



## [Most European Countries and Canada Resume UNRWA Funding While Israel Seeks to Dismantle the Organization](#)

Sweden and Canada were among the countries that recently announced they will resume aid payments to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The humanitarian agency is the largest of its kind operating in Gaza, and provides critical healthcare, education, relief, employment, and social services – resources that are especially important and necessary now due to Israel’s ongoing destructive military offensive in Gaza and the dire humanitarian crisis that it has brought about. The welcome development of the resumption of funding comes amid news that the Israeli army is seeking to dismantle the relief organization. This is just the latest in Israel’s long-standing efforts to try and hinder the work of UNRWA and have it disbanded. Last month in February, Israel put forth unsubstantiated allegations that several UNRWA workers were involved in the October 7th Hamas attacks. These claims were later debunked, but still prompted over a dozen countries to cut their funding to the agency. In addition to an independent entity finding that the allegations had no merit, a recent report highlighted how Israeli authorities coerced detained UNRWA employees into falsely stating ties to Hamas, and consisted of first-hand accounts of mistreatment and human rights violations suffered while apprehended. In the report, detainees described instances of abuse which included beatings, threats, torture, and the denial of medical treatment. UNRWA has stated that it plans to hand the report over to other agencies, both inside and outside of the United Nations, that specialize in documenting human rights abuses.

Observers hope that the moves to reinstate funding to UNRWA may prompt other countries that paused financial aid to follow suit, as there is a massive need for a significant uptick in humanitarian assistance services. United Nations officials have warned of the worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza, stating that more than a quarter of the civilian population there is on the brink of famine. Furthermore, at least 85% of citizens have been forcibly displaced due to Israel’s ongoing military offensive, with an estimated 1.5 million Palestinians currently taking refuge in and around Rafah – a city that itself remains under risk of a potential destructive Israeli military operation and that now has a population in excess of five times larger than it was prior to the War on Gaza. The conflict has also devastated the Palestinian territory’s health system and infrastructure, overwhelming hospitals, doctors, and other healthcare workers. According to recent data, Sweden is the fourth largest contributor to the UNRWA’s budget, and Canada is the eleventh largest. The European Union (EU) is also a major UNRWA donor, and earlier this month, the EU’s European Commission announced that it would provide 50 million euros as well. UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini has emphasized the unprecedented nature of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and expressed that he is “cautiously optimistic that within the next few weeks...a number of (other) donors will return.”

Israel has severely restricted the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza, leading the United States and others to conduct airdrops and announce plans to build a temporary port along Gaza’s Mediterranean coast to bring in aid by sea. However, aid groups have rightly pointed out that these are more costly, ineffective, and time-consuming methods to deliver food and medical supplies, and that the focus should be on pressuring Israel to open up aid crossings and allow trucks to enter via land. Humanitarian groups have consistently outlined the serious obstacles that they face in trying to deliver aid into Gaza, largely due to obstructive practices by Israeli authorities. These include arbitrary layers of inspections and denials, unexplained delays, unnecessary hurdles, and inconsistency in

green-lighting and vetting aid deliveries. All of this has resulted in what these organizations refer to as a “complex system with multiple potential choke points rather than a good-faith system optimized to maximize aid volumes.”

On top of the blatant methods to impede humanitarian aid, fair and impartial analysts also see through Israel’s pattern of continuous attempts to undermine the work of UNRWA. This was evident with last month’s unsubstantiated and debunked allegations against several agency employees, which was clearly aimed at damaging UNRWA’s reputation and financially strapping it. The organization has long been the target of Israeli hardliners who seek to see it disbanded because it perpetuates the issue of Palestinian refugee return and serves as a constant reminder that Palestinians were forcibly displaced from their ancestral homes. Prior to the onset of the War on Gaza, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described UNRWA in his own words as “an organization that perpetuates the problem of Palestinian refugees and the narrative of the right of return...and therefore UNRWA should be removed from the world.” Now, unsurprisingly, after countries like Sweden and Canada have decided to resume their UNRWA funding, it was revealed this week that the Israeli army has presented a plan for the full dismantling of the agency – merely the latest effort to derail the organization.