

MOPAN

2017-18 ASSESSMENTS

---

**Organisational Performance Brief**

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

**Published June 2019**

## Key findings

### **UNRWA is highly knowledgeable about its mandate and context, given its long-standing engagement in the region and the strength of its workforce.**

UNRWA is greatly affected by its operating context, primarily the absence of political solution regarding a Palestinian state, the Gaza blockade and the Syrian civil war. At the same time, the Agency is affected by the fluctuations and scarcity of its resource pool coupled with increasing costs, refugee needs and protection concerns. Thanks to its long-standing engagement, its entrenched field presence, and its strong role in education, health and social services, UNRWA has a unique and comprehensive understanding of the context in which it is operating, whom it aims to serve and what is needed to accomplish its mission. UNRWA's staff are highly-committed. The vast majority of staff are Palestine refugees and form part of the refugee communities that UNRWA serves. This is a comparative advantage of UNRWA that is recognised by both the organisation and its partners, is well developed within UNRWA's strategy, and is reflected in its supporting documentation spanning issues of conflict, political economy, gender and vulnerability. UNRWA's Medium Term Strategy (MTS) 2016-21 reflects this deep understanding, in that it is forward-looking in terms of management working within the parameters of UNRWA's mandate; it considers the needs of the organisation going forward to 2021; and it highlights where investment is needed to achieve each strategic goal in terms of capacity strengthening, leveraging of partners, institutional reform, infrastructure development, and, most significantly, resource requirements and mobilisation.

### UNRWA KEY FACTS

**MISSION AND MANDATE:** UNRWA was established by United Nations (UN) General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949. UNRWA is mandated to provide protection and assistance through the delivery of relief, human development and protection services to Palestine refugees registered with the Agency and to other persons eligible to receive UNRWA services, including persons displaced by the 1967 hostilities, in its five fields of operations (the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank including East Jerusalem). Although created as a temporary agency, UNRWA has been operational for 68 years and the UN General Assembly has repeatedly renewed UNRWA's mandate (on three-year terms), most recently extending its mandate until 30 June 2020. UNRWA provides assistance and protection to a population of some 5.5 million registered Palestine refugees to help them achieve their full human development potential.

**GOVERNANCE:** UNRWA does not have an executive board. The UNRWA Commissioner-General reports to the UN General Assembly and is supported by the Deputy Commissioner-General. The Advisory Commission (AdCom), created in 1949, is tasked with advising and assisting the Commissioner-General in carrying out the Agency's mandate. The AdCom is currently comprised of 28 Members, including donor and host government representatives, and 3 Observers, and meets twice a year to discuss issues of importance to UNRWA.

**STRUCTURE:** UNRWA has more than 28 000 staff, the majority of whom are Palestine refugees. The staff work across the Agency's five fields of operations. UNRWA headquarters are located in Amman, Gaza and East Jerusalem. Representative offices are located in New York; Washington, DC; and Brussels, with a liaison office in Cairo.

**FINANCE:** UNRWA is primarily funded from voluntary contributions. The UNRWA programme budget expenses for the 2017 fiscal year were USD 774.77 million. Budget allocations are guided by the strategic objectives and priorities outlined in the Medium Term Strategy, with roughly half of this budget going to education. In response to emergency situations in the region, UNRWA has launched emergency appeals to cover assistance costs that are not covered by the programme budget. In recent years, UNRWA has suffered repeated shortfalls in its budgets.

**In this highly volatile and challenging operating context, UNRWA has demonstrated its ability to continue to deliver its core services in fulfilment of its temporary mandate, despite challenges.** There is in general a limited body of independent evidence for assessing the performance of the Agency in terms of its results. The evaluations that are available speak to the relevance of UNRWA's services under highly challenging operational and humanitarian conditions. Based on management results data and analysis, the core programme areas of education and health show strong achievement in terms of quality of service provision, progress towards the Agency's targeted learning and health outcomes, and results that compare well with other providers in the same operating environments. Moreover, much of this progress has been achieved in a deteriorating, or at best static, context. Overall, political turmoil, conflict, travel and trade restrictions, and resource constraints have significantly inhibited UNRWA's ability to deliver results and to meet planned delivery targets. The lack of funds often compromises the efficiency and cost effectiveness of UNRWA's development effectiveness as well.

**At the same time, reforms are responding to the constraints, and UNRWA's education and health programmes for example combine high technical capacity and a proven capability to operate efficiently.** Ongoing funding constraints have signified increased cost-saving and austerity measures, yet UNRWA's core programmes have maintained high-quality service delivery while also taking steps to strengthen inclusive aspects of programming. Examples of UNRWA's health programming initiatives include transitioning all health clinics to the e-Health (electronic medical records) system and the person-centred Family Health Teams. These teams provide the benefit of longer but less frequent visits to primary doctors, limiting hospital visits to only the most vulnerable people and referring others to less-expensive care facilities. Education reform has increased efficiency and reduced costs very substantively through more rigorous management of the Class Formation process. While the initiatives reflect a well-managed and mature reform process, these programmes nevertheless are still largely not resilient to the strains of continuing uncertainties around funding and of an increasingly challenging operating context, given increasing class sizes, etc. In the areas of relief and social services and camp improvement/infrastructure, the direction of reform is

set, but the change process is nascent; both the gains achieved to date and the momentum of reform remain vulnerable.

**UNRWA continues to balance a cautious and rigorous approach to risk management with an increasingly strategic approach to how it engages and with whom.** The Agency has consistently applied strong internal measures for managing the organisation's budget, responding effectively to volatile funding conditions. UNRWA is actively pursuing good tactical use of project-related funding within programming and is taking an increasingly strategic approach to engagement with a range of actors and partnership approaches that is focused on leveraging the Agency's resources and comparative advantage. UNRWA's current financial challenges compel it to think more innovatively about partnerships; to maximise opportunities to increase resource mobilisation through partnerships; and to find ways to strengthen outcomes through creative combinations of UNRWA staff resources, funding and partnering. Risks to the organisation in regard to service delivery remain high, at least in the short term, and will continue to require active management.

**UNRWA has a well-considered and robust results-based monitoring system.** Despite the limitations in evaluation evidence already mentioned, results-based management, including evaluative thinking, is a live practice within service areas at regular intervals and different levels of the organisation. While relatively new, the results-based monitoring system rests on strong foundations and generates large amounts of data. It has informed planning and decision-making at different levels within the Agency and has generated clear data on expenditure by field of operation and programme. However, the related processes remain onerous for the few staff who are responsible for their management. In addition, key elements of UNRWA's work, such as protection, are not fully reported on in the results-based monitoring system, and collection of reliable and accurate data can be difficult depending on the field of operations.

**At the same time, UNRWA would benefit from addressing the lack of strategic evaluations.** UNRWA has a medium-term evaluation plan which covers the same time period as the MTS, and the Agency has developed an annual evaluation

work plan. However, UNRWA's evaluation coverage through this formal structure has been affected by the organisation's current funding situation, which has resulted in a number of evaluations and a meta-synthesis of evaluation quality not being completed as planned. There is very limited independent evaluation to demonstrate and to guide both the organisation's progress towards its strategic objectives and its contribution to the learning and path of wider humanitarian and development goals in the region. Strengthened evidence on the relevance, effectiveness, impact and efficiency of UNRWA's programmatic work and overall approach can inform strategic thinking by the Agency, its donors and host governments on how best to deal with the complex challenges that lie ahead.

**UNRWA could also become more strategic in how it manages its workforce.** While conditions vary across the fields of operations, in general there is limited movement within UNRWA staffing structures and limited opportunity to introduce new skills and/or reconfigure staff among silos. Within these constraints, UNRWA uses task teams to facilitate cross working and as a way to recognise talented staff within the organisation. In this way, staff also get a chance to fully use their skills, given that staff in the Gaza Strip and other fields of operations may be over-qualified for their positions. The limited opportunity for developing leadership skills within the field is a constraint. Increasing quality requirements at a time of pressure on resources also create challenges to decentralised staff performance management and the needs of strategic human resources management. While UNRWA's staff performance management system is clearly set out, it is not always implemented in practice. The Agency could benefit from a strategic human resources strategy that remains considerate of the uncertainties and increasing security risks faced by staff, but also is more forward looking on the need to reconfigure staff resources and the changing skills mix to enable UNRWA to best navigate the uncertain path to deliver on its mandate.

**UNRWA could work towards improving its approach to cross-cutting issues.** Available evaluations reflect variable integration of cross-cutting issues; while human rights and protection are mainstreamed in UNRWA's approach and its activities, gender and to a much lesser degree climate change are addressed less consistently. UNRWA requires coherent and consistent structures across the organisation to further strengthen

its gender architecture and to prevent gender being "projectised" or siloed within one programme area. The organisation also requires either an explicit policy and/or strategy regarding its approach to addressing environmental sustainability and climate change. There is limited evidence that a commitment to environmental sustainability informs interventions at the programmatic level.

**Finally, UNRWA could further advance its delivery of a protection agenda.** UNRWA is committed to the protection of human rights at the highest level. The Medium Term Strategy contains UNRWA's most recent policy statement of its commitment and approach to addressing human rights of Palestine refugees through all aspects of its work, highlighting rights as a strategic priority for the 2016-21 period. To further its protection work, UNRWA established at the headquarter level a Protection Division in 2016 along with dedicated protection teams across all its fields of operations. However, limited core resources from the programme budget have been allocated to this Division and associated structures across UNRWA field offices. At the field office level, many of the resources available for protection are from projects, including for the salaries of key institutional protection posts. Just 5% of the costs needed for protection now come from the programme budget. As the Agency considers the best methods to embed a protection agenda, it faces a deteriorating situation in many of its field offices and in which the agenda to date has been largely projectised. The Agency must consider ways (including practical reporting) that would suit an environment of very limited programme budget allocation for staffing and resources to further protection.

# Performance at a glance

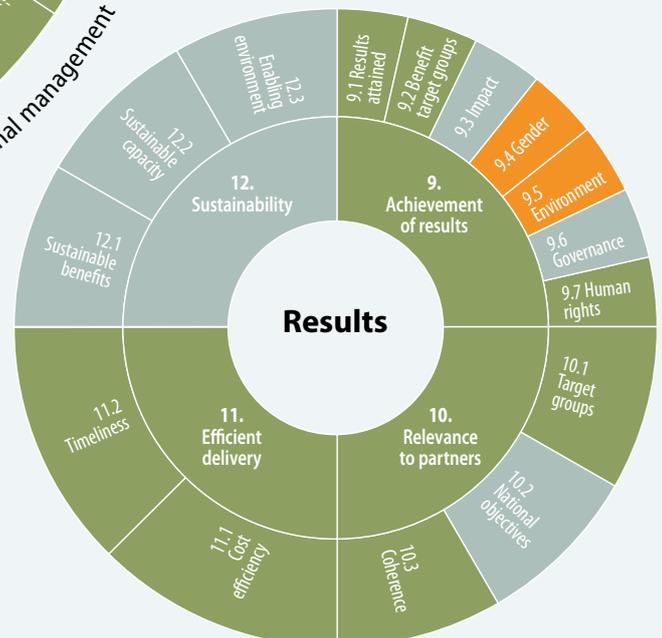
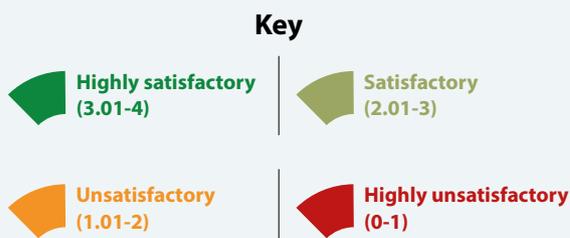
UNRWA in 2018 is an organisation that is competent, resilient and resolute. Its way of working and the results it is achieving in a resource-constrained environment reflect a well-managed organisation that delivers. UNRWA provides a lifeline for extremely poor families and offers stability in an inherently unstable environment by keeping alive the hopes

and possibilities of Palestine refugees. It does so, for example, by delivering a solid, basic education and by representing Palestine refugees within the UN and with UN member states. However, the persistent funding crisis has had a significant impact on UNRWA's ability to invest in its services, development and systems beyond the "essentials" of delivering education, health, relief and social services, and camp services.

## PERFORMANCE RATING SUMMARY



The Agency has robust organisational reform and improvement processes. With iterative learning and adaptation, these have resulted in more effective programmatic approaches characterised by a high technical competence. This is particularly strong in education and health where the operating structure of UNRWA has encouraged and facilitated innovation within its fields of operation. Reform processes in other service areas such as relief and social services and camp services, while well sighted, have been more vulnerable to the funding crisis, and progress has been less developed over the period assessed.



The funding crisis constrains the ability of UNRWA management to capitalise on the strengths of the Agency, more actively engage with new challenges, and start to explore where and how a more coherent approach across the Agency can deliver added value. More broadly, there remain somewhat existential and ideological questions that are outside the scope

of this organisational performance assessment; these regard the extent to which UNRWA, given its temporary and politicised mandate, can “future proof” itself without more fundamental questions being considered and addressed through its governance structure and within the dynamic of the international political order.

## About this assessment

The Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) is a network of 18 countries<sup>1</sup> that share a common interest in assessing the effectiveness of the major multilateral organisations they fund, including UN agencies, international financial institutions and global funds. The Network generates, collects, analyses and presents relevant and credible information on the organisational and development effectiveness of the organisations it assesses. This knowledge base is intended to contribute to organisational learning within and among the organisations, their direct clients and partners, and other stakeholders. Network members use the reports for their own accountability needs and as a source of input for strategic decision-making.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is one of the 14 organisations assessed by MOPAN in 2017-18. This was the second MOPAN assessment of UNRWA; the first was conducted in 2011. Denmark and Switzerland championed the assessment of UNRWA on behalf of the Network.

This brief accompanies the full assessment published in early 2019, which can be found on MOPAN’s website at [www.mopanonline.org](http://www.mopanonline.org). UNRWA’s management response will be made available on that website as well.

The assessment of performance covers UNRWA’s headquarters and its five fields of operations. It addresses organisational systems, practices and behaviours, as well as results achieved during the period 2016 to mid-2018. It relies on three lines of evidence: a document review, interviews with staff and small groups, and an online partner survey.<sup>2</sup>

### MOPAN’s evidence lines for UNRWA

- Review of 150 documents
- 89 staff interviews
- 42 partners surveyed in the 5 fields of operations

The MOPAN 3.0 methodology entails a framework of 12 key performance indicators and associated micro-indicators. It comprises standards that characterise an effective multi-lateral organisation. More detail is provided in MOPAN’s methodology manual.<sup>3</sup>

### Organisations assessed by MOPAN in 2017-18:

- ADB
- GEF
- IFAD
- OHCHR
- UNESCO
- UNHCR
- WFP
- FAO
- GPE
- IOM
- UN Women
- UNFPA
- UNRWA
- WHO

1: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States – and two observers, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates.

2: The online survey was conducted among partners of UNRWA in its five fields of operations (the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank including East Jerusalem).

3: Available at [www.mopanonline.org](http://www.mopanonline.org)