at its training centres, upgrading and replacing workshops and equipment and introducing new courses, based on assessed market needs. To facilitate this and ensure the relevance of training programmes offered, the Agency is planning to establish a TVET research and development unit, as recommended by a recent UNESCO review, to assist in the development of a systematic approach to curriculum development and strengthen links with the local and regional business community. Another concern for the Agency in this domain is the increasing gap between the number of places available and the demand for these places. To enable the Agency to expand its services with only modest investment, UNRWA will maximize the use of existing resources, through keeping centres open for longer, increasing the number of short-term courses and making timetables more flexible. To address specific needs in Gaza, the Agency will construct a new centre in the southern Gaza Strip.

The microfinance industry in the areas where UNRWA operates remains underdeveloped and the Agency is seeking to expand its services considerably, to raise the programme beyond its present position as the foremost microfinance institution in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) to that of the leading institution in the region. The MMP will expand its network of branch offices in West Bank, Jordan and Syria, expand the outreach of its existing loan products, and also develop housing loan products which will complement the work and mission of the newly established urban development unit.

- Capacity building

The ambitious initiatives UNRWA is proposing in this plan will only succeed if the Agency's workforce is equipped with the necessary skills to manage the change. Staff also need to be able to adapt to other developmental issues which they may face in the coming years. The MTP incorporates a far-reaching, multi-faceted capacity building component, embracing both human resource needs and management information systems. Pre- and in-service staff training programmes will be developed for operational and administrative/support staff, including for teachers, social workers and health professionals at all levels. Career development programmes will be established as the

Agency makes a commitment to institutional excellence and strives to maximize the potential of its key asset.

In terms of information systems, the roll-out of a new refugee registration system by the relief and social services programme will ensure the accuracy of a wide range of data on refugees and will allow for integration and cross-referencing of data from the health and education programmes. Planned improvements in the management information systems administered by these two departments will enhance the Agency's ability analyze data on its services and ensure their relevance.

- Improved planning capacity

The Agency's capacity for strategic planning is compromised by a variety of factors, both intrinsic and extrinsic, some of which are discussed above. UNRWA does not always have access to accurate, up-to-date information on Palestine refugee living conditions at the field-level, on which needs can be assessed and priorities based. The introduction of the new refugee registration system and the management information systems in education and health will go some way towards addressing these gaps. A great deal of data is also already available from a range of sources, including the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the University of Geneva and FAFO, who have conducted a number of surveys and studies in recent years with the Agency's full support. UNRWA has a responsibility to go further and, alongside the Urban Planning Unit and TVET Research and Development Unit, plans to establish its own specialized research function. This will provide a key linkage between fields and HQ programme departments and strengthen existing relationships with the research institutions listed above (and others), enabling UNRWA to rapidly update its data, analyses and responses. Providing support at both field and HQ-level, it will help to guide policy and decision makers and examine issues relating to humanitarian and development assistance from a broader perspective. It will also ensure more efficient use and management of the wealth of data at the Agency's disposal.

3. Conclusion

This plan is the Agency's assessment of how best to respond to the humanitarian and development needs of Palestine refugees over the coming five year period. It remains a draft plan. Programmes and budgets will be finalized based on the outcome of the Geneva Conference in June 2004 and further consultations.

**UNRWA Medium Term Plan
Financial Overview by programme**

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
Education	92,181,320	97,676,320	84,835,320	85,000,320	85,737,320	445,430,600
Health	31,126,000	29,500,700	18,419,800	19,766,600	25,167,200	123,980,300
Relief and Social Services	21,504,134	18,247,798	16,540,855	16,701,585	16,060,918	89,055,290
Improving housing conditions	62,691,100	64,668,875	70,310,081	69,871,034	68,470,707	336,011,797
Microfinance and Microenterprise	4,860,000	6,360,000	8,860,000	9,015,000	8,515,000	37,610,000
TOTAL	212,362,554	216,453,693	198,966,056	200,354,539	203,951,145	1,032,087,987