

3. Norway's policy towards UNRWA

Norway regards UNRWA as the most important channel for providing humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees in the Middle East. UNRWA is very important to the Palestinian refugee population, both as a provider of health and education services and as an employer. Norway gives particular emphasis to the fact that UNRWA, through its contributions to improving the living conditions of a large population group in the region, is helping to stabilise the situation in a region marked by conflict and social unrest.

UNRWA's role as a service provider is crucial in parts of the region where the refugee population is large and where a large proportion of people live in refugee camps. This is particularly true of Gaza, where 70 per cent of the population are registered refugees, and where UNRWA is a very important neutral service provider. According to the IMF, the average income per inhabitant of Gaza (per capita GDP) is 35 per cent lower than it was in 1994. In view of this very worrying trend, the services UNRWA provides to the population of Gaza play a critical, vital role.

As a consequence of the general political, economic and humanitarian situation in the Palestinian Territory, UNRWA is facing major challenges as regards fulfilling its mandate vis-à-vis a growing population group. The proportion of the Palestinian population living in deep poverty and in need of assistance is growing. Israel's closure regime is making it difficult for the population to access education and health services, and entire population groups are being cut off from services as a result of the separation barrier.

Reform

In Norway's view, UNRWA needs to be rationalised and made more effective. In 2007, UNRWA, in response to a Norwegian initiative and with the support of donor countries, launched a comprehensive reform process aimed at strengthening the

organisation's administrative capacity and ensuring more efficient service delivery to the refugees. The first phase of this reform process was completed in 2010, and the second phase will run from 2011 to 2013. The effect of the initial reforms will now be evaluated, and reforms will be continued wherever a need remains. The reforms encompass measures to increase the effectiveness of the health and education programmes and the quality of service delivery. Increased organisational efficiency is also an important measure to reduce the need for ever-larger donor contributions, even though this increase is primarily due to the steady growth in the refugee population. The donor countries also have a job to do. Just 10 countries, including Norway, finance over 90 per cent of UNRWA's budgets. Norway is working to secure a more even distribution of the burden among donor countries, and to expand the group of donor countries, which at present primarily comprises the USA, the EU and Western European countries.

UNRWA's financial situation

As AdCom chair in 2008/2009, Norway spearheaded efforts to find a solution to the precarious financial situation. Norway worked to mobilise resources and, in cooperation with other supporters, encouraged donors to increase their contributions to UNRWA. Norway has also been a driving force behind efforts to ensure that UNRWA coordinates its activities with the UN system and other humanitarian projects.

Norway wishes to emphasise the need to ensure a balance between the reform agenda and current challenges relating to UNRWA's core activities. Norway is working to ensure greater transparency within the organisation, and is encouraging UNRWA to maintain its focus on new standards of accountability, improved results reporting, anti-corruption measures and internal evaluation.

UNRWA

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

1. Facts and figures

Type of organisation: Organisation financed through voluntary contributions

Established in: 1949

Headquarters: Gaza and Amman

Number of country offices: 5 field offices and 4 liaison offices in addition to the headquarters

Head of organisation: Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi, Italy

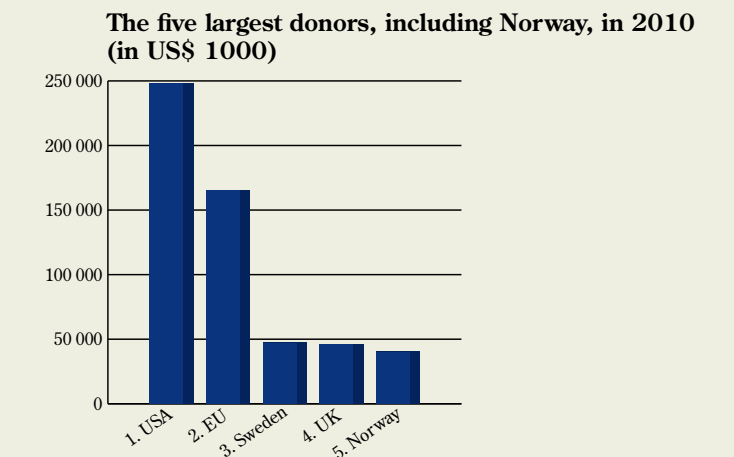
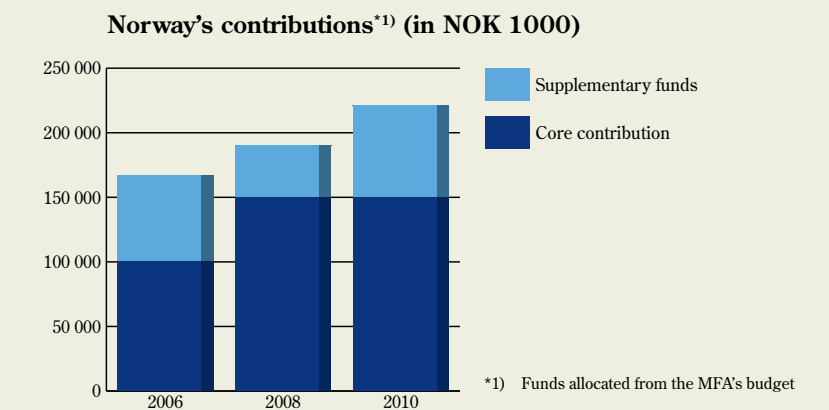
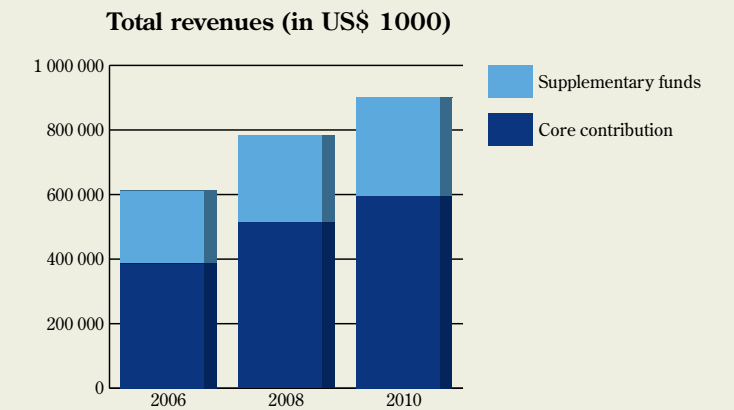
Dates of Board meetings in 2011: The UN General Assembly is UNRWA's governing body, and renews UNRWA's mandate. The UNRWA Advisory Commission meets twice a year (in November and June), and is composed of the host country and the largest donors

Norway's representation on Advisory Commission: Yes

Number of Norwegian staff: 4

Responsible ministry: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)

Website: <http://www.unrwa.org/>



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<http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/ud/selected-topics/un>.

Mandate and areas of activity

UNRWA is a humanitarian organisation established by the UN General Assembly in 1949. Its mandate is to meet the basic needs, such as education, health care, social services and humanitarian assistance, of around 4.5 million registered Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Gaza and the West Bank. UNRWA has 29 000 employees, 99 per cent of whom are Palestinian. Most of the employees are themselves refugees.

UNRWA is administered directly by the UN General Assembly. It does not have its own governing bodies to approve activities and budgets, but rather holds Host and Donor Meetings (HDMs) once a year. During HDMs, information is exchanged and strategic issues are discussed. UNRWA also has an Advisory Commission (AdCom), which meets twice a year.

One of AdCom's main tasks is to chair a policy dialogue between the largest donors, the host country and UNRWA

concerning the organisation's priorities and resource use. AdCom is also tasked with preparing joint responses with the Commissioner-General to extraordinary events that affect the organisation's operations and the situation of Palestinian refugees.

AdCom's 21 members and three observers (including the PLO), meet in the region twice a year.

UNRWA's main task is to meet the Palestine refugees' basic needs. The programme areas specify the following aims:

- Ensure a minimum standard of housing and nutrition
- Ensure that all refugee children have access to primary education
- Ensure access to primary health care

UNRWA's strategy for 2010–2015 covers sub-areas such as education, health, poverty reduction, microcredit programmes and job creation, infrastructure (in the refugee camps), and human rights.

- Norway provides both regular operational funding and funding for strategic key projects. In Gaza, Norway, along with the USA, has financed the development and implementation of mandatory human rights training. At all 238 UNRWA schools in Gaza, which educate more than 200 000 children, pupils receive teaching on the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its historical background. The curriculum and teaching methods have been developed with the aim of engaging pupils and developing critical thinking. This teaching programme is unique in the Arab world, and an important counterweight to radicalisation and intolerance.
- Another initiative financed by Norway is a wide-ranging programme for women in Gaza. The programme components are training (for example in computer skills), awareness-raising, sport and physical training, women's refuges, discussion groups and cultural activities. Women are in a particularly vulnerable position. Domestic violence is a major problem, and is linked to high unemployment and poverty. Many women have suffered trauma due to war and conflict. These centres provide Palestinian women with help and inspiration to begin working, establish local and international contacts, participate in public life and demand their rights. The detailed report on this programme states, for example, that 10 500 women have participated in the activities of the women's centres, and that 300 members of UNRWA's health staff have received training on dealing with domestic violence.

2. Assessments: Results, effectiveness and monitoring

UNRWA reports on its results to the General Assembly every year. In addition, in 2010 UNRWA developed a results-based framework for reporting to donors. The framework utilises the established development goals of the organisation, but also includes other indicators for use in monitoring special appeals for emergency assistance. The 2010 report established a baseline (2009 data), and set long-term, specific, goals. This provides a solid basis for systematic monitoring by Norway (and other donors), of long-term trends in UNRWA's results and goal-achievement.

UNRWA's strategic plan applies the Logical Framework Analysis model for its programmes. Moreover, a results-based monitoring (RBM) system is used which reports on the sum total of the organisation's operations.

Annual reports by UNRWA's headquarters, for example by the education, health and microfinance departments, discuss the results achieved by UNRWA's core programmes. During 2010, UNRWA's health workers provided over 10 million health consultations. The pressure on health workers is very high, with an average of 101 consultations per doctor per day. In addition, UNRWA provided 700 000 dental consultations and 260 000 dental health checks. Over 100 000 pregnant women (estimated to represent 70 per cent of all pregnant Palestine refugees), underwent health checks in 2010. At the same time, UNRWA's health costs of around USD 20 per refugee have remained stable in recent years. UNRWA runs a total of 700 schools for 483 000 pupils, who are distributed equally across both genders. All pupils are offered health checks, vaccinations, hearing and eye tests, dental health consultations, vitamin supplements and health education. The field offices of the emergency relief programmes in the West Bank and Gaza also prepare an annual report for their Emergency Appeal. The Lebanon field office reports separately on the reconstruction of Nahr-el-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon.

UNRWA faces constant difficulties in offering a quantitatively and qualitatively adequate service to a growing refugee population in circumstances characterised by resource scarcity and unpredictability. The Palestinian refugee population is growing by 2.4 per cent a year. The generally difficult socio-economic situation of Palestinian refugees, particularly in Gaza, is increasing the need for UNRWA's services. Voluntary contributions have not increased in line with costs. An important aspect of UNRWA's operations is the organisation's role as an employer. UNRWA employs almost 30 000 teachers, health workers and other staff, almost all of whom are Palestinian refugees. Budget deficits therefore not only have negative consequences for the refugees who use UNRWA's services, but also result in increased unemployment.

Norway has functioned as an important supporter of UNRWA in the context of mobilising increased resources, reforming the organisation and helping to find long-term solutions to the financial problems.

UNRWA is regarded as highly important to the mandate area. UNRWA makes considerable efforts to assist in the coordination and integration of the overall efforts of the UN and other stakeholders in the Palestinian territory. Cooperation with the UN and OCHA has been strengthened, in part through the CAP cooperation, for which UNRWA has sector responsibility. An express priority has been to strengthen cooperation with organisations which hold related mandates (WFP, UNICEF, etc.), and to increase coordination with the host countries Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

Financial reports

UNRWA reports in accordance with the United Nations System Accounting Standards (UNSA). UNRWA's Commissioner-General has introduced a new "Finance Operation Plan", which will ensure that UNRWA will be one of the few UN funds and programmes able to report in accordance with the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) as of 1 January 2012. This means that accounts will be closed on a monthly basis, allowing ongoing monitoring of all expenditure channels each month. This procedure provides a basis for monthly reporting on UNRWA's financial situation to key donors and members of UNRWA's advisory committee. The new accounting procedures are a major improvement on previous practice. UNRWA's financial management has been improved substantially in 2010. UNRWA will undergo an external audit of its IPSAS readiness at the end of 2011. UNRWA's bilateral reporting on Norwegian-financed projects (outside UNRWA's core budget), are considered highly satisfactory, both financially and as regards results.

UNRWA's Department of Internal Oversight Services (DIOS) conducts regular internal audits. UNRWA's results achievement is evaluated by external commissions appointed by DIOS. The most recent evaluation was undertaken in 2009. In addition to making an annual report to the General Assembly, UNRWA also reports to a separate advisory committee of which Norway is a member.

In 2007, UNRWA developed special regulations for the purpose of protecting whistle-blowers. In addition, it has a separate Advisory Committee on Internal Oversight, consisting of three external and three internal members. Every second year, UNRWA undergoes an external audit by the UN Board of Auditors (UNBOA). UNBOA's reports quantify the degree to which recommendations in previous reports have been implemented.