



**Ministry for Foreign Affairs**

Department for Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs

**Strategy for Sweden's cooperation with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) 2020–2023**

**1. Scope of the strategy**

This strategy will underpin Sweden's cooperation with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) during the period 2020–2023. The strategy establishes the priorities and forms of collaboration for Sweden's partnership with UNRWA at global, regional and national level.

The strategy is guided by Sweden's Policy for Global Development and its overall objective of contributing to equitable and sustainable global development<sup>1</sup>, the Policy Framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance<sup>2</sup> (referred to below as the Policy Framework), and the Swedish Foreign Service action plan for feminist foreign policy 2019–2022<sup>3</sup>. The strategy also takes its cue from the Government's guidelines for strategies in Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance<sup>4</sup> and Sweden's strategy for multilateral development policy<sup>5</sup>.

The strategy also takes its cue from the Government's priorities in the area of humanitarian assistance in accordance with the Strategy for Sweden's humanitarian aid provided through the Swedish International

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<sup>1</sup> Shared responsibility: Sweden's Policy for Global Development (Govt Bill 2002/03:122)

<sup>2</sup> Government Communication 2016/17:60

<sup>3</sup><https://www.regeringen.se/496bd5/contentassets/8b3aa00d45f34e4cba0b96801815ba9d/utrikesforvaltningens-handlingsplan-for-feministisk-utrikespolitik-20192022>

<sup>4</sup> UD2017/21053/IU

<sup>5</sup> Reg. no UD2017/21055/FN

Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) 2017–2020<sup>6</sup>. According to these, humanitarian assistance must be based on humanitarian needs and be guided by the humanitarian principles of *humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence* and the principles of *good humanitarian donorship*.

Moreover, the strategy is based on UNRWA's mandate and strategic policy documents. The organisational assessment conducted by the Government Offices (Ministry for Foreign Affairs) in 2019 forms the basis of the strategy<sup>7</sup>. The strategy also takes into account the information on cooperation with UNRWA contributed by Swedish missions abroad and government agencies in Sweden. The agreement on four-year core support to UNRWA entered into in August 2018 and applicable during 2018–2021 also forms the basis of Sweden's advocacy work within the organisation.

The Government has devised the strategy in consultation with the relevant government agencies and civil society actors.

## **2. UNRWA's mandate and activities**

### **2.1 UNRWA's mandate**

UNRWA is the UN's relief organisation for Palestine refugees and was established in 1949 by the UN General Assembly after many people were forced to flee or were driven from their homes as a result of the State of Israel being declared, and the ensuing war. It was established that the organisation's mandate would be to provide refugees with humanitarian assistance until a peaceful solution to the conflict could be reached. At the current time, almost five and a half million Palestine refugees are entitled to humanitarian assistance from UNRWA, one third of whom are still living in refugee camps. UNRWA's main activities include providing education, primary care and humanitarian support in the form of food support or cash support. UNRWA's mandate is geographically limited to Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine, where UNRWA is the only body that has a mandate to respond to the humanitarian needs of Palestine refugees.

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<sup>6</sup> Reg. no UD2017/01299/KH

<sup>7</sup> UD2019/19479 Organisational assessment of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

## 2.2 Strategic plan

UNRWA's mandate is contained in the organisation's strategic plan: the Medium Term Strategy (MTS) 2016–2021, which has been approved by the UNRWA Advisory Commission, of which Sweden is a member. In 2019, UNRWA proposed extending the strategy to cover 2022. The strategy is based on five strategic results areas and takes its cue from a long-term plan and forward-looking analysis of the size and future needs of the refugee population. The five areas involve ensuring that:

- 1) refugees' rights under international law are protected and promoted;
- 2) refugees' health is protected and the disease burden is reduced;
- 3) school-aged children complete quality, equitable and inclusive basic education;
- 4) refugee capabilities are strengthened for increased livelihood opportunities; and
- 5) refugees are able to meet their basic needs of food, shelter and environmental health.

The strategy relates to 10 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in the 2030 Agenda and supports the implementation of normative frameworks such as the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) and the Grand Bargain. Given UNRWA's recurrent financing problems, a great deal of energy is invested in resource mobilisation, which is regulated in a separate strategy, also adapted to the organisation's mandate.

## 2.3 UNRWA's financial structure

UNRWA is essentially financed exclusively by voluntary contributions, apart from a small proportion (currently approximately 5 per cent of the core budget), which is financed via the UN's regular budget. In the long term, UNRWA is considering shifting to a needs-based budget, but the budget for 2020 is planned according to anticipated revenue. UNRWA has been affected by recurrent financial deficits and since 2012 it has been working completely without any financial reserves. Reduced contributions from donors have therefore had a direct effect on UNRWA's activities.

UNRWA's main activities are financed by its programme budget and two emergency appeals for arising needs as a result of the conflicts in Palestine and Syria. UNRWA's total costs for 2019 are expected to have amounted to USD 1.07 billion. For several years, Sweden has been UNRWA's sixth

largest donor, and Swedish support goes to both the programme budget in the form of core support and from Sida's humanitarian funds to UNRWA's emergency appeals.

## 2.4 Organisational assessment

In the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' organisational assessment from 2019, UNRWA – with its comprehensive mandate and close work with a large group of recipients – is considered to be extremely relevant to several of the Government's thematic focuses and objectives of Sweden's humanitarian aid. UNRWA's significant role for stability in the Middle East, as well as its crucial role in upholding the rights of Palestine refugees, is also clear in the organisational assessment. Moreover, the organisational assessment states that UNRWA needs to improve its work in the areas of gender mainstreaming and environment and sustainability.

In 2019, the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an investigation into accusations of official misconduct and abuse of power against individuals in the UNRWA leadership. In light of the investigation, the organisation has presented proposed reforms, including in the areas of governance and accountability, management and decision-making, personnel issues and workplace culture, and closer cooperation with other UN bodies. These are issues that are also highlighted in the organisational assessment and a great deal of attention will be paid to these issues in this strategy.

## 3. Focus and thematic priorities

Through dialogue and financial contributions, Sweden will work to ensure that UNRWA achieves its overall remit and implements its strategic plan, with a focus on Sweden's priority issues. The following thematic areas will be prioritised in Sweden's cooperation with UNRWA during the period 2020–2023; Sweden will be clear about these priorities in its dialogue with UNRWA and work actively to promote synergy effects. Bilateral support to UNRWA – multi-bi support – must be in line with the strategy's priorities and approaches in relation to UNRWA.

### 3.1.1 Human rights, democracy and the rule of law

UNRWA plays an important role in protecting and safeguarding the rights of Palestine refugees and, as a humanitarian organisation, also defending respect for international humanitarian law and humanitarian

principles in an ongoing conflict. UNRWA thus contributes to the Government's objectives concerning human rights, democracy and the rule of law, which are basic prerequisites for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Sweden will act to ensure that:

- UNRWA applies a rights-based approach in its work, focusing clearly on human rights, including all women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights; and
- UNRWA's work for the human rights of particularly vulnerable groups is strengthened.

### 3.1.2 Saving lives, alleviating suffering and maintaining human dignity

UNRWA is essentially a humanitarian organisation whose activities are important for the Government's overarching objectives in the area of humanitarian assistance, namely to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity. Not least as a result of the crisis in Syria and Palestine (particularly Gaza), UNRWA has had to increase its efforts to provide life-sustaining humanitarian support. However, UNRWA's precarious financial situation affects the organisation's possibilities to deliver humanitarian support in humanitarian crises in accordance with its mandate.

Sweden will act to ensure that:

- UNRWA pursues a needs-based, rapid and effective humanitarian response to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain the human dignity of people affected by crises;
- UNRWA works to guarantee the sustainability of results, including strengthening the link between humanitarian support and long-term development results, as well as work to prevent risks and build resilience, in order to save lives and reduce the risk of recurrent humanitarian crises; and
- UNRWA works to increase respect for humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law.

### 3.1.3 Global gender equality

Sweden's continued engagement in UNRWA's gender equality work is important as part of the feminist foreign policy. UNRWA's

comprehensive operational activities mean that the organisation has a considerable normative role to play in the societies in which it operates. Although UNRWA has policy documents<sup>8</sup> for gender mainstreaming in all of its activities, this gender mainstreaming lacks a clear place in UNRWA's organisation and resource distribution.

Sweden will act to ensure that:

- UNRWA, in accordance with its Gender Equality Strategy<sup>9</sup>, integrates all parts of its activities into gender equality work and that this mainstreaming is consistent across UNRWA's different activities in the field; and
- UNRWA strengthens women's and girls' enjoyment of their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and that it works to prevent and combat all forms of mental, physical and sexual gender-based violence in all situations and environments.

#### 3.1.4 Equitable health

UNRWA is a key actor in the area of health, as the organisation provides over three million Palestine refugees with health and medical care, and a further two million are entitled to care under the auspices of the organisation. UNRWA's work in the area of health contributes to the Government's objective for equitable health, which is about defending all people's right to health, including SRHR and infant and maternity care.

Sweden will act to ensure that:

- UNRWA continues its work to strengthen access to care and offers quality maternity care, and highlights young people's need for and access to SRHR, in close cooperation with relevant actors and UN bodies; and
- UNRWA prioritises psychosocial measures, particularly among children and young people who have experienced conflict.

#### 3.1.5 Education

UNRWA's work to give children a quality, equitable education is important for the Government's objective on equitable and inclusive education of high quality at all levels for girls and boys, women and men. UNRWA's activities in this area are also relevant to the Government's objective to highlight in particular the importance and the role of

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<sup>8</sup> Gender Equality Strategy 2016–21

<sup>9</sup> Gender Equality Strategy 2016–21

education in conflict and post-conflict situations and humanitarian crises. Particular attention will be paid to girls and marginalised groups, including children with varying functional abilities. UNRWA's framework for teaching makes clear that it should reflect the UN's fundamental values and principles, such as respect for human rights, tolerance of difference and peaceful conflict management. UNRWA follows national school curricula in host countries, but it has the possibility to use additional educational programmes to supplement its teaching when national curricula fall short. In this regard, UNRWA also plays a key role in the Government's work to combat extremism and intolerance.

Sweden will act to ensure that:

- UNRWA's work to provide quality education in crises is prioritised;
- UNRWA secures, develops and evaluates its work to promote the UN's fundamental values and principles in teaching, such as respect for human rights, tolerance of difference and peaceful conflict management.

### 3.1.6 Environmental and climate-resilient sustainability

UNRWA's comprehensive activities, such as responsibility for infrastructure and waste management in refugee camps, mean that the organisation has a major impact on the environment and climate in the societies in which it operates. UNRWA can thus contribute to the Government's environment and climate objectives.

Sweden will act to ensure that:

- UNRWA adopts an environment and climate policy or a strategy for environment and climate work that is in line with the Paris Agreement and guides UNRWA's work, not least in the refugee camps in which the organisation is responsible for infrastructure and waste management; and
- UNRWA strengthens the integration of climate-resilient and environmental sustainability and measures to effectively implement the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

#### 4. Priorities concerning the organisation's working methods

The Government Offices' organisational assessment states that strategic evaluations and an independent evidence-based approach are areas for development at UNRWA. UNRWA's independent Department of Internal Oversight Services (DIOS) has free access to staff, documents, archives, etc. to conduct thorough examinations. DIOS is also responsible for following up on and implementing the recommendations given. However, it lacks its own delegated budget for examinations and during the period 2015–2017 it was not able to conduct the evaluations planned. OIOS's investigation of UNRWA in 2019 was the result of a report from DIOS, which does nonetheless show that accountability mechanisms are in place and working as they should.

Based on the organisational assessment and preliminary conclusions on measures as a result of OIOS's investigation, Sweden will give particular priority to the following areas concerning the organisation's working methods.

Focusing on reform, risk management, transparency, independent systems for internal controls, and anti-corruption:

- UNRWA's work for greater transparency and closer information exchange with donors concerning the organisation's work, including in the follow-up of recommendations from internal and external audits and evaluations;
- UNRWA's work to combat corruption and power abuse, in which UNRWA's DIOS is given a stronger position, improved protection for whistleblowers and the requisite resources;
- UNRWA's work on independent systems for accountability and transparency – including, but not exclusively, in relation to the organisation's handling of the issue of sexual harassment and exploitation within UNRWA and its operations; and
- UNRWA's continued work to implement reforms, also in light of the OIOS investigation.

Focusing on long-term and flexible financing:



- UNRWA's work to increase the proportion of core support in the budget and broadening the donor base, and increased visibility for Swedish core support and Sweden's bilateral support.

Focusing on sustainable results and results-based management:

- UNRWA's work to strengthen results-based management and budgeting and to make clear the link between objectives, resources, activities and results in the organisation's accounts;
- incorporation of cross-cutting priorities in the organisation's core budget in order to guarantee qualitative, effective and sustainable results in all operational activities;
- UNRWA's ability to constructively and effectively cooperate with the private sector and civil society in the field; and
- UNRWA's development of sustainable procurement (use of selection criteria for economic, environmental and social sustainability, and application of life cycle analysis), including coordination with other UN bodies.

Focusing on reform and streamlining of the UN system:

- UNRWA's work to implement reform of the UN development system with the objective of implementing the 2030 Agenda;
- UNRWA's role in and responsibility for further strengthening harmonisation and coordination within the UN system in the countries in which it operates, with respect for its mandate, and joint implementation as *one* UN, including continued and deepened cooperation with relevant UN actors;
- UNRWA's further development and contributions to the ongoing work in the UN to strengthen the ability to prevent conflicts by enhancing and developing synergies between humanitarian and development initiatives for peace; and
- UNRWA's commitments to making the humanitarian response system more efficient, transparent and inclusive, in light of the Grand Bargain agreed at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016.

Focusing on personnel issues and workplace culture:

- UNRWA's work for good leadership and a good organisational culture, in which the guiding concepts of professional conduct and integrity are particularly relevant;
- UNRWA's recruitment of staff, including better use of the Swedish resource base;
- UNRWA's work to ensure an even gender balance, with a special focus on senior/management positions, non-discriminatory employment and organisational structures and a human resources policy that makes it easier for both men and women employees to combine work and family life and helps to prevent and combat all forms of sexual harassment and exploitation; and
- UNRWA's compliance with its policy of zero tolerance of sexual exploitation in all parts of the organisation.

## **5. Advocacy and forms of collaboration**

### **5.1.1 Advocacy**

Sweden's position as one of the largest donors of core support to UNRWA, and its political commitment to UNRWA, provide good opportunities for dialogue and influence at the highest political level, official level and in the field via our missions abroad in UNRWA's areas of activity. Through its membership of the UNRWA Advisory Commission and the Sub-Committee, Sweden has the possibility to follow and influence the ongoing management and monitoring of UNRWA's activities. During the initial strategy period, Sweden has a particularly good opportunity to influence cooperation as chair of the Sub-Committee.

The fact that Sweden entered into an agreement in 2018 on multi-year core support to UNRWA further deepens our close cooperation with the organisation. Sweden's active role in UNRWA's resource mobilisation (by organising several recurring donor conferences for UNRWA and carrying out advocacy work vis-à-vis other donors, for example) creates good opportunities for advocacy and dialogue with the organisation.

The main advocacy channels include:

- a continuous and consistent bilateral dialogue with UNRWA at both political and official level, including through an annual high-level consultation with the UNRWA leadership, preferably at state secretary level;
- active and constructive involvement in the UNRWA Advisory Commission and Sub-Committee, with the aim of gaining traction for Swedish priorities and values;
- a constructive and results-oriented dialogue with UNRWA and its counterparts to continuously follow up on Swedish core support and multi-bi support;
- harnessing Swedish expertise and experience in UNRWA's areas of activity by promoting recruitment of Swedes to UNRWA's regular positions and through various resource base development programmes (including secondments and JPO positions) for mutual learning and skills exchange; and
- harnessing Swedish suppliers' expertise in procurements, and Swedish expertise in sustainable procurement and innovation procurement.

#### 5.1.2 Forms of collaboration

The Government Offices (Ministry for Foreign Affairs) has the main responsibility for Sweden's relations with UNRWA. Strategic, consistent and effective advocacy requires close cooperation and information exchange with all the relevant agencies (especially Sida and the Consulate-General in Jerusalem, the Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations in New York and other relevant missions abroad) and with other actors in Sweden such as civil society organisations and business. The overarching division of roles and responsibilities within the Government Offices, and between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sida and the missions abroad, in relation to UNRWA is set out in Sweden's strategy for multilateral development policy.

Organisation consultations on UNRWA are held at least once a year, with the aim of sharing experiences from cooperation and dialogue and strengthening coordinated and strategic action. The organisation consultations are convened by the Government Offices (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), which invites representatives of relevant ministries, Sida,

the Swedish Consulate-General in Jerusalem and other relevant agencies in Sweden and abroad to attend.

## **6. Follow-up**

The main results monitoring is carried out in relation to UNRWA's Medium Term Strategy and its accompanying results reports, as well as Sweden's priorities as outlined in this strategy.

The strategy is monitored continuously, including through the organisation consultations that are held between the Government Offices, Sida, the Consulate-General in Jerusalem and other relevant agencies.

A new organisational assessment of UNRWA will be conducted ahead of the upcoming strategy period and by 2023 at the latest.