



# gaza in 2020

unrwa operational response  
may 2013



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## Foreword

**The** United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established as a subsidiary organ of the United Nations General Assembly on 8 December 1949 and became operational on 1 May 1950. The Agency has played an essential role for over 60 years since its establishment in providing education, health, camp improvement, and relief and social services to the Palestine refugees.

In the small coastal enclave that is the Gaza Strip, UNRWA is responsible for helping over 1.2 million refugees, more than 70 per cent of Gaza's total population. For over a decade, the socio-economic situation in Gaza has been in steady decline. Since the imposition of the blockade in 2007, the situation has plummeted to crisis levels, where it remains today: in 2012, real GDP per capita in the Gaza Strip remained at only 81 per cent of the 1994 level and at half the level recorded in the West Bank.<sup>1</sup> Years of economic deterioration have left the vast majority of the population unemployed or underemployed and dependent on international assistance.

In 2009, UNRWA issued the *Gaza Recovery and Reconstruction Plan (GRRP)* to meet the identified needs of the time, much of which was due to the effects of demolitions and conflict in the preceding years. The *GRRP* foresaw the construction of 100 new schools, which will be completed during 2015, and the repair and reconstruction of Palestine refugees' homes, which is well underway. Given the context today, UNRWA must now address the fact that the Gaza Strip may be nearly uninhabitable by 2020 unless remedial action is taken.

In August 2012 the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in the occupied Palestinian territory issued a forward-looking report: *Gaza in 2020: A Liveable Place?* This document outlines the challenges facing Gaza in the

<sup>1</sup>- Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), National Accounts Statistics.



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coming years: economic, demographic, social services, and environmental. The report is compelling reading as it lays out the set of factors that make the immediate future of the Gaza Strip, and the over 1.6 million people who currently live there, remarkably precarious. For example, by 2020 the Gaza Strip may be effectively unable to access usable water. Following the release of the *Gaza in 2020* report, UNRWA conducted a study on how the challenges and trends in Gaza will affect the refugee population and how the Agency will have to respond not only through enhanced regular services, but also interventions above and beyond core service provision. This report summarizes the results of that study.

The broad objective of *Gaza in 2020 – UNRWA Operational Response* is to highlight the challenges UNRWA will face within the coming seven years, the programmatic response required and estimate the resources required to meet the challenges. It should be read as an evolution of the *Gaza Recovery and Reconstruction Plan (GRRP)*. It takes advantage of the Agency's unique position as the largest UN agency in the Gaza Strip, as a trusted partner of the international community and as a direct service provider to almost three quarters of the population.

The document does not venture any opinion or forecast on the evolution of political events, nor does it offer prescriptive advice based on different political scenarios. UNRWA will continue to advocate for full access to human rights for all Palestine refugees, as protected within international humanitarian law. However, for operational planning purposes the document implicitly assumes that the situation in Gaza will remain as it currently is, with no significant economic development.

## Summary

By the year 2020 the Palestine refugee population in Gaza will increase to approximately 1.6 million, up from 1.2 million refugees today. The substantial population growth rate will thus add some 400,000 Palestine refugees to an already overcrowded and heavily urbanized area. The infrastructure of electricity, water and sanitation, municipal and social services is already struggling to keep pace with the needs of the growing population. By 2020 electricity provision will need to double to meet demand, damage to the coastal aquifer will be irreversible unless remedial action is taken, and hundreds of new schools and expanded health services will be needed for an overwhelmingly young population.

In 2013, UNRWA in Gaza is expected to spend 238 million USD on core services such as education, health, relief and social services. Based on the estimated refugee population growth over the next seven years and the correlated need to increase staffing, UNRWA's budget is expected to increase to 315 million USD in 2020.<sup>2</sup> Gaza's emergency budget is expected to increase at a similar pace, from 243 million USD in 2013 to 300 million USD, including priority interventions such as food assistance, job creation and community mental health.<sup>3</sup> UNRWA also expects to spend 124 million USD on ongoing construction projects in 2013. At the time of writing, and based on actual needs, construction projects in the three sectors outlined below – demographic growth and urbanization, basic infrastructure and social services – would cost the Agency an expected 235 million USD per year until 2020.

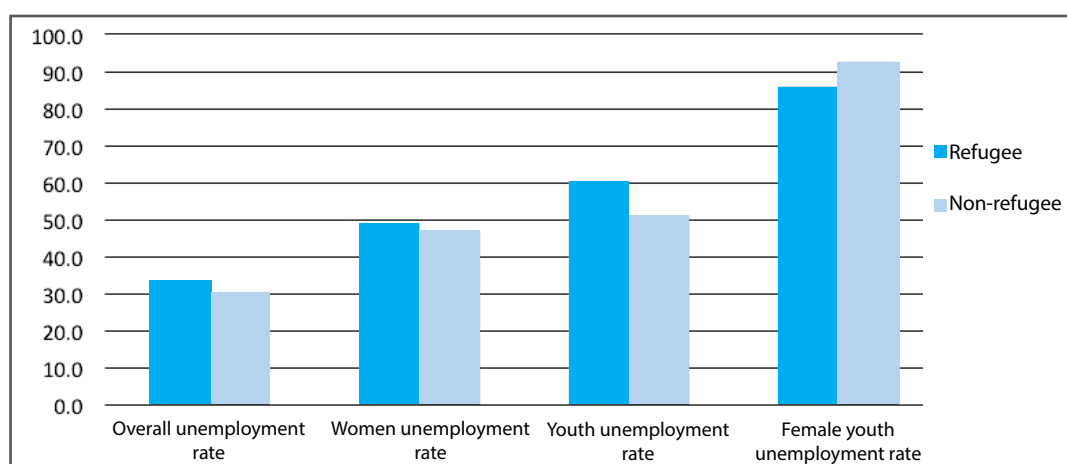
## 1. Economy

### General situation in Gaza

Indicators	Refugee	Non-refugee	Overall
Unemployment rate	33.2 per cent	30.1 per cent	32.2 per cent
Women unemployment rate	48.8 per cent	46.9 per cent	48.3 per cent
Youth unemployment rate	60.2 per cent	51.1 per cent	57.2 per cent
Female youth unemployment rate	85.8 per cent	92.5 per cent	87.7 per cent

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), Labor Force Survey Quarter 4/2012.

### 2012 unemployment rates



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), Labor Force Survey Quarter 4/2012.

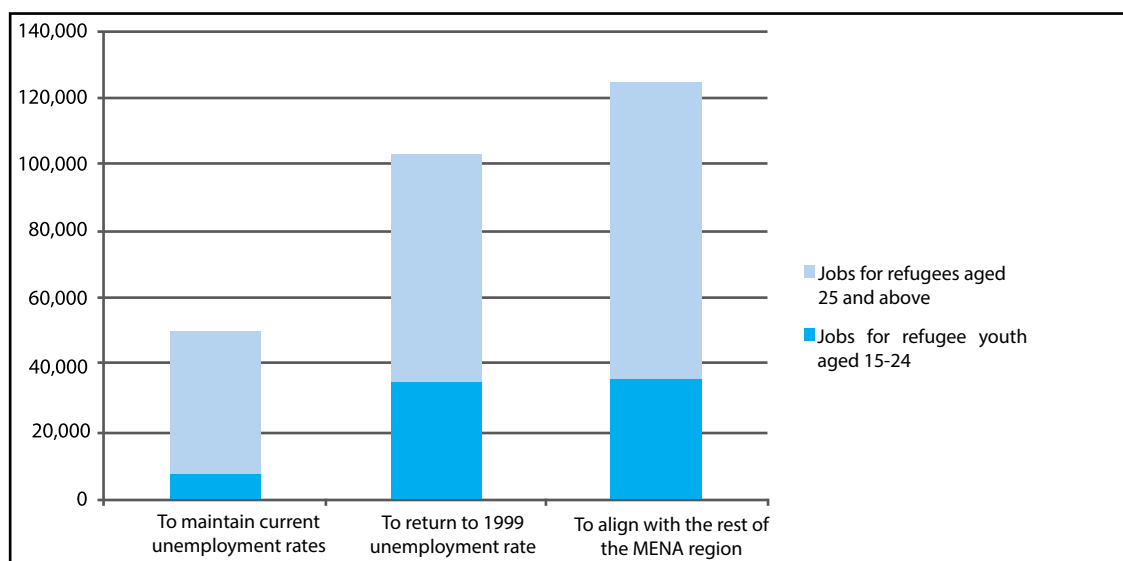
2- Estimate based on refugee population growth, staff number increase and natural salary growth, assuming all other factors being equal (i.e. procurement costs, inflation at current rate, political parameters unchanged).

3- Calculation based on the total ask under the UNRWA 2013 Emergency Appeal, including priority interventions Emergency Food Aid and School Feeding (78 million USD), Job Creation Programme (59.7 million USD), and Community Mental Health Programme (3.5 million USD).

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- Despite some economic growth after the limited relaxation of the blockage in mid-2010, Palestinians in Gaza are now, on average, worse off than they were in the 1990s. The local economy had a period of relative growth in 2011 with real GDP per capita increasing by 14 per cent, but this pace primarily reflected an increase in construction (not a growth in more productive and income-generating sectors of the economy) and was largely fuelled by tunnel trade and external assistance. Such pace could not be sustained in 2012 and real GDP per capita growth slowed to three per cent over the year. The economic growth was also unable to compensate for the severe GDP contractions faced over the last two decades.
- Following the tightening of the blockade in 2007, prices in the Gaza Strip soared and, since 2010, stabilized at high levels. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased by 21 per cent between 2006 and 2009, pulled up by a 33 per cent jump in the Food Consumer Price Index (FCPI) over the same period. Given the inability of the local economy to generate higher nominal wages, the purchasing power of the working population has dropped by a dramatic 29 per cent since 2000.<sup>4</sup>
- In line with the decline in GDP per capita and the rise in food prices, unemployment now stands at a higher level than in the late 1990s. It is also back on a rising trend, after some improvements in 2011. By the end of 2012, the unemployment rate stood at 32.2 per cent (33.2 per cent among refugees). Youth and women are particularly affected, with refugee youth unemployment at 60.2 per cent and female refugee youth unemployment at 85.8 per cent. The Gazan economy currently counts 121,000 unemployed persons, of whom 84,000 (69 per cent) are Palestine refugees and a worrying 53,000 (44 per cent) are youth below the age of 25.<sup>5</sup>
- By the end of 2020, the Gazan economy will need to generate an estimated 50,000 jobs (6,250 per year) just to absorb the increasing Palestine refugee labor force and maintain the current refugee unemployment rate. To align Palestine refugee unemployment rates with the rest of the MENA region a total of 124,000 jobs will need to be generated by 2020. However, recent labor force statistics indicate that the economy is in fact losing jobs, with an overall 11,000 jobs lost in Gaza over the second half of 2012.<sup>6</sup>

### Additional jobs to be created for Palestine refugees by 2020



4- PCBS, Labor Force Survey Quarter 4/2012 & PCBS, Consumer Price Index Statistics.

5- PCBS, Labor Force Survey Quarter 4/2012. Unemployment defined as per ILO definition.

6- Calculation based on PCBS, Labor Force Survey Quarter 4/2012.

## What it means for Palestine Refugees

### Unemployment

In 2013, refugees are experiencing higher economic volatility in Gaza with unemployment rising more dramatically than for non-refugees. UNRWA is a very important source of employment and income for Palestine refugees, directly through UNRWA jobs, indirectly through work generated by UNRWA construction and other projects, and through cash-for-work opportunities.

### Food security

Food insecurity in Gaza is primarily caused by lack of economic access to food due to high unemployment, low wages and high food prices. As per 2011 data, 60 per cent of the Palestine refugee population were assessed as food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity even after receiving assistance. The preliminary results of the 2012 Socio-Economic and Food Security Survey (SEFSec) suggest a considerable increase in food insecurity as compared to 2011, and thus a reverse in trend from previous years. With economic activity severely constrained, recent gains in unemployment being reversed, and global food prices expected to rise, many poor refugees have exhausted their coping mechanisms (taking on loans, cutting back consumption, etc.) and are now much more vulnerable to small price increases than they were in 2008.

### UNRWA's response

UNRWA has a significant role in responding to the crisis in Gaza's economy. In 2012 UNRWA expended 406 million USD, which represents approximately 16 per cent of Gaza's GDP.

The Agency implements multiple programmes to mitigate the humanitarian consequences of the man-made crisis in Gaza. In 2012, UNRWA generated 21,000 jobs and short-term positions. This includes 13,000 regular jobs with the Agency such as teachers or social workers, 3,000 cash-for-work positions and 5,000 jobs through UNRWA's construction programme. Combined, these jobs represented 8.2 per cent of all employment in the Gaza Strip, and contributed to reducing the unemployment rate by almost six percentage points.

### Job Creation Programme (JCP)

In addition to providing a source of income, UNRWA's Job Creation Programme (JCP) also restores dignity, self-respect and some self-reliance to thousands of refugees each year. Macro-economic analysis indicates that the Agency's cash-for-work programme, known as the Job Creation Programme (JCP), also had a stabilizing effect on the Gaza economy, particularly for refugees.

Although UNRWA's JCP has partially protected refugees from the extreme volatility of the Gaza economy over the last ten years, severe funding shortfalls forced UNRWA to reduce the number of cash-for-work contracts from 42,684 in 2010 to 11,444 in 2012. The introduction of poverty prioritization into JCP programming has allowed the Agency to more precisely target its assistance to the poorest in Gaza. The percentage of poor among JCP workers increased from 20 per cent in 2011 to 80 per cent by the end of 2012, reaching 84 per cent among unskilled positions.





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Under the 2013 Emergency Appeal UNRWA requested 59.7 million USD to implement the JCP in Gaza. An increasing number of refugees will be supported to work within the private sector in order to facilitate economic growth in Gaza. UNRWA will continue to use its JCP database, which has been recognized as a best practice in the cash-for-work sector in Palestine, to match applicant skills with opportunities. UNRWA will also continue to provide Gaza's best and brightest Palestine refugee university graduates with much needed and deserved work opportunities.

### Food assistance

In order to avoid a humanitarian crisis, UNRWA in 2013 is distributing food to some 827,000 poor refugees in the Gaza Strip. UNRWA is also continuing to implement an expanded school feeding programme, reaching all 225,000 students in its schools in the Gaza Strip.

Food assistance for Palestine refugees in Gaza is funded through two mechanisms, the annual Emergency Appeal and the Agency's core budget, at a combined cost of 93.3 million USD in 2013. UNRWA appealed for 78 million USD to cover the costs for emergency food assistance and school feeding in 2013 and requires 15.3 million USD from the core budget to cover the remaining food assistance needs.<sup>7</sup> Assuming the caseload increases at the same pace as the overall population and procurement costs are stable, UNRWA's budget for food aid in 2020 will increase by 30 per cent to 122 million USD annually.

### Microfinance

Through its Microfinance Programme, UNRWA offers seven loan products, including Solidarity Group Lending, which targets micro-enterprises owned by women, and youth start up loans targeting Palestine refugee youth who have an educational or technical background and are willing to start their own businesses. The microfinance programme is self-sustainable, the largest financial intermediary to the small business and micro-enterprise sector in Gaza, and has over the years awarded more than 100,000 loans valued at almost 115 million USD.

### Economic self-sufficiency

UNRWA is looking at additional ways in which it is able to use its programmes to alleviate poverty amongst poor Palestine refugees, particularly through the creation of self-sustaining initiatives that will contribute to an improved macro-economic condition in the Gaza Strip. The Agency will work to achieve this by sparking local production through purchasing from the local market whenever possible (e.g. school furniture, food), adapting its technical and vocational training programme to be more responsive to market needs, and continue microfinance and JCP activities. For example, in one initiative, UNRWA will target skilled youth and facilitate the establishment of a social enterprise that will provide ICT training and jobs to unemployed graduates. IT aspects of two UNRWA projects will be outsourced to this enterprise as *seed projects*.

<sup>7</sup> With the intention to create efficiencies at an operational level and harmonize assistance for improved equity UNRWA will implement a unified food basket in 2014. Food assistance will continue to be funded from the General Fund and the Emergency Appeal.

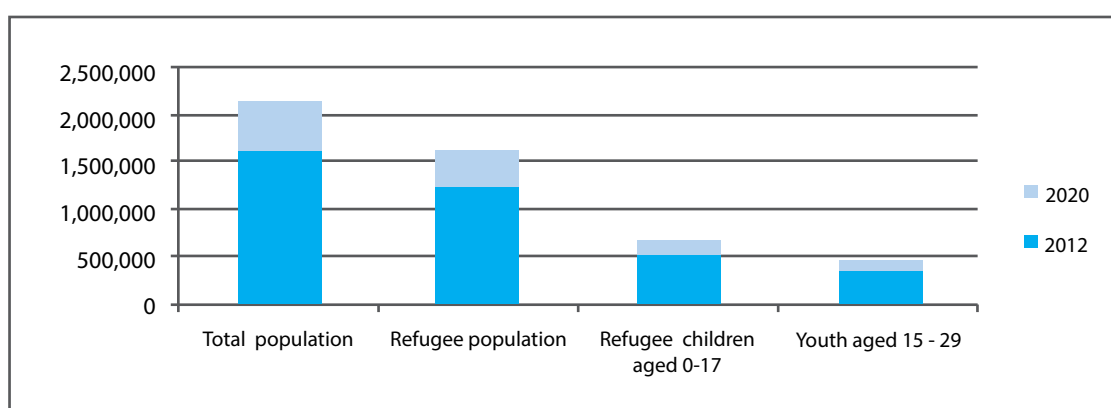




## 2. Population Growth and Urbanization

### General situation in Gaza

Indicator	Value
Palestine refugee population in 2012	1.2 million
Palestine refugee population estimate in 2020	1.6 million
Population density in 2012	4,505 people per km <sup>2</sup>
Projected population density in 2020	5,835 people per km <sup>2</sup>
Palestine refugee children aged 0 – 17 in 2012	523,401
Palestine refugee children aged 0 – 17 in 2020	701,671
Palestine refugee youth aged 15 – 29 in 2012	360,170
Palestine refugee youth aged 15 – 29 in 2020	482,843



The Gaza Strip has a high population density at 4,505 people per square kilometer, with 1.6 million inhabitants living in an area of 365 square kilometers. Approximately half of the population is children, and almost three quarters of the population registered Palestine refugees.

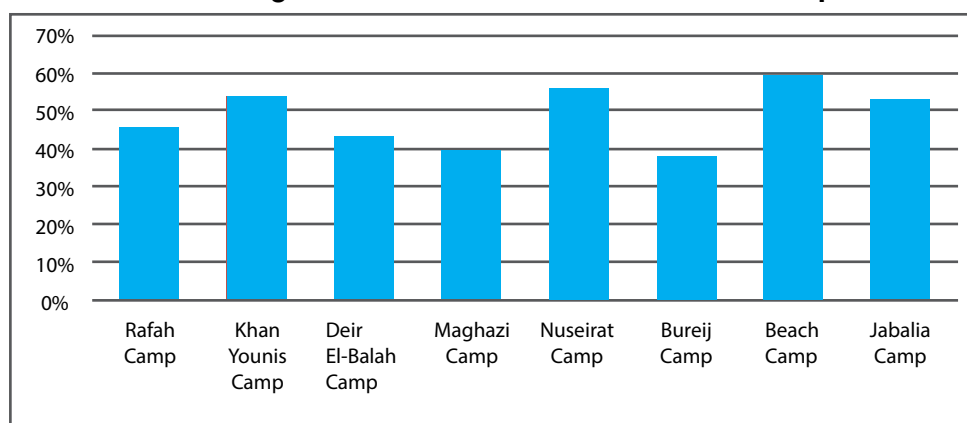
The annual refugee population growth rate for Gaza in 2012 stood at a high 3.5 per cent and is expected to decline only to some 3 per cent by 2020. The inevitable increase in the population will pose further strains on access to affordable housing and services including electricity, water and wastewater treatment. Population growth and the high number of adolescents who will enter the labor force in the coming years also mean that the economy will have to grow in line to keep pace with the expanding labor force.

### What it means for Palestine refugees

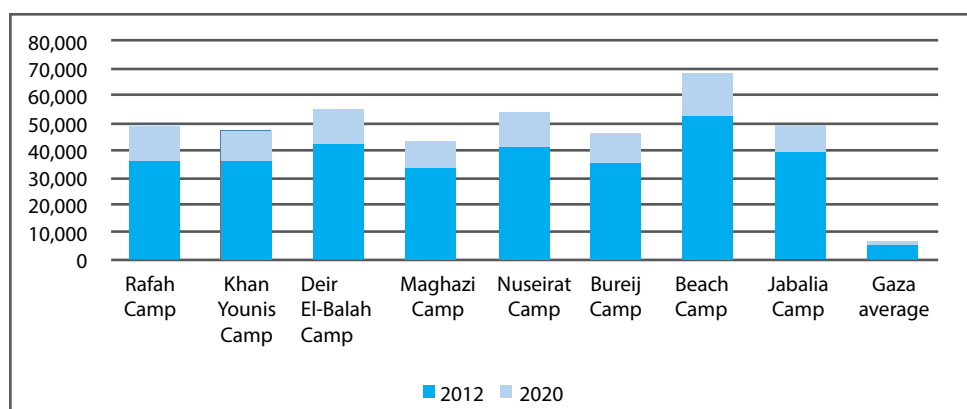
Over 540,000 registered Palestine refugees, that is 43 per cent of Gaza’s Palestine refugee population, live in the eight official refugee camps. Over the years the camps have transformed from temporary tent-cities into complex structures characterized by a mix of buildings ranging from shacks to multi-storey dwellings. UNRWA’s focus on key services provision – such as education and health – as well as reconstruction of housing damaged or demolished as a result of Israeli military operations has limited the extent to which UNRWA has been able to reconstruct, renovate, or even maintain shelters in the refugee camps. Some of the camps are considered to be among the densest urban environments in the world, and over the decades, refugees’ dwellings both inside and outside the camps have fallen into disrepair.

The quality of the camps’ physical environment cannot be separated from the refugees’ quality of life. In Gaza an average of 49 per cent of camp shelters are in substandard conditions. Walls of refugee shelters are mostly structurally unsafe, poorly insulated and not water proof. Roofs are frequently irreparable and consequently in need of replacement. Ventilation is inadequate, and shelters are damp and musty, cold in winter and hot in summer. Many families are crowded into too few rooms and most of the roads are narrow, inaccessible and unlit.

**Percentage of substandard shelters in the camps**



**Refugee camp population per km<sup>2</sup>**





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## UNRWA's response

### Shelter

Over the past decade Israeli military action has resulted in the damage or complete destruction of thousands of refugee shelters. UNRWA had to prioritize assistance to thousands of displaced refugees to repair and reconstruct homes damaged during conflict over the reconstruction of shelters for the poorest of the poor, as was initially foreseen in the *Gaza Recovery and Reconstruction Plan (GRRP)*. In 2013 UNRWA will provide shelter assistance to the remaining caseload from the 2008-2009 Israeli military operation (42.5 million USD), and over 7,000 refugee families will receive financial support to repair and reconstruct homes damaged during the November 2012 escalation in violence (15.6 million USD). With conflict-related repair and reconstruction of homes well underway, UNRWA intends to support the reconstruction of 20,000 substandard shelters of the poorest of the poor living outside the camps – including the shelters planned under the *GRRP* – by 2020.

### Camp improvement

In Gaza, camp improvement has become necessary to better the living conditions of residents and to improve environmental health. Comprehensive development work needs to be carried out inside and outside the camps to address chronic problems such as overcrowding, random expansion of buildings, unplanned land use, inaccessible roads and alleys and deteriorated shelters.

UNRWA is expecting to start work on a pilot camp improvement project in Deir El-Balah Camp. The implementation of this project will include a survey to update existing data on the camp as well as participatory planning process to develop camp improvement plans in partnership with the community. Camp improvement plans, developed by UNRWA as part of its managerial and programmatic reform process, follow a holistic and participatory approach that reflects both the social and physical aspects of camps, and engages the community to increase ownership of beneficiaries over the development process. This means that Deir El-Balah Camp will be improved according to priorities identified by the community, which are likely to include widening of the roads, construction or rehabilitation of public facilities and establishment of green areas. UNRWA aims at expanding camp improvement from the pilot project in Deir El-Balah Camp to all other camps in Gaza by 2020.

### 3. Basic Infrastructure

#### General situation in Gaza

##### Electricity supply

The Gaza Electricity Distribution Company (GEDCo) is unable to cover current electricity demand in Gaza and is therefore forced to apply a strict distribution schedule of electricity supply. Gaza's inhabitants face regular power cuts affecting private businesses and homes, health services, wastewater treatment plants, and schools. Many of these facilities rely on back-up generators, which are expensive, damaging to the environment and prone to cause fires.

The Gaza Strip receives most of its power, 120MW, from Israel, while up to 100MW are produced at the only power plant in Gaza, and 22MW are imported from Egypt. Under ideal circumstances, this adds up to 242MW, against a peak demand of up to 350MW. The GEDCo expects electricity demand to increase to 550MW by 2020, more than twice what is currently being provided.

##### Water

As highlighted by reports of the World Bank and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the situation in relation to water and sanitation for the Palestinians in Gaza is critical. Today 90 per cent of water from the aquifer is not safe to drink without treatment. Most Palestinians in Gaza do not have access to clean water, due to the pollution of the aquifer and the economic inaccessibility to other sources of drinking water, such as commercially sold water. As a result, the average water consumption in Gaza is 70 to 90 liters per person per day, below the global WHO standard of 100 liters per person per day.

The entire aquifer could become unusable as early as 2016, with the damage irreversible by 2020. UNEP recommends ceasing abstraction immediately, as it would otherwise take centuries for the aquifer to recover. The water crisis is an existential threat to the Gaza Strip as a livable place.

##### Sanitation

At present, only 25 per cent of Gaza's wastewater is being treated and re-infiltrated for use in green areas and agriculture. Some 90,000 cubic meters of raw or partially treated sewage is released daily into the Mediterranean Sea and environs, creating pollution, public health hazards, and problems for the fishing industry. Work is ongoing on the construction of new and refurbished wastewater treatment plants to cope with both present and future demands, but these efforts will need to be accelerated. Some 44 million cubic meters of wastewater are generated annually at present, a figure which could rise to 57 million cubic meters annually by 2020.

#### What it means for Palestine refugees

The environmental health risks for the 43 per cent of refugees living in the camps, where the average population density is at nearly 40,000 persons per square kilometre, has become increasingly challenging. Solid waste is inappropriately disposed at dumping sites outside camps. Standing wastewater near camps provides breeding grounds for mosquitoes, threatening the safety of children and the health of the whole community. Refugee camps in Gaza face a high prevalence of water borne diseases and most families rely on cesspits for sewage and on private vendors for drinking water at a financial cost that is difficult for impoverished refugees to afford. About 40,000 cesspits are in use in Gaza, and most of them are manually emptied due to the lack of connection to the sewerage network.





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## UNRWA's response

The situation in relation to water is not an issue that can be addressed by a single agency. Addressing this situation in a sustainable way will require a cooperative and long term approach between various UN Agencies, local authorities, the Government of Israel, and the international community. UNRWA is currently planning a full evaluation of how it can improve its use of renewable energy and reduce its overall environmental footprint. The Agency plans to play an important role in three sectors:

**Access to water:** UNRWA is discussing with donors the possibility of improving access to water by installing multiple small-scale desalination plants. Additionally, UNRWA is investigating the possibility of using run-off water to recharge the aquifer and to improve the water distribution network – particularly in the refugee camps – in order to reduce water loss.

**Environmental health:** UNRWA collects solid waste in the eight refugee camps and dumps almost 7,000 MT in approved landfills every month. The Agency is exploring how it can support the expansion of recycling capacity in Gaza so less waste is dumped and economic benefit can be extracted.

**Electricity:** In 2013 UNRWA will be undertaking a study on the installation of solar panels in its facilities. In addition to reducing its overall energy needs, and thus reducing pressure on the power grid, UNRWA will look to use its various tools to support the expansion of the solar industry in Gaza by training technicians and outsourcing installation and maintenance to the private sector. UNRWA will also use its communication tools, particularly its satellite TV channel, to educate the population on efficient use of electricity.

## 4. Social Services

### General situation in Gaza

#### Health services

The quality of the public health sector needs to be substantively improved. Most public health facilities are unable to provide safe and adequate services and need to be rehabilitated or upgraded.

While Israeli authorities permit the access of medical supplies into Gaza, there are frequent breakdowns of medical equipment resulting from power interruptions and water impurities, among other factors. For this and other reasons, many patients are forced to seek treatment outside Gaza for a wide range of medical problems, which is difficult due to movement restrictions imposed by the blockade.

#### Education

People in Gaza are comparatively well educated, with a literacy rate of 96 per cent. Despite the value placed on education and high school attendance rates, maintaining the quality of education remains a major challenge. This is largely due to a shortage of school buildings which forces double shifting and results in shorter school hours, as well as due to a high number of students per classroom.

Currently, the technical and vocational education and training system has a low status in Gaza. Access to technical and vocational training, as well as to universities in the West Bank or abroad, is limited by restrictions imposed by the blockade.

#### Social protection

The Gaza Strip is currently sustained through external funding and the tunnel economy, with the blockade continuing to impact nearly every aspect of life. The socioeconomic conditions remain characterized by widespread unemployment, high levels of poverty, food insecurity and political tensions.

Social protection consists of policies and programmes, including financial and other support, that increases access to services such as health, education, housing or nutrition for people that are often not only poor but also marginalized – such as people with disabilities, children, women, youth, orphans and the elderly.

## What it means for Palestine refugees

### Health

With impoverished Palestinians unable to afford the fees charged at Ministry of Health and private clinics and hospitals, and a chronic shortage of medicines and medical supplies in the Ministry of Health central pharmacy, UNRWA continues to be the primary health care provider of last resort for Palestine refugees in Gaza. Refugees are also increasingly seeking assistance from UNRWA to access secondary and tertiary care, particularly for abject poor refugees and patients with special medical needs.

Indicator	Value
UNRWA health centers in Gaza in 2012	21
UNRWA health centers in Gaza in 2020	25
Patient visits in 2012	4,418,452
Patient visits in 2020	5,208,636
Target daily medical consultations per doctor	90
Daily medical consultations per doctor in 2012	112
Daily medical consultations per doctor in 2020	126
Health staff in 2012	988
New health staff needed in 2020	325



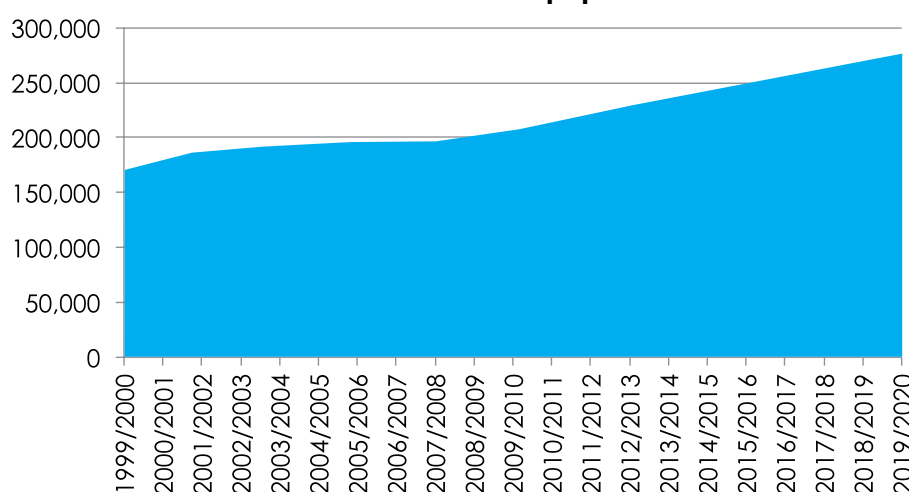
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## Education

The lives of Palestine refugee children and families in Gaza are characterized by seemingly insurmountable challenges, such as regular violent conflict, entrenching poverty and aid dependency, and an inadequate standard of living. These difficulties undermine children’s right to education.

UNRWA in Gaza currently crams 225,000 students into 245 schools that operate out of 136 school buildings. 86 per cent of the school buildings operate on double-shift basis, hosting one of the 245 schools of students in the morning and a different school of students in the afternoon. As a result, refugee children in Gaza receive a severely truncated education and have little or no opportunity to engage in recreational or creative pursuits during the regular school year. In the 2011/2012 school year, a significant proportion of children enrolled in UNRWA schools failed their Arabic or mathematics examinations. Male students lag behind female students. Boys have also been found to be more likely to drop out and to be comparatively more prone to violence and other disruptive behaviors than their female counterparts.

**Growth of student population**



Indicator	Value
UNRWA students in 2012	225,000
UNRWA teachers in 2012	7,800
UNRWA school buildings in Gaza in 2012	136
UNRWA school buildings in Gaza in 2020	249
UNRWA students in 2020	275,000
UNRWA teachers needed in 2020	9,500
Average number of students per classroom in UNRWA schools in 2012	38





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## Social protection

Given the duration of the ongoing man-made crisis in Gaza, more and more refugees are moving from a situation of relatively simple, unemployment generated poverty to one of deep poverty, rooted in increasing marginalization and vulnerability. In 2000, when the economy was functioning normally in Gaza, only 10 per cent of refugees required UNRWA assistance to meet their basic needs. Today, that number has increased to nearly 70 per cent. With this aid dependency has come an increasing reliance on UNRWA to provide not only basic social services and humanitarian assistance but broader support – such as psychosocial and gender based violence interventions – to an ever increasing number of vulnerable refugees.

## UNRWA's response

In Gaza, at least 80 per cent of the population receives some form of assistance.<sup>8</sup> Of this assistance, UNRWA is the most important source, with 81 per cent of all assisted households mentioning UNRWA services.

## Health services

Through its Health Department, UNRWA operates 21 primary healthcare centres in Gaza; however, the number of Palestine refugees turning to UNRWA for assistance in meeting their health care needs continues to rise, straining the system. From 2009 to 2011, there was an 11 per cent increase in the number of consultations provided at UNRWA health centres, with over 4.4 million patient visits in 2012. With referrals to medical care abroad difficult or slow to access due to the blockade and with no other provider capable of intervening, UNRWA provides a portion of the costs of secondary and tertiary health care for vulnerable groups.

The Agency aims at improving the quality of health services provided to Palestine refugees in Gaza by implementing – in line with UNRWA's health reform policy – a family health team approach, in which teams of health staff coordinate to provide enhanced and comprehensive care to families. This approach has improved

8- SEFSec, 2011.

the quality of relationships between medical staff and patients and is creating a greater continuity in care. In addition, e-Health, a computerised patient data system, is also being introduced in health centres in Gaza with the aim of improving information management processes for both patients and health staff.

UNRWA is working to promote access to health care services in the Gaza Strip by ensuring that sufficient levels of essential medical staff, equipment and supplies are available to respond to the increased demand caused by the shortage of similar medicines and supplies in Ministry of Health and private clinics.

The number of patient consultations at UNRWA health centres is expected to increase to 5.2 million in 2020. To tackle population growth and to continue to provide quality health care to Palestine refugees in Gaza in 2020, UNRWA will need to build four new health centres, replace eight health centres and hire 325 new health staff, doubling the number of medical officers and increasing the number of midwives by 50 per cent.

### **Community Mental Health Programme (CMHP)**

UNRWA responds to the continuing, profound psychosocial needs in the Gaza Strip by deploying a network of psychosocial counselors to its schools, health centres and relief and social service offices. Counselors provide individual and group counseling sessions, as well as referrals to other mental health services as necessary. The Community Mental Health Programme encourages the development of constructive coping strategies and promotes mental wellbeing. The programme also provides support to 32,000 people through group and individual counseling, and to some 240,000 people through mental health awareness activities, including to all students at UNRWA schools. Based solely on demographic growth and the likely continuation of the difficult context in Gaza, UNRWA will remain committed to meeting Palestine refugees' mental health needs in the coming years.



## Education

Population growth is currently adding some seven to eight thousand additional students to UNRWA schools each year. As such, a key focus for UNRWA is to address the resulting overcrowding in schools, to reduce the number of double shifted schools and to avoid triple shifting. With an additional 75 schools between now and 2020 UNRWA aims to continue the provision of quality education, to improve the learning environment, to provide more opportunities for extracurricular activities and better educational opportunities for students with special needs.

The 2009 *Gaza Recovery and Reconstruction Plan (GRRP)* foresaw the construction of 100 new schools out of which 27 have been completed as of April 2013, and 38 are under construction. UNRWA expects the remaining 35 schools foreseen in the *GRRP* to be completed during 2015. UNRWA has also proposed a programme of investment aiming to address current physical space shortages and to replace makeshift arrangements such as shipping containers and rotating classrooms. In order to keep up with the increasing student population, and in addition to the remaining 35 schools from the *GRRP*, 40 more schools (for a total of 75) will be needed by 2020 to accommodate an additional 50,000 students. Depending on how many new schools will be completed by 2020, student intake and class size, UNRWA estimates that 9,500 teachers and 200 support staff will be needed by 2020.

Education at UNRWA schools in Gaza is implemented in accordance with the Palestinian Authority curriculum for grades 1-9. To promote human rights, specially trained teachers deliver an additional subject in Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance for all children in all grades.

To support the work of the Education Programme and improve basic literacy and numeracy UNRWA in Gaza developed the UNRWA satellite television channel which broadcasts educational programming. In Gaza alone, 200,000 children regularly watch UNRWA TV. According to a 2012 survey, 81 per cent of students in Gaza who watch UNRWA's education programme feel that there has been an improvement in their studies.

Another key component of working to improve the quality of education is the Respect and Discipline Initiative. Participation has grown from 21 schools since its 2008/09 pilot phase to 136 schools in the 2012/13 school year and will include all schools in the 2013/2014 school year. The initiative has been developed in collaboration with a team of Palestinian professors. The initiative aims to reduce the level of violence in schools and directly improve behaviour and norms of students while ultimately contributing to improved academic achievement.





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As set forth in the Agency's Education Reform Strategy, UNRWA strives to ensure that children and youth with special needs do not face stigma, attitudinal, or other barriers to education. One core initiative towards this end is Special Children – Special Needs. Under this initiative, almost 12,000 children in UNRWA schools underwent medical screening and assessment during the 2012/2013 school year. The Agency provided glasses and hearing aids to needy children and referred children to surgery as well as to specialists abroad as needed.

In 2011, unified exams underwent a methodological revision to better test critical thinking and writing skills through more open-ended questions. It reflects a shift away from pure focus on knowledge and better incorporates skills being taught through the curriculum and in the classroom.

The Agency also runs vocational training for around 2,000 students per year through two technical and vocational training centres. Courses are selected based on an analysis of market demand, and such training provides young graduates practical skills necessary to enter the Gaza labor market

### **Social protection**

UNRWA will continue to advocate for the full protection of the human rights of Palestine refugees as required by our mandate, UN resolutions, and international law. We will continue to advocate for a resolution of their plight in the context of a just and lasting peace, agreed by the parties in consultation with the refugees, whose freely exercised and informed choices must be respected. The blockade that has been strictly enforced since 2007 prevents any sustained economic growth and the full realization of human rights of the Palestine refugees in Gaza.

UNRWA's social protection strategy is to utilize its many programmatic channels to mitigate the effects of the blockade and the other drivers of poverty and marginalization. To respond to high levels of vulnerability, poverty and food insecurity among the refugees in Gaza, UNRWA has put in place a large number of social protection initiatives, particularly through its Relief and Social Services Programme.

These programmes include working through community based organizations (CBOs) to strengthen the capacity of refugees to conceive and carry out sustainable social services tailored to the needs of their own communities. This indirect service delivery to the most vulnerable refugees – particularly women, people with disabilities, children and youth, orphans and the elderly – is currently provided through a network of CBOs

that organize a wide range of activities. Over the coming years UNRWA aims to strengthen and expand its strategic partnerships with effective CBOs. In addition to the ongoing work with the poor and with young women, particularly vulnerable groups will be supported through indirect services such as rehabilitation services for people with disabilities, providing life skills training and counseling to orphans, and recreational and psychosocial services to the elderly.

Quality education being one of the most important elements of social protection in Gaza, UNRWA implements programmes with the specific aim of ensuring all children can avail themselves of this essential right. The Agency's Special Children – Special Needs project, described above, ensures that children with special needs can be identified early and provided the support they need to succeed. UNRWA also implements a summer learning programme to help students who failed classes to advance with their peers, and an integrated learning programme for children with learning difficulties.

UNRWA in Gaza will continue to mainstream gender in service provision, and further specific gender initiatives. One long-term goal is the development of skills and leadership abilities which are key components of the Young Women's Leadership Programme. UNRWA in Gaza has also introduced a referral system to provide comprehensive services – legal aid, psychosocial services and health care – to address gender based violence (GBV). The GBV Referral System will continue to evolve and will begin to look at broader violence in refugee families and expand efforts to support victims.

UNRWA is further committed to addressing inclusion and participation of the ever growing youth population in Gaza and to upholding the ten commitments to youth made by the Commissioner General in 2012 at the Youth Conference in Brussels. To this effect UNRWA in Gaza is currently studying the establishment of community level youth councils that will advise on the use of micro-grants, empowering youth to work together to set and act upon the priorities they see for their community.

The Agency is also planning to access the potential of youth to contribute positively to their society by creating a cadre of volunteer social workers to assist vulnerable refugees in accessing available services, both from the Agency and external service providers, and providing these youth volunteers with real work experience.

Multiple plans are in place to mainstream disability into UNRWA operations. Standards intended to facilitate access for people with disabilities are currently implemented in UNRWA facilities, and individuals are supported through the provision of needed assistive devices, primarily through referral to partner CBOs. In addition, staff practices during service provision, especially food distribution, will consistently reflect particular care to protect and facilitate access for people with disabilities. The Rehabilitation Centre for the Visually Impaired – established by UNRWA in 1962 – will continue to offer training, educational and recreational activities to visually impaired children.

### **UNRWA installations**

In order for UNRWA to remain operational in times of military operations, to reduce costs and increase efficiencies the Agency has to relocate its logistics facilities. UNRWA also has to relocate the Jabalia food distribution centre to a more appropriate site.





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## Conclusion

Unless substantial changes occur in Gaza, in particular the lifting of the blockade, the current situation is expected to worsen over the coming years to 2020 and beyond. During this period, the Palestine refugee population is expected to increase by 400,000 to 1.6 million. This poses substantial challenges to UNRWA in delivery of essential humanitarian and development assistance to the most vulnerable and impoverished households.

As outlined in the Gaza in 2020 report, without drastic action the daily lives of Palestinians in Gaza will soon be dramatically worse than they are now. There will be virtually no reliable access to safe drinking water, standards of healthcare and education will have continued to decline, and the vision of affordable and reliable electricity for all will have become a distant memory. Palestine refugee camps will become increasingly overcrowded and deteriorate further, with current substandard conditions at a risk of becoming unlivable. Food insecurity will worsen and the mental health impacts of a protracted emergency will have far reaching social consequences.

UNRWA has a vital role in alleviating poverty of Palestine refugees in Gaza, and in mitigating the humanitarian impact of the man made crisis in the territory. However, without significant support from the international community, UNRWA will struggle to continue providing its current, critical range of services. It is essential that the inhabitants of Gaza are able to exercise and enjoy the full range of fundamental human rights to which they are entitled. For Palestine refugees, UNRWA is currently the main source of assistance and of protection of these rights. In order for UNRWA to have the capacity to continue to fulfill this role over the coming years, international support will be needed for the delivery of essential assistance towards food security, decent housing, environmental health, and social services.

Urgent action is needed to ensure that Palestine refugees in Gaza are able to enjoy a dignified and decent standard of living now and in the future.



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اللاجئين الفلسطينيين في الشرق الأدنى