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## United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees Background Guide 2022

Written by: Aemin Becker and Tara A. Kwan, Directors,  
with contributions by Shelley Kashyap



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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2022 National Model United Nations New York Conference (NMUN•NY)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). This year's staff are: Directors Aemin Becker (Conference A), and Tara Kwan (Conference B). Aemin graduated with a Masters in International Security from Sciences Po Paris and currently works in consulting. Tara A. Kwan is currently pursuing her Masters in Social Work from the University of California, Los Angeles and she obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. She previously worked as a program manager for a nonprofit assisting asylum seekers.

The topics under discussion for the UNRWA are:

1. Situation of and Assistance to Palestinian Women
2. Providing Career Opportunities for Youth

UNRWA is an important organization within the UN system, as it plays a vital role in providing relief works and population development services to Palestinian refugees around the world. Established by the UN after the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict, the Agency is primarily focused on the direct delivery of services to Palestinian refugees within its five fields of operation: Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. These services include the provision of educational facilities and health services, as well as emergency relief services during times of crisis.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to explore your Member State's policies in depth and use the Annotated Bibliography and Bibliography to further your knowledge on these topics. In preparation for the Conference, each delegation will submit a Position Paper by 11:59 p.m. (Eastern) on 1 March 2022 in accordance with the guidelines in the [Position Paper Guide](#) and the [NMUN•NY Position Papers](#) website.

Two resources, available to download from the [NMUN website](#), serve as essential instruments in preparing for the Conference and as a reference during committee sessions:

1. [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#) - explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-Conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions. Delegates should not start discussion on the topics with other members of their committee until the first committee session.
2. [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#) - include the long and short form of the rules, as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory [NMUN Conduct Expectations](#) on the NMUN website. They include the Conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the Conference itself, please contact the Under-Secretaries-General for the Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs (HRHA) Department, Citlali Mora Catlet (Conference A) and Caitlin Hopper (Conference B), at [usg.hrha@nmun.org](mailto:usg.hrha@nmun.org)

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

Sincerely,

**Conference A**

Aemin Becker, Director

**Conference B**

Tara Kwan, Director

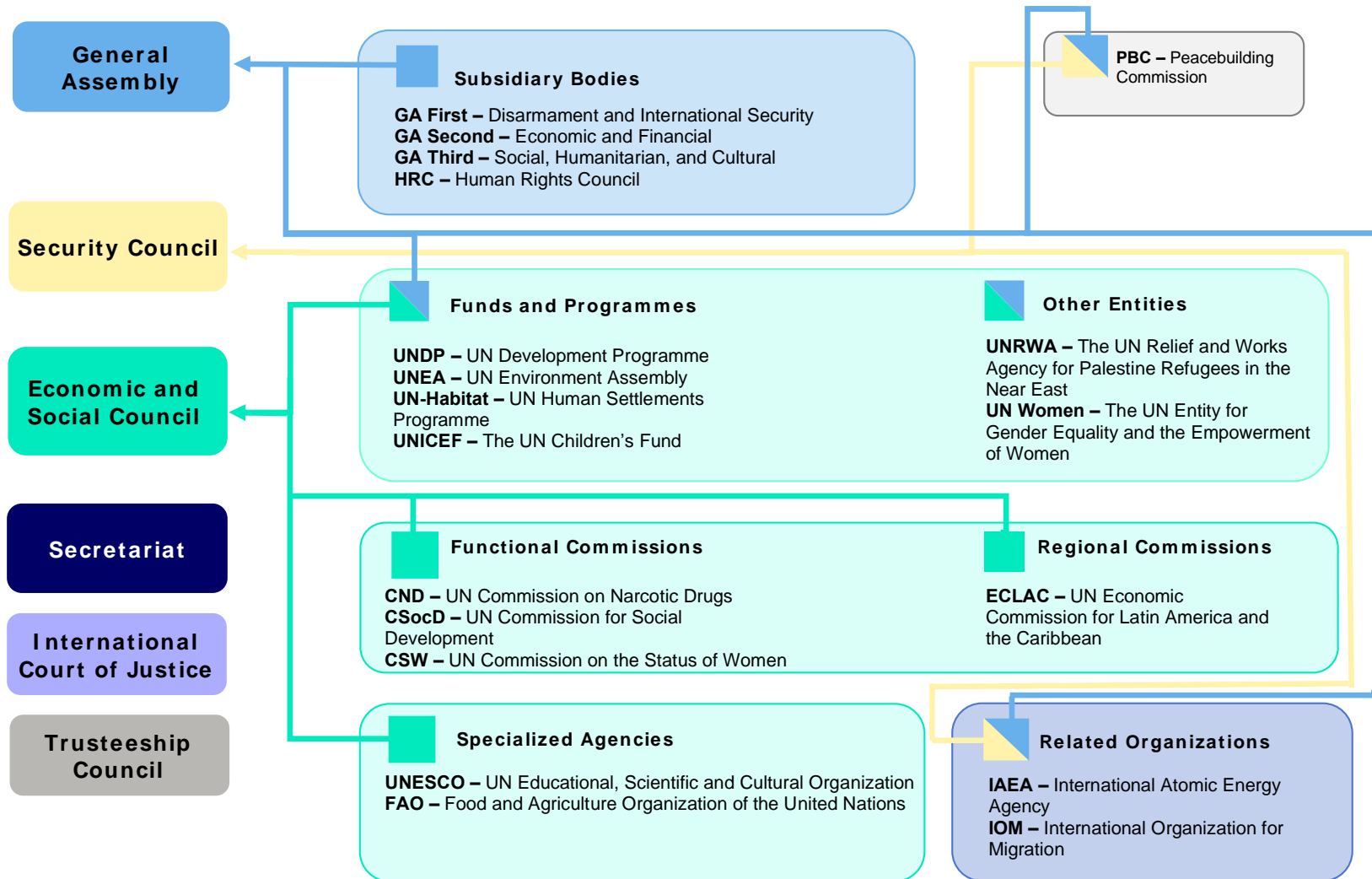


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## United Nations System at NMUN•NY

This diagram illustrates the UN system simulated at NMUN•NY and demonstrates the reportage and relationships between entities. Examine the diagram alongside the Committee Overview to gain a clear picture of the committee's position, purpose, and powers within the UN system.



## Committee Overview

### Introduction

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provides over 5.7 million registered Palestinian refugees in the Middle East with humanitarian and development assistance and is the United Nations' (UN) primary relief service for this population.<sup>1</sup> UNRWA's services include direct relief and works services, consulting with Near Eastern governments for relief efforts, and planning for a time when relief is no longer needed.<sup>2</sup> UNRWA was created as a temporary solution following the outbreak of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the resulting suffering of Palestinian, Jewish, and Arab refugees.<sup>3</sup> Most of the agency's work has centered on the occupied Palestine territories (OPT), currently recognized as the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza strip.<sup>4</sup> Over time, UNRWA's mandate has also extended to persons who are displaced and in need of assistance located in the regions where UNRWA offers services.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, UNRWA now also offers relief services for Palestinian and other refugees affected by conflict in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria as well.<sup>6</sup>

In 1948, the General Assembly adopted resolution 212 (II) on "Assistance to Palestine Refugees" to provide emergency relief alongside other UN bodies and humanitarian organizations to refugees of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.<sup>7</sup> This emergency relief proved insufficient, leading the General Assembly to adopt resolution 194 (II) on "Palestine – Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator" (1948) to establish the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP).<sup>8</sup> The UNCCP was mandated to aid in the political resolution of the conflict by mediating a settlement between all parties involved and aiding in refugee resettlement.<sup>9</sup> UNCCP was unable to resolve all issues due to their limited resources, leading them to recommend the creation of a UN agency devoted to solving these problems.<sup>10</sup> In response, the General Assembly established UNRWA by adopting resolution 302 (IV) on "Assistance to Palestine Refugees" (1949).<sup>11</sup>

UNRWA began operations on 1 May 1950.<sup>12</sup> Though initially focused on financing relief, such as using money to fund food ration distribution, UNRWA gradually shifted to direct service delivery.<sup>13</sup> UNRWA provides services in the areas of education, healthcare, relief, and social services including food rations, microfinancing, infrastructure and camp improvement, emergency crisis response, and protecting refugees' rights under international law.<sup>14</sup> Seeing a continued need for the agency's existence, UNRWA's mandate has been consistently renewed by the General Assembly whenever it nears expiration, and is currently renewed until 30 June 2023.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UNRWA, *FAQ: UNRWA, Who We Are*.

<sup>2</sup> UNRWA, *FAQ*.

<sup>3</sup> UNRWA, *About UNRWA*, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> UN General Assembly, *Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine (A/RES/75/22)*, 2020; UNRWA, *What We Do*.

<sup>5</sup> UNRWA, *FAQ: UNRWA, What We Do*.

<sup>6</sup> UNRWA, *What We Do*.

<sup>7</sup> UN General Assembly, *Assistance to Palestine Refugees (A/RES/212(III))*, 1948.

<sup>8</sup> UN General Assembly, *Palestine - Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator (A/RES/194(III))*, 1948.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> UNISPAL, *From Humanitarian Crisis to Human Development - The Evolution of UNRWA's Mandate to the Palestine Refugees*, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> UN General Assembly, *Assistance to Palestine Refugees (A/RES/212(III))*, 1949.

<sup>12</sup> General Assembly, *Assistance to Palestine Refugees (A/RES/302(IV))*, 1949; UNRWA, *Who We Are*.

<sup>13</sup> UNRWA, *About UNRWA*, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> UNRWA, *About UNRWA*, 2020; UNRWA, *What We Do*.

<sup>15</sup> UNRWA, *Who We Are*.

## **Governance, Structure, and Membership**

UNRWA has become one of the largest agencies for crisis intervention in the Middle East.<sup>16</sup> Headquartered in Amman, Jordan, UNRWA also operates field offices in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Lebanon, and Syria.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the agency has liaison offices in New York, Washington D.C., Brussels, and Cairo.<sup>18</sup>

UNRWA is headed by the Commissioner-General and Deputy-Commissioner-General, and consists of an Advisory Commission (AdCom), made up of a Secretariat and the Bureau of the Sub-Committee.<sup>19</sup> The current Commissioner-General and Deputy-Commissioner-General are Philippe Lazzarini of Switzerland and Italy and Leni Stenseth of Norway respectively.<sup>20</sup> The Commissioner-General is the only head of a UN body who reports directly to the General Assembly.<sup>21</sup> They are responsible for the coordination of all UNRWA programs, staffing, financial regulations, administrative activities, and working with AdCom and the Secretary-General.<sup>22</sup> The Deputy Commissioner-General advises the Commissioner-General on the administrative running of the agency, chairs agency-wide committees, leads UNRWA's strategic response to emergent situations, and promotes transparency and financial sustainability.<sup>23</sup> Both positions are appointed by the Secretary-General in consultation with AdCom, which is tasked with assisting and advising the Commissioner-General in fulfilling UNRWA's mandate.<sup>24</sup> These appointments, held for three years, can be renewed as long as Member States and the Secretary-General support the renewal.<sup>25</sup>

AdCom's membership consists of the four UNRWA host countries and leading donors, which are Member States whose contributions to the agency averaged \$5 million per year for three consecutive years, consisting of a total of 29 Member States.<sup>26</sup> There are also four Observer Members, the European Union, League of Arab States, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and Palestine.<sup>27</sup> AdCom typically meets twice a year, in June and November, though Member States and Observers meet more regularly through the Sub-Committee of AdCom.<sup>28</sup> AdCom and the Commissioner-General meet to review issues affecting UNRWA's work, allocate funding, and review the Commissioner-General's annual report before its submission to the General Assembly.<sup>29</sup>

The officers of AdCom include a Chair and Vice-Chair, which rotate annually alphabetically.<sup>30</sup> The Chair alternates between a host and a donor country.<sup>31</sup> Both positions are appointed at the June AdCom meeting.<sup>32</sup> In June 2021, Hassan Mneymneh of Lebanon and Diane Corner of the United Kingdom were appointed as Chair and Vice-Chair.<sup>33</sup> AdCom has its own Secretariat, which facilitates its work and field visits, and coordinates with the Bureau of the Sub-Committee to facilitate effective partnerships between

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<sup>16</sup> UNRWA, *What We Do. Emergency Response*.

<sup>17</sup> UNRWA, *Organizational Structure*.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> UNRWA, *Advisory Commission*.

<sup>20</sup> UNRWA, *UNRWA Commissioner-General; UNRWA, UNRWA Deputy Commissioner-General*.

<sup>21</sup> New Zealand, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook 2021-2022*, 2021, p. 268.

<sup>22</sup> UN General Assembly, *Assistance to Palestine Refugees (A/RES/212(III))*, 1948.

<sup>23</sup> UN Permanent Missions, *Deputy Commissioner-General of UNRWA, at the level of Assistant Secretary-General*.

<sup>24</sup> UNRWA, *Advisory Commission; UNRWA, UNRWA Commissioner-General; UNRWA, UNRWA Deputy Commissioner-General*.

<sup>25</sup> New Zealand, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook 2021-2022*, 2021, p. 268.

<sup>26</sup> UNRWA, *Advisory Commission*.

<sup>27</sup> UNRWA, *Members of the Advisory Commission*, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> UNRWA, *Advisory Commission*.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> UNRWA, *Advisory Commission Officers*, 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

AdCom and the UNRWA Secretariat.<sup>34</sup> The AdCom Secretariat has a Chair and two Vice-Chairs.<sup>35</sup> They are appointed at AdCom's November session with the requirement that one of these positions be filled by an UNRWA host country.<sup>36</sup> The current chair is Gerhard Krause of the European Union, and the Vice-Chairs are Erling Home of Norway and Magdi M. Elderini of Egypt.<sup>37</sup>

Almost 90% of UNRWA's funding comes from voluntary donations, with additional funding from partnerships with sister UN agencies, businesses, foundations, community-based organizations, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private donations.<sup>38</sup> UNRWA's 2020 Programme Budget totaled \$806 million, with 58% allocated for educational programs, 15% to promote refugee health, 13% for support services, 6% for relief and social services, and 4% for infrastructure and camp improvement.<sup>39</sup> These allocations reflect UNRWA's strategic priorities, contained within UNRWA's strategy policy document known as the *Medium Term Strategy*, with the current framework being the *Medium Term Strategy 2016-2021* (2015).<sup>40</sup> UNRWA faces chronic funding shortages due to increased need for their services, driven by regional instability and exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>41</sup>

### **Mandate, Functions, and Powers**

UNRWA's official mandate, created by General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) on "Assistance to Palestine Refugees" (1949), is to provide "direct relief and works programmes" to Palestinian refugees.<sup>42</sup> Palestinian refugees are defined as "persons 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."<sup>43</sup> Refugees' descendants can also be registered if they meet certain criteria.<sup>44</sup> To be eligible for services, a person must be living in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, or the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), meet the definition of a Palestinian refugee, be registered with the agency, and need assistance.<sup>45</sup>

Though initially created to provide relief services such as food rations and emergency medical services to Palestinian refugees, the agency adopted additional development goals to expand their assistance to other areas of refugees' lives, including helping refugees acquire knowledge and skills, improve their health, achieve decent standards of living, and enjoy their human rights.<sup>46</sup> This is done through direct delivery services provided by the agency's over 30,000 member staff, 95% of whom are refugees themselves, who act as nurses, doctors, teachers, or aid distributors.<sup>47</sup>

UNRWA's key programme areas are education, health, relief and social services.<sup>48</sup> UNRWA provides education to over 500,000 Palestinian refugee children in 710 schools.<sup>49</sup> It also provides technical vocational training and higher education at eight Vocational Training Centres and two educational science faculties to around 10,000 additional students.<sup>50</sup> Regional volatility arising from

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<sup>34</sup> UNRWA, *Secretariat*.

<sup>35</sup> UNRWA, *Officers of the Advisory Commission*.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> UNRWA, *How We Are Funded*.

<sup>39</sup> UNRWA, *How We Spend Funds, 2020*.

<sup>40</sup> UNRWA, *Core Programme Budget*.

<sup>41</sup> UNRWA, *UNRWA In Figures, 2019*.

<sup>42</sup> UN General Assembly, *Assistance to Palestine Refugees (A/RES/302(IV))*, 1949.

<sup>43</sup> New Zealand, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook 2021-2022*, 2021, p. 267.

<sup>44</sup> UNRWA, *Consolidated Eligibility and Registration Instructions (CERI)*, 2009.

<sup>45</sup> UNRWA, *Who We Are*.

<sup>46</sup> UNRWA, *What We Do*.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> UNRWA, *UNRWA Programme Budget for 2020-2021*, 2019.

<sup>49</sup> UNRWA, *What We Do*.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

the conflict in Syria, the blockade in Gaza, and the West Bank's occupation increase the difficulty of providing ongoing, quality education to Palestinian refugees living in these areas.<sup>51</sup> To overcome these challenges, UNRWA deployed its Education in Emergencies (EiE) programme, which delivers education in alternative ways and focuses on providing more psychosocial support, and safety and security training for students, their parents, and staff.<sup>52</sup> For example, to aid refugee children who are unable to access school or study at home, UNRWA provides safe learning and recreational spaces, enabling children to both study and engage with each other and the instructors in a supportive, safe environment.<sup>53</sup>

UNRWA delivers primary healthcare services through a network of 143 primary health facilities and mobile health trucks, which provide preventive, general, and specialist care.<sup>54</sup> In 2020, UNRWA employed over 3,000 staff at its facilities.<sup>55</sup> In 2011, UNRWA adopted the Family Health Team model in their health centres.<sup>56</sup> This model emphasizes long-term relationships between providers and patients and a holistic, cross-cutting approach to healthcare.<sup>57</sup> In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNRWA's Department of Health worked with the World Health Organization (WHO) and Member States to protect Palestinian refugees from SARS-CoV-2 transmission.<sup>58</sup> Their response included the deployment of telemedicine, mobile phone applications, home delivery of medications, and sanitation and disinfection throughout camps.<sup>59</sup>

The agency also provides emergency cash funds and income-generating opportunities through its Microfinance Department.<sup>60</sup> This work contributes to entrepreneurs' ability to open and operate small, informal businesses using cash and credit loans, which generate income and help alleviate poverty.<sup>61</sup> Microfinancing can also be used to create youth entrepreneurship opportunities by providing start-up loans.<sup>62</sup> These programs are administered through 23 branch offices located in Jordan, Syria, the West Bank, and Gaza.<sup>63</sup> Between 1991 and 2017, the program extended 475,905 loans for a total of \$531.41 million distributed.<sup>64</sup>

Partnerships with private organizations, NGOs, other UN bodies, and Member States are an important way UNRWA accomplishes its work.<sup>65</sup> Member States voluntarily donate funds to UNRWA's annual budget, while partnerships with NGOs and other UN agencies can contribute to the creation of further reports or investment in human development projects, supplementing UNRWA's efforts in these areas.<sup>66</sup> For instance, UNRWA's NGO partnerships include one with the World Diabetes Foundation (WDF) to prevent and treat diabetes amongst Palestinian refugees.<sup>67</sup> In this partnership, UNRWA and WDF combine their resources and specialized knowledge to collectively increase their efforts' effectiveness.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, UNICEF and UNRWA partnered in Damascus to provide a playground for Palestinian refugee children.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> UNRWA, *Education in Emergencies (EiE)*.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> UNRWA, *What We Do*.

<sup>55</sup> UNRWA, *Health Programme 2021*, 2021.

<sup>56</sup> UNRWA, *What We Do*.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> UNRWA, *Health Programme 2021*, 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> UNRWA, *What We Do*.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> UNRWA, *Our Partners*.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> UNRWA, *NGO Partners*.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> UNRWA, *Reaching for the Sky*, 2015.



## **Recent Sessions and Current Priorities**

UNRWA's current priorities are embodied in five-year strategic plans known as the Medium Term Strategy.<sup>70</sup> The Medium Term Strategy 2016-2021 outlined five strategic outcomes: protect and promote refugees' rights under international law; protect refugees' health and reduce the disease burden; ensure school-aged children complete quality, equitable, and inclusive basic education; ensure refugee capabilities are strengthened to increase livelihood opportunities; and ensure refugees can meet basic human needs such as food, shelter, and environmental health.<sup>71</sup> To achieve these outcomes, UNRWA made three commitments within the document: ambitiously fundraise to maximize resources and finding new solutions to bridge financial gaps and transform existing partnerships into long-term strategic engagements; further strengthen management systems to maximize impact and address key sustainability challenges; and foster a culture of partnership between refugees and staff.<sup>72</sup> In his opening statement at the June 2021 AdCom meeting, Commissioner-General Lazzarini briefly touched on each of these strategic priorities.<sup>73</sup> He commented on the continued threat to refugees' rights posed by regional instability, hailed UNRWA's good reputation for quality education, and elaborated on the existing funding shortfall and its effects on UNRWA's work.<sup>74</sup>

As the agency is primarily based on program delivery and not policy-making, it reports to the General Assembly rather than adopting resolutions.<sup>75</sup> The reports summarize the status of the agency's programs, including recent developments and barriers faced.<sup>76</sup> The 2019 report, delivered in September 2020, highlighted the continuing volatile situation across UNRWA's areas of coverage and how, despite it, UNRWA continued to deliver relief to refugees with its education, healthcare, social, and relief services, infrastructure and camp improvement, and microfinance.<sup>77</sup> The report also described how the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and increased the need for aid.<sup>78</sup>

UNRWA utilizes Emergency Appeals to draw attention to specific issues which especially require support.<sup>79</sup> Two Emergency Appeals were published in 2021.<sup>80</sup> *The Occupied Palestinian Territory Emergency Appeal 2021* draws attention to the issues of Palestinian refugees in the OPT, where the situation has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, an unemployment rate of 49% in the third quarter of 2020, a volatile security situation, political instability, and the complete dependency of many refugees on UNRWA's basic humanitarian assistance.<sup>81</sup> The appeal notes that refugees in the West Bank are especially vulnerable to threats to their health and well-being, including settler violence and general socio-economic hardship, due to higher than average rates of unemployment and poverty and threats from occupying Israeli forces.<sup>82</sup> Considering this, the Emergency Appeal sets three strategic priorities: increase economic access to food through food aid, cash-for-work, and emergency cash assistance for crisis-affected households; maintain refugee access to critical services; and effectively manage and coordinate emergency responses to ensure improved program delivery.<sup>83</sup>

*The Syria Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal 2021* notes that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated refugees' long-term displacement and socio-economic crises, affecting Palestinian refugees in Syria,

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<sup>70</sup> UNRWA, *Medium Term Strategy 2016-2021*, 2016.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> UNRWA, *Commissioner-General Opening Statement, Virtual Advisory Commission*, 2021.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> New Zealand, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook 2021-2022*, 2021, p. 268.

<sup>76</sup> UN General Assembly, *Report of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East 1 January-31 December 2019, 2020*.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> UNRWA, *Emergency Appeals*, 2021.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> UNRWA, *Occupied Palestinian Territory Emergency Appeal 2021*, 2021.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> UNRWA, *Occupied Palestinian Territory Emergency Appeal 2021*, 2021.

Lebanon, and Jordan.<sup>84</sup> It states that in Syria, 91% of the estimated 438,000 Palestinian refugees live in absolute poverty, and 40% are displaced.<sup>85</sup> In 2020, living conditions deteriorated further because of economic crises, causing the Syrian pound's value to fall and leading to more expensive basic commodities.<sup>86</sup> In terms of COVID-19, testing capacity across Syria remains low, and the extent of the spread among Palestinian refugees is not tracked.<sup>87</sup> Refugees in Lebanon are facing similar issues, including the falling value of the Lebanese pound and increased economic hardship and vulnerability.<sup>88</sup> In Jordan, the Emergency Appeal notes that lockdowns and other pandemic measures have reduced refugee access to daily and informal employment.<sup>89</sup> In response, the Emergency Appeal sets out three strategic priorities: provide cash assistance and expand direct food aid; continue to provide emergency health services; and maintain and repair installations to ensure effective service delivery and continued participation in regional coordination mechanisms.<sup>90</sup>

UNRWA began a digital transformation and modernization process in 2021, focusing on improving service delivery and providing quality, inclusive remote education.<sup>91</sup> In addition to digitalizing many operations, UNRWA is focusing on improving data collection to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their humanitarian assistance and relief and social services.<sup>92</sup> Recent innovations include paperless health centers and the digital learning platform Education in Emergencies (EiE).<sup>93</sup> The platform allows students continued educational access despite remote learning constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>94</sup>

Funding shortfalls, particularly in 2020 and 2021, threaten UNRWA's ability to fund operations and limit its ability to provide aid.<sup>95</sup> In response, Jordan and Sweden will co-host an international conference in October 2021 to seek agreement on funding commitments among UNRWA's Members and Observers.<sup>96</sup> A blueprint of *UNRWA's 2023-2028 Strategic Plan* will also be presented, with the plan itself set to be finalized by mid-2022.<sup>97</sup>

## **Conclusion**

UNRWA is the UN's primary relief service for Palestinian refugees in the Middle East, providing both humanitarian and development assistance to over 5.7 million registered refugees.<sup>98</sup> The agency's key program areas are education, health, and relief and social services.<sup>99</sup> Current priorities, embedded in the *Medium Term Strategy 2016-2021* (2015), include protecting refugees' rights and health, ensuring quality access to education and basic human needs, and increasing livelihood opportunities.<sup>100</sup> UNRWA's ability to accomplish these priorities is challenged by continued regional instability and funding shortfalls, though recent modernization processes attempt to increase the agency's efficiency to address these challenges.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> UNRWA, *Syria Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal 2021*, 2021.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> UNRWA, *Modernizing UNRWA*, 2021.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> UNRWA, *FAQ*; UNRWA, *Who We Are*.

<sup>99</sup> UNRWA, *UNRWA Programme Budget for 2020-2021*, 2019.

<sup>100</sup> UNRWA, *Medium Term Strategy 2016-2021*, 2016.

<sup>101</sup> UNRWA, *UNRWA In Figures*, 2019; UNRWA, *Modernizing UNRWA*, 2021.

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*The Commissioner-General of UNRWA delivers reports annually to the General Assembly. The most recent report was delivered at the General Assembly's seventy-fifth session in September 2020 and covered UNRWA's operations from January 1 to December 31, 2019. The report outlines the most recent developments in UNRWA's operations across its geographic areas of focus, which include political, economic, and security developments in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Reading this report will give delegates up-to-date information on the current status of UNRWA's operations in each of the locations in which it operates. This information will provide valuable context and insight.*

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. (2016). *Medium Term Strategy 2016-2021*. Retrieved 27 June 2021 from:

[https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/mts\\_2016\\_2021.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/mts_2016_2021.pdf)

*UNRWA uses five-year strategic plans known as Medium Term Strategies to guide their programmatic work. This document is the most recent Medium Term Strategy for 2016 to 2021. It describes UNRWA's current operations and accomplishments as of 2015, before elaborating on UNRWA's strategic vision and objectives for 2016-2021, crystallizing the objectives into five strategic priorities. In addition to describing these five strategic priorities, this document also elaborates on UNRWA's understanding of the situation Palestinian refugees face, and the assumptions that informed the creation of the strategic priorities. This foundational document will aid delegates in comprehending what UNRWA currently aims to achieve as well as the challenges the agency currently faces, thereby informing the positions that delegates' Member States will take and the solutions that they could propose.*

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. (2019). *UNRWA Programme Budget for 2020 – 2021*. Retrieved 7 August 2021 from:

[https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2020-2021\\_programme\\_budget\\_blue\\_book.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2020-2021_programme_budget_blue_book.pdf)

*UNRWA's program budgets cover two-year periods. This document is the most recent budget, published in 2019 and covering 2020 to 2021. It begins by describing the general layout of the budget and how it relates to UNRWA's strategic priorities, then continues to explain current operations, constraints, challenges, accomplishments, and financial resources as it pertains to each of the UNRWA's sub-programs. These sub-programs pertain to the strategic priorities outlined in UNRWA's Medium-Term Strategy 2016-2021. By reading this document, delegates will increase their understanding of UNRWA's priorities, operations, and functions, as well as current challenges that the agency faces.*

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. (2020). *About UNRWA*. Retrieved 27 June 2021 from:

[https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/about\\_unrwa\\_two\\_pager\\_english\\_2020.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/about_unrwa_two_pager_english_2020.pdf)

*This document provides an overview of UNRWA, including the locations in which it operates, important facts, and strategic areas of focus. Specifically, the document describes the definition of Palestinian refugees that guides UNRWA, UNRWA's unique role as a direct provider of services, and issues currently faced by Palestinian refugees, particularly stemming from armed conflicts in Syria, the West Bank, and Gaza. By reading this document, delegates will enhance their understanding of the committee and can begin to apply their knowledge of UNRWA's most current issues to the specific topics being discussed.*

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*The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) form the core of the United Nations' work across its agencies and bodies. This document matches UNRWA's current work to more than half of the SDGs, illuminating UNRWA's role in achieving the SDGs within the context of the United Nations system. For instance, the document describes UNRWA's work in achieving SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) by first illustrating the context UNRWA operates in and then how UNRWA's microfinance program has been used to create income-generating opportunities for both Palestinian adults and youth. Delegates reading this document will find examples of UNRWA's work that are useful to understand the general work of the body as well as comprehending the work currently being done to address the specific topics under consideration.*

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## 1. Situation of and Assistance to Palestinian Women

*“Destruction is gender blind, but reconstruction is not. It is key that all Gazans, women and men, be involved in the reconstruction process of their community.”<sup>102</sup>*

### **Introduction**

Women make up nearly half of Palestinian society with 49% of the 5.1 million person population in occupied Palestinian territory (OPT).<sup>103</sup> In both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, approximately one out of every ten households is headed by a female.<sup>104</sup> Despite this, Palestinian women continue to face many challenges such as food insecurity, limited access to clean water, reduced employment, less educational opportunities, low levels of political participation, and lack of adequate healthcare compared to Palestinian men.<sup>105</sup> They are also subjected to disproportionate levels of gender-based violence (GBV) such as physical and verbal attacks, sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, and death.<sup>106</sup>

Gender inequality and other social issues have generally been viewed as secondary issues to the protracted occupation and political instability in the OPT.<sup>107</sup> However, the COVID-19 lockdown has further increased economic insecurity and domestic violence experienced by women.<sup>108</sup> During the early stages of the pandemic in April 2020, 42.8% of the people staying in Gaza’s quarantine facilities were female but the facilities were not fully prepared for women’s needs due to the insufficient hygiene kits, lack of psychosocial counselling, particularly for women quarantining away from their children, and inadequate healthcare for pregnant women.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, about 60% of workers in the care sector and 70% of the frontline health workers in OPT are women and face a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 and a heavier workload than their peers as the pandemic continues to evolve.<sup>110</sup>

A recent increase in violence within the ongoing Palestinian and Israeli conflict has also exacerbated the gendered disparities for social services and increased GBV against Palestinian women.<sup>111</sup> Most recently, in May 2021, Israeli authorities’ plan to evict four Palestinian refugee families in East Jerusalem ignited violent clashes between Palestinians and Israelis which later ended in a negotiated ceasefire.<sup>112</sup> These recurring conflicts further set back efforts to empower Palestinian women due to the interruption of provided social services and increases of violence are documented in its aftermath.<sup>113</sup>

As the main agency assisting Palestinian refugees in the region, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is responsible for promoting women’s rights and providing for their needs.<sup>114</sup> UNRWA’s program is tasked with providing education, relief and social services, refugee camp infrastructure, healthcare, microfinance, and protection to sustain the livelihoods of all Palestinian refugees.<sup>115</sup> Given UNRWA’s range of direct services in OPT, gender mainstreaming, defined as “the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action,

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<sup>102</sup> Zayyan, OPINION: How Gaza’s war rubble removal can make way for gender equality, *Thomson Reuters Foundation News*, 2021.

<sup>103</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *H.E. Dr. Awad, Highlights the Situation of the Palestinian Women on the Eve of the International Women’s Day, 08/03/2020*, 2020.

<sup>104</sup> UNFPA, *PCBS-UNFPA Joint Press Release on the occasion of World Population Day*, 2021.

<sup>105</sup> UN Women, *Gender and Wars in Gaza Untangled: What Past Wars Have Taught Us?*, 2021, pp. 7-20.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>110</sup> UN Women, *COVID-19: Gendered Impacts of the Pandemic in Palestine and Implications for Policy and Programming: Findings of a Rapid Gender Analysis of COVID-19 in Palestine*, 2020, p. 16.

<sup>111</sup> UN Women, *Gender and Wars in Gaza Untangled: What Past Wars Have Taught Us?*, 2021, pp. 4-5.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>114</sup> UNRWA, *About UNRWA*, 2021.

<sup>115</sup> UNRWA, *About UNRWA*, 2021.



including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels,” is key to ensuring that women’s needs are met.<sup>116</sup> UNRWA is dedicated to providing adequate resources and social services to Palestinian women, along with combatting the GBV perpetrated against them.<sup>117</sup>

### ***International and Regional Framework***

Articles 21, 23, 25, and 26 in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) state that all people have the rights to participate in their country’s government, work in favorable conditions, have a right to an adequate standard of living, particularly for mothers and children, and have a right to education, all of which are particularly relevant to Palestinian women who do not currently have equal opportunities to access social services and participate fully in politics.<sup>118</sup> General Assembly resolution 302 on “Assistance to Palestine refugees,” also adopted in 1948, established UNRWA to provide direct relief to Palestinian refugees.<sup>119</sup> However, this landmark resolution does not mention gender, nor does it contain provisions specific to women.<sup>120</sup>

In 1979, the General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW), which defines discrimination against women and establishes a framework for Member States to take national action to address the discrimination that women face.<sup>121</sup> The 1995 *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* covers twelve major areas of women’s rights, including poverty, education and training, health, violence, armed conflict, economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms, human rights, media, environment, and the girl child.<sup>122</sup> In addition, in 2000, the Security Council adopted its landmark resolution 1325 on “Women and peace and security,” which stressed the importance of women’s equal participation as active, engaged actors in politics, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding.<sup>123</sup> Security Council resolution 1325 led to the creation of Palestine’s Second National Action Plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and Subsequent Resolutions 2020-2024.<sup>124</sup> This National Action Plan specifically outlines a framework for Palestinian women and identifies four pillars on Prevention and Protection, Accountability, Participation, and Relief and Recovery, as the key areas of focus.<sup>125</sup> The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, adopted in 2015, consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve peace and prosperity for everyone, including women.<sup>126</sup> In particular, UNRWA’s work in assisting Palestinian women focuses on SDG 1 (“no poverty”), SDG 2 (“zero hunger”), SDG 3 (“good health and well-being”), SDG 4 (“quality education”), SDG 5 (“gender equality”), and SDG 8 (“decent work and economic growth”).<sup>127</sup> With the adoption of its *Policy on Gender Equality* in 2007, UNRWA reiterated its commitment to ensure gender mainstreaming in order to meet the needs of women and girls in Gaza.<sup>128</sup> UNRWA’s *Gender Equality Strategy 2016 – 2021* (2015) builds upon this policy and its first *Gender Mainstreaming Policy 2008 – 2005*.<sup>129</sup> These documents continue to highlight the importance of

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<sup>116</sup> UN Women, *Gender Mainstreaming*.

<sup>117</sup> UNRWA, *About UNRWA*, 2021.

<sup>118</sup> UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948.

<sup>119</sup> UN General Assembly, *Assistance to Palestine refugees (A/RES/302 (IV))*, 1948.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*, 1979.

<sup>122</sup> UN Women, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Beijing+5 Political Declaration and Outcome*, 2014.

<sup>123</sup> UN Security Council, *Women and peace and security (S/RES/1325 (2000))*, 2000.

<sup>124</sup> Ministry of Women’s Affairs, State of Palestine, *The Second National Action Plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security and Subsequent Resolutions 2020 - 2024*, 2020.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> UN General Assembly, *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

<sup>127</sup> UNRWA, *UNRWA and SDG 5: Gender Equality and Women’s and Girl’s Empowerment*, 2021.

<sup>128</sup> UNRWA, *UNRWA’s Policy on Gender Equality*, 2007.

<sup>129</sup> UNRWA, *UNRWA Gender Equality Strategy 2016-2021: Annual Implementation Report January-December 2019*, 2020.

including gender in its policies and programs through gender architecture, gender markers, leadership, and gender accountability, to result in more equitable and inclusive treatment of Palestinian women.<sup>130</sup>

### ***Role of the International System***

In a region with a protracted humanitarian crisis which has been exacerbated by COVID-19, UNRWA works to maintain stability and support the refugee population through the five strategic outcomes in the *Agency's Medium-Term Strategy for 2016 – 2021* (2015).<sup>131</sup> Refugee rights and health and improving access to health services are priorities for UNRWA to protect under international law.<sup>132</sup> Continuing to provide basic education for school-aged children is another focus, particularly with literacy rates among female refugees lagging behind that of male refugees in all of UNRWA's operations.<sup>133</sup> Improving the livelihood of the refugees through access to human, social, natural, physical, and financial capital, especially for vulnerable groups such as women, is also urgent when refugee women continue to face lower levels of unemployment.<sup>134</sup> Basic needs such as food and shelter are vital to sustaining the poorest refugees, and UNRWA works to address the issue by providing them direct cash and food assistance.<sup>135</sup>

UN Women is the leading UN agency advocating for gender equality by working with Member States and within the UN system, thus making it a critical partner in supporting UNRWA with empowering Palestinian women.<sup>136</sup> It specifically promotes women's political participation in OPT which remains low due to harmful gendered stereotypes and the ongoing conflict impeding activist efforts to organize women.<sup>137</sup> One example is UN Women's work with the State of Palestine's Ministry of Women's Affairs to draft and implement *Palestine's Second National Action Plan (2020)* to promote Palestinian women's involvement in international peace processes and peacebuilding along with integrating gender in all levels of decision making.<sup>138</sup> Aligning with its goal to increase women's leadership, UN Women has also supported programs such as a capacity-building project to help women graduating from nursing schools find jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>139</sup>

Other UN entities that are instrumental in supporting UNRWA's work include the World Food Programme (WFP) which is responsible for addressing world hunger, providing emergency nutrition relief, and overseeing logistical responses to humanitarian crises.<sup>140</sup> WFP mitigates food insecurity in the region through its cash transfer platform which allows Palestinian women to purchase food and other needed products with an electronic voucher at one of its three hundred shops in Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem.<sup>141</sup> United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is another UN agency providing health care to Palestinian women, specifically for sexual and reproductive health.<sup>142</sup> It also works to address GBV in the West Bank and Gaza by collecting data, conducting outreach, and improving care to survivors of GBV.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> UNRWA, *UNRWA Gender Equality Strategy 2016-2021: Annual Implementation Report January-December 2019, 2020*.

<sup>131</sup> UNRWA, *About UNRWA*, 2021.

<sup>132</sup> UNRWA, *Medium-Term Strategy 2016 – 2021*, 2016, p. 1.

<sup>133</sup> UNRWA, *Medium-Term Strategy 2016 – 2021*, 2016, pp. 11, 17; UNESCO, *Bridging the Gender Gap: Mapping and Analysis of Gender Policies in Palestine (2011-2017)*, 2019.

<sup>134</sup> UNRWA, *Medium-Term Strategy 2016 – 2021*, 2016, pp. 11, 17.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>136</sup> UN Women, *About UN Women*.

<sup>137</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs, State of Palestine, *The Second National Action Plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security and Subsequent Resolutions 2020 - 2024*, 2020, p. 13.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> UN Women, *Two birds with one stone: UN Women helps vulnerable women find jobs in the battle against COVID-19*, 2021.

<sup>140</sup> WFP, *Our Work*, 2021.

<sup>141</sup> WFP, *WFP and UNFPA to support gender-based violence survivors in Palestine*, 2021.

<sup>142</sup> UNFPA, *About Us*, 2021.

<sup>143</sup> UNFPA, *What We Do: Gender-based violence*, 2021.

WFP and UNFPA, along with other UN agencies, partner with UNRWA for humanitarian and development interventions for Palestinian women.<sup>144</sup>

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) supplement the work that UNRWA and other UN agencies do for Palestinian women.<sup>145</sup> The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (NGOWG) is composed of 19 international NGOs who work as a coalition to further the Women, Peace and Security agenda globally and at the UN.<sup>146</sup> NGOWG often makes recommendations to the UN Security Council to include women in the peacebuilding process and promote gender-sensitive humanitarian aid.<sup>147</sup> Its most recent recommendation in June 2021 calls attention to the high rates of GBV and the continued lack of female inclusion in peace-making discussions.<sup>148</sup>

### ***Ensuring Adequate Resources and Access to Social Services for Palestinian Women***

Gender inequality and gender dynamics in the West Bank and Gaza, further deepened by the protracted conflict and COVID-19, impact Palestinian women's access to resources and social services.<sup>149</sup> Almost a third of the population, 1.7 million people, suffer from food insecurity with women being at a higher risk.<sup>150</sup> Pregnant women and new mothers are particularly at risk of food insecurity since they require more nutritious food and/or food items for infants, particularly for women whose stress may cause difficulties in breastfeeding.<sup>151</sup> In 2021, UNRWA provided emergency food parcels to 1.2 million Palestinians, including women, especially impacted by COVID-19 in Gaza.<sup>152</sup> WFP granted food assistance in the form of Cash-Based Transfers (CBT) to 333,955 food insecure Palestinians, 20% of whom have a female head of household.<sup>153</sup> Recognizing the importance of closing the gender gap in food access, UN Women and WFP recently signed an agreement in February 2021 to more closely coordinate on gender empowerment activities through CBTs and multipurpose cash assistance.<sup>154</sup> To further support vulnerable women who are pregnant or lactating and children under five years, WFP launched the "Nutrition Awareness and Cash-Based Transfer" program in the southern West Bank to provide a monthly supplement to purchase nutritious foods which benefited 256 women and their families.<sup>155</sup>

Inadequate health care, heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, places an increased burden on Palestinian women who are expected to be caregivers, both outside of medical emergencies and in the immediate aftermath of medical situations, as patients are typically discharged before a full recovery.<sup>156</sup> Healthcare facilities damaged by conflict and experiencing an influx of patients as a result of COVID-19 which has caused a shortage of much-needed health care.<sup>157</sup> Pregnant women are particularly vulnerable since there is a deficit of midwives in Palestine.<sup>158</sup> UNRWA, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), addresses healthcare needs through its 140 health centers and has served 48% of the 5.7 million Palestinians who are eligible for UNRWA services, including 176,574 women who received

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<sup>144</sup> UNRWA, *United Nations*.

<sup>145</sup> NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security, *Israel & Palestine*, 2021.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> UN Women, *COVID-19: Gendered Impacts of the Pandemic in Palestine and Implications for Policy and Programming: Findings of a Rapid Gender Analysis of COVID-19 in Palestine*, 2020.

<sup>150</sup> WFP, *WFP Palestine Country Brief July 2020*, 2020.

<sup>151</sup> UN Women, *Gender and Wars in Gaza Untangled: What Past Wars Have Taught Us?*, 2021, p. 16.

<sup>152</sup> UNRWA, *Occupied Palestinian Territory Emergency Appeal 2021*, 2021.

<sup>153</sup> WFP, *WFP Palestine Country Brief July 2020*, 2020.

<sup>154</sup> WFP, *WFP and UN Women join forces to foster gender equality and women's empowerment in Palestine*, 2021.

<sup>155</sup> WFP, *WFP Palestine Country Brief July 2020*, 2020.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>158</sup> UN Women, *COVID-19: Gendered Impacts of the Pandemic in Palestine and Implications for Policy and Programming: Findings of a Rapid Gender Analysis of COVID-19 in Palestine*, 2020, p. 16.

family planning care.<sup>159</sup> Launched in 2011, UNRWA's preconception care program targets infant and maternal mortality rates by assessing risk factors, providing screenings for diseases, and prescribing folic acid supplements to women.<sup>160</sup> Its corresponding antenatal care offers additional health screenings, visits, iron and folic acid supplements, and subsidized hospital delivery for all pregnant women, while its postnatal care helps manage the pregnancy risks which may affect the mother and child.<sup>161</sup> To further bridge the gap for maternal and reproductive healthcare, UNFPA has been providing services such as education on contraceptives, strengthening midwifery training, and improving breast cancer screenings for Palestinian women since 1986, serving 15,736 women of reproductive age.<sup>162</sup>

Women also face significant obstacles for gainful employment and a large pay gap which contributes to the wide economic disparities between Palestinian women and men.<sup>163</sup> Despite women constituting 49% of the population in the West Bank and Gaza, women only make up 43% of public sector employees.<sup>164</sup> However, female enrollment in secondary education is 90% and higher education is 60% which illustrates how higher education for women is not translating into employment.<sup>165</sup> Leadership roles in the workplace continue to be low, with women only making up about 12% of senior management and executive positions.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, women are still expected to take on the bulk of household chores and caregiving even if they are also employed.<sup>167</sup> To economically empower women, UNRWA provides microfinance loans to women so they have the financial capital to fund economic activities.<sup>168</sup> UNRWA's Poverty Alleviation Program in the West Bank offered business development services for women which included vocational coaching and business counselling so they could develop sustainable businesses to financially support themselves.<sup>169</sup> Aiming to combat the gender employment gap, UNRWA's Young Women Leaders Programme (YWLP) provides new female graduates with employment empowerment training and short-term employment opportunities to better integrate them into the labor market.<sup>170</sup> On the national level, the Palestinian Ministry of Labour allotted a one-time emergency cash transfer of \$212 USD to unemployed workers, 18.5% whom were women, in 2020 with another transfer planned in 2021.<sup>171</sup> The Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection, a national program run by the Palestinian Ministry of Labour, created over 4,000 employment opportunities and 560 income-generating opportunities, around 40% of these opportunities targeting women.<sup>172</sup> However, Palestinian women still face disproportionate economic impacts due to the pandemic.<sup>173</sup> Many women did not receiving their wages after a State of Emergency was declared in Palestine and 31.6% of female workers that registered for financial assistance did not receive any.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> UNRWA, *Department of Health Annual Report 2020, 2021*, pp. 7-9

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-38.

<sup>162</sup> UNFPA, *UNFPA Palestine, 2021*.

<sup>163</sup> UN Women, *COVID-19: Gendered Impacts of the Pandemic in Palestine and Implications for Policy and Programming: Findings of a Rapid Gender Analysis of COVID-19 in Palestine, 2020*, p. 10.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>165</sup> UN Women, *COVID-19: Gendered Impacts of the Pandemic in Palestine and Implications for Policy and Programming: Findings of a Rapid Gender Analysis of COVID-19 in Palestine, 2020*, p. 10; UNESCO, *Bridging the Gender Gap: Mapping and Analysis of Gender Policies in Palestine (2011-2017)*, 2019.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>168</sup> UNRWA, *UNRWA Gender Equality Strategy 2016-2021: Annual Implementation Report January-December 2019, 2020*, p. 10.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>170</sup> UNRWA, *The UNRWA Young Leaders Programme Provides Training on the Right to Work, 2019*.

<sup>171</sup> ILO, *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories: Report of the Director-General – Appendix 2021, 2021*, p. 38.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>173</sup> The Democracy and Workers' Rights Center, *The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic and Containment Measures on Palestinian Women Workers, 2020*, p. 4.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

There has been a consistent lack of women's representation in leadership roles due to gender inequality and traditional social norms.<sup>175</sup> Women continue to hold a central role in supporting their families and communities, yet they are visibly absent from more public and political decision-making spaces.<sup>176</sup> The widespread belief that women should allow men to be in charge of politics is strongly shared by Palestinian men and women alike, 59% and 41% respectively.<sup>177</sup> Women only make up 11.7% of leadership positions and only 16% of parliament members are female.<sup>178</sup> Their perspective has been missing in key reconciliation agreements such as the Fatah and Hamas talk in October 2017 where no woman was present.<sup>179</sup> Increasing more opportunities for Palestinian women to lead and participate in both formal and informal political dialogue is crucial to reflect the female perspective.<sup>180</sup> The third pillar of *Palestine's Second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security* focuses on women's political participation and outlines actions to include women in the political process.<sup>181</sup> Training women, forming networks of women leaders, advocating for women's representation, and raising public awareness about the need for women's political participation are all key actions to implement in order to ensure that women's needs are discussed, negotiated for, and met.<sup>182</sup> The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) is a global partnership of four UN entities, CSOs, and donors which funds several projects oriented towards expanding women's participation on the peacebuilding and recovery process.<sup>183</sup> These projects include the Psycho-social Counselling Center for Women (PSCCW), which offers training to local community-based organizations' members and young activist women on women empowerment topics and utilization of social media to advocate for women's rights.<sup>184</sup>

### ***Combating Gender-Based Violence in Occupied Palestinian Territory***

GBV is a term for violence against women that may lead to physical, sexual, or psychological harm due to their gender as well as any harm that is attributed to power inequalities based in traditional gender roles.<sup>185</sup> Decades of military occupation and the patriarchal Palestinian culture created an environment where GBV is prevalent.<sup>186</sup> The third *Violence Survey in Palestinian Society 2019* (2019) shows that over half of married women, 57%, have experienced psychological violence, 9% have experienced sexual violence, and 18% have experienced physical violence at the hands of their husbands.<sup>187</sup>

Measures taken to slow the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic such as quarantining and physical distancing puts many Palestinian women at risk of becoming victims to GBV, as their social and protective networks have been disrupted and they have reduced access to protective services.<sup>188</sup> Quarantine measures confine women and children who live with their abusers and restrict their access to safe shelter.<sup>189</sup> In response, the GBV Sub-Cluster in the OPT formed and is made up of more than 60

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<sup>175</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs, State of Palestine, *The Second National Action Plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security and Subsequent Resolutions 2020 - 2024*, 2020, p. 13.

<sup>176</sup> UN Women, *COVID-19: Gendered Impacts of the Pandemic in Palestine and Implications for Policy and Programming: Findings of a Rapid Gender Analysis of COVID-19 in Palestine*, 2020, p. 19.

<sup>177</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs, State of Palestine, *The Second National Action Plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security and Subsequent Resolutions 2020 - 2024*, 2020, p. 13.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>183</sup> Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, *Our Mission*, 2021.

<sup>184</sup> Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, *Palestine*, 2021.

<sup>185</sup> UN Women, *Navigating Through Shattered Paths: NGO Service Providers and Women Survivors of Gender-Based Violence: An Assessment of GBV Services in Gaza*, 2017.

<sup>186</sup> UNFPA, *Gender-based violence*, 2021.

<sup>187</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Violence Survey in Palestinian Society 2019*, 2019, p. 65.

<sup>188</sup> UNFPA, *Impact of the COVID19 Outbreak and Lockdown on Family Dynamics and Domestic Violence in Palestine*, 2020.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

members, consisting of 11 UN agencies, over 40 national and international NGOs, and 8 line ministries working together to combat the increasing levels of GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>190</sup> The GBV Sub-Cluster has been providing services such as emergency health care, legal assistance, GBV awareness sessions, and shelter.<sup>191</sup> Mental health services are instrumental to helping survivors of GBV recover; however these professional and psychosocial services are difficult to access in OPT.<sup>192</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNRWA health clinics provided remote mental health and psychosocial support and address GBV for survivors which helped increase access to these critical services.<sup>193</sup>

Married women are vulnerable to repeated physical violence, with the risk of violence increasing in proportion to the level of household poverty, which underscores the importance of economic empowerment in tackling GBV.<sup>194</sup> The lack of legal mechanisms, economic hardship, and high burden of proof severely limit Palestinian women's access to justice in domestic violence cases.<sup>195</sup> HAYA: *Eliminating Violence Against Women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (2018 - 2022)* focuses on addressing GBV through a multi-pronged approach by increasing access to services, strengthening legal and policy frameworks, and changing community held gendered practices and attitudes needed to combat GBV.<sup>196</sup> Funded by the Government of Canada and jointly implemented by UNFPA, UN Habitat, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC), and UN Women, HAYA engages with women from specific groups such as rural areas as well as men and boys in different outreach and awareness programs to educate them on the harmful beliefs contributing to GBV.<sup>197</sup> It has established a comprehensive and updated directory for GBV services in various areas like health, legal, and security services in the West Bank and Gaza Strip that women can access.<sup>198</sup>

## Conclusion

The continuous conflict in the region, in addition to the ongoing blockade and the COVID-19 pandemic, further impedes the journey towards gender equality for Palestinian women who are disproportionately affected and are in a more vulnerable situation compared to women who are not in a conflict zone.<sup>199</sup> Increasing access to and providing sufficient resources to address basic social needs such as food, employment, and health care will help women in the OPT, particularly pregnant women and new mothers who need more support, achieve gender equality.<sup>200</sup> Equal female political participation and representation in leadership are integral in ensuring that women have a say on the decisions that will also directly impact their livelihoods.<sup>201</sup> Palestinian women continue to experience high rates of GBV, especially from their partners, which is difficult to address due to the lack of existing laws protecting them.<sup>202</sup> For continued progress in attaining gender equality in the OPT, incorporating gender

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<sup>190</sup> UNFPA, *Humanitarian Response Plan 2021*, UNFPA, *State of Palestine*, 2021, pp. 5-8.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-8.

<sup>192</sup> UN Women, *Navigating Through Shattered Paths: NGO Service Providers and Women Survivors of Gender-Based Violence: An Assessment of GBV Services in Gaza*, 2017, p. 52.

<sup>193</sup> UNRWA, *Essential UNRWA Assistance to Survivors of Gender-Based Violence is at Risk Due to Severe Financial Shortfall*, 2020.

<sup>194</sup> UN Women, *Navigating Through Shattered Paths: NGO Service Providers and Women Survivors of Gender-Based Violence: An Assessment of GBV Services in Gaza*, 2017, pp. 21-23.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 2017.

<sup>196</sup> UNODC, *Palestine: The Launch of the Joint Programme HAYA on Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls*, 2018.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> UN Women, *Palestine GBV Service Directory*.

<sup>199</sup> UNRWA, *How Does She Cope? Women Pushed to New Limits in the Gaza Strip*, 2019.

<sup>200</sup> UN Women, *COVID-19: Gendered Impacts of the Pandemic in Palestine and Implications for Policy and Programming: Findings of a Rapid Gender Analysis of COVID-19 in Palestine*, 2020.

<sup>201</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs, State of Palestine, *The Second National Action Plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security and Subsequent Resolutions 2020 - 2024*, 2020.

<sup>202</sup> UN Women, *Navigating Through Shattered Paths: NGO Service Providers and Women Survivors of Gender-Based Violence: An Assessment of GBV Services in Gaza*, 2017.

mainstreaming and obtaining adequate funding are fundamental for all international relief efforts aimed at empowering Palestinian women.<sup>203</sup>

### **Further Research**

Moving forward on their research on this topic, delegates should consider the following questions: How can UNRWA and other UN entities work to better fulfill Palestinian women's basic needs? What capacity-building activities can UNRWA, UN agencies, and NGOs do to fill any gaps in implementation? Are there other areas outside of basic needs, healthcare, political participation, and GBV that Palestinian women experience which the international community can assist with? How can all of the groups involved with assisting Palestinian women improve on their aid and response for future conflicts that may arise in the region or another crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic? What can be done to support vulnerable women including women who are pregnant, have disabilities, elderly, or experience mental illness?

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<https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20palestine/attachments/publications/2021/04/napen%20report2021compressed%201compressed%201.pdf?la=en&vs=1448>

*This National Action Plan (NAP) provides the background context about women in the State of Palestine. The NAP begins with a detailed history of OPT and the Security Council resolutions effect on women. It details the four pillars which compose the NAP and establishes Palestine's goals and commitments to women in areas of peace and security over the next four years. This plan can be used to guide additional research in other areas. and how it relates back to the pillars.*

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2021). *Gender and Wars in Gaza Untangled: What Past Wars Have Taught Us?*. Retrieved 20 June 2021 from:

<https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20palestine/attachments/publications/2021/06/d8-rqa%20brief-compressed%203.pdf?la=en&vs=851>

*This report provides a detailed snapshot into needs of Palestinian women and girls after the recent conflicts in Gaza. It has up-to-date statistics on basic needs such as shelter and non-food items, education, water, sanitation, and hygiene, protection, food security, and health which makes the report a good starting point to further look into the issues. This illustrates the severity of the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza which has been heightened with the COVID-19 pandemic.*

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (2019). *Bridging the Gender Gap: Mapping and Analysis of Gender Policies in Palestine (2011-2017)*. Retrieved 17 June 2021 from:

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*UNESCO's publication is the first mapping and study on gender policies in Palestine and its findings showed 97 gender related policies with 702 accompanying policy interventions or activities during the 2011 – 2017 time period. This report identifies current gender equality measures in place and analyzes the gaps and challenges in its implementation in order to set threshold for gender equality policies, provide data and information on the effectiveness, and suggest recommendations to promote gender*

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<sup>203</sup> UNRWA, *UNRWA Gender Equality Strategy 2016-2021: Annual Implementation Report January-December 2019, 2020*.

equality. It offers a more historical outlook on past policies and actions taken to serve Palestinian women and girls.

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. (2019). *How Does She Cope? Women Pushed to New Limits in the Gaza Strip*. Retrieved 13 June 2021 from:

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*This is a report that delves into an UNRWA commissioned study about how women in the Gaza strip live their lives and their coping mechanisms in the face of the ongoing conflict. There were over a hundred women over a geographic and social spectrum surveyed through a variety of methods and the report captures their views. It provides more background and context about the Gaza situation from a gendered perspective. The UNRWA report also features several case studies that provides a more in-depth, personal look into the women's lives.*

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*The document outlines UNRWA's Gender Equality Strategy (GES) which builds upon its first Gender Mainstreaming Strategy 2008-2015. Its GES emphasizes the importance of gender in policies and programs to lead towards more equitable and inclusive treatment for the Palestinian refugee population. There are four drivers identified for change which are gender architecture, gender marker, leadership, and gender accountability. It is useful to review the report to learn more about the results from the previous strategy and how UNRWA can continue to promote female Palestinians.*

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## 2. Providing Career Opportunities for Youth

### *Introduction*

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provides numerous humanitarian services for Palestinian refugees, from healthcare and emergency services to human development and career opportunities.<sup>204</sup> UNRWA administers services to 5.7 million Palestinian refugees.<sup>205</sup> According to the Youth Strategic Framework for Palestine Refugees in Lebanon, jointly published by UNRWA and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 20% to 25% of the Palestinian refugees under UNRWA's administration are youth.<sup>206</sup> Large proportions of this youth population are unemployed and thus severely impacted by poverty.<sup>207</sup> As of 2018, 70% of Palestinian refugee youth in Lebanon and 90% of Palestinian refugee youth in Syria lived in poverty, at or below \$208 per month.<sup>208</sup> The same study found that 5% of Palestinian refugee youth in Lebanon and 13% in Syria lived in extreme poverty, at or below \$75 per month.<sup>209</sup> It is worth noting that definitions of youth vary by agency.<sup>210</sup> The United Nations (UN) Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) proposes that the definition may vary depending on regionally specific economic situations and cultural norms.<sup>211</sup> The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) conceptualized youth as "a person between the age where he/she may leave compulsory education and the age at which he/she finds his/her first employment."<sup>212</sup>

UNRWA helps prevent or mitigate conditions of poverty and economic distress amongst Palestinian refugees.<sup>213</sup> Thus, UNRWA pays particular attention to long-term economic solutions that help Palestinian refugees achieve economic empowerment and become less vulnerable to poverty.<sup>214</sup> Career and employment opportunities have been identified as long-term economic solutions that help foster self-reliance.<sup>215</sup> In UNRWA's *1962 Annual Report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA* (1962), the positive multigenerational economic impact of skill development and employment opportunities is highlighted.<sup>216</sup> The report also noted how unemployment leads to economic dependency on organizations such as UNRWA for basic provisions.<sup>217</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic caused global economic and healthcare crises that have resulted in an increased amount of youth without employment opportunities, not in training, or not attending school.<sup>218</sup> UNRWA does not have a set definition for career opportunities.<sup>219</sup> Career opportunities may be considered opportunities that make securing employment more likely.<sup>220</sup> The International Labour

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<sup>204</sup> UNRWA, *What We Do*.

<sup>205</sup> UNRWA, *Frequently Asked Questions*.

<sup>206</sup> UNRWA, *Youth Strategic Framework for Palestine Refugees in Lebanon*, 2018, p. 2.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> ILO, *Glossary of Statistical Terms*.

<sup>211</sup> UN DESA, *Definition of Youth*, 2013.

<sup>212</sup> UNESCO, *TVETipedia Glossary*, 2014.

<sup>213</sup> UN General Assembly, *Assistance to Palestine Refugees (A/RES/302 (IV))*, 1949.

<sup>214</sup> UN General Assembly, *Operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/RES/75/94)*, 2020.

<sup>215</sup> UNRWA, *UNRWA and SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth*.

<sup>216</sup> UN General Assembly, *Annual Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/52/14)*, 1962.

<sup>217</sup> UN General Assembly, *Annual Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/52/14)*, 1962.

<sup>218</sup> UN DESA, *Goal 8: Promote Sustained, Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth, Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for All*.

<sup>219</sup> UNRWA, *Frequently Asked Questions*.

<sup>220</sup> ILO, *Glossary of Statistical Terms*.

Organization (ILO) defines employment as being paid to take part in the provision of services or production of goods.<sup>221</sup>

### ***International and Regional Framework***

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948) establishes fundamental and foundational rights for all persons, across Member States and cultures.<sup>222</sup> Article 23 explicitly states that every person has the right to work and that all who work have the right to payment that can provide "an existence worthy of human dignity."<sup>223</sup> Furthermore, article 22 enshrines the rights to social security and dignity and directly links them to having economic means.<sup>224</sup>

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (1989) recognizes childhood as a period of preparation to live "an individual life in society" with full human development.<sup>225</sup> The convention addresses the question of equipping children and youth with career opportunities to increase their likelihood for gainful employment.<sup>226</sup> Article 28 (b) specifically encourages Member States to develop accessible and affordable secondary education, while article 28 (d) emphasizes the importance of accessible vocational training.<sup>227</sup> The *Declaration on the Right to Development* (1986) connects the ability of individual persons to secure employment to the broader goal of states' economic development, especially in developing countries.<sup>228</sup> Further, the declaration links individual economic progress to the full realization of human rights.<sup>229</sup>

The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015) established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of 17 goals including reduced inequality and poverty, and providing everyone with food, education, clean water, and employment.<sup>230</sup> The 2030 Agenda emphasizes youth unemployment as a grave current and future concern.<sup>231</sup> To eradicate poverty, the 2030 Agenda calls for the implementation of programs providing greater career opportunities for individuals so that all can secure employment.<sup>232</sup> As SDG 1 ("no poverty") and SDG 4 ("quality education") demonstrate together, equitable youth education can provide career opportunities to help secure employment and reduce poverty.<sup>233</sup> Each SDG has multiple specific benchmarks for progress called targets; each target has specific data points to track progress called indicators.<sup>234</sup> Target 1.a of SDG 1 ("no poverty") focuses on allocating resources to poverty reduction measures.<sup>235</sup> Indicator 1.a.2 measures investment in essential services, including education, thereby linking investments in education to the reduction of (extreme) poverty.<sup>236</sup> Target 4.4 focuses on providing people, including youth, with education and particularly "technical and vocational skills."<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> ILO, *Glossary of Statistical Terms*.

<sup>222</sup> UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*, 1989.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>228</sup> UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Right to Development (A/RES/41/128)*, 1986.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>230</sup> UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Goals, The 17 Goals*.

<sup>231</sup> UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015, p. 5.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>233</sup> UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Goals, The 17 Goals*.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> UN DESA, *Goal 1: End Poverty in all its Forms Everywhere*.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>237</sup> UN DESA, *Goal 4: Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All*.

## ***Role of the International System***

The General Assembly has focused on youth before, particularly when it designated 1985 as the International Youth Year.<sup>238</sup> Outcome documents from the United Nations World Conference for the International Youth Year directly connected employment to development, and the General Assembly recommended in resolution 40/14 on "International Youth Year: Participation, Development, Peace" that UN agencies focus on "youth employment and education" to promote the human development of youth.<sup>239</sup> The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights emphasized the continued need to ensure that all people can attain "an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families", particularly with respect to "food, clothing, and housing," making economic self-sufficiency a condition for human dignity as defined in the UDHR.<sup>240</sup>

*UNRWA's 2016-2021 Medium Term Strategy (MTS) (2015)* informs its current operational work and includes five strategic outcomes that address a broad range of issues, from human rights to health, food, and shelter.<sup>241</sup> Strategic outcome four, refugee capabilities strengthened for increased livelihood opportunities, pertains directly to UNRWA providing career opportunities via education, vocational training, microfinance, and other avenues.<sup>242</sup> UNRWA provides vocational training at training centers via the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) program, offering both short- and long-term courses.<sup>243</sup> UNRWA also provides career opportunities via the Microcredit Community Support Programme (MCSP).<sup>244</sup> The opportunities provided through it contribute to creating jobs and sustaining small businesses.<sup>245</sup> Microfinance loans provided by the MCSP aim "to increase the individual household assets of vulnerable Palestine refugees", including youth.<sup>246</sup> From 2010 to 2014, UNRWA provided \$48.8 million in 50,800 loans to youth aged 18 to 30 years.<sup>247</sup>

UN entities like Education Cannot Wait (ECW) have also contributed financial and operational resources to provide career opportunities for youth, particularly through education.<sup>248</sup> ECW is a global fund administered by UNICEF, founded during the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, and funded by the European Union (EU), governments, private corporations, and non-governmental organizations.<sup>249</sup> In January 2021, ECW approved a grant of \$1.5 million to help UNRWA achieve its goal of providing all Palestinian refugee youth with basic and secondary education.<sup>250</sup> The funding allowed for the education of 32,000 Palestinian refugee students in grades one to nine via the UNRWA Learning Support Program (LSP), which focuses on inclusive education and the retention of vulnerable student populations, such as girls and children or youth with disabilities.<sup>251</sup> ECW funding also provided supplies and personal protective equipment for 14,000 children to return safely to UNRWA schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> UN General Assembly, *International Youth Year: Participation, Development, Peace (A/RES/40/14)*, 1985.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> OHCHR, *Question of the Realization in all Countries of the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and Study of Special Problems Which the Developing Countries Face in Their Efforts to Achieve These Human Rights (Resolution 1993/14)*, 1993.

<sup>241</sup> UNRWA, *Medium Term Strategy 2016-2021*, 2016.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> ECW, *Education Cannot Wait Approves US \$1.5 Million Grant in Lebanon for UN Relief & Works Agency for Palestine Refugee Children and Youth*, 2021.

<sup>249</sup> ECW, *About Us: Education Cannot Wait (ECW) is the First Global Fund Dedicated to Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises*.

<sup>250</sup> ECW, *Education Cannot Wait Approves US \$1.5 Million Grant in Lebanon for UN Relief & Works Agency for Palestine Refugee Children and Youth*, 2021.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

## ***The Importance of Education in Providing Youth Career Opportunities***

Unemployment amongst Palestinian refugee youth contributes to their poverty, and access to educational opportunities has been shown to increase the ability to secure employment.<sup>253</sup> There is therefore a clear correlation between education and income level.<sup>254</sup> In 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 40.2% of Palestinian youth, which comprise the majority of Palestinian refugees, were unemployed.<sup>255</sup> In Syria, 78% of Palestinian refugee youth were unemployed in 2017, whereas the unemployment rate of the general Syrian population was 53%.<sup>256</sup>

UNRWA provides career opportunities through its Graduate Training Programme for recent university graduates in Gaza.<sup>257</sup> Since the creation of the program in 2001, it has provided opportunities for 31,451 graduates.<sup>258</sup> Additionally, UNRWA funds and operates 710 primary schools, eight secondary schools, and eight vocational training centers, where almost 8,000 Palestinian refugee youth can acquire technical and vocational skills that will help them compete in local labor markets.<sup>259</sup> Each primary school student costs an estimated \$841 per year, and UNRWA's schools collectively provide for over 539,000 students.<sup>260</sup> UNRWA also operates a Technical and Vocational Education and Training and Youth program (TVET).<sup>261</sup> TVET course specializations include mechanics, electrical installations, plumbing, accounting, nursing, and other skills in high demand.<sup>262</sup> TVET programs are offered at eight vocational training centers operated by UNRWA, with a combined capacity for 7,500 refugee youth.<sup>263</sup> UNRWA offers short-term courses, one- and two-year courses for youth who have completed nine to 10 years of school, and in-depth two-year courses for youth who have completed 12 years of school.<sup>264</sup> Over 34,000 graduated TVET programs in the past 10 years, and over 81% of 2016 TVET graduates secured employment within one year of completing vocational training.<sup>265</sup>

UNRWA and the EU jointly conducted the 2012 Engaging Youth conference, held to establish priorities for Palestinian refugee youth programs and emphasize the importance of education in increasing youth employment opportunities.<sup>266</sup> UNRWA, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, and Palestinian refugee youth attended the conference.<sup>267</sup> UNRWA, in collaboration with Palestinian refugee youth, created an outcome document called the *Ten Youth Commitments (2012)*.<sup>268</sup> Four of the ten commitments directly relate to education: 1 ("education"), 3 ("vocational training"), 5 ("scholarships"), and 6 ("skills development").<sup>269</sup> It demonstrates that education is a top priority for the estimated 1.5 million Palestinian refugee youth.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Tiltnes et al., *Progress, Challenges, Diversity: Insights into the Socio-Economic Conditions of Palestinian Refugees in Jordan*, 2013.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> ILO, *The Situation of Workers of the Occupied Arab Territories*, 2021.

<sup>256</sup> UNRWA Department of Internal Oversight Services, *Evaluation of UNRWA's Engaging Youth Project in Syria*, 2018.

<sup>257</sup> UNRWA, *Through Its Job Creation Programme, UNRWA Gives Hope to Palestine Refugee Youth*, 2017.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> UNRWA, *What We Do*.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> UNRWA, *Technical and Vocational Education and Training Programme*.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> UNRWA, *Engaging Youth: Palestine Refugees in a Changing Middle East*, 2012.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> UNRWA, *UNRWA's Ten Youth Commitments*, 2012.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

UNRWA also provides professional guidance and ongoing education for Palestinian refugee youth ages 17 to 33 via the Engaging Youth project.<sup>271</sup> UNRWA conducted Phase II of the project in Syria with funding from the European Commission.<sup>272</sup> As part of the project, focus groups with refugee youth identified several barriers to employment, including discrepancies between their skill set and in-demand skills, low salaries, internal displacement due to conflict in the region, and prohibitively high travel costs to cities with more job opportunities.<sup>273</sup> Youth identified vocational training as the most valuable pillar of the project, with a specific interest in short-term courses.<sup>274</sup> However, from 2014 to 2017, only 30% or fewer graduates of the short-term courses were able to secure employment, largely due to the courses not being tailored to the needs of the labor market.<sup>275</sup> In its review of the Engaging Youth project, UNRWA's Department of Internal Oversight Services recommended increased surveillance of jobs in high demand and tailoring future vocational course offerings to labor market needs.<sup>276</sup>

To combat the challenges in education access resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, UNRWA developed and launched a new method of service delivery, the Digital Learning Platform (DLP), to address the inability to provide in-person education.<sup>277</sup> The DLP is available online in both English and Arabic and helps parents and students access learning resources from home.<sup>278</sup> However, access to the DLP requires a stable internet connection, which is not always given in the region UNRWA operates in.<sup>279</sup> Mr. Moritz Bilagher, the acting UNRWA Director of Education, emphasized the importance of internet access by noting that "thousands of UNRWA students still face unequal access to the tools and infrastructure, particularly reliable internet, which is essential to succeeding in the 21st century."<sup>280</sup>

### **Addressing Causes of Female Employment Gaps Amongst Palestinian Refugee Youth**

As established in UNRWA's 2007 Policy on Gender Equality, UNRWA directly connects gender equality and women's empowerment, including economic empowerment, with protecting human rights and furthering development.<sup>281</sup> Under article 17 of the UDHR, all persons have the right to independently and individually own property.<sup>282</sup> Per UN Women, the right to own property provides women with economic empowerment, which may help bolster gender inequality by counteracting cultural norms in which women "have limited say in household decision-making."<sup>283</sup> Economic independence for women contributes to women's empowerment.<sup>284</sup>

Per UN Women, some 2.7 billion women worldwide are legally barred from holding the same jobs as men.<sup>285</sup> 75% of men worldwide, ages 15 or older, participate in labor markets, while labor market participation is only at 48.5% for women in the same age group.<sup>286</sup> Women are also more likely to be unemployed.<sup>287</sup> Additionally, women spend twice as long as men on domestic chores and caretaking,

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<sup>271</sup> UNRWA, *Engaging with the Youth of Syria*.

<sup>272</sup> UNRWA Department of Internal Oversight Services, *Evaluation of UNRWA's Engaging Youth Project in Syria*, 2018.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> UNRWA, *UNRWA Launches Innovative Centralized Digital Learning Platform for Half a Million Palestine Refugee Students*, 2021.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> UNRWA, *What We Do*.

<sup>282</sup> UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948.

<sup>283</sup> UN Women Asia and the Pacific, *Women's Land and Property Rights*.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> UN Women, *Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment*.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.



decreasing their ability to complete paid work in the labor market.<sup>288</sup> Furthermore, gender-based violence (GBV), which includes rape, sexual violence, physical violence, and genital mutilation, directly affects girls from a young age and can interfere with education and employment opportunities.<sup>289</sup> The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reported that 53% of children aged five to 17 in the West Bank had been exposed to violence as of 2005, with almost half the exposure to violence occurring at school and violence being cited as a factor for dropping out of school.<sup>290</sup> In 2007, nearly 30% of children in the West Bank dropped out of school around the age of 16, and this high youth dropout rate has contributed to the high youth unemployment rate in the region.<sup>291</sup>

UNRWA has taken a comprehensive approach to ensure economic empowerment for women, including extensive staff training to address GBV via the program Building Safety: Mainstreaming GBV Interventions into Emergency Preparedness, Prevention and Response.<sup>292</sup> UNRWA has implemented its 2016-2021 Gender Equality Strategy, titled *Integrating Gender, Improving Services, Impacting Lives* (2015), which emphasizes the need to better understand the cause for girls' higher school drop-out rates compared to boys and to close the gendered dropout gap.<sup>293</sup> UNRWA has emphasized the usefulness of gender-disaggregated data in understanding gendered gaps in education and employment and has called for the continued collection of gender-disaggregated data.<sup>294</sup> The MTS includes targets focused on gender-disaggregated data, "thereby ensuring that gender receives specific attention at all stages of the programme cycle."<sup>295</sup> The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has further emphasized the importance of collecting disaggregated data to adequately locate and address human rights gaps.<sup>296</sup>

UNRWA actively engages in providing career opportunities for Palestinian refugees via several programs and mechanisms, including providing small business loans via the Microfinance and Microenterprise Programme (MMP).<sup>297</sup> In Gaza, 31.3% of all loans provided by the UNRWA Department of Microfinance were given to youth, defined as ages 18 to 30 in 2017.<sup>298</sup> The 1,307 loans given to youth totaled \$1.99 million, while in 2017, 43% of all microfinance loans were given to women.<sup>299</sup> UNRWA has taken numerous measures to achieve gender parity in employment rates.<sup>300</sup> It provides job placements within UNRWA or other related organizations for women and youth through its Job Creation Programme, which aims at providing 35% of available job opportunities to women and 25% to youth.<sup>301</sup> The priority placement for women and youth is based on higher rates of unemployment; in 2016, the youth unemployment rate in Gaza was 61.4%, while that for women was 68.6%.<sup>302</sup>

According to UN Women, education also works towards closing the employment gender gap.<sup>303</sup> Education and vocational training provide girls and women with the ability to learn skills necessary for employment, especially as technological advancements continue to create new jobs that require new skill

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<sup>288</sup> UN Women, *Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment*.

<sup>289</sup> UNICEF, *The Situation of Palestinian Children in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon*, 2010.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> UNRWA, *What We Do*.

<sup>293</sup> UNRWA, *Gender Equality Strategy 2016-2021 Annual Implementation Report*, 2019.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> UNRWA, *Medium Term Strategy 2016-2021*, 2016.

<sup>296</sup> OHCHR, *Question of the Realization in all Countries of the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and Study of Special Problems Which the Developing Countries Face in Their Efforts to Achieve These Human Rights (Resolution 1993/14)*, 1993.

<sup>297</sup> UNRWA Gaza Field Office, *Microfinance and Microenterprise Programme*.

<sup>298</sup> UNRWA, *Microfinance in the Gaza Strip*.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> UNRWA, *Gender Equality Strategy 2016-2021 Annual Implementation Report*, 2019.

<sup>301</sup> UNRWA, *Through Its Job Creation Programme, UNRWA Gives Hope to Palestine Refugee Youth*, 2017.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> UN Women, *Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment*.

sets.<sup>304</sup> However, school and workplace infrastructures may specifically disadvantage girls and women, with SDG 4 (quality education) indicator 4.a.1 calling for the inclusion of "single-sex sanitation facilities" to help provide women and girls with increased safety, dignity, and privacy.<sup>305</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Palestinian refugee youth are a growing subset of the Palestinian refugee population, which experiences high rates of unemployment and poverty.<sup>306</sup> Female youth are less likely to be employed than their male counterparts.<sup>307</sup> Education and vocational training can help provide the skills needed to compete in local labor markets.<sup>308</sup> Career opportunities ranging from education and technical training to microfinance and promoting entrepreneurship can help Palestinian refugee youth secure employment, which then contributes to reduced poverty rates amongst them.<sup>309</sup>

### **Further Research**

Delegates may consider the following questions: How can UNRWA improve its ability to provide career opportunities for youth? What changes can be made to current education and vocational training by UNRWA to increase employment rates amongst program graduates? How can UNRWA help female youth participate in the labor market at a rate commensurate with their male peers? What role should civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, and other intergovernmental partners play in mitigating current obstacles to full youth employment?

## **Annotated Bibliography**

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. (n. d.). *UNRWA and SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth*. Retrieved 3 August 2021 from: <https://www.unrwa.org/unrwa-and-sdg-8-decent-work-and-economic-growth>

*On this website, an elaboration on the relationship between UNRWA and Sustainable Development Goal 8 can be found. SDG 8 focuses on employment and lists several specific targets that will help achieve the goal of decent employment for everyone. This website may help delegates more thoroughly understand how UNRWA programs meet the targets of SDG 8 and help Palestinian refugees secure employment. Specifically, it elaborates on the high rate of unemployment amongst youth and particularly female youth. Youth and women are also emphasized as vulnerable groups, who are prioritized in microfinance loan allocation by UNRWA. Delegates will find this source helpful to understand the specific issue of career opportunities for Palestinian refugee youth, especially related to education and gender, within the larger context of the UN system and international framework.*

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. (2012). *UNRWA's Ten Youth Commitments*. Retrieved 3 August 2021 from: <https://www.unrwa.org/unrwas-ten-youth-commitments>

*This is the outcome document of the 2012 Brussels conference "Engaging Youth: Palestine Refugee Youth in a Changing Middle East." This document lists 10 priorities developed by UNRWA and Palestinian refugee youth together. The priorities include health, rights, partnerships, participation, communication, and five priorities related to career opportunities: education, vocational training, microfinance, scholarships, and skill*

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<sup>304</sup> UN Women, *Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment*.

<sup>305</sup> UN DESA, *Goal 4: Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All*.

<sup>306</sup> UNRWA, *Medium Term Strategy 2016-2021*, 2016.

<sup>307</sup> UN Women, *Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment*.

<sup>308</sup> UNRWA Department of Internal Oversight Services, *Evaluation of UNRWA's Engaging Youth Project in Syria*, 2018.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*

*development. This list helps delegates better understand UNRWA's recent focus regarding its operations and resources. It also presents numerous approaches to providing career opportunities for youth, as half of the 10 commitments pertain to different career opportunities. This outcome document may help delegates understand regional issues with education, vocational training, skill development, and microfinance that have informed UNRWA priorities and programs for the past decade.*

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, Department of Internal Oversight Services. (2018). *Evaluation of UNRWA's Engaging Youth Project in Syria*. Retrieved 10 September 2021 from: [https://dios.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/resource\\_87481\\_35956\\_1540814515.pdf](https://dios.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/resource_87481_35956_1540814515.pdf)

*In this report, UNRWA provides an analysis of its program, Phase II of the Engaging Youth project in Syria. The evaluation includes conversations with Palestinian refugee youth and an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the program. The weaknesses of the program include a mismatch between courses offered and in-demand jobs. Thus, delegates should consider the causes of the difference between the relatively low employment rate of Engaging Youth graduates versus the relatively high employment rates of TVET graduates. Additionally, as UNRWA operates in areas of protracted crises, analysis in this report regularly considers the impact of the Syrian crisis on Palestinian refugee youth. This report can help delegates better understand unique conflict- and crisis-related challenges that may hinder Palestinian refugee youth from taking advantage of the career opportunities provided by UNRWA.*

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. (2018). *Youth Strategic Framework for Palestine Refugees in Lebanon*. Retrieved 3 August 2021 from:

[https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa\\_unicef\\_youth\\_strategic\\_framework.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_unicef_youth_strategic_framework.pdf)

*This report, jointly developed by UNRWA and UNICEF, provides detailed statistics and demographic information on the poverty and unemployment levels of Palestinian refugee youth in Lebanon and Syria. Delegates may find this source useful to gain a robust understanding of the living situations and unique challenges of Palestinian refugee youth, from their housing conditions and the availability of water and vocational training to a definition of the poverty line for Palestinian refugee youth in Syria and Lebanon. Delegates will also understand the differences between the zones in which UNRWA operates since each area faces unique challenges and poverty levels. Knowledge of these unique challenges helps delegates understand the barriers that prevent Palestinian refugee youth from securing steady employment.*

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. (2019). *Gender Equality Strategy 2016-2021 Annual Implementation Report*. Retrieved 3 August 2021 from:

[https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/2019\\_gender\\_implementation\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/2019_gender_implementation_report_final.pdf)

*UNRWA adopted its Gender Equality Strategy 2016-2021 to implement organizational and structural changes that would help close gender-based gaps in education, healthcare, and employment, and address gender-specific issues such as gender-based violence. The Gender Equality Strategy builds on previous gender mainstreaming efforts, such as the UNRWA Gender Equality Policy of 2007. The 2019 implementation report notes the progress achieved so far and the challenges ahead, especially with respect to the four pillars identified in the Gender Equality Strategy. These pillars include gender architecture, a gender marker tracking the allocation of financial resources, leadership, and gender accountability. Delegates may find section 3.2.3 of the implementation report particularly useful, as it covers gendered economic empowerment and leadership, and explains the economic empowerment of women through microfinance loans and vocational training. Section 3.2.4 addresses the gender gap in school dropout rates. The implementation report helps inform delegates of the challenges UNRWA faces after implementing the Gender Equality Strategy and other strategies.*

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