UNRWA USA is an independent 501c3 nonprofit that supports the humanitarian and human development work of UNRWA through fundraising, education, and advocacy.

Mission

UNRWA USA aims to promote a life of dignity and human development for Palestine refugees by informing the American public about UNRWA’s work and generating support for its programs in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank including East Jerusalem, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan.

UNRWA USA’s signature event is the Gaza 5K walk/run. Established in 2012, this race has raised nearly one million dollars to provide psychosocial counseling to Palestine refugee children in Gaza through UNRWA’s Community Mental Health Programme (CMHP).

UNRWA USA has garnered support from donors in every US state.

About UNRWA

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions from UN Member States. The Agency’s services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance and emergency assistance, including in times of armed conflict.

Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict, UNRWA was established by United Nations General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) of December 8, 1949 to carry out direct relief and works programs for Palestine refugees. The Agency began operations on May 1, 1950. In the absence of a solution to the Palestine refugee problem, the General Assembly has repeatedly renewed UNRWA’s mandate, most recently extending it until 30 June 2017.

UNRWA services are available to all Palestine refugees living in its areas of operations, who are registered with the Agency and who need assistance. When the Agency began operations in 1950, it was responding to the needs of about 750,000 Palestine refugees. Today, some 5 million Palestine refugees are eligible for UNRWA services.
Key Players

Abby Smardon
UNRWA USA Executive Director
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Abby Smardon has served as UNRWA USA’s Executive Director since 2010. Overseeing projects to raise critical funds and awareness in the US for UNRWA’s work, she travels extensively to the occupied Palestinian territory, Lebanon, and Jordan to facilitate and evaluate humanitarian projects. Smardon and her team have raised $8 million dollars to support human development and relief efforts for Palestine refugees.

Pierre Krähenbühl
UNRWA Commissioner-General
@PKraehenbuehl

Appointed by the Secretary-General in November 2013, Pierre Krähenbühl became Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees on March 30, 2014. As Commissioner-General, he serves at the level of Under-Secretary-General. A Swiss national born in 1966, Mr. Krähenbühl has 25 years of experience in humanitarian, human rights and development work.

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Factsheet

General

- 2016 UNRWA In Figures: https://www.unrwa.org/resources/about-unrwa/unrwa-figures-2016
- UNRWA provides education, primary health care, relief and social services, infrastructure and camp improvement, microfinance, and emergency response to some 5 million registered Palestine refugees in five fields of operation: the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon.
- 500,598 students go to UNRWA schools
- 3.1 million Palestine refugees access UNRWA health services every year
- Nearly 300,000 Palestine refugees are supported by the Social Safety Net programme

Palestine refugee children’s mental health in Gaza¹

- The blockade has had a devastating impact on children in Gaza, affecting physical and mental health, as well as the learning environment
- Most children have never left the 365 sq km enclave.
- Every child above the age of 10 in Gaza has witnessed death, destruction, and displacement as a result of three traumatic military assaults in six years
- During the 2014 hostilities, many children witnessed the death or injury of a family member or neighbor, and many more experienced displacement, often in tense emergency shelters
- In the immediate aftermath of the 2014 assault, it was estimated that upwards of 373,000 children required direct and specialized psychosocial support.
- While many reactions related to exposure to traumatic events dissipate with time, 20 to 30% of children can be expected to continue to experience significant difficulties. Other research has shown rates of significant distress as high as 40 to 50%. The above figures do not include children experiencing less serious difficulties such as trouble sleeping, physical complaints, poor concentration at school, low achievement, disruptive behavior, and/or aggressive or risk-taking behaviors.
- The 2014 hostilities further ingrained a deep sense of fear and anxiety, while the shock of losing a home and returning to destroyed neighborhoods has eroded a sense of certainty in the future
- UN rapid assessments have found that an estimated 1,000 children who suffered disabling physical injuries

UNRWA Community Mental Health Programme (CMHP)

- Through the Community Mental Health Programme (CMHP), a network of 267 school based counselors and 84 psychosocial facilitators will attend to individual refugee, family and communal psychosocial needs.
- In 2017, a total of 13,300 refugee children will receive individual counseling, while a further 21,000 will receive specialized group counselling.
- 32 additional CMHP counselors are needed to provide counseling to at-risk refugees
- CMHP counselors identify and support children experiencing neglect or abuse
- CMHP counselors follow up with children who have dropped out of school as a result of the difficult socioeconomic conditions created by the blockade and conflict to facilitate their return to education

¹ UNRWA 2017 oPt Emergency Appeal
L-R: Shaymaa El-Ansary (Gaza 5K Volunteer), Maher Nasser (Director, Outreach Division, United Nations Department of Public Information), Abby Smardon (Executive Director, UNRWA USA), Richard Wright (Director, UNRWA Representative Office, New York), at the 2015 NYC Gaza 5K, Brooklyn, New York

Participants at the 2015 Orange County Gaza 5K smile for the camera at Mile Square Regional Park, Fountain Valley, California
Runners at the start line wave to the camera at the 2015 Gaza 5K, Rock Creek Park, Washington DC

Videos

Why Lauren Runs the Gaza 5K (watch)

Highlights from the 2016 NYC Gaza 5K (watch)

Logo
In the News

Elizabeth Kucinich, “Gaza’s Plight Matters to the World”
The Hill, June 23, 2016

Delinda Hanley, “Gaza Solidarity 5K Walk/Run Raises $132,000”
Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, August 2014

Delinda Hanley, “Friends of UNRWA  Bid Farewell to Filippo Grandi”
Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, May 2014

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