

SDC FACTSHEET MULTILATERAL ORGANISATION

October 2018



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC



FACTS AND FIGURES

Mandate

UNRWA's mandate is to provide assistance and protection to over 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, healthcare, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance and emergency assistance, including in times of armed conflict.

Type of organisation: UNRWA is a subsidiary organ of the United Nations General Assembly.

Institution

Head of organisation: Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl (Switzerland)

Headquarters: Amman, East Jerusalem and Gaza City

Number of country offices: Five operational offices in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and three liaison offices in New York, Washington and Brussels.

Number of staff: ca. 31,000 (99% locally recruited, less than 1% internationals)

Established in: 1949

Governance: The work of UNRWA is guided by the UN General Assembly, which endorses its biennial programme budget. UNRWA's main forum for discussion is the Advisory Commission, whose purpose is to advise and assist the Commissioner-General in the implementation of the mandate. The Commissioner-General reports directly to the UN General Assembly.

Switzerland's financial contribution 2018:

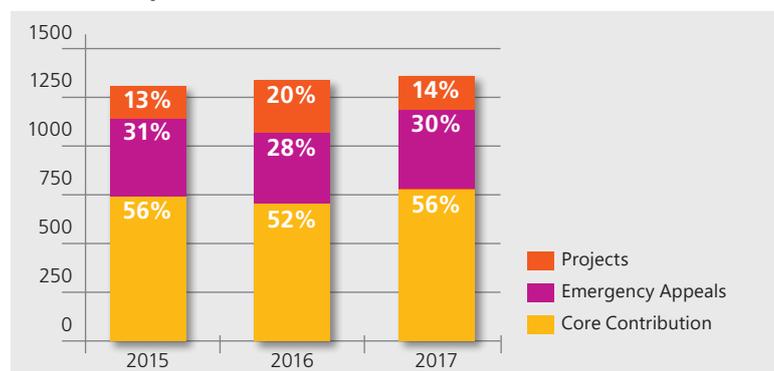
Core contribution: CHF 23 million

Additional funding: CHF 3 million

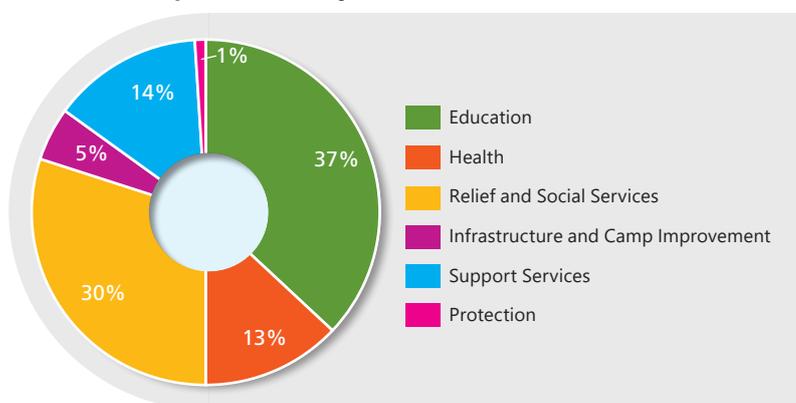
Number of Swiss staff: 2

Website: www.unrwa.org

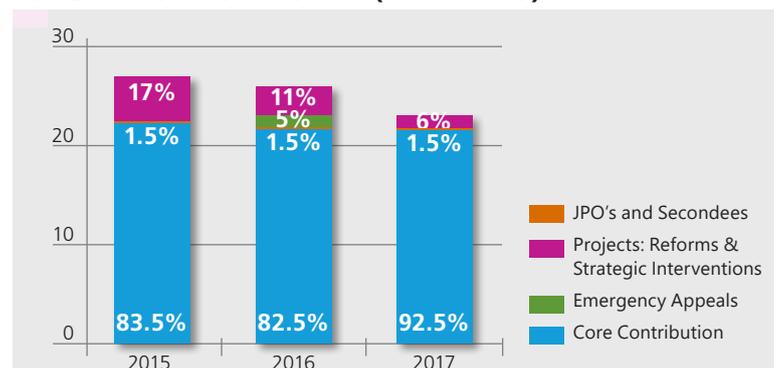
UNRWA Expenditures (in Mio. CHF)



UNRWA expenditures by focus area (2017)



Switzerland's contributions (in Mio. CHF)





UNRWA © Screenshot of the promotion for the Health Talk Show, produced by the UNRWA Communications with Communities (CwC) team, and broadcast on UNRWA TV and its associated YouTube channel

UNRWA - FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES

Mandate

UNRWA was **established** as a subsidiary organ of the United Nations General Assembly on 8 December 1949 and became operational on 1 May 1950. It is one of the largest United Nations programmes. Created as a temporary agency until a just and durable solution for Palestine refugees is achieved, its mandate has been repeatedly renewed, most recently until June 2020.

The **mandate** has evolved over time in response to developments in the region and the changing needs of the refugees¹. UNRWA currently provides primary healthcare, basic education, relief and social services, infrastructure and camp improvement, microfinance, emergency assistance and protection of refugees' rights under international law. Services are delivered in accordance with the United Nations' humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational independence.

UNRWA is unique in the UN system **with a quasi-governmental set-up and mode of service delivery**. Services are delivered directly, by operating a regional network of health centres, schools and distribution sites that are run by 31,000 staff from the

¹ Palestine refugees are defined as persons whose place of residence was Palestine between 1 June 1946 and 15 May 1948, and who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict. When the Agency began its operations, it was responding to the needs of about 750,000 Palestine refugees. Today, 5.3 million persons are eligible for UNRWA services.

refugee population. The vast majority (85%) of UNRWA's expenditure is in salary to its teachers, health-care providers and social workers. This ensures that a substantial part of any contribution to the Agency ends up as direct support to the Palestine refugee community.

In a region marred by conflict and political volatility, UNRWA is an effective contributor to stability. For more than 65 years, UNRWA has been able to maintain services, build refugees' resilience and achieve high standards of human development as measured by key indicators of literacy, gender parity as well as maternal and child health. The Agency's workforce and infrastructure have enabled it to be one of the most effective responders in rapid-onset crises, including the most recent ones in the Gaza Strip and Syria.

Medium-term outcomes

The outcomes of the UNRWA Medium-Term Strategy 2016-21 are:

- 1) Refugees' rights under international law are protected and promoted;
- 2) Refugees' health is protected and the disease burden is reduced;
- 3) School-aged children complete quality, equitable and inclusive basic education;
- 4) Refugee capabilities are strengthened for increased livelihood opportunities;
- 5) Refugees are able to meet their basic human needs of food, shelter and environmental health.

As articulated in UNRWA's reform process, the Agency is committed to strengthening its management practices to build an ambitious and diversified approach to fundraising, address key issues related to its financial sustainability and foster a culture of partnership with refugees and staff.

Results

- Primary medical **health services** are provided yearly to 3.6 million refugees through a network of 143 health centres. The health reform, with its focus on a Family Health Team approach and e-health, generated improvements in terms of quality of care, cost effectiveness and high level of satisfaction among beneficiaries and staff.
- Over 500,000 students attend UNRWA's 700 schools and nine vocational training centres yearly. Significant progress was made in relation to students' performance, retention and drop-out rates as a result of the **education** reform. UNRWA schools have built a reputation for high academic achievements including in highly volatile contexts ('Education in Emergencies'), while achieving ground-breaking gender parity rates.

- 300,000 refugees are regularly supported with a **social safety net** comprising food assistance – through electronic cash transfers and in-kind delivery – skills training and rehabilitation services. The Agency has improved its capacity to target beneficiaries and address poverty by bringing cross-cutting themes together. This holistic approach enables UNRWA to rapidly expand its assistance during conflicts – over one million persons were assisted during the conflicts in Syria and the Gaza Strip.
- UNRWA promotes **respect for Palestine refugees' rights** through advocacy and monitoring and through reporting of violations of humanitarian and human rights law. It also addresses cases of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of vulnerable groups. Critical steps were taken to prevent gender-based violence with the establishment of a referral system. UNRWA also developed its capacity to implement **protection-tailored** programmes such as cash-for-work for communities threatened by land confiscation.
- UNRWA has ensured continuity in service delivery and it has generally maintained its ability to implement far-reaching reforms despite the challenges associated with the deterioration of its operational environment and the Agency's chronic financial instability.

SWITZERLAND

UNRWA is one of Switzerland's key multilateral partners in the Middle East. Switzerland recognises that UNRWA is making an important contribution towards stability and peace in the region. Despite the increasingly complex political environment in which UNRWA operates, it is committed and determined to meet its neutrality obligations.

The World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 highlighted one of UNRWA's greatest strengths, which is to deliver both short-term emergency services and longer-term human development programmes. Moreover, UNRWA is internationally recognised for its innovative Education in Emergencies programme whereby it ensures the continuity of quality education even in the most difficult circumstances, for instance in Syria.

Switzerland has financially supported UNRWA since its establishment, and both have enjoyed a long-standing, trust-based partnership. The Swiss support to the Agency is widely recognised as being strategic – in particular for its active role in UNRWA's governance and its strong support for catalytic initiatives. In addition to its contribution to the programme budget, Switzerland funds reforms and strategic initiatives in support of the implementation of UNRWA's Medium-Term Strategy. It also contributes with secondments from the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit, JPOs and with funding for emergency appeals.

Switzerland's strategic priorities:

- **The Agency's protection response** is strengthened, with a focus on vulnerable Palestine refugees and the community in which they live;
- **UNRWA's financial stability** is strengthened by securing adequate and predictable resources and by implementing measures to maximise the use of available resources. Switzerland is supporting UNRWA to establish new partnerships and expects to see a World Bank Trust Fund take formal shape. The Trust Fund offers prospects for sustained funding and a potential to transform the current way of working;
- The **reform process** continues and it is supported by the Agency's stakeholders, i.e. beneficiaries, staff, host countries and donors. As a long-term donor, Switzerland will maintain its active role in the UNRWA reform process, and, with other partners, actively contribute to the discussion on the future of the organization.

Swiss role in UNRWA governance

Since its accession to the UNRWA Advisory Commission in 2005, Switzerland has assumed an important role, contributing to shaping the Agency's strategic decisions through policy support and facilitation work. This proved instrumental in the development of the Medium-Term Strategy 2016-21 and in ensuring strong support for the reform process. The Advisory Commission meets twice a year and comprises the host countries and the main donors of the Agency (27 members and 3 observers). Switzerland was appointed Chair of the Advisory Commission in July 2016 for a period of one year. During its chairmanship Switzerland led the most comprehensive consultation process to date on the topic of how to bring UNRWA onto a more sustainable financial footing. Over a period of one month, 54 Member States, intergovernmental bodies and international financial institution were consulted and the findings, which are the basis for UNRWA's resource mobilization strategy, summarized into a report by the UN Secretary General dated March 2017.

Results of Swiss cooperation with UNRWA

Switzerland has been one of UNRWA's main partners in the **reform process**. Its support has included major reforms such as in education and health, which have led to tangible improvements in terms of the quality of services delivered. Switzerland has also supported strategic interventions related to protection, staff relations and internal communication, all of which have enabled UNRWA to shape its responses to key challenges faced by the Agency. Switzerland has supported the UNRWA Resource Mobilisation Strategy towards consolidating existing partnerships and exploring new funding opportunities with the private sector and emerging donors, with a view to putting UNRWA on the path towards financial sustainability. Switzerland also supported the setting-up of a modern Enterprise Resource Planning System.



UNRWA © A Palestine child refugees drawing during a Community Mental Health Programme (CMHP) activity at Al-Amal Preparatory Girls in Khan Younis, southern Gaza . Photo credit: ©UNRWA Gaza 2017. Photo by Rushdi Al-Sarraj

Switzerland has also played a key role in supporting **innovative and region-wide UNRWA initiatives**. For example, it supported a series of workshops with academics aimed at shaping the long-term vision for the Agency in a changing environment, and the School Parliaments, aimed at fostering a culture of human rights and democratic practices among young people.

UNRWA'S CHALLENGES

As stated by the current Commissioner-General, Palestine refugees face a human development and protection crisis and their situation is unsustainable. UNRWA's financial shortages and the instability of the region pose unprecedented threats to the achievements made in support of the refugees' well-being. Currently the most challenging issues include the following elements:

- UNRWA is confronted with an **increased demand for services** resulting from a growth in the number of Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. Despite possessing strong human capital as a result of the education and healthcare provided by UNRWA and host countries, many lack the assets and opportunities required for sustainable livelihoods.
- **Protection threats** from armed conflicts and protracted occupation are increasing. A growing number of refugees are denied the same basic human rights as other citizens due to their legal status, and are excluded from social, political and economic life.

- The Agency operates with large chronic deficits in its Programme Budget and Emergency Appeals. This poses a serious risk to UNRWA as an institution, since these financial difficulties jeopardise the stabilising role the Agency has assumed in its five fields of operation, and they also represent a serious impediment to human security in the region.
- In 2018, UNRWA started the year with a USD 243 Mio deficit. The deficit increased to USD 558 Mio following the US announcement to reduce and then to stop their contributions. The Agency was able to reduce the deficit by increasing fund-raising efforts and diversifying donors. At the same time, the Agency also started to implement strong austerity measures. A series of conferences also on ministerial level (Rome, New York) increased UNRWA's visibility, helped mobilize strong political commitment and resulted in significant additional funding.

Contact:

Jacqueline Birrer, Institutional Focal Point UNRWA,
SDC/HA:
+41 58 462 30 28
jacqueline.birrer@eda.admin.ch