

UNRWA IN FOCUS

Briefing Papers

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Comparing UNRWA and WHO

This paper compares the health provision of UNRWA to that of another major UN agency, the World Health Organization (WHO). The purpose in doing so is to provide global context to the targeted work of UNRWA with Palestinian refugees and to illustrate the scope of its activities relative to another major international health organisation. Other briefing papers (**comparison to UNHCR, NGOs, states**) will also examine UNRWA in this comparative light.

MANDATE

WHO

WHO was established in 1948. As outlined in its Constitution, its primary role is to direct international health and to lead partners in global health response, striving to set standards and norms in the field of global health.¹

The Thirteenth General Programme of Work defines WHO's strategy for 2019-2023. It focuses on targets:

- One billion more people to benefit from universal health coverage,
- One billion more people better protected from health emergencies,
- One billion more people enjoying better health and well-being.²

UNRWA

The Agency was founded in 1949 under General Assembly Resolution 302 and assists and protects some 5.7 million Palestinian refugees in its five areas of operation: Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.³ For detail on UNRWA's mandate, see briefing paper "An Agency in Evolution."

Regarding its mandate to protect the health of its beneficiaries, UNRWA provides health services.

Currently, 3,134,732 refugees are registered to access these services, which feature 143 primary health facilities and 3,298 health staff.⁴ In 2019, USD 155.1 million was spent on the health programme, which is an estimated \$49 per registered beneficiary.⁵ The 2021 budget for UNRWA's health programme was set at USD 143.5 million.⁶

Having undergone significant reform in 2011, the programme aids UNRWA objectives in other areas. It helps address cross-cutting issues such as education, gender-based violence, child protection, poverty, and community development. In addition, the UNRWA Environmental Health programme controls the quality of drinking water, provides sanitation, and carries out vector and rodent control in refugee camps.

SIZE

WHO

- Around 7,000 employees, largely international.
- 194 member states.
- 150 country offices. More than 50% of WHO staff work in these offices.
- Headquarters in Geneva.
- 6 regional offices in Washington DC, Brazzaville, Copenhagen, New Delhi, Cairo, and Manila.

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://apps.who.int/gb/bd/pdf_files/BD_49th-en.pdf#page=6

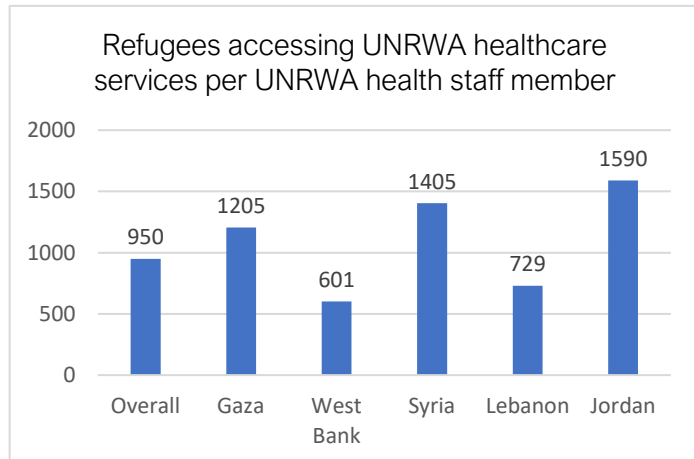
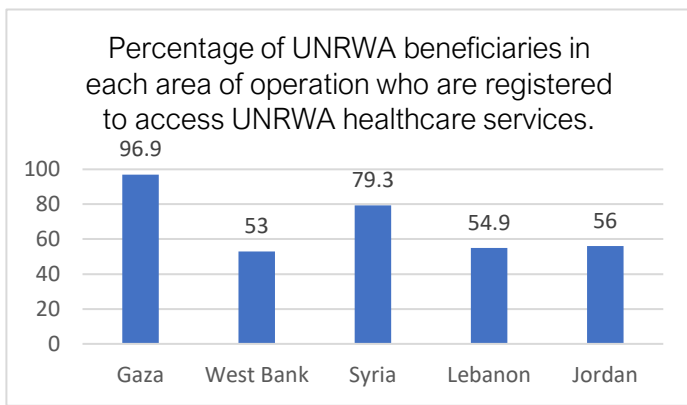
² <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/324775/WHO-PRP-18.1-eng.pdf>

³ <https://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are>

⁴ <https://www.unrwa.org/what-we-do/health>

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

⁶ https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2020-2021_programme_budget_blue_book.pdf

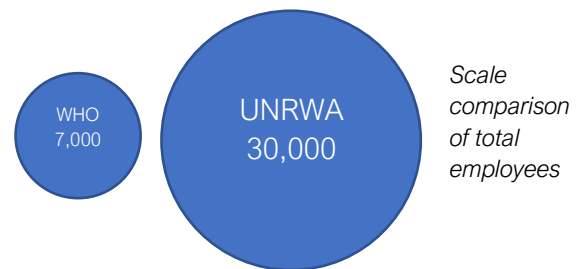


WHO has a close partnership with UN agencies, donors, foundations, academia, NGOs and private sector groups. More than 700 institutions support WHO's work. The World Health Assembly (WHA) is WHO's decision-making body, which is composed of delegates representing each member state. The 73rd annual session of the WHA produced 10 Resolutions and 33 Decisions.⁷

The Executive Board, composed of 34 technically qualified members, annually agree upon the agenda for, and resolutions to be considered by, the WHA.

UNRWA

- Over 30,000 employees, majority Palestinian.
- The UNRWA Headquarters are located in Amman and Gaza. The Agency maintains a field office in each of its areas of operations – Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip – and liaison offices in New York, Washington, Brussels, and Cairo.



BUDGET

WHO

WHO is financed in part by assessed contributions paid by member states. Most of the Organization's financing comes from voluntary contributions from member states and partner organizations, such as foundations and civil society. Contributions from the private sector, usually in the form of in-kind donations, provide less than 1% of WHO's financing.

The top five contributors to the WHO budget in 2018-19 budget were the USA (which contributed almost double that of the second largest contributor), the UK, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the GAVI Alliance and Germany.⁸ The US threatened to withdraw from the Organization over concern of the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic; however, the US stopped the withdrawal process in January 2021.⁹

The 2020-21 biennium total budget was USD 5.84 billion, which includes the core programme budget and a USD 1 billion emergency fund.¹⁰

A recent trend has increasingly seen donors divide up funds for the organization's annual budget before it reaches WHO, earmarking contributions for their favoured causes. This is exemplified by the Director-General's report on health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, in which the Director-General specifies which national government has provided funding for a specific programme or service.¹¹ It has been argued that this is symptomatic of a changing role the organization plays in global health.¹²

⁷ <https://www.who.int/about/governance/world-health-assembly/seventy-third-world-health-assembly>

⁸ <https://www.who.int/about/funding/contributors>

⁹ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sgsm20546.doc.htm>

¹⁰ <https://www.who.int/about/finances-accountability/budget/WHOPB-PRP-19.pdf?ua=1>

¹¹ https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA73/A73_15-en.pdf

¹² Chow, 2010. "Is the WHO Becoming Irrelevant?". *Foreign Policy*. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/12/09/is-the-who-becoming-irrelevant/> [Last Accessed 30 March 2021].

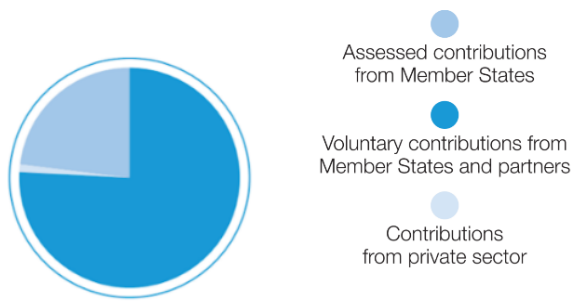


Chart showing proportion of contributions to WHO budget. Taken from [WHO corporate brochure](#).

UNRWA

The projected core programme budget for the 2020-21 biennium is USD 2.2 billion. This does not include emergency funding. For detail on UNRWA's budget, see briefing paper "An Agency in Evolution."

As with WHO, the US has caused financial concern for UNRWA. Historically the agency's largest donor, in 2018 the US reduced contributions from USD 360 million to 60 million, cutting to zero in 2019. On 7th April 2021 it was announced that the US would recommence aid, sending USD 150 million to the Agency¹³. Further information on UNRWA's relations with the US can be found in briefing paper "The US and UNRWA".



Scale comparison of 2020-2021 biennium budgets excluding emergency funding, in USD billion.

RECENT REPORTS CONCERNING WHO

A 2020 report on corruption found that there has been "a clear increase in the volume and the scope of anti-corruption, accountability, and transparency

measures" implemented by WHO in recent years, although the efficacy of these measures is unclear.¹⁴

The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the risks that corruption poses to the health sector. WHO is overseen by the Office of Internal Audit and Oversight (IAO) which produces an annual report submitted to the World Health Assembly,¹⁵ and the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee (IEOAC) organized through its Executive Board. The IEOAC advises the Program, Budget and Administration Committee, as well as the Director-General by request on issues within WHO's mandate.¹⁶

The Director-General reports inter alia on health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan. The most recent report was published in November 2020.¹⁷ As the report states, WHO activity in this region is in line with the four strategic priorities identified jointly with the Palestinian Ministry of Health and partners in the Country Cooperation Strategy for WHO and the occupied Palestinian territory 2017 - 2020.¹⁸ The priorities focus on developing the Palestinian health system and strengthening the Palestinian Ministry of Health and its partners.

It is of note that the report makes little mention of UNRWA, despite the Agency being a significant healthcare provider to Palestinian refugees in the region. This is exemplified by the fact that the WHO Director-General makes recommendations to Israel, the Palestinian Authority and third states, but not to UNRWA.

In contrast, the World Bank refers frequently to UNRWA in its reports and has produced a study on UNRWA's education programme, recognizing the Agency's impact to a greater extent than WHO.¹⁹

Arguably, UNRWA's status as a politically neutral agency as opposed to a national government affects

¹³ <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/united-states-announces-restoration-us-150-million-support-palestine>

¹⁴ <https://globalizationandhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12992-020-00629-5>

¹⁵ https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA73/A73_28-en.pdf

¹⁶ <https://globalizationandhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12992-020-00629-5>

¹⁷ https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA73/A73_15-en.pdf

¹⁸ https://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/palestine/documents/ccs_palestine_2017-2020_web_-_final.pdf?ua=1&ua=1&ua=1

¹⁹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/learning-in-the-face-of-adversity-the-unrwa-education-program-for-palestine-refugees>

its relationship with WHO, which has been criticised for being too state-oriented and not recognising the fact that in this age non-state actors play a leading role in global health, such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.²⁰ Also, in his report the Director-General makes little mention of the Syrian Golan, where UNRWA is the sole healthcare provider. This is likely due to challenges to data collection during an ongoing conflict.

By Ela Oldfield

Useful Links

World Health Assembly 73rd session
https://apps.who.int/gb/e/e_wha73.html

WHO Basic Documents
<https://apps.who.int/gb/bd/>

WHO Corporate Brochure
https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/about-us/global-guardian-of-public-health.pdf?sfvrsn=f59a271_2

UNRWA Who We Are
<https://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are>

UNRWA General Fund Programme Budget 2020-2021
https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2020-2021_programme_budget_blue_book.pdf

Further Reading

Akgün, B. and Çelik, M., “Global Governance in the Post-pandemic Period: The World Health Organization and the Future of International Organizations.” in: M. Seker, A. Ozer and C. Korkut, ed., *Reflections on the Pandemic in the Future of the World*. (Ankara: Turkish Academy of Sciences Publications, 2020): pp. 351-368. Available at: <http://www.tuba.gov.tr/files/images/2020/pandemic%20kitab%C4%B1%20ing/Reflections%20on%20the%20Pandemic%20in%20the%20Future%20of%20the%20World.pdf> [Last Accessed 9 March 2021]

Ruger, J., “International institutional legitimacy and the World Health Organization.” *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 68, No. 8 (2014): 697-700. [Last Accessed March 30, 2021], from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43281819>

Cueto, M., Brown, T., & Fee, E., *The World Health Organization: A History (Global Health Histories)*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). doi:10.1017/9781108692878

Chow, J., “Is the WHO Becoming Irrelevant?.” *Foreign Policy*, (2010). Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/12/09/is-the-who-becoming-irrelevant/> [Last Accessed 30 March 2021].

²⁰ For example, from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/12/09/is-the-who-becoming-irrelevant/>