

# UNRWA

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

## 1. Facts and figures

**Type of organisation:** Agency financed through voluntary contributions

**Established in:** 1949

**Headquarters:** Gaza City (Palestine) and Amman (Jordan)

**Number of country offices:** Palestine (Gaza City and East Jerusalem), Jordan, Lebanon and Syria

**Head of organisation:** Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi (Italy)

**Dates of Board meetings in 2013:** UNRWA does not have a Board. The UN General Assembly is UNRWA's governing body. UNRWA's mandate is renewed every third year and currently runs until 30 June 2014. UNRWA's Advisory Commission meets twice a year (16 and 17 June and in November)

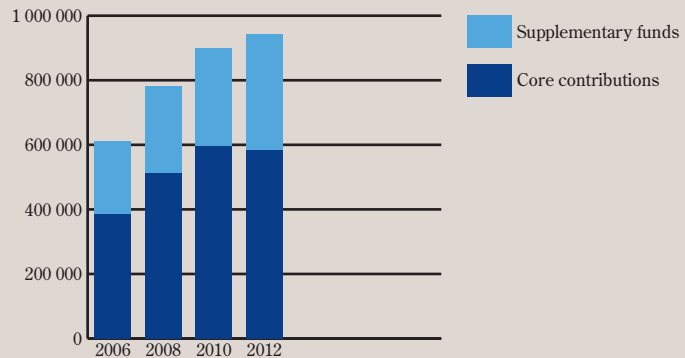
**Norway's representation in Advisory Commission:** Norway is represented in both the UN General Assembly's Fourth and Fifth Committees, and in UNRWA's Advisory Commission.

**Number of Norwegian staff:** 2

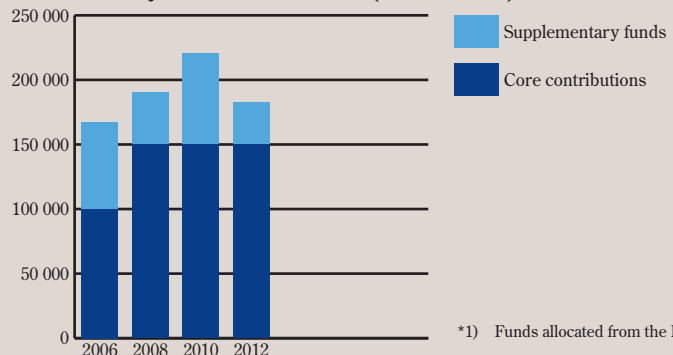
**Competent ministry:** Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Website:** [www.unrwa.org](http://www.unrwa.org)

**Total revenues (1000 USD)**

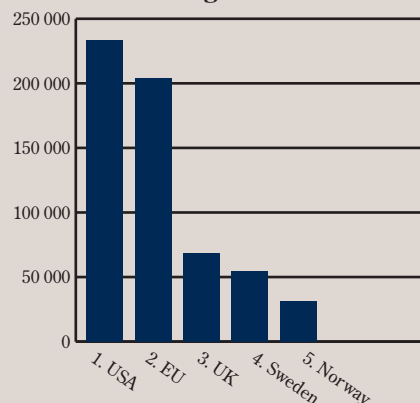


**Norway's contributions\*1) (1000 NOK)**



\*1) Funds allocated from the MFA's budget

**The five largest donors in 2012 (1000 USD)**



NORWEGIAN MINISTRY  
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

## **Mandate and areas of activity**

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is a unique organisation, mandated to meet the basic needs of around 5 million registered Palestine refugees in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Gaza and the West Bank. UNRWA was established as a temporary agency to deal with the Palestine refugee problem in December 1949 following the creation of the state of Israel. In the absence of a solution to the Palestine refugee issue, the UN General Assembly has renewed UNRWA's mandate a number of times. UNRWA does not have its own governing bodies that approve activities and budgets. UNRWA has an Advisory Commission (AdCom), which meets twice a year. One of AdCom's main tasks is to lead a policy dialogue between the largest donor countries, host countries and UNRWA concerning the Agency's priorities and use of resources.

UNRWA's primary task is to meet the Palestine refugees' fundamental needs by providing access to basic education and primary health services and ensuring a minimum standard of housing and nutrition.

## **Results achieved in 2012**

UNRWA carried out over 9 million medical consultations in 2012. To reduce the number of patients served per doctor at health clinics and improve the follow-up of individual patients,

UNRWA has introduced Family Health Teams, consisting of a doctor, a nurse and a nursing assistant. This has already resulted in fewer medical consultations; fewer antibiotics are being prescribed and the number of days that patients spend in hospital is declining slightly. This contributes to better, more effective healthcare delivery, which in turn means financial savings for the Agency in the long term. More pregnant women have received antenatal care and post-natal follow-up, an important means of preventing complications related to pregnancy.

With 701 schools and close to 500,000 pupils, education is UNRWA's main focus area. Tests show that the results achieved by UNRWA pupils are good on average compared with results achieved at state schools in the respective host countries. However, results differ significantly from one school to another, a situation that UNRWA is working to remedy through its current education reform, which will end in 2015. Half of the children enrolled in schools are girls, and the drop-out rate is low.

Through its work and its role as employer for 30,000 Palestine refugees, UNRWA has helped to improve the standard of living of a large population group in the region and to stabilise the situation in the Middle East, a region characterised by political and social unrest and growing socio-economic problems.

In Gaza, UNRWA provides mandatory human-rights education. The curriculum focuses on values, individual and collective rights and obligations, and respect and tolerance. The subject is taught at 245 schools in Gaza and reaches more than 200,000 schoolchildren. Teachers have undergone special training in communicating the curriculum. The curriculum and textbooks have been developed with a view to engaging the pupils and fostering critical thinking skills and positive behaviour. A recent evaluation points out that teachers and pupils now have a greater awareness of human rights and the historical background for these rights, and that teachers now have a positive attitude towards teaching this subject.

Human-rights education has made an important contribution towards ensuring that the young population – who live in a conflict-torn area in difficult surroundings in Hamas-governed Gaza – receive good training in human rights, universal values, tolerance and conflict resolution.

## 2. Assessments: Results, effectiveness and monitoring

### **The organisation's results-related work**

UNRWA can demonstrate good results, particularly in the fields of health and education, which are UNRWA's core areas of activity.

UNRWA's Medium Term Strategy 2010–2015 was drawn up in 2008. This was the first time the Agency had prepared a strategic document that had clear goals and that sought to align UNRWA's efforts and mandate with those of other UN organisations. A total of 15 strategic objectives were formulated within the framework of four human development goals. UNRWA reports provide baseline data from 2009 and set long-term, quantified targets. Both the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) and a recent mid-term evaluation of the strategic plan assessed UNRWA's performance favourably, although there is still room for improvement. However, UNRWA needs to set more realistic objectives, particularly in the light of the extremely challenging political context in which UNRWA operates, with ongoing conflicts and social unrest. A process has now been initiated to adjust UNRWA's strategic objectives. The AdCom members are being consulted in this process.

### **Planning and budgeting systems**

UNRWA uses results-based budgeting, and with new systems in place the Agency can increasingly also use activity-based budgeting. Its financial management systems have improved significantly as a result of reform measures. In 2012, the UK conducted a fiduciary risk assessment, which concluded that UNRWA can demonstrate improvements since 2009 and that the fiduciary risk is low. Since January 2012, UNRWA reports in accordance with International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS), which entail monthly closing of accounts to make it possible to maintain continuous oversight of spending.

The greatest challenge with which UNRWA must contend is that its budget is growing in step with the growing refugee population, while voluntary donor contributions do not suffice to fully finance the Agency's budgets, and that several programmes are underfunded. Every year, UNRWA has substantial budget deficits. In the past year, the donors and UNRWA have held discussions concerning the Agency's budgetary priorities and allocations. This is a problematic area for UNRWA due to the difficult social and political situation in the Agency's spheres of activity, particularly because demand for UNRWA services is on the rise. However, both the donors and UNRWA agree on the necessity of a strategic discussion on how UNRWA is to deal with the financial challenge, an issue that was addressed at AdCom meetings as early as 2012. It is positive that in the past year UNRWA has responded to the AdCom members' request for greater access to information and involvement in discussions

concerning the budget and priorities; this is a discussion that will be continued, not least as part of the strategic discussion that is to culminate in a new strategic plan for 2016 and onward.

### **Oversight and anti-corruption**

The 2011 MOPAN review concluded that UNRWA's monitoring and evaluation system is satisfactory. UNRWA has both an internal and an external audit function. The Agency has switched from rule-based auditing to risk-based auditing, and has become more transparent in the past five years. External audits are conducted by the UN Board of Auditors. Internal audits are carried out by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS).

UNRWA's audit reports are considered to be satisfactory. The latest audit report points out that UNRWA has fully implemented 52 out of 61 recommendations from the previous audit report, and is following up on the remaining recommendations. It has been pointed out, however, that there is a need to strengthen the way the Agency follows up on irregularities identified in audit reports.

Norway and other donors engage in an ongoing dialogue with the Agency to promote the strengthening of the internal audit function and its follow-up. There is also room to strengthen UNRWA's anti-corruption policy. Ensuring greater transparency and more access to information for donors will be an important part of this work, and will also be key topics in the further dialogue aimed at generating greater confidence in the Agency.

### **Institution-building and national ownership**

UNRWA works closely with the host country authorities, other UN organisations and non-governmental organisations. UNRWA makes substantial efforts to promote the coordination and integration of the overall efforts of the UN and other stakeholders, especially in Palestine. This is done, among other things, through the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) coordination mechanism, in which UNRWA has sector responsibility and where cooperation with the UN and OCHA has been strengthened. One of UNRWA's stated priorities has been to strengthen cooperation with organisations that hold related mandates (such as the World Food Programme and UNICEF). UNRWA plays an important role in coordinating the humanitarian efforts of the UN organisations and other humanitarian organisations in the Gaza Strip.

### **Willingness to learn and change**

UNRWA's leadership shows a willingness to change and has actively supported reform efforts, thereby achieving significant improvements since the reform process was initiated in 2007. This has helped to strengthen the Agency, with particular focus on management and personnel policy,

decentralisation and results-based management. UNRWA's financial management and results management have improved substantially. However, implementing reforms requires training, funding and time. Many of UNRWA's challenges lie in the Agency's size, its mandate, and the context in which it operates. The reform process continued in a new phase as from 2011, and entails measures to increase the effectiveness of programmes for health, education and targeting of social services, and to enhance the quality of the delivery of these services. The education reform also entails

a reorientation towards more vocational training so as to increase employment opportunities. It is too early to assess the results of the ongoing reform process, but UNRWA's leadership is open to reform, an attitude that is driving reform efforts forward.

The mid-term review of UNRWA's Strategy 2010–2015, which was finalised in January 2012, has led to a process to adjust the strategic framework that is to culminate in a new strategic plan for 2016 onward.

### 3. Norway's policy towards UNRWA

UNRWA is the most important channel for humanitarian support for the Palestine refugees in the Middle East. Norway considers it important to support UNRWA's efforts so as to maintain an adequate level of services for the Palestine refugees, who are both poorer and more vulnerable than the rest of the population in the countries or areas in which they live. The percentage of refugees who are living in poverty and require assistance is growing.

UNRWA plays a pivotal role in the parts of the region with a large refugee population and where a large proportion of the refugees live in refugee camps. This applies particularly to Gaza, where the refugee population accounts for 70 per cent of the population. In this area, UNRWA is an important, neutral service provider and a veritable lifeline for the refugees.

In addition to providing essential basic services for Palestine refugees, UNRWA is regarded as a guarantor that the rights of Palestine refugees, including the right to return, are not forgotten. UNRWA's responsibility for Palestine refugees will therefore last until negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians are concluded and a solution is finally found for the current conflict.

As a result of the general political and difficult economic and humanitarian situation in the region, however, UNRWA faces significant challenges in fulfilling its mandate in respect of a growing population group. The refugee population is growing by 2.5 per cent per year, and services are maintained for all those entitled to them in accordance with the mandate given to UNRWA by the United Nations, but contributions from donors have not increased correspondingly. In the past few years, UNRWA's financial situation has deteriorated and the Agency has had to reduce its range of services, among other things by enlarging school classes, freezing investments in buildings and equipment and taking other urgent action. Norway has attached particular importance for several years to finding a solution to the Agency's financial situation. There is a need to devise a better system of burden-sharing, by increasing the number of and finding new donors, and UNRWA is working purposefully to expand its circle of donor countries. Norway has also urged UNRWA to coordinate its activities to a greater degree with the UN system and other humanitarian efforts. UNRWA has improved its performance in this respect in the past few years.

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