

## ***10 Reasons why UN member states should support UNRWA***

UNRWA (The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East) is facing a financial and political crisis due to the withdrawal of funding by key UN donor states, primarily the US. The [Strategic Assessment](#) of UNRWA, commissioned by the UN Secretary-General in 2025, concluded that UNRWA will collapse unless urgent action is taken to strengthen its governance structure and to sustain its financing. This Policy Brief highlights ten reasons why it is in the interest of UN member states to support UNRWA.

### **1. Upholding moral responsibility**

Palestine refugees have been exiled for 78 years since the Nakba in 1948. Unlike other refugees in the world, Palestine refugees have been denied the right to return which is inalienable under international refugee law. Through the United Nations, the international community took responsibility to protect their rights and established a dedicated agency to do so - UNRWA. In December 2025, 151 UN member states, out of 193, voted in favour of renewing UNRWA's mandate for another 3 years. In doing so, they confirmed their political support for Palestine refugees and affirmed the need to support UNRWA financially for "the well-being, protection and human development of the Palestine refugees and for the stability of the region".<sup>1</sup>

### **2. Preventing greater burden on UNHCR and the 1951 Convention**

The financial collapse of UNRWA would not end refugee status for Palestine refugees but would rather bring them within the protection of the 1951 Refugee Convention. The approximately 6 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA would automatically become the responsibility of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). At a time, when UNHCR is already facing the worst refugee crisis since WWII, this would considerably increase the operational, financial and political strain on UNHCR.

### **3. Preventing further instability.**

Given the grave situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) especially Gaza and given the economic fragility of the neighbouring countries hosting Palestine refugees including Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, UNRWA's collapse would most likely lead to increased unemployment, instability and radicalization. Host countries will struggle to absorb the additional costs and responsibilities. The costs of addressing these outcomes later will enormously exceed the costs of supporting UNRWA now.

### **4. Preserving UNRWA's achievements and contributions**

Despite consistent attempts by opponents of UNRWA to undermine its legitimacy and attack its credibility, UNRWA's record of achievements and its contribution to regional stability are recognized by member states and by the UN General Assembly (UNGA). UNRWA delivers services to Palestine refugees including:

- a. An education system which supports more than 500,000 refugee children
- b. Extensive vocational training programmes
- c. A commitment to gender equality is embedded in all its programmes
- d. UNRWA's microfinance initiatives is one of the largest such programmes in the world.

These achievements and contributions of UNRWA will be lost if it collapses or otherwise ceases operations.

### **5. Ensuring humanitarian assistance to Gaza.**

Only UNRWA currently can ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance on the scale required and provide for the education, health, relief and protection of Palestine refugees in Gaza. While the US-initiated Board of Peace is

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<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly [resolution 80/78](#) of 5 December 2025

unlikely to lead to a just settlement of the Palestine refugee issue, it may allow for greater humanitarian assistance. Since UNRWA already has local trust, an established delivery structure and 12000 staff on the ground in Gaza, it offers the quickest and most effective way to provide for the basic needs of Palestine refugees and is uniquely positioned to ramp up humanitarian assistance at pace and at scale.

## **6. Contributing to peaceful resolution of the conflict**

Given the largely illegal actions of the current US administration, UN member states are seeking alternative pathways to contribute to the peaceful resolution of core problems in the region. Supporting UNRWA consistently and generously opens legal and cost-effective opportunities for them to play an important role which can be distinguished from the US's current war footing in the region. With its significant presence in the OPT and in the neighbouring countries, contributions to UNRWA's education, health and development programmes provide member states an entry point to the region without getting embroiled in regional and internal politics.

## **7. Countering accusations of complicity with genocide.**

Despite the preliminary assessment of the International Court of Justice and the conclusions of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the OPT, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, as well as those of international scholars (including Israeli genocide scholars), many member states are aiding Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza through their ongoing military, financial and political support. Such support violates binding obligations under the prevention pillar of the Genocide Convention. Providing financial and political support for UNRWA will help to rehabilitate their international standing and mitigate the harm done to the Palestinian people in Gaza.

## **8. Addressing domestic polarisation caused by the catastrophe in Gaza.**

In some UN member states, government support for Israel has caused anger and deep divisions both in their body politic and in their populations. Supporting UNRWA can have a two-pronged benefit: on the one hand, it promotes peaceful resolution through the soft power of humanitarian assistance, which is more acceptable to the constituency sympathetic to Israel, and on the other, it recognizes the rights and eases the plight of Palestine refugees which would appeal to the constituency more sympathetic to the Palestinians.

## **9. Avoiding greater financial liabilities**

If UNRWA collapses, it will be obliged to dismiss its staff, dispose of its vehicles and other property and relinquish its leases. Given a workforce of nearly 30,000 employees and physical assets in 58 camps throughout the region, this process will come at a very high cost including severance payments, additional pension obligations, penalties for early cancellation of leases as well as ongoing expenses and salaries for a rump administration to safeguard UNRWA refugee registration and archival material. The sums entailed in allowing UNRWA to collapse will far exceed the cost of supporting and sustaining UNRWA now. The closing down of UNRWA will not be the great saving for the international community that a few advocates of its collapse imagine. Moreover, the rights of Palestine refugees and the UN's permanent responsibility for them will continue to exist.

## **10. Fulfilling permanent responsibility of the United Nations**

In its resolutions, the UNGA has confirmed its "*permanent responsibility*" for the Question of Palestine until a final settlement is reached. This responsibility is rooted in the UN's historic role in the 1947 partition plan and its ongoing commitment to the human rights including the self-determination of the Palestinian people. Support for UNRWA, as confirmed by the ICJ, demonstrates a commitment to fulfilling that responsibility until a just resolution is reached.

***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.***