

PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

AUGUST 2024



ABOUT UNRWA

Mission and Mandate

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is a United Nations (UN) organisation responsible for direct service provision to Palestine refugees, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight¹. It began operations on 1 May 1950. UNRWA's mission and comparative advantage are enshrined in its temporary mandate dating to UNGA Resolution 302 IV of 8 December 1949. Its mandate is periodically extended for periods of three years, most recently until 2026.

UNRWA's activities focus on the direct delivery to eligible persons² of basic education, primary health care, relief and social services (RSS), infrastructure and camp improvement, microfinance, protection, and emergency assistance, including in situations of armed conflict. UNRWA does not have a mandate to administer refugee camps or to protect the physical security of Palestinian refugees. On 31 December 2022, UNRWA registered 6.65 million eligible persons, an increase of 8% compared with 2018. Of these, 38% are in Jordan, 26% in Gaza, 17% in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), 10% in Syria, and 8% in Lebanon. The differences in terms of number of eligible persons and their needs differ substantially between and within the five areas of operations. Of 6.65 million eligible persons registered, approximately 2.5 million receive UNRWA assistance.

Governance

UNRWA is led by a commissioner-general and two deputy commissioner generals appointed by the UN Secretary General and responsible to the UN General Assembly (UNGA). UNRWA's AdCom, established in 1949, is tasked with advising and assisting the commissioner-general in carrying out the agency's mandate. The 29 members of the AdCom include donor and host government representatives, and 4 observers who meet twice a year to discuss issues of importance to UNRWA. A subset of members and observers meets more regularly through its sub-committee (SubCom).

Structure

UNRWA is headquartered in Amman, Jerusalem, and Gaza, and maintains field offices in each of its five areas of operation (fields). UNRWA also maintains representative offices in New York, Brussels, Washington, and Cairo. By the end of 2022, it employed 27 756 staff, of whom 213 were international staff. With over 90% of local employees (also known as area staff) registered as refugees, UNRWA is both a critical service provider to and employer of Palestine refugees. Specialised programme departments provide strategic, technical, and operational direction and oversight. UNRWA's operations are also supported by ten specialised support departments.

1. "What is the mandate of UNRWA?"; UNRWA, 2024

2. UNRWA is mandated by the UN General Assembly to serve "Palestine refugees". The term was defined in 1952 as any person whose "normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948 and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict." Palestine refugees are persons who fulfil this definition as well as descendants of fathers fulfilling the definition. In addition to Palestine refugees, the UN General Assembly also mandated UNRWA to offer services to certain other persons who require humanitarian assistance, on an emergency basis as and when required, in UNRWA fields of operations. Notably, the General Assembly has mandated not to provide services to persons in the region who are currently displaced and in serious need of continued assistance as a result of the 1967 and subsequent hostilities. These persons are not registered as Palestine refugees. [UNRWA, 2024](#).

Finance

From 2018-22, UNRWA's annual expenditures ranged between USD 1.19 (2018) and USD 1.31 billion (2022). The agency has three sources of funding: (i) a programme budget fund that supports core operations, support systems and structures; (ii) emergency appeals for humanitarian interventions, and (iii) funding for specific, time-bound projects that improve services without increasing recurrent costs. In 2022, 94.9% of UNRWA's funding came from voluntary contributions by UN member states. Other sources of funding included private partnerships (1.3% of funding in 2022) and contributions from the UN core budget and other UN entities (3.8% in 2022). UNRWA operates in a highly resource-constrained environment, and demand for its services has consistently outstripped the availability of funding.

TOP 20 DONOR PLEDGES TO UNRWA PROGRAMMES 2018-22 (USD)

Rank	Donor	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
1	Germany	177 439 447	169 924 991	210 384 339	176 979 810	202 054 285	936 782 872
2	USA	60 429 282	0	0	338 400 000	343 937 718	742 767 000
3	EU	178 989 326	131 742 673	157 059 235	117 653 367	114 199 150	699 643 751
4	Sweden	64 999 762	64 544 971	60 420 012	54 240 009	60 969 987	305 174 741
5	UK	92 754 569	76 259 850	64 129 434	40 104 619	21 158 281	294 406 753
6	Saudi Arabia	159 956 771	49 536 960	28 933 333	0	27 000 000	265 427 064
7	Japan	44 999 224	43 438 361	33 080 021	50 510 511	30 152 202	202 180 319
8	Norway	36 278 753	29 539 249	27 877 600	29 988 568	34 180 677	157 864 847
9	France	15 261 693	45 924 606	22 986 067	27 958 309	28 909 838	141 040 513
10	Qatar	51 499 779	41 720 520	8 000 000	17 000 000	10 500 000	128 720 299
11	Canada	26 746 123	18 618 549	24 083 407	27 614 551	23 713 560	120 776 190
12	Netherlands	22 677 756	21 710 232	22 130 814	27 007 706	21 189 038	114 715 546
13	UAE	53 800 000	51 800 000	1 000 000	0	0	106 600 000
14	Turkey	18 774 000	11 099 308	20 561 025	20 471 544	25 199 080	96 104 957
15	Spain	19 055 991	9 216 072	14 358 262	17 720 114	13 797 995	74 148 434
16	Italy	17 090 974	15 238 757	17 714 100	15 804 547	18 033 970	83 882 348
17	Kuwait	50 000 000	5 000 000	0	11 500 000	12 000 000	78 500 000
18	Denmark	14 475 903	10 822 103	15 717 155	21 139 515	15 885 563	78 040 239
19	Belgium	15 498 794	13 503 431	13 203 288	13 901 370	12 558 653	68 665 536
20	Australia	16 017 103	13 853 706	8 393 204	7 551 819	13 797 995	59 613 827

Source: UNRWA (Donor Charts, 2018-2022)

KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

UNRWA's mandate and operating modality are rooted in the Arab Israeli conflict. Its performance has been significantly affected by political positions of local authorities and external parties to the conflict as a result. During the period under review – July 2018 until April 2023 – the external environment deteriorated in all five of UNRWA's fields of operation. Economic crises, conflict and the pandemic have meant that all five fields of operation experienced multiple overlapping challenges, most of which were rooted in prolonged socio-economic and political instability and insecurity, amplified by global economic, environmental and health shocks.

UNRWA's services have maintained and improved the living conditions of Palestine refugees and are a contributing factor to local and regional stability. Nevertheless, a growing refugee population facing deteriorating living conditions without a just and lasting solution to their plight combined with a gap between budgets and funding received, an internal leadership crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic created difficult circumstances during the assessment period. Nonetheless, UNRWA was able to adapt and successfully deliver its services to those in need without large-scale disruptions.

UNRWA's internal leadership crisis in 2019 triggered a series of organisational reforms (known as the "Management Initiatives"), several of which are beginning to deliver results. UNRWA's senior leadership is making a purposeful effort to address internal management issues and has succeeded in securing some new regular budget-funded posts to accelerate the renewal and/or revision of policies, processes, and systems in areas that need attention, such as protection, resource mobilisation, gender, environment, ethics, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (PSEAH), internal control and oversight, ombudsperson, human resources management (HRM) and evaluation. Still, increasingly challenging funding conditions have forced UNRWA to prioritise fundraising, resource management, and service delivery over other organisational needs. Although the trajectory during the assessment timeframe is positive, capacity shortfalls in the aforementioned areas remain.

The UNRWA Senior Management Team (SMT) has also taken positive measures to improve organisational performance and effectiveness during the assessment timeframe. It is promoting a different organisational culture by engaging field offices in an advisory capacity and introducing innovative ways of working both internally and externally. In addition, UNRWA has renewed its staff regulations and rules, and standards of conduct for the international civil service, thereby emphasising the UN Values and Behaviours Framework. With the appointment of a director of strategic positioning and change, UNRWA has taken a positive step organisationally to enhancing its business processes and initiating structural adjustments in areas such as delegation of authority, accountability framework, ERM and human resource management (HRM). When addressing these matters, it will be important to re-examine existing approaches to types of service and delivery modalities and explore opportunities for greater flexibility at decentralised levels, tailored to local needs.

In terms of its operations, UNRWA has managed to maintain its scope and reach to eligible beneficiaries, providing them highly relevant and effective services. Nevertheless, the quality and in some cases the quantity of UNRWA's services suffered from the funding gap. The agency's mainstreaming of human rights improved through a stronger focus on protection, even though this was affected by the temporary de-funding by the United States. Progress was also visible in internal and external communication, security risk management, internal audit, ethics, planning, and components of HRM, although capacity shortfalls remain. In other areas, UNRWA's performance has been less satisfactory. Mainstreaming and consolidating cross-cutting themes such as gender, youth, people with disabilities, and environmental sustainability showed only limited progress during the assessment period. UNRWA's accountability to affected populations (AAP) remains a concern and would benefit from the use of a multi-dimensional approach to accountability that includes sharing information, consultation, and participation by vulnerable groups. Because of the gap between the budget and funding received, funding uncertainties and the conflicts and other crises that have affected all five fields of operation, UNRWA has needed to be flexible and responsive to emerging needs, making it difficult to apply consistently the principle of results-based budgeting (RBB). Programmatically, it will be important to better define the role and position of protection within the agency's policies, processes, and organisational structure, including its role regarding service departments, gender, ethics, and PSEAH.

Due to more than a decade of deep financial crisis, UNRWA has had to defer urgently needed investments to improve/replace capital assets (buildings, cars, office equipment), update its business processes and systems, meet its environmental commitments, and overcome staff shortages in key areas to grow and diversify income. Its 2023-28 strategic plan included a one-time capital investment plan of USD 199 million.

Confronted with a growing number of eligible beneficiaries, an adverse external context, and chronic financial challenges, UNRWA's operating model is becoming increasingly unsustainable. The agency justifiably emphasises the importance of collective responsibility – of the UN system, the international community, and of host states/duty bearers³ – to provide essential services to Palestine refugees. Whilst UNRWA acknowledges these strategic challenges and undertakes efforts to meet them, the wider political context makes significant progress difficult. The overarching questions – how to achieve adequate and predictable funding, build synergies between donors and host nations

3. Duty bearers are those actors who have a particular obligation or responsibility to respect, promote and realise human rights and to abstain from human rights violations. The term is most commonly used to refer to state actors, but non-state actors can also be considered duty bearers.

and thus support UNRWA in realising its mandate in an unstable region – continue to go unanswered, resulting in adjustments and adaptation to increasingly challenging circumstances.

UNRWA achieved satisfactory ratings for 10 of the 11 MOPAN KPIs applied to assess organisational performance and effectiveness.

Strategic management

UNRWA's unique mission and temporary mandate is tied to the realisation of a political solution to the situation of Palestine refugees. The agency's performance is therefore subjected to considerable scrutiny and affected by political circumstances beyond its control. UNRWA's six-year strategies set out its statement of intent. UNRWA's MTS (2016-22) and strategic plan (2023-28) include specific forecast budgets, which, given actual funding received, have not been achieved. Consequently, the MTS and strategic plan provide more limited guidance for operational decisions, which are often determined by funding decisions and urgent needs. During the assessment period, ensuring programme delivery to meet the immediate needs of refugees was often prioritised over other critical HQ and field office functions such as HRM, PSEAH, cross-cutting themes and issues, and internal control and oversight. UNRWA's organisational structure and strategic plans reflect its mandate, with a strong focus on primarily standardised decentralised service delivery in the five fields. UNRWA's HQ and field offices are small, and have very low number of international staff.

UNRWA's commitment to cross-cutting issues is well articulated in both the MTS (2016-22) and the strategic plan (2023-28), as well as through dedicated policy documents and frameworks on gender, disability, and protection. The funding gap has adversely affected UNRWA's performance in this area. Despite featuring as a key strategic priority, the agency's protection structures and activities are almost entirely dependent on volatile, earmarked project funding. At the field level, there is limited capacity to implement gender action plans, and UNRWA has no dedicated budget line for addressing gender equality. While UNRWA's newer installations have been assessed as complying with disability inclusion standards, resource constraints have hindered efforts to renovate older installations with a view to improving accessibility. The agency has undertaken some initiatives with respect to environmental sustainability and tackling climate change, including the development of an environmental sustainability policy implementation plan, which is currently under development.

Operational management

Thanks to their skills, experience and robust contextual understanding, staff are one of UNRWA's greatest strengths. At the end of 2022, UNRWA employed 27 756 staff, of whom only 213 (0.7%) were international staff. Resource allocations across functions reflect organisational priorities. There is broad recognition among stakeholders of the stabilising effect UNRWA has on the socio-economic, political and security situation in the region. However, the financing and funding models supporting UNRWA operations are unpredictable, inflexible and inadequate in relation to its requirements. UNRWA's resource mobilisation and external communication are being professionalised with the aim of achieving greater diversification, predictability, and flexibility of funding. UNRWA is working on but does not yet have a consolidated accountability framework that clearly delineates roles and responsibilities, delegation of authority, and principles and methods of accountability. Meanwhile, funding shortfalls and volatilities have led to more centralised decision-making on operational resourcing matters (notably staffing and procurement).

UNRWA operates with a single integrated budget framework, incorporating all three budget portals (programme budget, priority projects and emergency appeals). It uses its three funding streams in a pragmatic and complementary way. The agency has made several improvements to its internal control mechanisms (e.g., it revised the charters of the department of internal oversight services (DIOS) and the advisory commission on internal oversight and issued an updated investigation policy) and successfully increased staff capacity, although capacity shortfalls remain. In accordance with international obligations, effort has gone into strengthening ethical behaviour in the workplace to prevent misconduct, including protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment such as the 2020 SEA Plan of Action. With a workforce of 28 000, only 3 dedicated positions for both ethics and PSEAH, and very limited funds available for staff training, there is limited capacity to adequately meet all PSEAH obligations and objectives,

such as policy development, training and advocacy, and support to focal points in the fields. The nature and scope of UNRWA's service provision and lack of resources means that SEA and SH remain an organisational risk.

Relationship management

Evidence from evaluations, interviews and the external partner survey shows that UNRWA's core services are widely perceived as being highly relevant to the needs of Palestine refugees, and its staff have a strong understanding of their local operating contexts, which enables them to address day-to-day operational challenges as they arise. UNRWA's operating environment presents a multitude of operational, strategic, political, financial and reputational risks. A risk management maturity assessment found UNRWA's risk management to be at a developing stage. The agency has recognised the need to strengthen its risk management practices and has obtained project funding to strengthen systems and practices in relation to risk management. UNRWA also recognises the need to modernise and streamline several of its business processes to enhance efficiency.

UNRWA is a direct provider of services to its beneficiaries. It works with a variety of other organisations in all five fields to improve the quality and/or scope of its service delivery. UNRWA's engagement in UN coordination structures and mechanisms was perceived to have improved throughout the assessment period. UNRWA's extensive collaborative arrangements with other organisations are not underpinned by systematic procedures or central guidance to promote joint planning and programming, and as such may raise exposure to certain risks. The agency's approach to ensuring AAP still needs considerable improvement – at the moment, affected populations are asked for feedback about UNRWA's services but the organisation lacks a systematic approach to understanding needs and being fully accountable to beneficiaries.

Performance management

UNRWA's **Results-Based Management (RBM)** system is centred on its common monitoring matrix (CMM). UNRWA reports annually against a subset of these indicators through annual operational reports and its online statistics bulletin. The annual operational reports do not present results achieved against targets over time, and this complicates assessments of the extent to which strategic objectives were met during the assessment period. The results of emergency appeals and projects are tracked separately through dedicated results frameworks. UNRWA produces a large amount of results data on the reach and effectiveness of its services, but this information is insufficiently used to inform planning and decision making.

UNRWA has a coherent and relevant evaluation policy and strategy framework. The evaluation planning, systems and procedures ensure evaluation quality. Since the last MOPAN assessment, the delivery of strategic evaluations and evaluation quality has improved. UNRWA tracks poorly performing programmes and responds to evaluation recommendations through a systematic approach to tracking and reporting on recommendations. Evidence from the assessment shows that it does less well in its application of performance data and use of evidence for learning, evidence-based design, and uptake of lessons learned. UNRWA relies heavily on donor-financed project budgets for its evaluations. The limited funding of the evaluation office restricts the scope of its work and therefore of its independence.

Results

UNRWA's interventions have been externally evaluated as relevant and as responding to the needs of Palestine refugees. Evaluations found that UNRWA was particularly effective in adjusting its approaches during COVID-19 in response to beneficiaries' needs under these changed conditions. The evidence on the use of systematic needs assessments and consultations with stakeholders and affected populations has been more mixed. Overall, UNRWA's services are delivered broadly in a cost-efficient manner, although the differences between the budget and funds received have negatively impacted the efficiency and effectiveness of operations. Evidence from evaluations and its own annual reports shows that UNRWA has consistently achieved strategic and operational results despite the contextual challenges and volatile funding it faces. UNRWA records the timeliness of project delivery only, rather than all services/activities, and according to corporate reporting, has been achieving project results on time.

Recognising the scope and scale of effectiveness of UNRWA's programmatic interventions in the five diverse and highly volatile contexts during the assessed period, UNRWA's overall performance was constrained by several factors, including the previously mentioned contextual challenges and differences between budget requirements and funding received. Despite these, operations were perceived by representatives from donor agencies and host countries and by independent external evaluators as having effectively contributed to regional stability and conditions for peace, through the delivery of humanitarian and development activities. Analysis of documentary evidence and evidence from interviews shows that while UNRWA has made progress in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, strengthening gender and vulnerability analysis, increasing staff capacity on gender, and ensuring consistent implementation of gender mainstreaming policies and programmes across all areas of operation is necessary to achieve optimal results. The agency has undertaken some initiatives regarding environmental sustainability and tackling climate change, but this area has been under-resourced and there is very little evidence or results of UNRWA's performance in this area. UNRWA provides essential services to Palestine refugees that all deliver development results that uphold the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). UNRWA has also adopted a new protection strategic framework and engages in protection monitoring to inform advocacy targeting duty bearers.

Based on the assessment's findings, the box below provides a summary of UNRWA's main strengths and areas for improvement, while the figure on page 7 provides a visual representation of ratings for each KPI and MI.

Additional information about the strength of evidence collected and analysed in the assessment is included in the technical annex. For the majority of the MIs, the assessment's findings are based on the triangulation of documentary, interview and survey-based evidence judged as having high or medium confidence, in accordance with MOPAN's analytical standards and framework. The assessment notes the more limited number and scope of independent evaluations that could inform it due to the capacity and budget of UNRWA's Independent Evaluation Office. Information about the confidence of evidence should inform the interpretation of findings.

Main strengths and areas for improvement

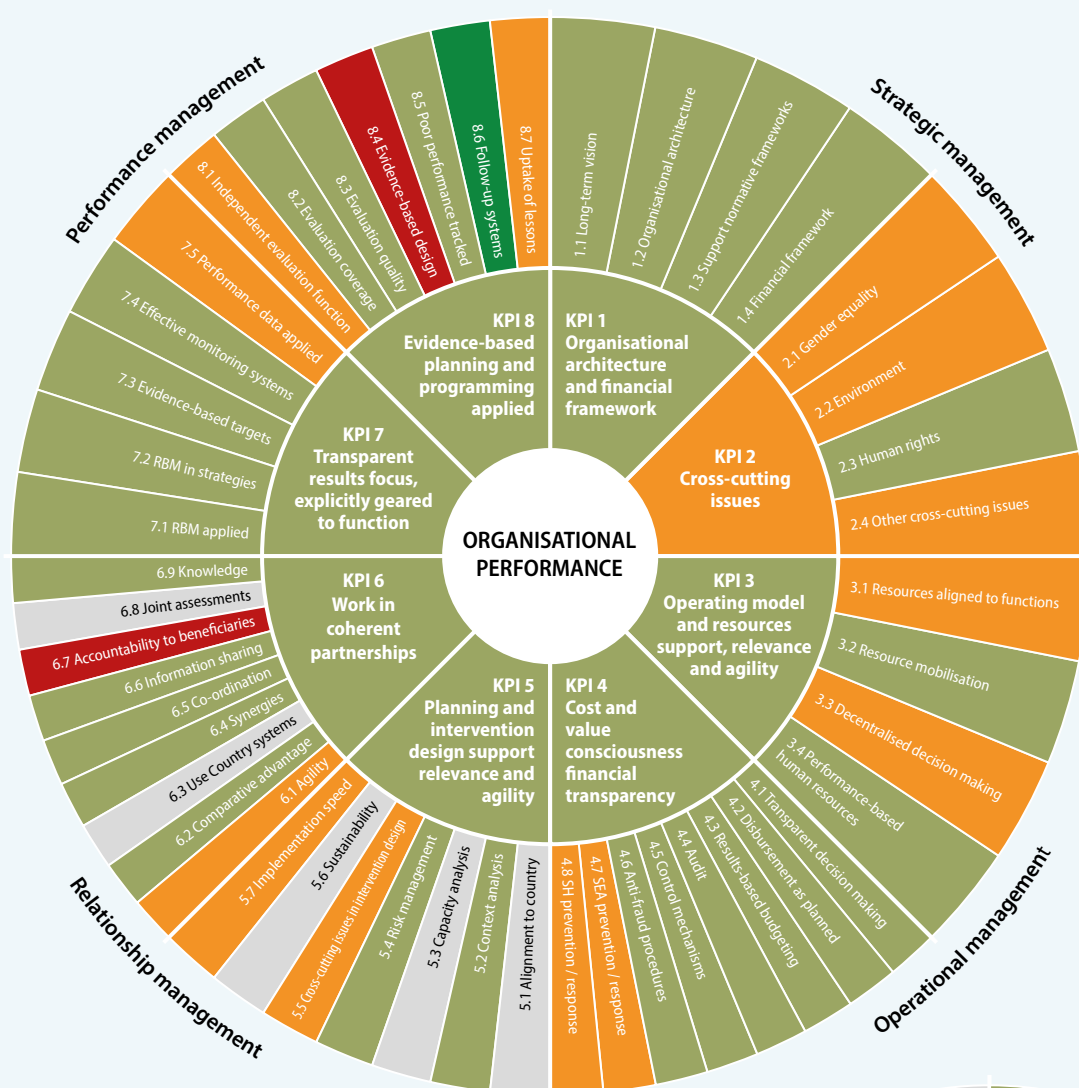
Main strengths

- UNRWA makes a unique and valuable contribution to regional and local stability.
- Proven ability to consistently deliver quality services to a growing number of eligible beneficiaries under increasingly difficult conditions.
- Proven adaptive capacity to deliver services in worsening conditions (e.g., COVID-19).
- Committed staff with a robust understanding of context.
- Improvements during the assessment timeframe in several functional areas: evaluation and oversight; planning and reporting; and external outreach (to donors, UN).

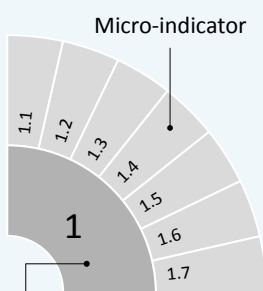
Areas for Improvement

- Consider the value of developing a more tailored organisational structure together with greater delegation of authority to the field and strengthened accountability.
- Improving/replacing UNRWA's physical infrastructure and assets and bolstering digitalisation of work processes and systems, as outlined in the capital investment plan.
- Strengthening performance in crosscutting policy areas, including gender equality and environmental sustainability.
- Matching capacity in vital back-office functions – which are essential for organisational effectiveness – with the ambitions and requirements of the agency and its donors. This includes management and oversight, ERM, PSEAH, ethics, evaluation and HRM.
- Continue to strengthen organisational culture to support effective service delivery in areas including communication, performance monitoring, use of needs assessments, resource mobilisation scenario planning, and a culture of learning and adapting.

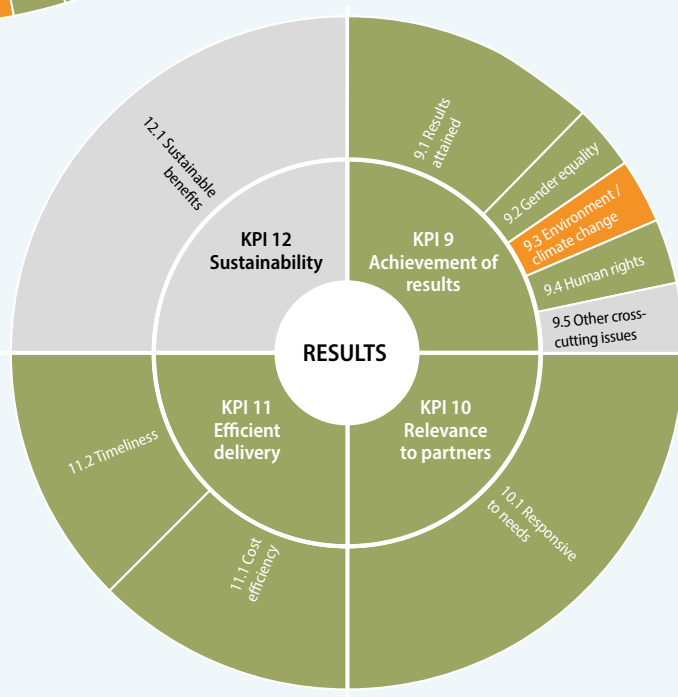
UNRWA'S PERFORMANCE RATING SUMMARY



How to read these charts



Key Performance Indicator



ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT OF UNWRA

This report provides a diagnostic assessment and snapshot of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and tells the story of its performance, within its mandate. This was the third MOPAN assessment conducted for UNRWA, following those completed in 2011 and 2017-18. Building upon the previous assessments, this one covers the period from July 2018 to April 2023.

The assessment of UNRWA was conducted through a rigorous process and took a collaborative approach, by integrating the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders. This collaborative approach provides MOs and Network members with a robust source of evidence-based guidance on the areas for improvement to achieve enhanced organisational performance.

The assessment draws on multiple lines of evidence (documentary, survey and interviews) from sources within and outside the organisation to validate and triangulate findings across 11 key performance indicators (KPIs), which are broken down into more than 220 individual indicators. The standard assessment framework was developed based on international best practice, and further customised by considering the specific mandate and priorities of UNRWA. Moreover, it has also been revisited to capture the impact of COVID-19 on UNRWA's mandate and operations, as well as to gauge to what extent UNRWA has been able to adapt and leverage its internal processes in response to COVID-19 in an agile manner.

THE ASSESSMENT APPROACH

The approach to Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) assessments has evolved over time to adjust to the needs of the multilateral system.

Starting in 2020, all assessments have used the MOPAN 3.1 methodology (MOPAN 2020), which was endorsed by MOPAN members in early 2020. The framework draws on the international standards and reference points, as described in the MOPAN Methodology Manual.

ABOUT MOPAN

MOPAN is a network of 22 members⁴ who assess multilateral organisations, shape performance standards, and champion learning and insights to strengthen development and humanitarian results and promote accountability. Capitalising on the Network's unique cross-multilateral system perspective and expertise, MOPAN members work together to deliver relevant, impartial, high-quality and timely performance information as a public good through an inclusive and transparent approach. MOPAN's performance information mitigates risks, informs decision-making and supports change, helping to increase knowledge and trust among all stakeholders and ultimately to achieve a stronger and better-performing multilateral system.



For more
information

4. Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Qatar, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States. *Türkiye and New Zealand are observers.