

UNRWA's Contribution to Early Recovery in Gaza

UNRWA is one of the United Nations' largest operational humanitarian and development agencies in the Middle East region. Due to the recent conflicts, its role and capacity has become even more important. This Policy Brief aims to answer the questions: how does UNRWA currently contribute to humanitarian assistance, education, health, water and sanitation in Gaza, as well as how it contributes to governance, socio-economic development and stabilization in the context of plans for Gaza's early recovery and reconstruction.

Humanitarian Assistance

1. Prior to the conflict beginning October 2023, UNRWA provided, with approximately 13,000 personnel, primary health care and food assistance to 70% of the population of the Gaza Strip. UNRWA was widely recognized at the Security Council and the General Assembly as *the* platform for humanitarian assistance in Gaza.
2. During the conflict, UNRWA converted most of its schools into shelters, at one point sheltering an estimated 1 million people.
3. UNRWA provides food assistance to approximately 1,900,000 recipients, providing **90%** of such services in Gaza.
4. UNRWA is considered by far the most present and effective aid provider in Gaza, according to a 2024 survey funded by USAID.

Education

5. In January 2025, UNRWA re-started formal online education and enrolled over 290,000 children, compressing two years of education into one, leading to examinations and grade-progression for 91% of the children. This meets the needs of around 50% of the population of Gaza. Since the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, UNRWA has maintained its online teaching but has also opened in-person Temporary Learning Spaces (TLS), reaching an additional 70,000 children, providing formal education, psycho-social support and education on the risks of unexploded ordnance.
6. UNRWA currently operates 97 accessible school facilities, with 8,059 teachers. Future initiatives aim to reintegrate remote or displaced learners back to in-person teaching.
7. The World Bank has identified UNRWA's quality of education provision as one year ahead of average public schools, with vetted learning materials, aligned with education standards and conflict-sensitive principles.
8. The 2024 Colonna Report on Neutrality suggests UNRWA has the most extensive neutrality framework in the UN system.¹

Health

9. UNRWA provides approximately 40% of primary health care consultations in Gaza, providing 4 million consultations in 2025 alone. UNRWA has provided over 10 million health consultations over two years of conflict.
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10. As of December 2025, 1,854 of UNWRA's personnel support healthcare provision, with 275 primary health experts (doctors, nurses), 302 psychosocial support professionals and 1,277 broader primary healthcare personnel.
11. UNRWA accounted for around 80% of immunization services in 2025 among Health Cluster Partners, providing 127,341 routine and 213,000 polio vaccinations. UNWRA child immunisation services currently meet the needs of 40% of Gazans. UNWRA has also created 29 Emergency Medical Points and 9 static Health Centres, with capacity to expand mobile medical facilities in affected locations.

Governance

12. UNRWA's 12,000 workforce can train Palestinian-led governance in Gaza and eventually transfer its staffing capacity to such an entity within a political solution.
13. Approximately 8,100 UNWRA personnel work within the teaching sector, 405 provide social assistance and welfare services, 330 provide public works services and 30 are experts in civil documentation.

Socio-Economic Development

14. UNWRA staff salaries inject approximately \$308.5million into the local economy, accounting for 22% Gazan bank transfers. This is an increase from \$307.7 million pre-war.
15. UNWRA has created 2,628 jobs, with a 2026 target to increase this number to 3,900.
16. 9,667 individuals have benefited directly from UNWRA's job creation programmes (JCPs), with a 2026 target to increase this number up to 10,000.
17. The total value of UNWRA's cash-for-work programmes, services that provides temporary employment to vulnerable individuals, is at \$10.6 million, up from \$9 million pre-war. 2026 targets aim to increase the value of these programmes up to \$19.2 million.

Stabilisation

18. Independent surveys have found that UNRWA has a 75% level of trust among the population which, combined with UNRWA's wide range of essential public services, equates to a major contribution to stabilization.
19. UNWRA is the largest provider of Explosive Ordnance Risk Education, which remains crucial for reconstruction and stabilisation.
20. Data suggests that the greater the aid from UNRWA the lower the reliance on and support for Hamas. UNWRA's commitment to and promulgation of UN principles has not only discouraged extremism and radicalization, it has also engendered greater stability in the OPT and the neighbouring countries hosting Palestine refugees.
21. UNRWA's capacity to deliver large-scale public services throughout Gaza has been highlighted as essential to future peace plans, with a potential disorderly shutdown of the Agency being "catastrophic to the millions of Palestinian refugees", according to a statement by the Foreign Ministers Group of Eight in December 2025.

The Palestine Refugee Policy Forum is an ad hoc group of independent analysts who seek to generate informed discussion on the future of UNRWA. Participants include Kjersti Berg, Mick Dumper, Mona Ali Khalil, Mezna Qato, Lex Takkenberg and Andrew Whitley. For previous Policy Briefs see: <https://sites.exeter.ac.uk/palestine-refugee-policy-forum/>