

# Ten-Point Recovery Plan for UNRWA

## Introduction

The purpose of this plan is to fill UNRWA's funding gap by the end of March 2024. The chief vehicle for achieving this objective is the 'Good Donorship Forum', (GDF), jointly convened by UNRWA and lead donors who did not defund. The GDF will elevate the conversation about UNRWA to the ministerial level in capitals, rather than with ambassador-level officials in the field.

The plan is premised on an acceptance that some donors, such as the US, have made a political decision not to fund UNRWA. The plan envisages not just bringing back the 'good' donors, but, thereafter diversifying UNRWA's donor base, by engaging the 160 remaining member states in the General Assembly, particularly Arab states, to fill the funding gap on a permanent basis.

To support of the swift and focused implementation of the 'ten-point plan', this document will be accompanied by an annex containing an implementation plan. This will include a list of the small number of officials in each defunding capitals who need to be approached to reverse the defunding decision. Key messages are set out at the end of this plan, which will form the basis of that conversation.

## Ten Steps to Recovery

1. Several defunding donors have indicated that they are prepared to resume funding to UNRWA, not least because they did not have sufficient intelligence information about the allegations against UNRWA staffers when they made the decision to defund. Australia's Foreign Minister, Penny Wong, has said this on the record: ([We don't have all the facts on UNRWA allegations, Penny Wong admits | United Nations | The Guardian](#)), other donors have made this clear in private. No donor, except the US, has indicated that it is determined to defund permanently. Others still, such as Norway, Ireland, Spain, Belgium and Slovenia have made it clear that they will abide by the principles of good donorship and continue to fund, if not increase funding. The strategic goal of this plan is work with the 'good donors' to bring back the defunders. To that end, UNRWA will collaborate with donors such as Norway and Ireland to convene The Good Donorship Forum at the level of Minister or Deputy Minister within a week.
2. Having made a hasty decision to defund, donors need something visible in the policy arena to allow them to turn the corner and justify the policy shift back to resuming aid. The OIOS report and/or the Independent Review will provide this, but the ground must be prepared. Donors will need to fly political kites to create the expectation of change. Information needs to be put out in advance of its publication that the OIOS report will not substantiate Israeli claims against UNRWA. This messaging is already out there, but needs to be reinforced. UNRWA must not be seen to be putting out this message, or taking any action to undermine the independence and integrity of the OIOS report. But sources in

New York close to the OIOS have already indicated to journalists and others that they will not be able to substantiate the Israeli claims and supporters of UNRWA engaged in media work can purvey this message.

3. Key messages for the donor community need to come from the donors themselves, along with UNRWA and all interested parties, in private advocacy and in the media. This messaging must highlight that in the absence of the US as the main donor to UNRWA, the Europeans and then the Gulf States must take a leadership role in the Middle East, exemplifying through action, humanitarian principles and the principles of good donorship, bringing life-saving humanitarian relief and long-term development assistance to some of the most marginalized communities in an increasingly unstable Middle East. The message must also be reinforced that UNRWA has taken swift and robust action in separating the staff members concerned and that the 'neutrality risks' are now significantly outweighed by the risk of humanitarian implosion triggering widespread loss of life and insecurity. It must be stressed to donors that, as recent history has shown, if six million Palestinians are deprived of aid and security, they will make the perilous journey to Europe: the point being (particularly to officials from right-wing, anti-immigration governments) that support to refugees through UNRWA in the Middle East is a much more cost effective and politically acceptable solution. (See messaging section below).
4. Donors must also be asked what more UNRWA can do to have funding restored. The suggestion must be strongly made that the OIOS report will give them the steer they need to resume funding – a ladder, if you like, on which they can climb down with honour, having made clear their position on neutrality so robustly. The Good Donorship Forum will co-ordinate public announcements for the renewal of funding by donors.
5. To be clear, the GDF will be convened in a congenial manner which is not accusatory. Refunding donors need to give each other cover (just as they did with the defunding decision). The good donors, along with UNRWA must take the lead in preparing and coordinating this policy shift. Other external stakeholders must support UNRWA in this strategy.
6. In order to convene the Good Donorship Forum in the next ten days, UNRWA must bring the 'good donors' together in the next three days, brief them on this strategy and request that they reach out to the defunders eg Australia, Netherlands, UK, Switzerland, Germany et al. (Canada is likely to remain with US, as are Italy and Austria.) UNRWA must do the heavy lifting, starting with the Com Gen's home country of Switzerland to help donors turn the corner. If Switzerland and the UK are on board, shifting the others will be easier.
7. UNRWA must also come to terms with the fact that the US is gone, at least in the short and medium term, as there is zero support on either side of the House in DC. The problem is also the size of the deficit. Only Germany and the EU can donate meaningful sums to fill the US deficit. But the Germans and the EU must be given assurances (encouraged by UNRWA and all stakeholders) that there will be concerted pressures on the Gulf States to step up, once the Europeans are back on board. UNRWA will be mindful

that Gulf states will want to contribute to highly visible projects (eg building a school or a health clinic) rather than into the General Fund.

8. The Europeans must also shift some of their funding from WFP and UNICEF to UNRWA and let the US use its “UNRWA money” for WFP and UNICEF. UNRWA will initiate contacts with these agencies in advance of these discussions becoming public, to ensure that any sense of competition is avoided and that institutional objectives are aligned.
9. A major concern is that with the US now out, Biden will not be able to prevent Netanyahu from forcing UNRWA to stop working in the oPt (visas, permits, financial arrangements etc), even if the funding gap is closed. In view of this, all UNRWA stakeholders need to look beyond Netanyahu. UNRWA must immediately move from the defensive, onto the offensive in terms of messaging, shifting the global conversation around UNRWA to a new terrain, purveying overtly political messages (see messaging section below).
10. In the longer term, the conversation needs to be shifted to narratives around peace and stability in the Middle East for Palestinians and Israelis, as well as stability in Europe (illegal migration and association tensions) if millions of Palestinians are forced to flee the Middle East for lack of services.

### **Key Messages**

- UNRWA’s work is unmatched in the region by any other agency. Its proven 75-year track record in building human capital in the oPt and beyond, is a unique and essential contribution to a two-state solution.
- The political attack on UNRWA is an attack on the two-state solution itself.
- It is also an attack on multilateralism. We cannot allow the political objectives of an extremist government in a single member state to undermine the international order, including IHL. A fully funded and fully functional UNRWA is the best answer to this.
- UNRWA is demonstrably vital to stability in the Middle East at a time when powerful members states are calling for the region to be stabilised. Defunding UNRWA will inevitably lead to instability.
- UNRWA is the most heavily audited agency in the history of the UN and its institutional integrity has been demonstrated on multiple occasions to the satisfaction of all donors. Individual allegations are an inevitable result of member states tasking UNRWA to work in the political vacuum left by their inability to bring peace.
- It is impossible to disband UNRWA and employ staff from UN agencies in Gaza to do UNRWA’s job. Total staff of other UN agencies in Gaza number just a few hundred, significantly short of the 13,000 employed by UNRWA. It would take years to establish a new UN entity in Gaza and the international community does not have time on its side, given 2.3 million people are facing starvation.
- It is far more cost effective and politically advantageous to pay UNRWA to deal with Palestinian refugees in the Middle East, rather than defunding UNRWA and risk millions of refugees heading to Europe. UNRWA has looked at comparative data for refugee

resettlement programmes. In 2019, OECD (<https://www.oecd.org/els/mig/migration-policy-debates-13.pdf>) estimate a minimum cost in OECD countries of EUR10,000 per adult refugee during their first year, or around US\$11,500 per person. Costs in the UK, Sweden and Germany are higher than OECD averages – the UK estimates total expenditures of around US\$17,000 for the first year for children of school age. UNRWA's costs are considerably lower – around US\$838 per year for education compared to several thousands per year as part of refugee resettlement programmes.

\*\*\*