

**Research Briefing**

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By Library specialists

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# UK aid to the West Bank and Gaza Strip: FAQs

## Summary

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## Summary

This research briefing addresses frequently asked questions about UK aid to the Occupied Palestinian Territories and support for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in the context of the conflict between Hamas and Israel from 7 October 2023.

The Commons Library research briefing, [2023/24 Israel-Hamas conflict: UK and international response](#) provides a summary of events in the conflict, the UK and international response, negotiations on ceasefires and humanitarian pauses in fighting, and arrangements for the delivery of humanitarian aid.

In line with Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office practice [when reporting past UK aid spending](#), this briefing primarily uses the term “West Bank and Gaza Strip” rather than The Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs).

## What is the humanitarian situation?

The [UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (UNOCHA) publishes daily updates on the humanitarian situation, including the level of humanitarian need, casualties, damage to infrastructure, and aid access (browse its [homepage](#) for ‘flash updates’ and ‘reported impact’). UN agencies report significant infrastructure damage, including to schools and hospitals, a shortage of medical staff, and [an “imminent” risk of famine](#).

Since April 2024, aid is being sent to Gaza through the Rafah, Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings. [Airdrops](#) and a [maritime corridor from Cyprus](#) have also been used. UNOCHA reports that the average number of trucks entering Gaza daily before 7 October were around 500, but since then [the highest daily average for the number of trucks sent has been 183](#), from 5 to 11 April 2024. The UK Government has backed [UN Security Council resolutions](#) demanding an increase of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip and [welcomed Israel’s commitment to increase the number of trucks](#) carrying aid daily to 500.

## What aid has been committed since October?

For 2023/24, the [UK has committed over £100 million in aid](#) to the OPTs (around US\$126 million). A total of [£35 million was provided to UNRWA](#) before funding was suspended in January (see next section). Additional commitments have also been announced by the [United States](#) (US\$180 million) and the [European Union](#) (€103 million, around US\$112 million, for

2023, and [€125 million for 2024](#), US\$136 million). [Germany](#), [France](#), [Canada](#) and [Japan](#) ([PDF](#)) have also pledged aid.

## How does the UK monitor its spending?

The UK Government states [no aid is provided to Hamas](#), who have governed the Gaza Strip since 2007, and who are designated a terrorist organisation by the UK Government and are [subject to UK sanctions](#).

Due to “prioritisation exercises” in the UK aid budget, the [UK Government has not provided direct aid to Palestinian Authority since 2021](#) (the Authority governs the West Bank), though some [technical assistance is provided](#) through commercial organisations.

The UK Government states all UK aid to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip [“undergoes rigorous oversight”](#). This includes [field visits, annual audits, due diligence assessments](#), and [mapping of downstream partners of the funding](#).

The Government also has a [memorandum of understanding with the Palestinian Authority](#), in which the Authority commits to uphold the principles of non-violence, respect international law and commit to taking action against incitement to violence (among other principles of the memorandum). The [UK raises any concerns directly](#) with the Palestinian Authority.

In every year from 2014 to 2022, at least half of UK aid to the West Bank and Gaza Strip [has been delivered through UNRWA](#), rather than through local authorities or civil society groups.

## Suspension of future funding to UNRWA

In January 2024, alongside other donors including the European Union and United States, [the UK said it would pause future funding decisions on UNRWA](#) in response to reports that “several” UNRWA staff were involved in the 7 October Hamas assault against Israel. The agency [called for donor funding to be resumed](#) to ensure the continuity of its work. As of 25 April, the European Union has [resumed its funding](#), as have [Sweden](#), [France](#) and [Germany](#).

The UK Government says [it had made all its planned contributions to UNRWA in the 2023/24 financial year](#) (£35 million) before its decision to pause future funding. Before it decides to resume funding, the Government says [it will consider two UN inquiry assessments](#) and require UNRWA to make “detailed undertakings” on “personnel, policy and precedents”.

The first report of two UN-commissioned investigations was published on 22 April. This [set out 50 recommendations for UNRWA](#), including more screening of UNRWA staff. UNRWA and the UN accepted the recommendations in full, while Israel [argued these were “cosmetic” changes](#) and says it will no longer work with UNRWA. The review also noted that in 2024 Israel had not provided supporting evidence that UNRWA staff were members of terrorist groups. The UK is awaiting both reports and UNRWA’s response [before making a decision](#).

# 1 UK aid to the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 2023/24

In line with the practice of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) [when reporting past UK aid spending](#), this briefing primarily uses the term “West Bank and Gaza Strip” rather than The Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). The FCDO’s forward-plans use the term OPTs.

## 1.1 Where can I find information on the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip?

During active conflicts and because of the challenges that journalists, researchers and civil society organisations have with accessing conflict zones, reports on specific stories and accurate statistics can be difficult to verify.

The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) provides daily updates on casualties, the numbers of internally-displaced people, damage to housing and infrastructure, and other information relating to the humanitarian situation: [Current hostilities in Gaza and Israel: Impact since 7 October 2023](#) (browse the page for ‘flash updates’ and ‘reported impact’).

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) also [issues daily situation reports](#). Unicef also publishes [State of Palestine situation reports](#), with a focus on children and Unicef work.

Several aid agencies continue to work in the Gaza Strip, which publish their own updates and statements. These include [Médecins Sans Frontières](#), the [Palestine Red Crescent Society](#) and the [International Red Cross](#).

### UK Government advice for those making donations

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office page, [Gaza: What you can do to help](#), provides advice for individuals and companies making safe donations to support the humanitarian response in Gaza.

Current casualty figures referenced by UNOCHA in its [‘flash updates’](#) are provided by the Hamas-controlled Gaza health ministry (for Palestinians) and the Israeli Government (for Israelis). UNOCHA says it will [verify final casualty](#)

[figures](#) against “at least two independent and reliable sources” (except in the case of Israeli injuries, which the UNOCHA checks against media reports).<sup>1</sup>

The UN Women report, [Gender alert: The gendered impact of the crisis in Gaza](#), 19 January 2024, compares the current conflict with violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories from 2008 to 7 October 2023. Using figures verified by UNOCHA for this earlier period, UN Women reports that:

In the period from 2008 to 7 October 2023, the UN documented the killings of 6,542 Palestinian civilians in hostilities, with women and girls making up less than 14 per cent of that figure. However, since 7 October, women and children have constituted about 70 per cent of the region’s deaths [[over 26,751 people in Gaza to 1 February 2024](#)].<sup>2</sup>

UN Women also note the “numerous accounts of gender-based atrocities and sexual violence” committed by Hamas on 7 October and the abduction of 65 women by the group.<sup>3</sup> UNOCHA reports over 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals have been killed, including 36 children, since 7 October.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2

## What are the challenges to aid delivery?

As set out in section 1 of the Commons Library briefing on the [2023/24 Israel-Hamas conflict: UK and international response](#), the UN Secretary General, UK Government, and others have raised concerns for the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and the level of aid getting through.

Humanitarian need was high in the Gaza Strip prior to the conflict: UNRWA had planned to provide food assistance to 1.2 million Palestinian refugees in the West Bank in 2023 (out of a population of 2.2 million).<sup>5</sup>

### Which crossing points into Gaza are open for aid?

There are three crossing points in and out of Gaza: Rafah, operated by Egyptian authorities and primarily used for people; Kerem Shalom, a goods crossing between Israel and Gaza; and Erez from Israel, also primarily used for people. From mid-April 2024, all three have been used for aid delivery.

#### Rafah crossing, open from mid-October 2023

Since the Hamas assault on Israel on 7 October 2023, access to the crossing was mostly limited, until, following negotiations between Egypt, Israel and

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<sup>1</sup> UNOCHA, [Data on casualties](#)

<sup>2</sup> UN Women, [Gender alert: The gendered impact of the impact of the crisis in Gaza](#), 19 January 2024, ‘Overview’

<sup>3</sup> UN Women, [Facts and figures: Women and girls during the war in Gaza](#), 19 January 2024

<sup>4</sup> UNOCHA, [Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel, flash update 101](#), 24 January 2024 and [Flash update 100](#), 23 January 2024

<sup>5</sup> UNRWA, [Occupied Palestinian Territory emergency appeal 2023](#), 19 January 2023, p13

the United States, Israel agreed to the reopening of the crossing for limited humanitarian aid on 18 October 2023.<sup>6</sup>

### **Kerem Shalom, open from mid-December**

Further negotiations led to the Kerem Shalom crossing being opened to humanitarian aid from 17 December.<sup>7</sup> The UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths has described Kerem Shalom as “the only crossing equipped to rapidly process a sufficiently large number of trucks” of humanitarian aid.<sup>8</sup>

### **Erez Gate, open from mid- April**

On 4 April, Israel said it would open Erez Gate, between northern Gaza and Israel, to humanitarian aid for the first time since 7 October. The crossing can handle up to fifty trucks a day. Israel says the first deliveries took place through the crossing on 11 April (after being checked at Kerem Shalom).<sup>9</sup>

### **Ashdod Port, open from mid-April**

Ashdod is one of Israel’s main container ports. On 17 April, the first humanitarian aid shipment from the port, of eight trucks, was sent into Gaza (entering via the Kerem Shalom crossing).<sup>10</sup>

Earlier, in January, the US Administration had announced Israel would allow flour to be shipped via Israel’s Ashdod Port.<sup>11</sup>

## **How many trucks are getting into Gaza?**

UNOCHA publishes figures on the number of vehicles carrying aid that have been able to cross into the Gaza Strip. The pre-October average per working day was 500 trucks. The highest daily average (by week) from 7 October 2023 to 5 April 2024 was 173 from 24 to 30 November, during the pause in fighting. Since 5 April, this previous peak was exceeded from 5 to 11 April (183 trucks per day on average that week) and 12 to 18 April (175 trucks).<sup>12</sup>

### **Proposed maritime corridor and US temporary pier**

On 8 March 2024, the US President, Joe Biden, announced that US troops will construct a temporary pier off the coast of the Gaza Strip to increase the delivery of humanitarian aid. Cyprus, the European Commission, Qatar, the

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<sup>6</sup> [Israel will let Egypt deliver some aid to Gaza, as doctors struggle to treat hospital blast victims](#), AP, 18 October 2023

<sup>7</sup> [Aid enters Gaza through Israel’s Kerem Shalom crossing \[...\]](#), Reuters, 17 December 2023

<sup>8</sup> UNOCHA, [Briefing to the UN Security Council \[...\]](#), 30 October 2023

<sup>9</sup> [Israeli military says first aid trucks entered Gaza \[...\]](#), Reuters, 12 April 2024; [Is Israel meeting promise to let more aid into Gaza?](#), BBC News, 12 April 2024

<sup>10</sup> [Humanitarian aid enters Gaza Strip via Ashdod port \[...\]](#), 17 April 2024

<sup>11</sup> White House, [Readout of President Joe Biden’s call \[...\]](#), 19 January 2024

<sup>12</sup> UNOCHA, [Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel: reported humanitarian impact](#), 22 April 2024



United Arab Emirates, and the UK have given their backing. However, these governments also noted that “there is no substitute for land routes”.<sup>13</sup>

The US Department of Defense estimates the pier will take up to 60 days to construct and allow up to 2 million meals per day to be delivered.<sup>14</sup> In April, the UK deployed RFA Cardigan Bay to the region to provide accommodation for US personnel working to establish the pier.<sup>15</sup>

The European Union, the UK and Israel have previously expressed interest in establishing a direct maritime corridor to Gaza from Cyprus.<sup>16</sup> To date, one ship, primarily funded by the United Arab Emirates, has directly reached the Gaza Strip using a separate temporary jetty (arriving on 15 March 2024).<sup>17</sup> Further deliveries were suspended due to safety concerns for aid workers.<sup>18</sup>

### Air drops in the Gaza Strip

Aid is also being delivered through air drops into Gaza, with the UK conducting its first drop of four tonnes of aid alongside the Jordanian air force on 21 February 2024.<sup>19</sup> A single land shipment from Jordan of UK aid on 13 March allowed 150 tonnes to be delivered to Gaza. The UK Government has called for Israel to open more land routes.<sup>20</sup>

## Reductions to supplies and UN operations in Gaza

UNOCHA reports “significant damage” to “critical infrastructure and essential services, affecting people’s ability to maintain their dignity and basic living standards.”<sup>21</sup> On 16 November, the World Food Programme said that “supplies of food and water are practically non-existent in Gaza and only a fraction of what is needed is arriving through the borders.”<sup>22</sup> A lack of fuel also caused a reduction in UN services.<sup>23</sup>

In March 2024 UNOCHA reported continuing access constraints for aid, including “lengthy inspection processes, fuel shortages resulting from Israeli restrictions, restrictions on the movement of trucks”, [and] continuing hostilities. It said that in areas requiring coordination with the Israeli Defence Forces, 26% of requested humanitarian food missions were facilitated by Israel. UNOCHA says Israel denied 40% of other convoys, postponed 20%,

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<sup>13</sup> US State Department, [Joint statement on advancing a maritime corridor \[...\]](#), 13 March 2023

<sup>14</sup> US Department of Defense, [To construct pier to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza](#), 8 March 2024

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Defence, [Royal Navy ship joins international effort \[...\]](#), 26 April 2024

<sup>16</sup> [Screened in Cyprus, British and Cypriot aid heads to Gaza via Egypt](#), Reuters, 2 January 2024; [Israel green-lights Cypriot aid plan for Palestinians \[...\]](#), Politico, 31 December 2023; European Commission, [Statement endorsing the activation of a maritime corridor \[...\]](#), 8 March 2024

<sup>17</sup> UAE Foreign Affairs Ministry, [UAE announce the arrival of first aid ship to Gaza](#), 15 March 2023

<sup>18</sup> [UAE and several charities pause Gaza relief \[...\]](#), Independent, 3 April 2024

<sup>19</sup> FCDO, [UK and Jordan drop life saving aid to Gaza hospital](#), 21 February 2024. A further drop occurred on 25 March 2024: [UK forces airdrop over 10 tonnes of supplies](#), 26 March 2024

<sup>20</sup> FCDO, [Major humanitarian push \[...\]](#), 13 March 2024; HC Deb, [21 March 2024](#), c805

<sup>21</sup> UNOCHA, [Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel: reported impact, day 45](#), 20 November 2023

<sup>22</sup> World Food Programme (WFP), [Gaza faces widespread hunger \[...\], warns WFP](#), 16 November 2023

<sup>23</sup> [UN agencies reduce Gaza aid operations as fuel runs out](#), BBC News, 31 October 2023

impeded 11%, and withdrew 3% due to security concerns, operational constraints, or prevailing restrictions. The total number of missions facilitated by Israel has increased, however, from 74 in January to 191 in March.<sup>24</sup>

## Damage to infrastructure and reduction in services

The UN Satellite Centre estimates that 35% of all buildings in the Gaza Strip have been damaged since 7 October 2023.<sup>25</sup> Damaged infrastructure in the Gaza Strip includes bakeries, health centres, and schools. As of 22 April 2024, UNOCHA says 11 of Gaza’s hospitals are partially functional and 26 are out of service, one out of three water pipelines coming from Israel is operational, and 80% of school buildings have been directly hit or are damaged.<sup>26</sup>

Challenges facing the distribution of aid once it arrives in the Gaza Strip include a lack of fuel, damage to infrastructure and roads, some break-ins at UN warehouses, and displaced Palestinians being housed in UN buildings.<sup>27</sup>

## Deaths of seven aid workers, 1 April 2024

UNOCHA report 249 aid workers and 499 health workers have been killed during the conflict from 7 October 2023 to 22 April 2024.<sup>28</sup>

On 1 April, seven aid workers (three of whom were British) were killed in an Israeli air strike in Gaza while distributing aid. The UK Government summoned the Israeli ambassador in response, “condemned” the attack, and called for the “immediate” creation of a deconfliction mechanism.<sup>29</sup>

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak also spoke to Mr Netanyahu, stating he was “appalled” by the killing of aid workers and demanded a “thorough and transparent independent investigation” into the events.<sup>30</sup> The Israeli Government said the attack was a “grave mistake” and will be investigated.<sup>31</sup>

Following a phone call between President Biden and Prime Minister Netanyahu, on 4 April Israel said it would open more aid corridors in Gaza. President Biden said, “US policy with respect to Gaza will be determined by our assessment of Israel’s immediate action on these and other steps”.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>24</sup> UNOCHA, [Humanitarian access snapshot-Gaza strip—1-31 March 2024](#), 6 April 2024; [Humanitarian access snapshot—Gaza Strip, end-February 2024](#), 6 March 2024

<sup>25</sup> UN Institute for Training and Research, [35% of buildings affected in Gaza Strip](#), 20 March 2024

<sup>26</sup> UNOCHA, [Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel: reported humanitarian impact](#), 22 April 2024

<sup>27</sup> [Gaza aid distribution struggles amid overcrowding, debris, lack of fuel](#), Reuters, 31 October 2023

<sup>28</sup> UNOCHA, [Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel: reported humanitarian impact](#), 22 April 2024

<sup>29</sup> FCDO, [ECDO summons Israeli ambassador over death of aid workers](#), 2 April 2024

<sup>30</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [PM call with Prime Minister Netanyahu](#), 2 April 2024

<sup>31</sup> [Israel acknowledges killing seven aid charity workers \[...\]](#), Times of Israel, 2 April 2024

<sup>32</sup> White House, [Statement from National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson \[...\]](#), 4 April 2024

## High humanitarian need in the wider region

The Occupied Palestinian Territories and neighbouring states host an already high number of refugees, including 5.9 million Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA (2.5 million are based in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank).

The following are registered with UNRWA, which is mandated solely to support Palestinian refugees: Jordan 3.1 million, Lebanon 1.3 million, and Syria 600,000 (in addition to the nearly 7 million Syrians internally displaced due to its civil war). Egypt currently hosts around 300,000 refugees registered with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), around half of whom are from Syria.<sup>33</sup>

UNRWA and other agencies supporting the general refugee population have been subject to funding pressures (see section 2 of this briefing) which have affected its support it can provide.<sup>34</sup> Jordan's government has also warned of increasing water scarcity due to population pressures.<sup>35</sup>

### General resources on humanitarian need in the OPTs

- UN, [\\$2.8 billion appeal for three million people in Gaza, West Bank](#), 17 April 2024
- World Bank, [Gaza Strip interim damage assessment](#) (PDF), March 2024
- UNOCHA, [Occupied Palestinian Territories: Humanitarian response plan](#), January 2023. It estimated 2.1 million people were in humanitarian need.
- UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), [Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people: Developments in the economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#), September 2023. Provides background on the economy, unemployment, and poverty.
- Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [UK-Occupied Palestinian Territories development partnership summary](#), July 2023. UK profile of humanitarian need in the OPTs and UK aid.

<sup>33</sup> UNHCR, [Refugees and other persons displaced by country—mid 2023](#) and UNHCR, [Egypt factsheet](#) 26 June 2023. Aside from Egypt, all figures for refugees registered with the UNHCR or the UNRWA.

<sup>34</sup> World Food Programme, [Tight funding forces WFP to reduce food assistance](#), 18 July 2023

<sup>35</sup> See the IDC, [UK aid for refugee host countries](#), HC 426, 26 May 2023, section 2 to 4 for Jordan, Lebanon and the OPTs and [Government response](#), 30 August 2023.

## 1.3

## What has the UK Government said about aid delivery?

### Committee reports and statements

On 1 March 2024, the Commons International Development Committee (IDC) published a [report on the humanitarian situation in Gaza](#).

The Committee noted the challenges and delays in the delivery of aid through land crossings and the “drop in the ocean” represented by air drops of aid.<sup>36</sup>

The Committee recommended that the UK Government call for all existing land crossings to be opened and put pressure on Israel “to speed up the progress of aid through checkpoints and border crossings”. It argued that “current border restrictions make it impossible to avert a famine”.

The Committee also noted also called for the UK to convene a recovery conference for Gaza, on the [model of that for Ukraine](#).<sup>37</sup>

The Foreign Affairs Committee Chair, Alicia Kearns, has also raised concerns for “Israel’s arbitrary denials and lengthy clearance processes” for aid trucks into Gaza and said Israel should open Ashdod port for humanitarian aid.<sup>38</sup>

### UK Government assessment

The Government has not yet published a formal response to the IDC. It has called for humanitarian pauses to allow the increased delivery of aid. The UK Government has also appointed a representative for humanitarian affairs in the OPTs, Mark Bryson-Richardson, to identify “bottlenecks” at the crossing points.<sup>39</sup>

In March 2024, during proceedings in the House of Lords and in correspondence with the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, the Foreign Secretary, Lord Cameron, said while getting aid into Gaza and organising its effective distribution is complex, Israel “is the country that could make the greatest difference”. He argued the Israeli Government should:

- Open Ashdod port (a port in Israel, as [part of a proposed maritime corridor](#)—this was opened to aid in April 2024).

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<sup>36</sup> This and next paragraph from International Development Committee, [Humanitarian situation in Gaza](#), HC 110, 1 March 2024, paras 5, 7-12, 16, 33

<sup>37</sup> As above, para 69

<sup>38</sup> Foreign Affairs Committee, [Foreign Secretary: “Enormous frustration” at arbitrary denials of aid by Israel](#), 21 March 2024

<sup>39</sup> FCDO, [Israel must act now to let aid through and save lives in Gaza \[...\]](#), 12 January 2024

- Issue more visas to UN workers capable of delivering humanitarian aid when it reaches Gaza.<sup>40</sup>

The Foreign Secretary also said that it is of “enormous frustration” to the UK Government that “UK aid for Gaza has been routinely held up waiting for Israeli permissions” at border crossings. He said that:

The main blockers remain arbitrary denials by the Government of Israel and lengthy procedures, including multiple screenings and narrow opening windows in daylight hours [...]

Increasing the number of trucks going into Gaza is vital [...] The Prime Minister [Rishi Sunak] and I [the Foreign Secretary] have raised this consistently with the Government of Israel.<sup>41</sup>

The Minister for International Development, Andrew Mitchell, also says the UK has been requesting Israel open Erez land crossing into northern Gaza and restore water, fuel, and electricity connections.<sup>42</sup>

The Israeli Government says it is actively facilitating the delivery of aid to Gaza and accuses Hamas of hoarding and diverting aid.<sup>43</sup> In March 2024, an Israeli Defence Forces spokesperson said Israel will “flood” Gaza with aid.<sup>44</sup>

In April, the UK Government welcomed the announcement by the Israeli Government that it would open the Port of Ashdod and Erez checkpoint for aid and its commitment to increase the number of trucks delivering aid to at least 500 a day.<sup>45</sup>

## 1.4 How much UK aid is planned for 2023/24?

The FCDO reports on UK aid to the Occupied Palestinian Territories as a whole, rather than between the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The UK Government says it has pledged “more than” £100 million in aid to the OPTs in 2023/24.<sup>46</sup> The FCDO’s summary page, [Humanitarian situation in Gaza](#), currently details aid totalling £97 million. Before the Hamas assault in Israel on 7 October 2023, the UK had pledged £27 million for the OPTs in two separate announcements in July and September 2023.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> HL Deb, [12 March 2024](#), c1913

<sup>41</sup> [Foreign Secretary to Foreign Affairs Committee, letter of 15 March 2024](#) (PDF)

<sup>42</sup> PQ 16258 [[Gaza: Humanitarian aid](#)], 7 March 2024

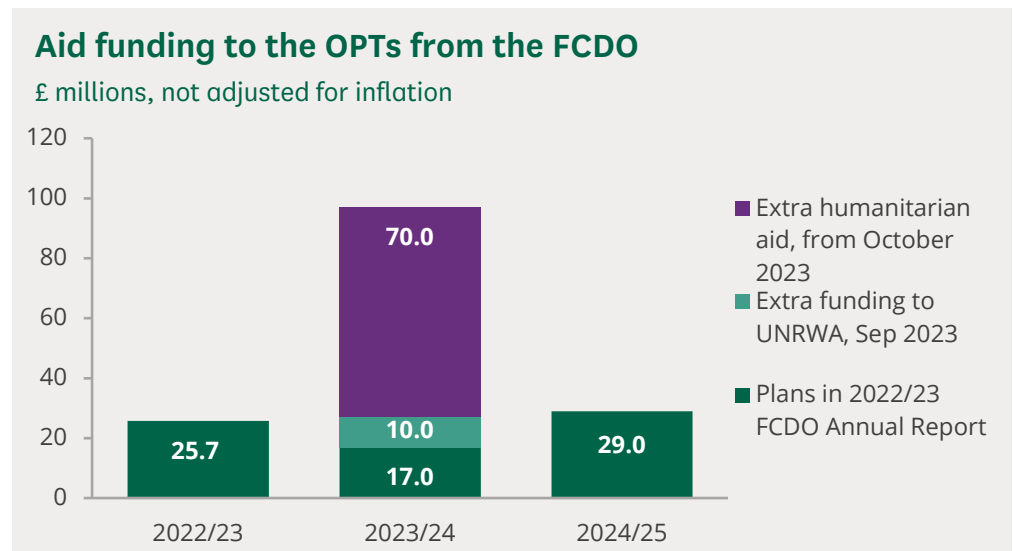
<sup>43</sup> Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Hammas-Israel conflict 2023: FAQs](#), 8 December 2023

<sup>44</sup> [Israel says it intends to ‘flood’ Gaza with humanitarian aid](#), Haaretz, 13 March 2024

<sup>45</sup> FCDO, [Foreign Secretary responds to Israeli changes on aid access](#), 5 April 2024

<sup>46</sup> FCDO, [Major humanitarian push as 150 tonnes of UK aid enter Gaza](#), 13 March 2024

<sup>47</sup> FCDO, [Annual report and accounts 2022 to 2023](#), July 2023, p268 and FCDO, [Foreign Secretary announces new support for almost 6 million Palestinian refugees](#), 13 September 2023



Sources: FCDO, [Annual report and accounts 2022 to 2023](#), July 2023, p268, FCDO, [Foreign Secretary announces new support for almost 6 million Palestinian refugees](#), 13 September 2023, FCDO, [Humanitarian situation in Gaza: The UK government's response](#), updated 20 March 2024

The Government says 80% of its aid in 2023/24 will be spent to address humanitarian need, or to provide health, education, or protection services for Palestinian refugees.<sup>48</sup> It will be spent through “trusted partners”, such as UN agencies.<sup>49</sup>

The Government says its funding includes £7.8 million to the UN Children’s Fund, Unicef, £8.3 million to the World Food Programme and £7.8 million to the Red Cross/Red Crescent.<sup>50</sup> It also provides £35 million to UNRWA in 2023/24.<sup>51</sup> The UK has also funded the establishment of a field hospital.<sup>52</sup>

Separately, the Scottish Government has announced £750,000 towards UNRWA in the Gaza Strip.<sup>53</sup>

## 1.5

## How much aid has the UK provided previously?

### UK bilateral aid

From 2009 to 2022, the UK provided a total of £776.9 million in bilateral aid (aid for a specific programme or purpose) to the West Bank and Gaza Strip.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>48</sup> PQ 1280 [[Gaza: Humanitarian aid](#)], 17 November 2023

<sup>49</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [UK announces £10m humanitarian aid for civilians in Occupied Palestinian Territories](#), 16 October 2023

<sup>50</sup> PQ 14108 [[Gaza: Humanitarian aid](#)], 21 February 2024

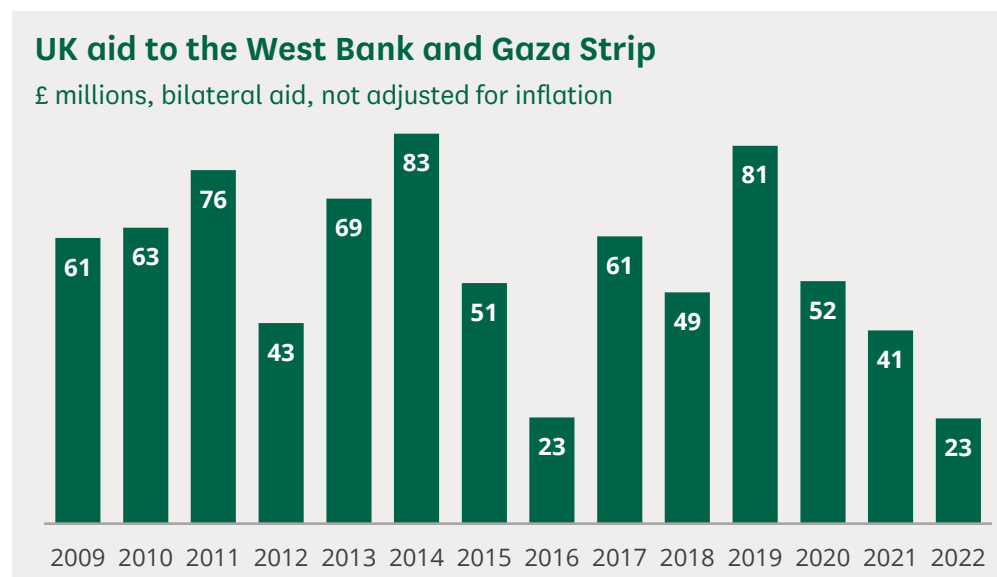
<sup>51</sup> PQ 18533 [[UNRWA: Finance](#)], 13 March 2023

<sup>52</sup> FCDO, [Largest UK aid delivery enters Gaza to feed 275,000 people](#), 20 March 2024

<sup>53</sup> Scottish Government, [Humanitarian aid for Gaza](#), 2 November 2023

<sup>54</sup> For the [purposes of aid reporting](#), the FCDO uses the term “West Bank and Gaza Strip”.

The amounts given have varied over time but have decreased in recent years. In 2022, the UK gave £22.5 million, the lowest amount in any year since 2009 (in 2016, the UK provided £22.7 million).



Source: FCDO, [Statistics on international development](#), various years

## UK aid through other channels

In addition to bilateral aid for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the UK also provides support through multilateral organisations such as the [UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East](#) (UNRWA). For more on UNRWA, see sections 2 and 3.

As the chart below shows, total UK bilateral aid and contributions to the core budget of UNRWA totalled £1,663 million from 2009 to 2022. In recent years, UK aid to UNRWA totalled £95.1 million in 2019, £87 million in 2020, £39.7 million in 2021 and £26 million in 2022.<sup>55</sup>

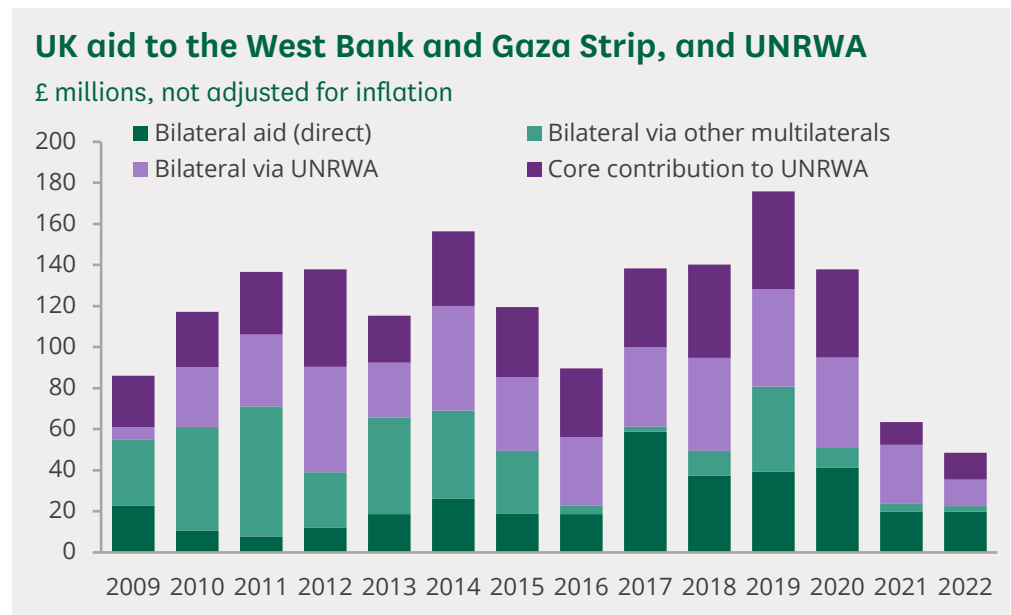
Not all aid provided to UNRWA’s core budget will have been spent in the OPTs, because the agency also provides support to Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and elsewhere in the Middle East.

Both total UK aid to the OPTs and core contributions to UNRWA peaked in 2019. In the three years since then, levels of aid have fallen, and in 2022 were lower than at any point since at least 2009. The Government said its spending allocations were made in line with “UK strategic priorities against a challenging financial climate”.<sup>56</sup>

In every year since 2014, at least half of the aid listed above has gone either to UNRWA directly or to other organisations via it.

<sup>55</sup> For financial years, see PQ 18833 [[UNRWA: Finance](#)], 25 March 2024

<sup>56</sup> PQ 59762 [[Palestinians: Development aid](#)], 13 October 2022



Source: FCDO, [Statistics on international development](#), various years.

## 1.6

## What is UK aid spent on?

### UK aid strategy and priorities

The FCDO has six specific aims for its work in the OPTs which are set out in the 2023 [UK–OPTs development partnership summary](#). Note the Palestinian Authority only governs the West Bank. Hamas governs the Gaza Strip.

1. Limit deterioration in security across the OPTs: through supporting a more accountable and inclusive PA [Palestinian Authority] security service.
2. A viable and more transparent and accountable Palestinian Authority, supported by a strong and open civil society: through technical assistance and expertise and through strengthening the capacity of civil society.
3. Reduced degradation of Palestinian rights, access to land and identity and promote adherence to international law.
4. Improve inclusive economic opportunities for Palestinians through: trade; investment; and infrastructure, particularly renewable energy and clean water.
5. Limit deterioration of humanitarian needs and sustain protection of Palestinian refugees, through policy engagement and funding support to UNRWA; responding to humanitarian crises; child focused social protection; and strengthening mental health services.



6. Promote UK values and soft power: through increased empowerment of women and inclusion; improving the quality of education; and promoting climate resilience.<sup>57</sup>

## Thematic and programme spending

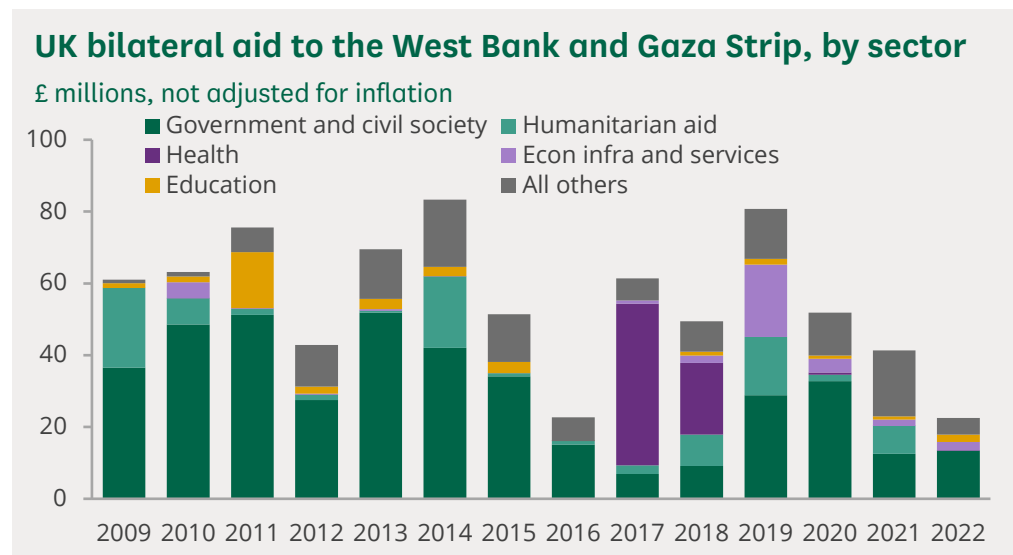
Most UK bilateral aid from 2009 to 2022 has been for the government and civil society sector (53%), followed by humanitarian aid (12%).<sup>58</sup>

For the most recent year of aid spending (2022), the largest single UK aid project was for technical assistance to improve the Palestinian Authority’s public financial management (£3.3 million, 15% of the total in that year). The second largest programme was the [British Council](#) (£2.5 million) and the third support to improve trade and customs (£2.5 million).

For a list of UK programmes, see the FCDO’s [page on the OPTs](#).

There have been years when sectors other than ‘government and civil society’ have been dominant. However, this may be at least partly because of how projects appear in the published statistics.

For example, health appears to dominate the statistics in 2017, but this is because the UK’s entire £45 million payment in financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority in that year was categorised in the UK’s published data under health. The sectoral breakdown is different in [the FCDO’s webpage covering this payment](#), implying that this categorisation may have changed.



Source: FCDO, [Statistics on international development](#), various years

<sup>57</sup> FCDO, [UK-OPT development partnership summary](#), 17 July 2023

<sup>58</sup> This section sourced from FCDO, [Statistics on international development](#), various years

## 1.7

## How is UK aid spent and monitored?

### No direct aid to Hamas

No UK aid is provided to Hamas, which governs the Gaza Strip and is a proscribed terrorist group in the UK and subject to UK sanctions.<sup>59</sup> The UK Government says the proscription of Hamas does not impede the ability of international non-governmental organisations to deliver legitimate humanitarian aid to the population.<sup>60</sup>

On 14 November 2023 the UK issued a general licence to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and funding from the UN and other select humanitarian organisations to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This licence provides for limited exemptions from the UK sanctions regime for humanitarian funding and material only.<sup>61</sup>

### Monitoring of UK aid and steps to avoid aid diversion

The Government says all funding to the OPTs “undergoes rigorous oversight”.<sup>62</sup> In the Gaza Strip, the Government states it has:

strong controls in place to monitor spending, including enhanced due diligence assessments, annual audits, and field visits; all to ensure UK aid reaches its intended beneficiaries and achieves value for money for the UK taxpayer. The UK’s funding agreements also commit partners to understand and comply with UK and international counter terrorism legislation.<sup>63</sup>

The Government says additional safeguards were introduced in 2017. These include “measures to verify and map downstream partners, non-payment of local taxes, and enhanced due-diligence processes”.<sup>64</sup>

In January 2024, the Government said it had “no information” to indicate any UK aid to Gaza since 2019 had been used for unintended purposes.<sup>65</sup>

The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI), which is responsible for scrutiny UK aid spending, said it would publish an information note on the effectiveness of UK aid spending in the Gaza Strip in May 2024.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Home Office, [Islamist terrorist group Hamas banned in the UK](#), 26 November 2021 and HM Treasury, [Current list of designated persons: Counter terrorism \(international\)](#), 16 June 2022, pp3-4

<sup>60</sup> PQ 118512 [[Non-governmental organisations: Gaza](#)], 4 February 2022

<sup>61</sup> Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation and FCDO, [OFSI General Licence INT/2023/3749168](#), 14 November 2023

<sup>62</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [UK announces £10m humanitarian aid for civilians in Occupied Palestinian Territories](#), 16 October 2023

<sup>63</sup> PQ 94457 [[Gaza: Humanitarian aid](#)], 11 January 2022

<sup>64</sup> HC Deb, [8 November 2023](#), c140

<sup>65</sup> PQ 9172 [[Gaza: Humanitarian aid](#)], 17 January 2024

<sup>66</sup> ICAI, [UK humanitarian aid to Gaza](#), updated 4 April 2024

## No direct aid to the Palestinian Authority since 2021

Since March 2021, the UK has not provided aid to the Palestinian Authority, which governs the West Bank, although has provided some technical assistance and advice programmes to improve the Authority’s transparency and accountability.<sup>67</sup> These programmes are provided through commercial suppliers.<sup>68</sup>

The Government ended aid to the Palestinian Authority in 2021 as a result of “prioritisation exercises” in the UK aid budget as part of the [reduction in aid spending from 0.7% of Gross National Income to 0.5%](#).<sup>69</sup>

In 2017 around £45 million was provided in financial aid to the Authority, with further payments of £20 million in each of 2018, 2019 and 2020.<sup>70</sup>

## Memorandum of understanding with the Palestinian Authority

Before March 2021, aid to the Palestinian Authority was provided under a Memorandum of Understanding with the FCDO. This had eight commitments, including for the participants to:

- Uphold the principle of non-violence and seeks a negotiated two-state solution to the Palestinian- Israeli conflict;
- Respect international law, relevant resolutions, previous agreements and obligations; and
- Commit to action against incitement to violence, including addressing allegations of incitement in the education curriculum [see below, page 17].<sup>71</sup>

The UK Government has not published its assessment on the adherence of the Authority to these principles, though has raised concerns directly.<sup>72</sup>

In response to parliamentary questions, in 2021 the Government said the Palestinian Authority “continues to demonstrate a credible commitment to our agreements”, including against inciting violence or hatred.<sup>73</sup> In 2022 the Government judged the Authority had a “partially credible” commitment to the principles but cited weaknesses such as human rights abuses and domestic accountability.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> FCDO, [UK-OPT development partnership summary](#), 17 July 2023

<sup>68</sup> PQ HL10142 [[Palestinians: Development aid](#)], 27 September 2023

<sup>69</sup> PQ HL10489 [[Palestinians: Development aid](#)], 26 October 2023

<sup>70</sup> FCDO, [Statistics on international development](#), various years

<sup>71</sup> FCDO, [Support to the Palestinian Authority to deliver basic services \[...\]: Memoranda of understanding](#), March 2022

<sup>72</sup> PQ 135435 [[Development aid](#)], 16 March 2022

<sup>73</sup> PQ 49946 [[Palestinian Authority](#)], 23 September 2021

<sup>74</sup> PQ 63915 [[Palestinians: Development aid](#)], 25 October 2022

In the past, the UK has also used a dedicated bank account for aid for the Palestinian Authority's health and education sectors, which was only paid to workers who had been vetted. Each payment was individually audited to ensure it reached the intended recipient. The UK Government said: "this rigorous process means we are confident no UK aid is being diverted".<sup>75</sup>

## Questions on UK aid spending

### Content of Palestinian school textbooks

In March 2020 and June 2021, the House of Commons debated the content of Palestinian school textbooks in response to reports that they may incite racial hatred or violence.<sup>76</sup>

Several studies of the content of Palestinian textbooks have been undertaken.<sup>77</sup> Published in 2021, the [Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research](#) was commissioned by the EU and backed by the UK Government. The Institute said its analysis of Palestinian textbooks "revealed a complex picture":

- 1) the textbooks adhere to UNESCO standards and adopt criteria that are prominent in international education discourse, including a strong focus on human rights, 2) they express a narrative of resistance within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and 3) they display an antagonism towards Israel.<sup>78</sup>

Both the EU and UK welcomed the report, with the UK Government stating it "highlights meaningful progress [in the content of textbooks] but also indicates that problematic content remains."<sup>79</sup>

The Government said it did not fund any educational material issued by the Palestinian Authority and raises its concerns directly with it. The Government also said that it accompanies UK support to UNRWA with "stringent attention to implementation of their neutrality policy, including how they apply this to textbooks".<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> PQ 64066 [[Palestinians: Development aid](#)], 1 June 2020

<sup>76</sup> HC Deb, [Palestinian School curriculum: Radicalisation](#), 10 March 2020, cc51-75WH and HC Deb, [30 June 2021](#), cc44WH-66WH

<sup>77</sup> For example, those undertaken by the [Israeli-based NGO, the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education \(IMPACT-se\)](#), and statements of reviews by UNRWA, [UNRWA improves safeguards on ensuring adherence of educational materials with UN principles](#), 14 January 2021

<sup>78</sup> Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, [Report on Palestinian textbooks](#), 2021, executive summary. The summary and full report expands on the conclusions quoted here.

<sup>79</sup> PQ 15315 [[Palestinians: Textbooks](#)], 20 June 2022 and EU reporter, [Lawmakers call on the EU to make report on antisemitic Palestinian school textbooks public](#), 16 June 2021

<sup>80</sup> PQ 15315 [[Palestinians: Textbooks](#)], 20 June 2022

For more information and reviews of educational material, see the Commons Library briefing on [EU review into Palestinian school textbooks](#), June 2021 and below, section 3.2

### **Palestinian Authority’s ‘Martyrs Fund’**

The [Palestinian Authority’s Amended Basic Law of 2003](#) guarantees welfare support for the “families of martyrs, prisoners of war, injured and disabled”, including education, health and social insurance.

The United States and Israeli Governments argue these payments incentivise and reward terrorism, particularly given the higher payments for longer prison sentences.<sup>81</sup> In 2018, the United States introduced the [Taylor Force Act](#), which suspends US aid to the Palestinian Authority so long as it continues to implement the existing prisoner payment policy. The Palestinian Authority has defended the payments as “support for the victims of the occupation”.<sup>82</sup>

The UK Government states that, “no UK aid is used for payments to Palestinian prisoners, or their families or the Martyrs Fund, nor has it ever been”.<sup>83</sup>

It has called for reform. In December 2022 the UK Government said it raises the prisoner payments system “at the highest level” of the Palestinian Authority:

Our clear and long-standing message to the Palestinian Authority (PA) is that the prisoner payments system should be reformed so that it is needs based, transparent and affordable. We continue to raise this with the highest levels of the PA, most recently the British Consulate General Jerusalem raised the matter with the Palestinian Prime Minister’s Office in December 2022. We also have robust safeguards in place to ensure that no UK aid is used for payments to Palestinian prisoners, or their families or the Martyrs Fund and will continue to raise this at the highest level.<sup>84</sup>

## **UK spending via UN agencies**

The UK also seeks to control and monitor aid spending through using multilateral organisations such as the UN to deliver aid. These include UNRWA (see sections 2 and 3).

In 2022, aid also went through the World Bank’s [International Bank for Reconstruction and Development](#), various UN agencies, non-governmental

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<sup>81</sup> US Department of State, [Country reports on terrorism 2021: Israel, West Bank and Gaza](#), 2022; [Full text of Netanyahu’s 2018 address to AIPAC](#), Times of Israel, 6 March 2018

<sup>82</sup> [Statement by Mahmoud Abbas President of the State of Palestine to the UN General Assembly General debate](#) (PDF), 24 September 2021

<sup>83</sup> PQ HL10141 [[Palestinians: Development aid](#)], 27 September 2023

<sup>84</sup> PQ 112078 [[Palestinians: Terrorism](#)], 30 December 2022

organisations both within the OPTs and elsewhere, and UK-based institutions such as the British Council.<sup>85</sup>

The FCDO says it has an agreement in place with UNRWA on fraud reporting, including quarterly monitoring visits.<sup>86</sup> In response to a parliamentary question in October 2023 on monitoring spending by UNRWA, the International Development Minister, Andrew Mitchell, said:

UNRWA operates in difficult circumstances, but I can tell him [Stephen Crabb MP] that we talk to it all the time about the proper use of these resources and we will do everything we can always to make sure that they go to the intended place.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Internal UK Government aid includes the Ministry of Defence's British Support Team providing training to the Palestinian Authority Security Forces, as mentioned in [PQ HL8534](#) from June 2018.

<sup>86</sup> FCDO Development Tracker, [Annual review 20456-published July 2022](#), section B

<sup>87</sup> HC Deb, [24 October 2023](#), c721

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## 2 UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)

For the allegations made against several UNRWA staff involvement in the 7 October assault against Israel, the suspension of funding by some donors, and subsequent UN reviews and response, see below, section 3.

### 2.1 What does UNRWA do?

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established in 1949 to carry out direct and relief works programmes for Palestinian refugees.<sup>88</sup>

Around 5.9 million refugees are eligible for its support, and it works across the West Bank and Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria to support them. It runs around 700 schools and 140 primary health care facilities and provides 1.8 million refugees with emergency food and cash assistance. This includes 1.2 million refugees in the Gaza Strip and 417,000 in Syria (2021 data).<sup>89</sup>

There is high humanitarian need in some of the populations it helps. For example, 93% of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live in poverty according to the December 2022 UNRWA survey.<sup>90</sup>

### 2.2 How is the agency funded?

UNRWA is not part of the [UN Assessed Contributions System](#), meaning its projects, operations and appeals are funded by voluntary contributions.<sup>91</sup>

UNRWA is primarily funded through contributions from UN member states, as well as the European Union. These constitute around 93% of the agency's funds. The remainder comes from other UN agencies and some businesses, charities, and individuals.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> UNRWA, [Palestinian refugees](#)

<sup>89</sup> UNRWA, [In action](#) (PDF)

<sup>90</sup> UNRWA, [Lebanon: UNRWA—Protection monitoring report](#), Q4 2022, 6 December 2022

<sup>91</sup> UNRWA, [FAQs](#)

<sup>92</sup> UNRWA, [How we are funded](#), accessed 8 August 2023

## 2.3

## What is the state of the agency's finances?

In June 2023, UNRWA said it had suffered from “ten years of chronic underfunding.” It said this impacted on the quality of its services, restricted its cash assistance programmes, led to larger class sizes for schoolchildren, and a struggle to “address emerging crises”, including the legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic on education.<sup>93</sup>

The agency cannot borrow money to fund its work and so, where there are shortfalls, it has either delayed payments to suppliers or reduced wages for its workers.<sup>94</sup> Funding shortfalls meant UNRWA began 2023 with a debt of US\$75 million.<sup>95</sup>

Funding has fallen from several sources in recent years:

- In 2018, the Trump Administration announced it would no longer fund the agency, arguing it was “irredeemably flawed.” The US has historically been the largest donor to UNRWA.<sup>96</sup> In 2021, the Biden Administration re-started funding to UNRWA.<sup>97</sup>
- Some Arab Gulf States have also reduced funding over the period.<sup>98</sup> Saudi Arabia, for example, pledged US\$160 million in 2018, and made smaller pledges in each subsequent year, falling to US\$27 million in 2022. It made no pledge in 2021. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) pledged US\$54 million in 2018, US\$52 million in 2019, and fell to US\$1 million in 2020. No pledges were made by the UAE in 2021 and 2022.<sup>99</sup>
- The UK contribution has also fallen. In 2021, it stood at £28.7 million in 2021. This was down from £50.1 million in 2020, £60.5 million in 2019, and £70.3 million in 2018. In October 2022, UNRWA said that “a return by the UK to its 2018 level of funding would cover approximately half of UNRWA financial gap in 2022.”<sup>100</sup>

In 2023, the Commons IDC has said a new funding model for the agency should be developed:

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<sup>93</sup> UNRWA, [Pledges at funding conference not sufficient to cover UNRWA financial requirements from September onwards](#), 2 June 2023

<sup>94</sup> [UNRWA warns its deficit hurts refugees as it calls for steady funding](#), Devex, 11 March 2022 and International Crisis Group, [UNRWA's reckoning: Preserving the UN agency serving Palestinian refugees](#), 15 September 2023

<sup>95</sup> Brookings, [In one move, Trump eliminated US funding for UNRWA and the US role as Mideast peacemaker](#), 7 September 2018 and [UNRWA warns its deficit hurts refugees as it calls for steady funding](#), Devex, 11 March 2022. See p17 of the Congressional Research Service's [The Palestinians: Background and US relations](#) (PDF), updated 27 October 2022

<sup>96</sup> [US ends all funding to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees](#), CNN, 1 September 2018

<sup>97</sup> [Biden Administration to restore \\$235m in US aid to Palestinians](#), BBC News, 7 April 2021

<sup>98</sup> [UNRWA warns its deficit hurts refugees as it calls for steady funding](#), Devex, 11 March 2022

<sup>99</sup> UNRWA, [UNRWA funding donor charts, 2018-2022](#) (figures for end of calendar year).

<sup>100</sup> [UNRWA evidence to the IDC](#), 11 October 2022, p2



The cycle of mandate renewal and funding pledges fails to provide long-term certainty for UNRWA and is a flawed model for providing municipal-style services. When donors reduce funding to UNRWA, UNRWA cannot exclude beneficiaries from receiving essential services, but it does not have the means to continue providing these services at the same level and with the same quality [...] We heard stark warnings about the risk of radicalised groups stepping into the void, with potentially dangerous consequences.<sup>101</sup>

In its October 2023 response to the Committee, the Government said it “remain[ed] concerned by the financial situation of the agency” and would work to mobilise funding for UNRWA and diversify its sources of income.<sup>102</sup>

## 2.4 How has UNRWA responded to the 2023/24 conflict?

### Statements and activities

In response to the Israel-Hamas conflict in 2023/24, UNRWA has:

- Called for an “immediate humanitarian ceasefire” and delivery of aid, including fuel, to the Gaza Strip.
- Called for an adherence to international law and for the release of hostages held by Hamas.
- Called for “adequate financial resources to lead the humanitarian response”.<sup>103</sup>
- Said around 3,000 staff in the Gaza Strip are reporting for work daily.<sup>104</sup>

UNRWA states that 180 of its staff have been killed since 7 October (to 21 April 2024).<sup>105</sup>

More information on UNRWA’s activities and assessment of the situation in the Gaza Strip during 2023 and 2024 can be found in its [daily situation reports](#) (browse its homepage for ‘UNRWA situation report’).

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<sup>101</sup> IDC, [UK aid for refugee host countries](#), HC 426, 26 May 2023, para 40

<sup>102</sup> [FCDO response to the IDC report on UK aid for refugee host countries](#), 20 October 2023

<sup>103</sup> UN, [More funding urgently needed as UNRWA struggles \[...\]](#), 3 November 2023

<sup>104</sup> UNOCHA, [Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel, flash update 104](#), 28 January 2024

<sup>105</sup> UNRWA, [Situation report 103](#), 23 April 2024 =

## 2.5

## Evaluations of UNRWA

**Henry Jackson Society, 2020**

Simon Waldman, an associate fellow of the [UK-based Henry Jackson Society think tank](#), published a critical report on UNRWA in 2020: [UNRWA's future reconsidered](#).

Its criticisms focused on financial mismanagement, the funding of Palestinian textbooks that have been criticised as promoting radicalisation, and allegations that UNRWA staff have supported violent action against Israelis. The report argued that UNRWA is “detrimental to the two-state formulation for peace in the region.”<sup>106</sup>

Speaking in November 2023, UNRWA Commissioner-General, Philippe Lazzarini, described claims that “its schools teach hatred” as “false and insidious” and that UNRWA “is committed to upholding UN humanitarian principles” and has “zero tolerance for hate speech, racism and incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence”.<sup>107</sup>

**International Development Committee Chair, 2022**

UNRWA was considered in an adjournment debate in the Commons in June 2022. The Chair of the International Development Committee, Sarah Champion, said she had “no doubt” UNRWA was an example of “money being well spent”.<sup>108</sup> The Chair said the agency played an important role in ensuring stability in the region and contributes to a two-state solution:

Without UNRWA, we risk destabilising the region further and emboldening those who do not share our belief that the best way to bring peace and stability to the region is through a political resolution to the conflict. [...] If we are to remain committed to our vision of two states, surely we should provide support to UNRWA, which has proved itself a reliable partner by which the international community can address the refugee constituency.<sup>109</sup>

In response to the 2022 debate, then Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Minister Vicky Ford said the UK is a “long standing supporter” of the agency and “value[s] the vital role it plays as a humanitarian service and a stabilising force in the region.”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Henry Jackson Society, [UNRWA's future reconsidered](#), 23 February 2020

<sup>107</sup> UNRWA, [Statement of Mr Philippe Lazzarini the Commissioner-General \[...\]](#), 11 November 2023 and UNRWA, [Remarks by UNRWA Commissioner-General \[...\]](#), 16 November 2023

<sup>108</sup> HC Deb, [15 June 2022](#), c175WH

<sup>109</sup> HC Deb, [15 June 2022](#), c178WH

<sup>110</sup> HC Deb, [15 June 2022](#), c180WH

## FCDO assessment of UK-funded work, covering 2020

Information on the FCDO's funding and evaluations of UNRWA can be found on its development tracker website under two programmes:

- [Supporting Palestinian refugees across the Middle East—in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria](#), last updated December 2022.
- [UK support for Palestinian refugees, 2022 to 2025](#), last updated December 2022. No annual report has been published to date.

The first programme's most recent published annual report covers 2020. The report's conclusions include the following:

- The agency “delivered human development assistance rapidly and effectively” by drawing on its operational strengths, in particular its workforce, despite the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- UNRWA had a “strength as a frontline service provider” and successfully innovated and adjusted service provision to meet the changing needs of the pandemic.
- Areas where UNRWA underachieved “can be largely attributed to the deteriorating financial situation the agency faces” as well as the pressures of the pandemic on its operations and finances.
- The FCDO scored the project “A” (the second possible highest rating) and judged it “met expectations” of the department.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> FCDO Development Tracker, [Annual review 20456-published July 2022](#), p1

## 3 UN reviews of UNRWA's neutrality, 2024

### 3.1 Allegations and creation of reviews, January

On 26 January 2024, UNRWA announced an investigation following reports that “several” of its employees were involved in the 7 October Hamas assault on Israel. UNRWA Commissioner General, Philippe Lazzarini, said the agency “immediately terminated” the contracts of the staff members and said any staff member who was involved in acts of terror would be held accountable, including through criminal prosecution.<sup>112</sup>

The agency said 12 UNRWA staff were implicated: nine were immediately identified, one was confirmed dead and the identities of two others were being clarified.<sup>113</sup> Two reviews were announced:

- An Independent Review Group (the “Colonna review”), appointed by the UN Secretary General, in consultation with UNRWA Commissioner General, led by former French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna.<sup>114</sup>
- A review by the [UN Office of Internal Oversight Services](#). This will produce a report which will not be published. It will make recommendations for the UN Secretary General to take forward. It is ongoing.<sup>115</sup>

These are in addition to a separate review announced by UNRWA on 17 January, which will consider the agency’s functioning and independence.<sup>116</sup>

### 3.2 What did the Colonna review find on UNRWA neutrality?

On 22 April, the report of the Independent Review Group, led by the former French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, was published. The review by the UN Office of Internal Oversight remains ongoing.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>112</sup> UNRWA, [Serious allegations against UNRWA staff in the Gaza Strip](#), 26 January 2024

<sup>113</sup> UN, [Statement by the Secretary General on UNRWA](#), 28 January 2024

<sup>114</sup> [Guterres appoints independent UNRWA review panel](#), 5 February 2024; UN, [Note to correspondents—on the independent review of UNRWA](#), 20 March 2024

<sup>115</sup> UNRWA, [Allegations against UNRWA staff](#), 8 February 2024; UN, [Highlights of briefing](#), 26 April 2024

<sup>116</sup> As above and [UN Palestinian refugee agency to launch independent review \[...\]](#), ABC News, 18 January 2024; UNRWA, [Spreading unsubstantiated claims about UNRWA \[...\]](#), 1 December 2023

<sup>117</sup> UN, [Independent review panel releases final report on UNRWA](#), 22 April 2024.

This section summarises the review’s finding and recommendations on UNRWA neutrality. The full report can be read at: [Independent Review of Mechanisms and Procedures to ensure adherence by UNRWA to the humanitarian principle of neutrality](#) (PDF).

In its summary, the Colonna review said that UNRWA had existing mechanisms and procedures to ensure neutrality but “neutrality-related issues persist”. It cited staff expressing political views, host-country textbooks with “problematic content” in some UNRWA schools, and politicised staff unions making threats to UNRWA.<sup>118</sup>

## Neutrality breaches reported against UNRWA

The review found that the annual number of alleged neutrality breaches of UNRWA staff were between 7 and 55 from 2017 to 2022 (an annual average of 21). It said that the number of allegations had “escalated significantly” since October 2023. From January 2022 to February 2024, 151 neutrality-related breaches were reported, with the majority related to social media posts. Fifty neutrality cases are under investigation, as of April 2024.<sup>119</sup>

The review noted that there may be “inconsistent reporting” of neutrality breaches due to the “decentralised” intake of reporting and challenges in reporting and investigating allegations in Gaza during active conflict.<sup>120</sup>

## Checking UNRWA staff lists and Israeli Government evidence

The Colonna review also describes the provision of annual UNRWA staff lists to Israel and the United States for UNRWA staff working in East Jerusalem, Gaza, and the West Bank. It says these lists allow these states to alert UNRWA of any concerns regarding any of its staff. The review noted that UNRWA itself lacked the support of intelligence services to undertake “efficient and comprehensive vetting” but does screen individuals against UN and World Bank sanctions lists annually. It says no individuals of concern had been identified via this screening method.<sup>121</sup>

The review noted that Israel had not informed UNRWA of any concerns relating to staff on these lists since 2011. Israeli officials told the review that it does not consider the sharing of these lists as a screening or vetting process but rather ensuring the diplomatic immunities and privileges of staff.

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<sup>118</sup> [Independent Review of Mechanisms and Procedures to ensure adherence by UNRWA to the humanitarian principle of neutrality](#) (PDF), 22 April 2024, pp4-5, 18-19

<sup>119</sup> As above, pp12, 14

<sup>120</sup> As above, p13

<sup>121</sup> This and next two paragraphs sourced from as above, pp21-22

The review also said that Israel had based its claims that a “significant number” of UNRWA staff are members of terrorist groups on UNRWA’s March 2024 list but “Israel has yet to provide supporting evidence of this”.

## Neutrality of UNRWA installations

The report says UNRWA has around 1,000 installations including schools, health centres and warehouses, and is responsible for ensuring their neutrality.<sup>122</sup>

UNRWA conducts quarterly reviews of each site. The review notes that a “limiting factor to the potential discovery of critical breaches [such as weapons or tunnels used by Hamas]” in these sites is that UNRWA does not have policing, military, or widespread investigative capacities.

## Education

UNRWA uses the local curriculum and textbooks of the Palestinian Authority. The review notes several reviews have been conducted into their content and UNRWA has “consistently worked” on ensuring neutrality (see above, pages 20 to 21). It said that the most recent UNRWA review, covering 2022/23, found what the Colonna review described as “grave violations of neutrality”.<sup>123</sup>

The 2022/23 UNRWA review had found 3.85% of textbook pages included “issues of concern to UN values, guidance or position on the [Israeli-Palestinian] conflict”, being either “educationally inappropriate” or not in line with UNESCO standards.

The Colonna review said that despite work by the Palestinian Authority and dialogue with UNRWA and UNESCO, “the issue persists” and “more work needs to be undertaken” to “avoid the promotion of discrimination and incitement to hatred and violence and the spreading of antisemitic views”.

## Recommendations and UNRWA response

The Colonna review provided 50 recommendations for UNRWA, which are listed in full in chapter 10 of the review. These included measures to strengthen internal oversight and greater engagement with donor states.<sup>124</sup>

To improve neutrality, the review recommended implementing additional ways to screen UNRWA staff, introducing a continuous vetting process of employees, and implementing regular sharing of staff lists with host countries and Israel to allow staff screening.

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<sup>122</sup> [Independent Review of Mechanisms and Procedures to ensure adherence by UNRWA to the humanitarian principle of neutrality](#) (PDF), 22 April 2024, p25

<sup>123</sup> These three paragraphs from as above, pp28-9, 30

<sup>124</sup> Section on recommendations sourced from [Independent Review of Mechanisms and Procedures to ensure adherence by UNRWA to the humanitarian principle of neutrality](#) (PDF), chapter 10

It also recommended strengthening collaboration with Israel on identifying misuse of UNRWA facilities and increasing the frequency of installation visits.

It also recommended reviewing all textbooks used by UNRWA, establishing a yearly review of all textbooks with UNESCO, and stopping using any teaching material with antisemitic references, hate speech or incitement to violence.

Both the UN and UNRWA accepted in full the report's recommendations and are working on an action plan to implement them. The UN also says it stands ready to work with courts and other authorities to prosecute any individuals found to be involved in acts of terrorism.<sup>125</sup>

The Israeli Government has been critical of UNRWA's conduct and challenges the April 2024 report. Israeli and other Government responses to the report and the original allegations are set out below, in section 3.4 and 3.5.

### 3.3 Which donors have suspended funding?

In January 2024, the United States, European Commission, UK, Australia, and Canada were among several donors to temporarily suspend funding or decisions on future funding following the allegations (note some did not plan any additional funding in the first quarter of 2024).<sup>126</sup>

On 19 April, G7 foreign ministers (the G7 is the US, UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the EU) issued a collective statement stating that UNRWA "has a vital role in the Gaza humanitarian response" and said it welcomed the investigations to provide transparency to the allegations and the review "in view of the implementation of the needed reforms".<sup>127</sup>

Since January, several donors have said they plan to restore or continue funding, as listed in the table below. These donors have emphasised they expect UNRWA to implement reforms and ensure its neutrality. In the case of the European Commission, it says its decision to renew funding is conditional on UNRWA conducting a review of its staff and an EU-appointed audit.<sup>128</sup>

The US Government, which is the biggest donor to UNRWA, providing US\$371 million in 2023, initially said would make a decision on restoring funding when the UN reviews are completed.<sup>129</sup> It also said that around US\$300,000 in funds had been planned for the remainder of the financial year and were suspended (US\$121 million had already been delivered).<sup>130</sup> However, in March 2024

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<sup>125</sup> UN, [Allegations against UNRWA staff](#)

<sup>126</sup> UNRWA, [The Gaza Strip: Humanitarian crisis deepens \[...\]](#), 1 February 2024

<sup>127</sup> FCDO, [G7 Foreign Minister's meeting communiqué, situation in the Middle East](#), 19 April 2024

<sup>128</sup> European Commission, [Commission will proceed to paying €50 million](#), 1 March 2024

<sup>129</sup> Congressional Research Service, [UNRWA: Overview and US funding](#) (PDF), 9 February 2024

<sup>130</sup> US State Department, [Press briefing](#), 30 January 2024

President Biden signed into law an Act suspending US funding to UNRWA until March 2025.<sup>131</sup> The Administration says it will spend aid via other channels.<sup>132</sup>

In the below table showing states that suspended payments and the current status of donor funding to UNRWA, donors who were a top-20 UNRWA donor in 2022 or 2023 are marked with an asterisk (\*). Some top-20 donors, including Norway and Saudi Arabia, are not shown because they did not pause funding or future funding decisions. Belgium, Ireland, Denmark, and Spain, though not top 20 donors, also said their funding would continue.<sup>133</sup>

Of the 13 top-20 donors that paused funding, the table shows, to date, that eight have announced they will provide funding in 2024, and five have not.

<b>Which countries suspending payments or decisions on future UNRWA funding have announced new pledges? Those marked * a top 20 donor in 2022 or 2023</b>			
<b>Announced funding will resume or confirmed future funding since January 2024</b>			
European Union*	1 March 2024	Expects <a href="#">UNRWA to carry out EU-appointed audit</a>	
Sweden*	9 March 2024	<a href="#">Further funding conditional on more reforms</a>	
Australia*	12 March 2024	<a href="#">Expects ongoing reforms by UNRWA</a>	
Canada*	12 March 2024	<a href="#">Expects further reforms of UNRWA</a>	
Denmark	15 March 2024	<a href="#">Says future reforms to UNRWA still needed</a>	
Iceland	19 March 2024	<a href="#">Expects further UNRWA reforms</a>	
Finland*	22 March 2024	<a href="#">Some funding earmarked for risk management</a>	
France*	28 March 2024	<a href="#">Subject to UNRWA making reforms</a>	
Japan*	2 April 2024	<a href="#">Expects further reforms by UNRWA</a>	
Germany*	24 April 2024	<a href="#">Welcomed the Colonna review</a> and commitment for its full implementation	
<b>Awaiting UN reports / no announcements on future funding</b>			
<a href="#">Austria</a>	<a href="#">Latvia</a>	<a href="#">New Zealand</a>	<a href="#">United Kingdom*</a>
<a href="#">Estonia</a>	<a href="#">Lithuania</a>	<a href="#">Romania</a>	
<a href="#">Italy*</a>	<a href="#">Netherlands*</a>	<a href="#">Switzerland*</a>	
<b>Funding suspended until March 2025</b>			
<a href="#">United States*</a>			

Source: See hyperlinks in table for each country. UNRWA top-twenty donor list from UNRWA, [Funding trends](#)

<sup>131</sup> [HR2882 Further Consolidated Appropriations Act](#), Title III funding limitation for UNRWA, Section 301

<sup>132</sup> US State Department, [Press briefing](#), 26 March 2024

<sup>133</sup> [Handful of EU states plus Norway will keep funding UNRWA](#), EU Observer, 29 January 2024



## 3.4

### Israeli, UN and Palestinian response

Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has said "UNRWA's mission has to end" and the agency "has to be replaced".<sup>134</sup>

The Israeli Government welcomed the funding freeze by donors and in March 2024 said it would stop working with UNRWA in the Gaza Strip, saying UNRWA "perpetuates the conflict rather than tr[ies] [to] alleviate it".<sup>135</sup> It also welcomed the US decision to freeze UNRWA funding until March 2025 and said that "UNRWA will not remain in Gaza after Hamas is removed".<sup>136</sup>

In response to the Colonna report, published on 22 April, the Israeli Government reiterated that it judged many UNRWA staff to be Hamas members and activists and that the report's recommendations to resolve this issue were "cosmetic" and the report "fundamentally flawed".<sup>137</sup>

Both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority have condemned the suspension of funding by donors and called for its restoration.<sup>138</sup>

In response to the initial allegations by Israeli on UNRWA staff involvement, the UN Secretary General called for the donors who have suspended their funding "to, at least, guarantee the continuity of UNRWA's operations".<sup>139</sup> In April, his office said the Secretary General had agreed with UNRWA to fully implement the Colonna report's recommendations and "appeal[ed] to all stakeholders to actively support UNRWA" as a "lifeline" for Palestinians.<sup>140</sup>

UNRWA has said that the decision of some donors to suspend funding "threatens our ongoing humanitarian work across the region" and it had not previously received any concerns on specific staff.<sup>141</sup>

## 3.5

### What is the position in the UK?

#### UK Government position

The UK Government says it will pause decisions on future UK funding to UNRWA while the allegations are reviewed. However, it said this did not affect

<sup>134</sup> Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [PM Netanyahu meets with a delegation \[...\]](#), 31 January 2024

<sup>135</sup> [Israel will stop working with UNRWA in Gaza](#), Reuters, 25 March 2024

<sup>136</sup> Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [FM Katz welcomes historic US decision \[...\]](#), 23 March 2024

<sup>137</sup> [UNRWA review: Israel hasn't provided evidence that agency staff were terrorist members](#), Times of Israel, 22 April 2024

<sup>138</sup> [Israel says will stop UNRWA from operating in Gaza after war](#), BBC Monitoring, 27 January 2024

<sup>139</sup> UN, [Statement by the Secretary General on UNRWA](#), 28 January 2024

<sup>140</sup> UN, [Statement attributable to the spokesperson for the Secretary General](#), 22 April 2024

<sup>141</sup> UNRWA, [UNRWA's lifesaving aid may end due to funding suspension](#), 27 January 2024

any UK funding for UNRWA for 2023/24, with a total of £35 million provided since 7 October 2023. No further payments were due in this financial year.<sup>142</sup>

The International Development, Andrew Mitchell, says the UK will continue to provide aid through other agencies, including UN ones, and has emphasized UNRWA's role as a "stabilising" one that is "critical to delivering humanitarian assistance".<sup>143</sup>

The Government says any future funding decisions will be made after the two reviews has concluded and expects UNRWA to give "detailed undertakings" about changes to "personnel, policy and precedents to ensure this can never happen again". It was pressing for the reviews to be "rapidly" concluded.<sup>144</sup>

In March 2024, the Minister said he "very much hopes" that UK funding to UNRWA can be resumed at the end of April.<sup>145</sup> Following the Colonna review, on 25 April the UK told the UN Security Council "we will set out our position on future funding to UNRWA following careful consideration of the final report and UNRWA's response".<sup>146</sup>

In answer to an April 2024 question in the House from Shadow Middle East Minister, Wayne David MP, who called for funding to UNRWA to be restored, Mr Mitchell said:

we are looking at all those reports [the Colonna report and Office of Internal Oversight Services report] and we will make a decision in our own time. Britain is not falling short in that respect, because we are currently fully funded on all the earlier commitments we made. We will look at the Office of Internal Oversight Services report and the UNRWA reaction to it. We are aware of non-traditional donors and private donations coming in, and UNRWA is fully funded until the end of May. When we reach our conclusion, I will be sure to inform the House of it.<sup>147</sup>

Several Conservative backbench MPs, including former Home Secretary Suella Braverman and Intelligence and Security Committee member Theresa Villers have called for UK funding to UNRWA not to be restored, arguing a new organisation should instead be established to deliver aid.<sup>148</sup>

## Charities and aid organisations in the UK

Bond, an umbrella group for UK aid organisations, has said the UK should ensure humanitarian assistance can continue to be funded and delivered via

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<sup>142</sup> HC Deb, [29 January 2024](#), c621; 630

<sup>143</sup> HC Deb, [29 January 2024](#), c621

<sup>144</sup> PQ 18514 [[UNRWA: Finance](#)], 21 March 2024

<sup>145</sup> HC Deb, [19 March 2024](#), c826

<sup>146</sup> FCDO, [Palestinian civilians in Gaza are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis](#), 25 April 2024

<sup>147</sup> HC Deb, [30 April 2024](#), c137

<sup>148</sup> [Restoring funding for " Hamas linked" UNRWA would be morally bankrupt \[...\]](#), The Telegraph, 20 April 2024

UNRWA.<sup>149</sup> In a separate statement, 21 aid groups, including Oxfam and Save the Children, warned if funding suspensions are not reversed “we may see a complete collapse of the already restricted humanitarian response”.<sup>150</sup>

## Labour Party

The Shadow Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, backed UNRWA’s decision to investigate and terminate staff contracts. He requested reassurances from the UK Government that “existing UK aid will continue to flow” and for the Government to outline a plan for funding to return.<sup>151</sup>

Shadow International Development Secretary, Lisa Nandy, has described as “unrealistic” suggestions that the humanitarian response in Gaza can be continued without UNRWA and has argued that the withholding of UK funding is despite the “government [being] aware that if UNRWA can’t continue its operations, the whole humanitarian system in Gaza collapses”.<sup>152</sup>

## Commons International Development Committee (IDC)

On 1 March 2024, the Commons IDC published a report on the humanitarian situation in Gaza. This said that UNRWA “is the only functioning organisation in parts of Gaza” and that the UK should “quickly” push for reforms so that UK and international funding continues.<sup>153</sup>

## Scottish Government

The Scottish Government, which has previously pledged £750,000 to UNRWA in 2023, said in March 2024 that the UK must provide aid to UNRWA, stating it was reassured that UNRWA would make necessary reforms and citing the funding decision of the European Commission.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Bond, [Statement on UNRWA](#), 30 January 2024

<sup>150</sup> ActionAid and others, [UNRWA funding cuts threaten Palestinian lives \[...\]](#), 29 January 2024

<sup>151</sup> HC Deb, [29 January 2024](#), c622

<sup>152</sup> [Lisa Nandy urges support for UN relief agency for Palestinians](#), The Guardian, 17 April 2024

<sup>153</sup> IDC, [Humanitarian situation in Gaza](#), HC 110, March 2024, paras 71-2

<sup>154</sup> Scottish Government, [UK Government must reverse decision to suspend aid](#), 11 March 2024

## 4

# Further reading and resources

## Commons Library briefings

- Commons Library research briefing, [2023/24 Israel-Hamas conflict: UK and international response](#)
- Commons Library research briefing, [Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories: A parliamentary reading list, 2020-2024](#)

## UK Government

- Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Humanitarian situation in Gaza: The UK Government's response](#), regularly updated. Summary of humanitarian aid and collection of press releases.
- Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Development Tracker: Occupied Palestinian Territories](#), regularly updated. UK aid programmes.
- Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [UK-OPTs development partnership summary](#), July 2023. Summary of UK aid activities.

## Committee reports and proceedings

- International Development Committee, [Humanitarian situation in Gaza](#), HC 110, March 2024. A government response is expected by May 2024.
- International Development Committee, [Oral evidence: humanitarian situation in Gaza](#), HC 110, 14 November 2023. Witnesses were Sam Rose (UNRWA), Shaina Low (Norwegian Refugee Council), Yasmine Ahmed (Human Rights Watch) and Melanie Ward (Medical Aid for Palestinians).
- International Development Committee, [UK aid for refugee host countries](#), HC 426, May 2023 and [Government response](#), October 2023. Section 4 covers the OPTs and sections 2 and 3 refugees in Jordan and Lebanon.
- [Written evidence](#) submitted to the International Development Committee includes that from the [Henry Jackson Society](#) and [UNRWA](#).

## Further resources and analysis

- Center for Strategic and International Studies, [Famine in Gaza](#), 11 April 2024
- Foreign Policy, [Don't give up on UNRWA](#), 29 March 2024
- Foreign Affairs, [Overhaul UNRWA-just not right now](#), 29 March 2024
- Washington Institute, [Options for UNRWA: From systematic reform to dissolution](#), 21 March 2024
- International Crisis Group, [Why donors should not suspend aid to UNRWA](#), 7 February 2024
- Human Rights Watch, [Gaza's blocked relief](#), 30 October 2023
- Chatham House, [The UN must coordinate field hospitals and hospital ships for Gaza](#), 27 October 2023
- Atlantic Council, [Humanitarian aid cannot be weaponised](#), 18 October 2023
- International Crisis Group, [UNRWA's reckoning: Preserving the UN agency serving Palestinian refugees](#), 15 September 2023
- UNRWA, [Gaza: 15 years of blockade](#), June 2022
- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, [UNRWA as a proxy site of conflict? The case of the Gaza Strip](#), 19 May 2022
- Foreign Policy, [Palestinian schools have a problem- and are running out of time](#), 5 November 2021

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