The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (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 was achieved, the UNRWA mandate was set to expire in one year. Seventy years later, the Agency continues to provide essential services for the well-being, human development and protection of Palestine refugees, pending a just solution.

Palestine refugees
The operational definition of Palestine refugees is people whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, and who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict. Descendants of Palestine refugee males are eligible to register as Palestine refugees.

UNRWA services are available to all those requiring assistance in the Agency’s areas of operation who meet the definition of a Palestine refugee and are registered with the Agency, and to some other groups.

Direct Service Delivery
UNRWA is unique among UN agencies in that it delivers services directly. These services include education, health care, relief and social services, microfinance, infrastructure and camp improvement, emergency assistance, and the protection of refugees’ rights under international law. UNRWA services are delivered in accordance with the United Nations principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational independence.

UNRWA operates in five fields
- Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem

550,000
Palestine refugees registered in UNRWA schools and vocational training centres

UNRWA employs nearly 28,044 staff, some 27,852 of whom are Palestine refugees

about unrwa

Figures are drawn from UNRWA registration data at 1 January 2022

www.unrwa.org
Palestine refugees are facing a human development and protection crisis. Food insecurity and poverty levels are high and rising, and youth unemployment rates are alarming, especially among young women. Despite possessing strong human capital that has been developed with the help of the education and health care provided by UNRWA and host authorities, many Palestine refugees lack the assets and opportunities required for sustainable livelihoods.

Palestine refugees are facing increasing protection threats from armed conflicts in Syria, the West Bank and Gaza. A growing number are denied the same basic human rights as other citizens due to their legal status, and are excluded from key aspects of social, political and economic life.

In this context, UNRWA is a stabilizing factor and supports the resilience of Palestine refugees by working towards the five strategic outcomes codified in the Agency's Medium-Term Strategy for 2016-2023:

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. Refugees' capabilities are strengthened for increased livelihood opportunities
5. Refugees can meet their basic human needs of food, shelter and environmental health

UNRWA relies on voluntary funding from donors, prioritizing the limited resources among its most critical services, with particular emphasis on the most vulnerable. Financial support for the Agency has not kept pace with an increased demand for services caused by growing numbers of registered refugees, deepening poverty and conflict. As a result, the Agency's core fund, which supports essential services and most staffing costs, operates with a large deficit.

UNRWA programmes include:

- **Education**: for approximately 544,710 students in 706 schools; plus 7,930 vocational training students
- **Health**: care that includes more than 7 million annual patient visits
- **Microfinance**: US$ 641 million in loans since 1991
- **Protection**: to safeguard the rights of Palestine refugees under international law
- **Relief and Social Services**: including social safety net support for nearly 398,044 refugees
- **Infrastructure and Camp Improvement**: in the 58 official Palestine refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip
- **Emergency Programmes**: in Syria and the occupied Palestinian territory

For more information please contact:

Juliette Touma, UNRWA Director of Communications  
Mobile: +972-54-240-2753, +962-7-9867-4628  
Email: j.touma@unrwa.org

Tamara Alrifai, UNRWA Director of External Relations and Communications,  
Mobile: +962-7-9090-0140  
Email: t.alrifai@unrwa.org

UNRWA is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The United Nations General Assembly established UNRWA in 1949 with a mandate to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to registered Palestine refugees in the Agency's area of operations pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA operates in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, The Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Tens of thousands of Palestine refugees who lost their homes and livelihoods due to the 1948 conflict continue to be displaced and in need of support, nearly 75 years on. UNRWA helps Palestine Refugees achieve their full potential in human development through quality services it provides in education, health care, relief and social services, protection, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance, and emergency assistance. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions. Donate to UNRWA.