

UNRWA IN FOCUS

Briefing Papers

Briefing Paper No. 1

April 2021

An Agency in Evolution

Establishment of the UNRWA Mandate

- Under General Assembly **Resolution 302 (IV)** of 8th December 1949, in response to recommendations from the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine's Economic Survey Mission, the United Nations Reliefs and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East was established. It had a broad and politically neutral mandate to provide "direct relief and works programmes" to Palestinian refugees, for humanitarian purposes and to further peace and stability. The Agency reports directly to the General Assembly. It has no single mandate recorded on one document; its mandate is comprised of resolutions primarily from the General Assembly and occasionally the Security Council.
- The Advisory Commission was established simultaneously to the Agency and meets biannually. It is tasked with advising and assisting the Commissioner-General in carrying out the Agency's mandate.¹

Focus on Economic Integration

- **Resolution 393 (V)** of 2nd December 1950 underlined economic integration of refugees into host states as a primary focus. However, the integration programmes failed, as recognised by **Resolution 916 (X)** of 3rd December 1955.
- This pre-empted a shift from integration to human resource development. **Resolution 614 (VII)** of 6th November 1952 noted the need for "increased relief expenditures" in the UNRWA budget, as well as the need of other claimants for relief in the region besides Palestinian refugees.
- **Resolution 1315 (XIII)** of 12th December 1958 emphasised vocational training, self-support, primary education, primary health and

continued relief as the "primary blue-print for UNRWA operations".²



Focus on Protection

- **Resolution 37/120 J** in 1982 included the first explicit reference to UNRWA's role in protection, urging the Secretary-General to undertake effective measures to guarantee the safety, security, and the legal and human rights of the Palestinian refugees in the occupied territories.
- As called upon by the Secretary-General in 1988 following **Security Council Resolution 605**, UNRWA launched the Refugee Affairs Officer programme. Its role was "to monitor the

UNRWA in Focus Project

The UNRWA in Focus project is an Exeter University student-centred activity, led by Professor Mick Dumper, designed to provide a platform for the publication of the students' research on one of the UN's largest institutions. UNRWA in Focus Briefing Papers are short and concise and aim to provide useful overviews on a range of issues relating to UNRWA, with the aim of exploring the notion of UNRWA as a significant political actor in the Middle East. Other Papers in the series can be found here:

<http://sites.exeter.ac.uk/unwraifocus/briefing-papers/>

¹ <https://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are/advisory-commission>

² P. Hansen, (2003), *From Humanitarian Crisis to Human Development – The Evolution of UNRWA's Mandate to the Palestine Refugees*. UNRWA. (2003, 21st September).

humanitarian situation of Palestinian refugees and intervene where possible with the Israeli authorities to address noted concerns.”³ The programme stopped in 1996 after the adoption of the Oslo peace accords but was replaced by the Operations Support Officer programme in 2000.⁴

- **Resolution 62/236** on 22nd December 2007 approved financing for an additional 119 international posts. It also established an additional senior post for a Senior Protection Policy Advisor for UNRWA to be funded through the regular UN budget, confirming the significance and continuation of the Agency’s protection mandate.
- In 2012 UNRWA adopted its [Protection Policy](#), setting out a comprehensive approach to protection.
- The first time the General Assembly referred explicitly to UNRWA’s protection framework and function in all field offices was in **Resolution 71/93** of 6th December 2016, paragraph 19.

The UNGA on UNRWA

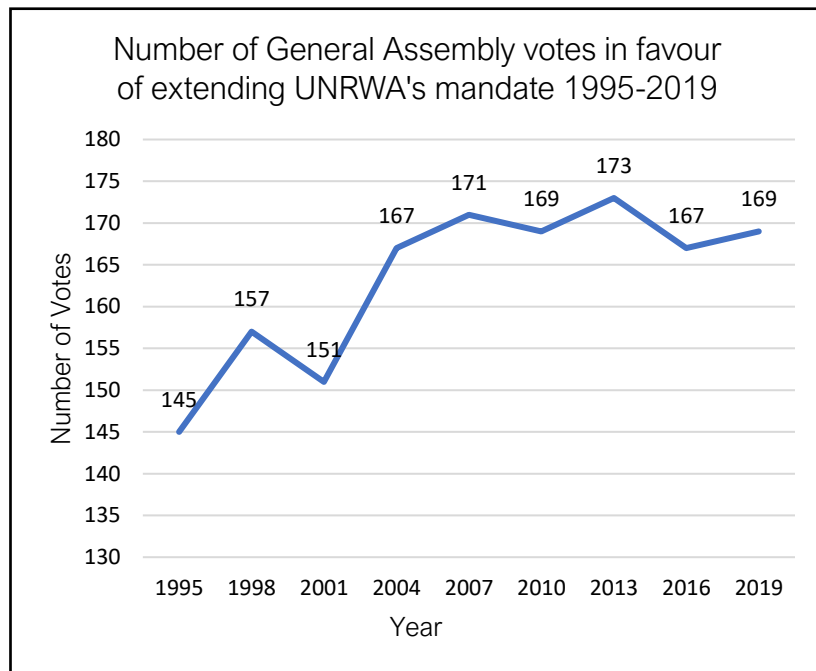
- The United Nations General Assembly produces annual resolutions on: (click to view most recent resolution on each)
 - [Operations of UNRWA](#)
 - [Palestinian refugees’ properties and their revenues](#)
 - [Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#)
 - [Right of the Palestinian people to self-determination](#)
 - [Assistance to Palestine refugees](#)
 - [Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine](#)
 - [Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities](#)

Upon scrutiny of UNRWA’s [mid-term goals 2016-21](#), UNRWA’s contemporary mandate focuses on refugee rights under international law, physical health, education, empowering refugees’ livelihood opportunities, and basic human needs of food, shelter and health. It provides essential services to three

³ D. Lilly, “UNRWA’s Protection Mandate: Closing the ‘Protection Gap.’” *International Journal of Refugee Law* 30, No. 3 (October 2018), 444–473.

⁴ For further details of the refugee affairs officer programme, see L. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998) 24.

⁵ https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/financial_report_and_audited_financial_statements_for_2019.pdf



generations of refugees as well as acting in emergency crises. Nevertheless, there remains confusion over UNRWA’s mandate due to its morphing and ambiguous nature.

Funding Model

- UNRWA’s budget is decided by the UN

Note: total UN membership changed from 185 states in 1995 to 193 in 2019.

General Assembly. The budget is organized around its four core programmes – education, health, infrastructure, and camp improvement – and non-programme projects, including emergency appeals.⁵

- Around 90.04% derives from voluntary contributions from UN member states.⁶ Other sources include the regular UN budget (contributing USD 30,270,000 in 2020, which amounted to 3.5% total donations that year),⁷ as well as from businesses and foundations. Private individuals also contribute donations, amounting to USD 4.20 million in 2019. Moreover, UNRWA collaborates with sister UN agencies to share expertise and benefit projects; in 2019 these collaborations amounted to USD 46.28 million.⁸

⁶ <https://www.unrwa.org/how-you-can-help/how-we-are-funded>

⁷ https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2020_confirmed_pledges_and_receipts_30_december_2020.pdf

⁸ <https://www.unrwa.org/how-you-can-help/how-we-are-funded>

- For 2021, UNRWA requires USD 806 million, in addition to USD 75 million of carryover from 2020 due to the gap in funding.⁹

By Ela Oldfield

Support and Opposition to Mandate Renewal

The General Assembly renews UNRWA's mandate every three years in resolutions titled Assistance to Palestine Refugees. See below for voting summary information on resolutions to extend the mandate from 2001 - 2019.

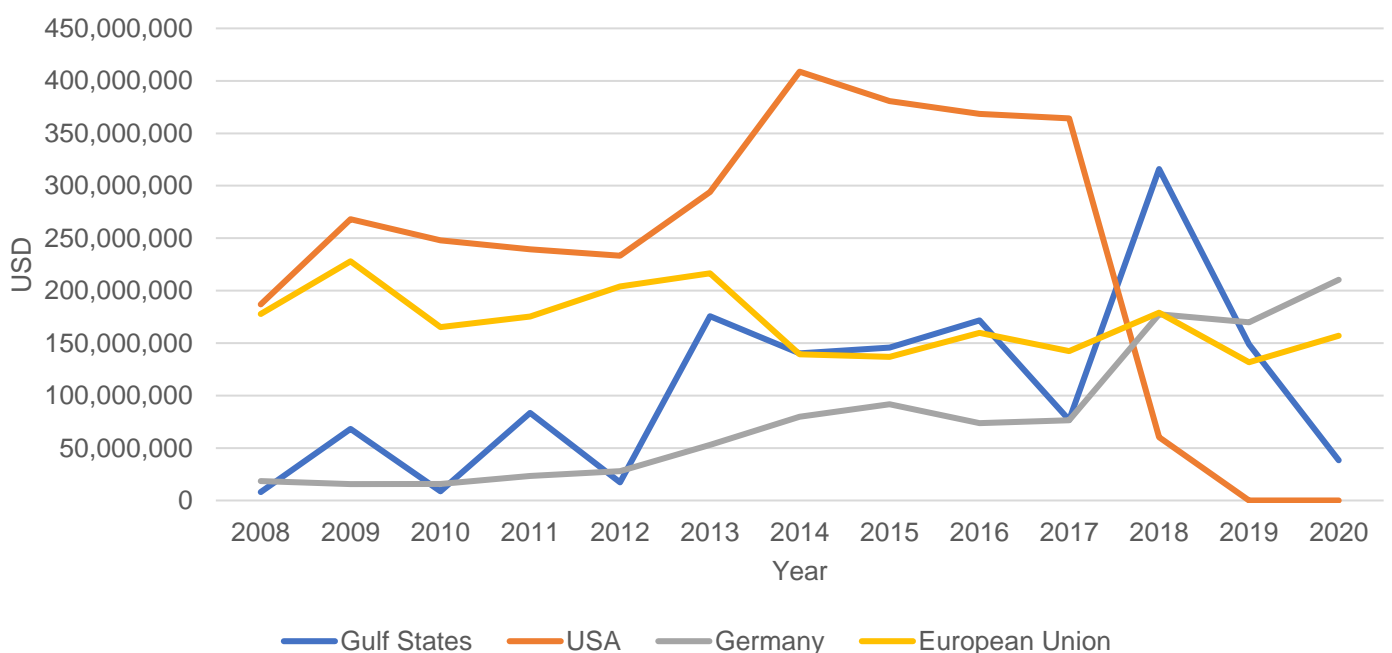
UN General Assembly Resolutions and Decisions on Assistance to Palestine Refugees can be found [here](#).

Pledges to UNRWA's Programmes (Cash and In-Kind) from Top 5 Donators in 2020, in USD.
Taken from [here](#).

| Donor | Programme Budget | OPT Emergency Appeal | Syria Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal | Projects* | Covid-19 Flash Appeal | Total |
|----------------|------------------|----------------------|--|------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| Germany | 70,108,549 | 39,129,287 | 28,178,624 | 39,795,043 | 33,172,836 | 210,384,339 |
| European Union | 95,605,399 | 1,155,524 | 46,688,821 | 161 | 13,609,330 | 157,059,235 |
| UK | 53,017,612 | 1,328,346 | 9,139,141 | 644,335 | 0 | 64,129,434 |
| Sweden | 56,274,505 | 2,590,942 | 15,545,665 | 0 | 0 | 60,420,012 |
| Japan | 16,187,833 | 7,071,644 | 4,105,981 | 4,169,110 | 1,545,454 | 33,080,021 |

* Projects includes pledges made toward the Nahr El-Bared (NBC) Reconstruction and Relief Appeal & Gaza Reconstruction

Total Annual Contributions to UNRWA in USD, 2008-2020



Graph comparing the total annual contributions to UNRWA 2008-2020, in USD, from the Arab Gulf states, the USA, Germany and the European Union. Note: exact amounts varied extensively between contributions to the core programme budget and the non-programme budget, which includes special projects and emergency crises.

⁹ https://www.unrwa.org/donor_resource

Further Reading

Hansen, P. *From Humanitarian Crisis to Human Development – The Evolution of UNRWA’s Mandate to the Palestine Refugees*. UNRWA. (2003, 21st September).

<https://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/3C891069FF7A368985256DC8007058DD>

Bartholomeusz, L. The Mandate of UNRWA at Sixty. *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, No. 2-3 (2009): 452–474.

Lilly, D. “UNRWA’s Protection Mandate: Closing the ‘Protection Gap’”. *International Journal of Refugee Law* 30, No. 3 (October 2018): 444–473.

Brynen, R. “UNRWA as avatar: Current debates on the agency – and their implications.” in S. Hanafi, L. Hilal & L. Takkenberg (eds), *UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees: From relief and works to human development*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014): pp. 263-283.

Schleifer, R. & Brochin, Y. “UNRWA’s Moment of Truth.” *Middle East Quarterly* 28, No. 1 (2021).

<https://doi.org/10.47620/FNVU1204>

Useful Links

A collection of all United Nations General Assembly Resolutions concerning the Middle East:

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/un-general-assembly-resolutions-on-israel-middle-east>

UNRWA General Fund Programme Budget 2020-2021:

https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2020-2021_programme_budget_blue_book.pdf

United Nations Voting Records:

<https://www.un.org/en/ga/documents/voting.asp>

UNRWA Strategy & Policy:

<https://www.unrwa.org/resources/strategy-policy>

UNRWA Donor Charts:

<https://www.unrwa.org/how-you-can-help/government-partners/funding-trends/donor-charts>