

2020 annual report

unrwausa



unrwa
usa national committee



12 mental health

Mental health matters. No person in the Gaza Strip has been spared from the devastating impact of the multiple Israeli military onslaughts in the past decade and a half. Your support provided refugees with the care all people deserve.

contents

what we achieved in 2020

10 food assistance

With some of the highest poverty rates in the world and over a decade of a comprehensive blockade, refugees face a daily struggle to put food on the table. Thanks to your help thousands of refugees didn't have to go without.

18 voices of unrwa

Our blog showcases refugee stories of resilience and strength. Read the top stories of 2020, including a hilarious and heartfelt tribute to a refugee dad, a story of a young artist painting to cope and overcome the horrors of living through multiple Israeli military assaults, and reflections of Valentine's Day in Palestine.

16 covid-19 response

COVID-19 shaped what 2020 looked like for most of the world. In the face of these challenges, you made sure refugee girls and boys could still continue learning and UNRWA frontline workers had the tools to stay safe and serve their communities.

22 donor spotlight

We could not do our work without our generous donors. This year we wanted to feature big-hearted donor who not only supports Palestine refugees through UNRWA USA, but also channels his love for tech and business to support Palestinian entrepreneurship and development.

Letter from our leaders

Dear friends,

2020 was unlike any year. The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the strength of our health care systems and economies, challenged the resilience of our relationships, and limited our ability to travel and visit faraway loved ones. But for Palestine refugees already facing occupation, blockade, violence, forced displacement, and poverty, the heightened sense of isolation and risk of infection has been particularly threatening.

In response, generous UNRWA USA supporters rose to the occasion to provide personal protective equipment (PPE), including masks, gloves, gowns, and eye protection for UNRWA health centers and frontline refugee staff, and supported UNRWA programs like cash assistance, food assistance, and primary health care, including mental health, for refugees.

As we all shifted to a virtual world, UNRWA USA held its first-ever [Virtual Gaza 5K + Digital Festival](#), supporting not only mental health care in the occupied Palestinian territory, but cash assistance for Palestine refugees in Lebanon reeling in the aftermath of the lethal Beirut blast.

2020 was also a time of reflection and calls for progressive change. In response to the waves of protests across the United States following the murder of George Floyd, among countless other Black Americans, as a staff and individuals we sought to be better allies, acknowledging the solidarity between the Palestinian struggle in the Middle East, the Black community in America, and that of all marginalized and oppressed people. In addition to 2020 being Mara's first year with UNRWA USA, we also welcomed new staff and three dynamic board members Lara Friedman, [Mike Farah](#), and [Nadia Saah](#).

As we entered into 2021, we saw some renewed hope with the reinstatement of US government funding to UNRWA and hopefully a shift towards more progressive US foreign policy towards the Middle East and the upholding of refugee rights.

In addition to these positive steps, we draw optimism and inspiration from the steadfast support of generous Americans like you who believe in a future where Palestine refugees can thrive -- thank you for continuing to keep Palestine refugees in your thoughts and actions.

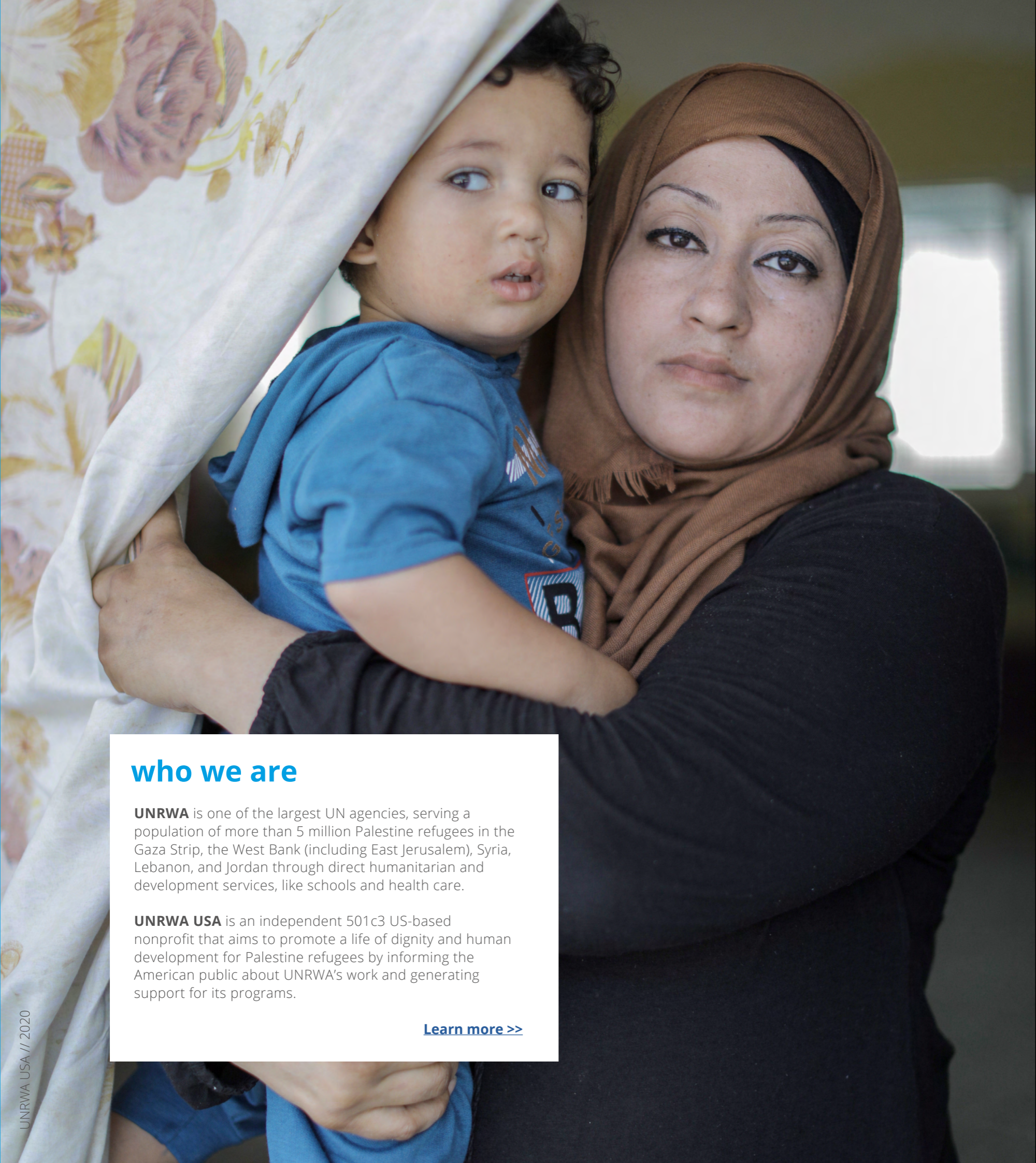


Mara Kronenfeld,
Executive Director



Ghassan Salameh,
Board Chair





who we are

UNRWA is one of the largest UN agencies, serving a population of more than 5 million Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan through direct humanitarian and development services, like schools and health care.

UNRWA USA is an independent 501c3 US-based nonprofit that 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.

[Learn more >>](#)

our vision

Until there is a just solution to their plight, a world where Palestine refugees thrive.

our mission

UNRWA USA lifts up the voices, experiences, and humanity of Palestine refugees to secure American support for resources essential to every human being, for the promise of a better life.

our donors

Our donors represent a diverse community of people across all 50 U.S. states and through their compassionate care, these individuals supply 88% of our annual funding.

our staff

- Mara Kronenfeld, Executive Director
- Laila Mokhiber, Director of Communications
- Lori Mosher, Director of Programs and Operations
- Hani Almadhoun, Director of Philanthropy
- Medhini Kumar, Communications Manager
- Harley Dority, Community Engagement Officer
- Venu Thirumala, Development Associate

our board

- Ghassan Salameh, Board Chair
- Elias Aburdene
- Karen AbuZayd, former UNRWA Commissioner-General
- Ambassador (ret.) Maura Connelly
- Ambassador (ret.) Ryan Crocker
- Mike Farah
- Lara Friedman
- Ambassador (ret.) Richard W. Murphy
- Imad I. Qasim
- Nadia Saah
- Shibley Telhami
- Ambassador (ret.) Philip C. Wilcox, Jr., Chair Emeritus

// 2020 your impact

\$1.4M was dispersed to UNRWA for life-enhancing services for Palestine refugees across **3** fields: the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), the Gaza Strip, and Lebanon:

1M refugees in Gaza received food assistance in the form of flour, rice, lentils, chickpeas, oil, and milk

10,323 UNRWA students and parents received mental health counseling in Gaza

4,200 refugees in Lebanon received cash assistance after the Beirut port explosion

502 visually impaired or immunocompromised students in Gaza received tablets so they could study uninterrupted despite COVID-19

19,961 refugees received primary health care services at UNRWA's health centers in Gaza

52 UNRWA schools in Gaza serving more than **55K** students were provided with disinfection supplies, tools, and materials to combat the spread of COVID-19

30 laptops were distributed among UNRWA teachers to facilitate remote learning in the West Bank



nourishing refugee families



meet um maher

As a young girl back in 1948, Um Maher was forced to flee her family's village clinging to her brother's shoulders. They took refuge in Nuseirat camp in the Gaza Strip. Nearly 74 years later, Um Maher still resides in the camp where she grew up, got married, and raised her kids and grandbabies.

For most refugees living in Gaza right now, UNRWA is the sole source of food and income. Um Maher is able to cook meals for her loved ones because of UNRWA food assistance. Um Maher's words are a reminder of the shameful reality facing more than one million refugees across Gaza: **"Sometimes, UNRWA food assistance was all we had to eat. It helped us to make it through."**

Despite having lived her entire life displaced, Um Maher still hopes for a better tomorrow. Beyond food assistance, she is grateful for the education her daughters received from UNRWA and the social services provided -- tools needed to empower and lift them out of poverty, and into a brighter future. She shares: **"UNRWA has always been there to help and was with us every step of the way."**

YOUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND ZAKAT DURING THE MONTH OF **RAMADAN**, ENABLED 8,816 REFUGEE FAMILIES IN GAZA TO PUT **FOOD** ON THE TABLE

ramadan food assistance

Even before COVID-19, half the population of the Gaza Strip -- one million refugees -- were living in poverty and could not afford to put food on the table for their families without assistance. Gaza's food insecurity is a result of a 14 year-long blockade that has devastated the economy and kept the people of Gaza from opportunities to trade with the rest of the world.

Despite their resilience, Palestine refugees in Gaza are now left with no other alternatives but to rely on international assistance - primarily from UNRWA - for basic staples including flour, rice, lentils, chickpeas, oil, and milk. Food is a human right and UNRWA USA supporters ensured that Palestine refugees could stock their pantries during Ramadan and beyond through Zakat and other charitable giving.

influencer partnerships

More than a dozen content-creators, community leaders, and brands leveraged their social media platforms to fill pantries in Gaza with food for refugees. They used their creativity and passion to make **clever videos**, organized Palestinian-themed swag giveaways, and raised significant awareness around food insecurity in Gaza.

If you have a platform you're willing to leverage for Palestine refugees, contact Laila Mokhiber at laila@unrwausa.org.



UNRWA USA // 2020

servicing refugee mental health needs



BECAUSE 1,300 OF YOU ACROSS 50 STATES RAN, WALKED, AND FUNDRAISED FOR THE **VIRTUAL GAZA 5K**, 10,323 UNRWA STUDENTS, PARENTS, AND TEACHERS LIVING UNDER A BRUTAL BLOCKADE RECEIVED SCHOOL-BASED OR INDIVIDUALIZED REMOTE **MENTAL HEALTH** AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

[virtual gaza 5k + digital festival](#)

The first ever Virtual Gaza 5K + Digital Festival evoked elements of Palestinian culture, art, and music -- all for a good cause: providing mental health care services for kids in Gaza and cash assistance to Palestine refugees in Lebanon. In celebration of the creative brilliance of the Palestinian diaspora, the line-up featured UN officials, UNRWA counselors and students, and VIP speakers including Rep. Rashida Tlaib, 47 Soul, Cherien Dabis, Alia Shawkat, and performances by MCA Abdul (the 12-year-old rapper from Gaza), SOL Band, Omar Offendum, and Elise Azkoul (The Voice Season 17 Team Gwen).

[Re-live the magic of the digital festival >>](#)

[meet khadija, unrwa school counselor](#)

Khadija Ismail Miqdad is a school counselor at UNRWA's Jabalia Preparatory Girls School A, where she has taught for over 14 years.

A lifelong learner, she is aspiring to complete her third degree and encourages her students by leading by example. She says: "I teach my female students that they have tremendous worth and value, and through learning, there is no limit to that value. Starting with myself is the best way to gain the trust of my students."

Over the years, her job as a counselor has only become more challenging. In Gaza, children have been exposed to multiple military assaults, a blockade that has existed for most of their lifetimes, and households that face poverty and unemployment. She says this has only increased the occurrence of domestic violence and PTSD in families. Beyond this, her students had to contend with COVID-19 this year. Despite the restrictions in social interactions and her own exhaustion from dealing with the pandemic, Khadija was always there for her students and their parents, using WhatsApp and Telegram to communicate with and support her students through an unprecedented time.

// responding to the beirut blast

Because you cared and rapidly responded to the tragic Beirut port explosion in August 2020, 4,200 refugees were provided cash assistance to mitigate against the deepening economic crisis -- you are helping the people of Lebanon rebuild.

On August 4, 2020, a massive explosion in Lebanon tragically destroyed or damaged nearly half the capital city of Beirut, left at least 137 dead, thousands injured, and reportedly 300,000 homeless.

Before the blast, this tiny, famously-resilient country, which hosts more refugees per capita than any country worldwide, was in the midst of a severe economic and financial crisis, while facing a growing number of COVID-19 cases, and an ongoing political deadlock.

In response, UNRWA USA supporters provided relief in the form of cash assistance to a portion of the nearly half a million Palestine refugees who, like their Lebanese hosts, are living day by day under very difficult and worsening conditions.

[On the ground in Beirut with Chaker Khazal >>](#)





// on the frontlines of the covid-19 pandemic

YOU SUPPLIED WEST BANK STUDENTS WITH 30 LAPTOPS

YOU PROVIDED TABLETS TO 502 VISUALLY IMPAIRED OR IMMUNOCOMPROMISED GAZA STUDENTS

YOU PROVIDED UNRWA SCHOOLS IN GAZA WITH PPE, CLEANING AND DISINFECTION SUPPLIES

YOU FUNDED SALARIES OF UNRWA FRONTLINE HEALTH CARE WORKERS IN THE WEST BANK



Through the COVID-19 pandemic, UNRWA has continued its work on the frontlines, responding to the health, protection, and humanitarian needs of disproportionately affected Palestine refugees.

In addition to its 3,000 health staff at 140 clinics across Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), and the Gaza Strip, UNRWA ran psychosocial support programs to help individuals and families cope with living under strict curfews and social distancing guidelines in some of the most crowded places on the planet.

To ensure UNRWA health staff could do their jobs effectively, UNRWA USA supporters and partners provided personal protective equipment (PPE), including masks, gloves, gowns, and eye protection for health centers and frontline refugee staff, supplied schools with disinfection supplies, provided tablets

to visually impaired or immunocompromised youth so they could continue their studies from home during the pandemic, funded the salaries to Palestine refugee health care workers in the West Bank, and provided laptops to UNRWA teachers to facilitate remote learning.

UNRWA USA Executive Director Mara Kronenfeld sat down with health care leaders Dr. Ghada al Jadba (Chief of the UNRWA Health Program in the Gaza Strip) and Dr. Akihiro Seita (UNRWA's Director of Health) to discuss COVID-19, access to health care (including mental health care), annexation, and human rights as part of an episode of Let's Talk UNRWA.

[**Hear about how the virus impacted refugees and UNRWA's proactive response >>**](#)

Through our Voices of UNRWA blog we amplify Palestine refugee voices and ensure stories of resilience are recorded and shared

Here are some highlights from 2020:

[The showdown between “Super Mario” Ziad vs. Ostaz Faour: memories from a childhood in Lebanon](#)

Ziad, affectionately referred to as ‘ammo Ziad (or Uncle Ziad), grew up in various refugee camps in Lebanon. To this day, he is known for his love for the phrase ‘hi guys’ and his iconic mustache, which his children will now claim has always been there, even as a child. This ‘stache is so iconic, in fact, in the stories of his childhood, he is described by his family as a young, Palestinian version of “Super Mario, hopping off the stacks of cinder-block buildings of Burj al Barajneh camp and banging on corrugated tin roofs with a tightly wrapped sandwich in his left fist and a stick in his right.”

Though mischievous as a kid (and perhaps still to this day!), his story represents not only the way that refugee kids are playful, smart, and curious, like kids around the world, but also the way in which the UNRWA community of teachers, principals, and employees, provides a secondary source of parental guidance to refugee kids. These role models and community leaders emphasized the strong communal values that Ziad and many other Palestine refugees now impart on their own children.

[An interview with refugee artist Malak Mattar: when paintings have more freedom of movement than people](#)

Meet Malak Mattar, a 20-year-old artist and Palestine refugee from the Gaza Strip. While Malak grew up in Gaza, her family, like a majority of residents, are refugees from north or east of the Strip’s current confines.

Her father’s side is from Al Jorah, a village by the sea in what is now known as

Ashkelon, where her grandparents were once fishermen. Her mother’s side hailed from Batani al Sharqi, a coastal village in the south of Palestine, where they were farmers. Forced to flee during the Nakba, her family arrived in Gaza in 1948 and have been refugees there ever since.

Today, Malak is known for her Picasso-like expressionist faces and abstract designs, painted largely in response to and a way to cope during and following the 51-day Israeli military assault on the Gaza Strip in 2014. Forced to stay inside and fearing for her own safety and that of her family and friends, she started to paint as an emotional release of the fear, anxiety, and terror she felt.

What was originally a form of coping and self-expression became her passion and livelihood, and one that has been appreciated by people far beyond the borders of the Gaza Strip. Since her first watercolor, she has produced hundreds of paintings, which have earned her international recognition, with her paintings being featured in Jerusalem, Spain, Turkey, Costa Rica, India, and the United States.

[What Valentine’s Day means in Gaza, Palestine](#)

Though he now lives in Virginia with his wife and daughters, Hani Almadhoun, UNRWA USA’s Director of Philanthropy, grew up in the Gaza Strip.

Hani’s father was an UNRWA teacher in Gaza and his family benefited from UNRWA services there, so he can speak firsthand from personal experience about the work UNRWA does and how the Gaza Strip has changed over the past few decades. Hani reflects on these changes through the lens of Valentine’s Day.



malak mattar,
artist + palestine
refugee

// unrwa alumni of north america

90 ALUMNI MEMBERS
20 US STATES
3 CANADIAN PROVINCES
3 VIRTUAL MEET AND GREETINGS

Join the UNRWA Alumni of North America and share what being a Palestine refugee means to you

The UNRWA Alumni of North America is an organized group of people who share the common experience of having attended UNRWA schools, benefited from UNRWA services, and/or served as UNRWA staff and are living in or citizens of the United States or Canada.

Palestine refugees are your local doctors, engineers, parents, leaders and change makers.

Through their personal stories and advocacy efforts, alumni aim to help change the US narrative around Palestine refugees and subsequently generate widespread American support for UNRWA.

Watch: UNRWA alum share what being a Palestine refugee means to them >>

meet ihmayed, unrwa alum

Ihmayed Ali (right) is a Palestine refugee who grew up in a cramped refugee camp near Baalbek in Lebanon, where he received UNRWA services. He is now a successful biomedical engineer in Canada and a proud member of the UNRWA Alumni of North America.

He says: "UNRWA provided me with the opportunity to gain an education and enabled me to earn multiple degrees...all my children graduated from Concordia University in Montreal and could not have reached their educational goals had it not been for the educational and employment opportunities UNRWA provided me."

[Read Ihmayed's full story >>](#)



ihmayed ali,
unrwa alum





meet ray milhem, unrwa usa donor

Ray Milhem is a proud Palestinian-American, who was born in Jordan, grew up in Kuwait, and now calls Pittsburgh home. His parents, who originally hailed from Palestine were forced to flee during the Nakba; however, they made sure he and his siblings visited Palestine every summer to stay connected with their family, culture, friends, and land. This is something he's continued to this day, with the exception of 2020 due to COVID-19.

As a result, Ray grew up hearing of the great work UNRWA was doing for his fellow Palestinians in the Middle East. After a prod by a friend to look up UNRWA USA's work stateside and a quick internet search fueled by a desire to help refugees, his next steps became clear: he became an UNRWA USA donor. His parents had always instilled in him to help those in need, a value he's passed along to his own children and one that he embodies through his generous and consistent support to UNRWA USA.

Ray came to the United States in 1979 when he was just 17 years old to study electrical engineering, focusing on communications and computers. Following graduation, he worked at a bank in Kuwait and then established a small tech company. After the Iraqi invasion in 1990, he tragically lost everything, but chose not to give up. He had a business visa to Canada and worked at AT&T, going on to help build the largest data network (pre-internet). A lover of all things technology, Ray moved to Silicon Valley and worked at a slew of pioneering companies like Nokia, Motorola, and Boeing. He has since started his own strategic advisory firm focusing on Fortune 500 companies and private equity companies.

Throughout his impressive career, Ray has consistently worked hard and chosen to give back, remembering those who are less fortunate, especially those in his home country of Palestine. Beyond giving to UNRWA USA, he has coached and mentored about 100 start ups, several of which are in the MENA region, including Palestine. Additionally, he is a co-founder of TechWadi, the largest Arab-American tech group, connecting Silicon Valley to rising entrepreneurs in the MENA region.

We are honored to have big-hearted, committed supporters like Ray who compassionately uplift the lives and livelihoods of Palestine refugees.

// unrwa usa partners

We are privileged to work with corporations, foundations, nonprofits, and organizations of all sizes who give generously to support Palestine refugees.

Our partners contribute in many ways to provide critical UNRWA programs for Palestine refugees in the Middle East and raise awareness here in the United States.

Meet some of our larger financial partners:



Gaza 5K sponsors

Sponsors help cover the cost of UNRWA USA's signature Gaza 5K walk/run events. This includes event promotion and an accompanying awareness campaign highlighting UNRWA's programs for Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip, allowing revenue raised by participants in the 5K to be sent to UNRWA to directly benefit mental health.

To learn how your organization or foundation can make an impact for refugees, please email info@unrwausa.org.



THE ITZKOWICH FAMILY

a few ways you can show solidarity with palestine refugees

#1

give monthly



Being an UNRWA USA Solidarity Sustainer (monthly donor) means providing reliable, consistent funds, ensuring that UNRWA can focus on what's most important: providing humanitarian assistance to over 5 million registered Palestine refugees.

We have hundreds of Solidarity Sustainers who give monthly to support the most urgent needs of Palestine refugees all year long.

[Give monthly](#)

#2

plan a gift



With [UNRWA USA's Planned Giving Program](#), you can empower Palestine refugees with hope and opportunity for generations to come.

Planned giving (a bequest) is easy, and you don't have to be wealthy to do it. You can leave a gift for refugees simply by naming UNRWA USA in your will or trust as one of your beneficiaries. Because your gift won't be made until after your lifetime, you can change your mind at any time.

#3

fundraise



Despite the pandemic, UNRWA USA supporters from across America chose to engage their communities by setting up virtual fundraising campaigns, including Gather for Gaza virtual events. Those who did fundraised to win exciting prizes like exclusive recipes and virtual cooking sessions from Chef Sameh Wadi.

[Read how Rhonda has raised thousands of dollars year after year through her Gazooglers' fundraising team](#) for the San Francisco Gaza 5K and in 2020 through her virtual Gather for Gaza event, fundraising to provide tablets to visually impaired children in Gaza during a time of remote learning.

#4

volunteer



Volunteers are the best advocates for our mission and the reason we're able to reach new communities of support around the country.

We're constantly looking for volunteers who are interested in advocating for Palestine refugees and driving more support for UNRWA programs through direct involvement in our operations and initiatives.

[Apply to volunteer](#)

#5

advocate



Very few elected officials have visited the occupied Palestinian territory or met Palestine refugees. Sharing refugee experiences and stories through [advocacy efforts](#) has the unique power to bring a deeper understanding and appreciation of the humanitarian needs of Palestine refugees and the US' role in addressing these needs as the largest historical contributor to UNRWA.

Thanks in part to the advocacy efforts of UNRWA USA supporters, UNRWA alumni, and other advocates and politicians, the Biden administration made good on its campaign pledge to resume funding to UNRWA in April 2021.

#6

donate



Each year, in coordination with the Agency, our nonprofit determines which high priority UNRWA programs are the most strategic and impactful to support

When you [donate to UNRWA USA](#), do so knowing that you're giving a tax-deductible gift to a critical program that enhances the lives of Palestine refugees.

You can give through donor-advised funds (DAF), stocks, and/or through employer matching programs.

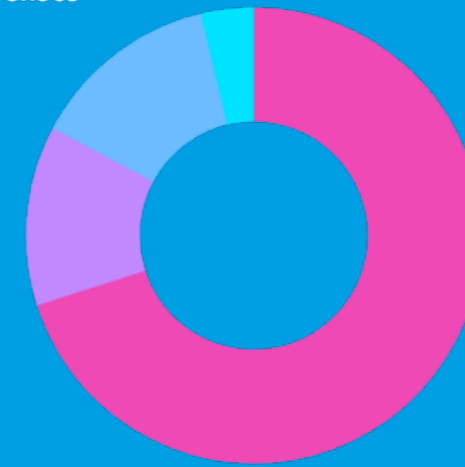
unrwa usa 2020 finances

SUMMARY OF UNRWA USA'S 2020 EXPENSES, INCLUDING GRANTS TO UNRWA, AND HOW WE ALLOCATED FUNDS SENT TO THE AGENCY TO BE USED IN THE FIELD

2020 statement of expenses

Administration Expenses
13.5%

Programming Expenses
12.8%

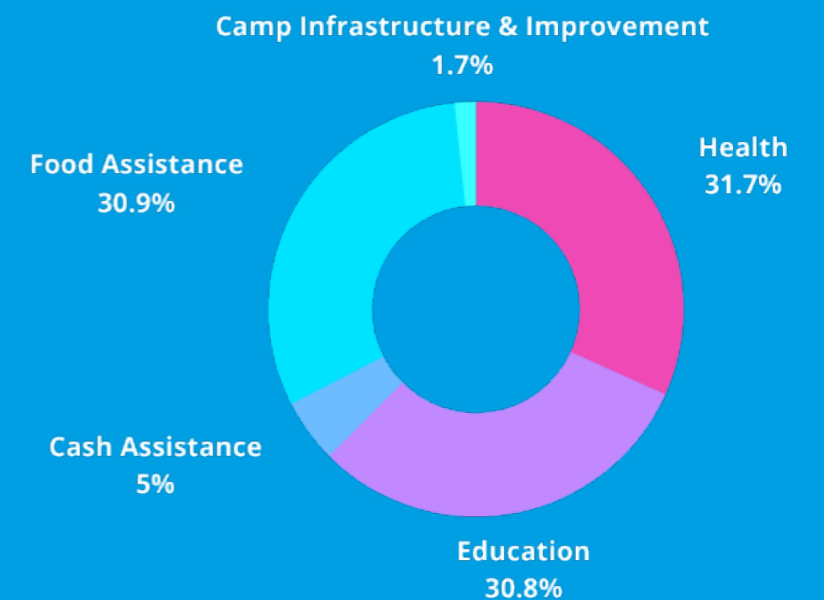


Expense	Amount
Grants to UNRWA	\$3,015,353
Programming Expenses	\$548,988
Administration Expenses	\$580,007
Fundraising Expenses	\$161,336
Total	\$4,305,684

Grants to UNRWA
70%

program allocation of funds sent to unrwa

UNRWA Program	Amount
Health	\$956,967.26
Education	\$977,386.00
Camp Infrastructure & Improvement	\$50,000.00
Cash Assistance	\$150,000.00
Food Assistance	\$931,000.00
Total	\$3,015,353.26





// thank you

for showing palestine refugees that
americans care



unrwa
usa national committee

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