

Backgrounder - Canada's support for Palestinian refugees

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From: Global Affairs Canada

Backgrounder

Canada has announced funding of up to \$90 million over 3 years for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

In the West Bank, Gaza, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, UNRWA's core programs provide basic education, health, social services and livelihood opportunities and help to protect the rights of Palestinian refugees, in line with the agency's mandate. By helping to meet the basic needs of Palestinian refugees, UNRWA's services contribute to stability in the region.

In response to the Syria regional crisis, UNRWA focuses on preserving the resilience of vulnerable individuals by providing humanitarian assistance and a protective framework for Palestinian refugees in the form of basic services, such as education, health, water, sanitation and hygiene and livelihood activities.

This continued commitment builds on Canada's previous support for Palestinian refugees. From 2016 through 2019, Canada committed a total of \$110 million in support for UNRWA. In addition, as part of new funding to respond to COVID-19 announced by the Honourable Karina Gould, Minister of International Development, in April 2020, Canada provided \$1.5 million to UNRWA to support the agency's preparedness and response to COVID-19 in the region.

Providing basic education, health and social services to Palestinian refugees - up to \$75 million over 3 years

This funding will help over half a million Palestinian refugee girls and boys receive quality basic education, which is a top priority for UNRWA, given that approximately half of its core budget is spent on education services. Canada's funding will also help to operate more than 140 primary health-care clinics and support outreach teams in delivering access to health-care services, medications and immunizations to approximately 3.5 million individuals. In addition, it will contribute to providing basic shelter and food for the poorest Palestinian refugees.

Through this funding, Canada is also continuing its support for UNRWA's ongoing efforts to promote neutrality in its operations and among its staff, the majority of whom are also Palestinian refugees. This assistance builds on previous Canadian support and demonstrates how Canada and UNRWA are working together to reinforce respect for the

humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, operational independence and impartiality. This is essential to the effective delivery of the agency's work and to Canada's continued support.

Humanitarian principles, including neutrality, represent a core commitment and value of UN staff, as well as a key element of UNRWA's regulatory framework. Canadian funding will help strengthen the agency's transparency and accountability in this regard. Through the Framework for Cooperation between Global Affairs Canada and UNRWA, Canada has set out its requirements regarding implementing reform, regular monitoring and reporting, and compliance with Canadian anti-terrorism requirements.

Emergency appeal for the Syria regional crisis - up to \$15 million over 3 years

Canada's support will provide humanitarian assistance to address the urgent needs of Palestinian refugees affected by the Syria regional crisis. Canadian assistance will provide food, cash and non-food items, as well as emergency health assistance, psychosocial and protection services, and high-quality and inclusive education for girls and boys. For Palestinian refugees from Syria displaced to Lebanon, Canadian assistance will also help to provide opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.

UNRWA's response to the COVID-19 crisis

The COVID-19 crisis is worsening pre-existing vulnerabilities among Palestinian refugees, and UNRWA is adapting. The agency has adjusted the delivery of its education and health services to protect the communities it serves and to limit the spread of COVID-19. UNRWA has managed to maintain its services and prevent outbreaks of COVID-19 within densely populated Palestinian refugee camps, although the risk of outbreaks remains a concern. The agency has shifted to telemedicine and home delivery of essential medications and food, distributed hygiene packs and food parcels to those in quarantine, set up health advice hotlines and maintained an education-in-emergencies program to support homeschooling and remote learning.

UN Office of Internal Oversight Services Investigation

Canadian officials have reviewed the confidential investigation report prepared by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services regarding allegations of misconduct among former UNRWA senior managers. The report supports the UN's earlier confirmations that no fraud or misappropriation of operational funds occurred. UNRWA's new senior management has committed to significant management reform initiatives aimed at strengthening UNRWA's accountability, transparency, management and governance. Canada will remain engaged on these efforts.