

# Scholars Circle Resource Guide

Double-sided

## UNRWA & Israel: The High-Stakes Battle Over Refugees and Aid



### Dr. Asaf Romirowsky

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Asaf is co-author of *Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief* and a contributor to *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel*. Recently, he co-edited *Word Crimes: Reclaiming the Language of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, a special issue of the journal of Israel Studies.

Asaf's publicly-engaged scholarship has been featured in The Wall Street Journal, The National Interest, The American Interest, The New Republic, The Times of Israel, Jerusalem Post, Ynet and Tablet among other online and print media outlets.

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# Common Q&A's

## How did UNRWA confuse the resettlement of Arab-Palestinian Refugees?

Almost since its inception, UNRWA, the international institution charged with aiding the refugees, has worked against their resettlement in Arab countries where Palestinians are located. One way UNRWA has done this has been by shifting its mission from refugee relief to education, devising its own expanded definitions of who is a refugee, and expanding its legal mandates to "protect" and represent refugees. As a result, the Palestinian clients of UNRWA have gradually taken over the organization and have undermined an international relief effort, created in naïve good faith, but with the complicity of the UN General Assembly.

## Who is a Refugee?

There are no qualifications regarding a refugee having been displaced to a country where UNRWA operates or whether they have obtained another nationality. Nor does UNRWA require individual applicants to have either endured all three criteria (residence, loss of homes, and loss of livelihood), or provide documentation of these statuses. UNRWA requires only a self-declaration from applicants. The mandate is effectively global and the agency views itself as the "global advocate for the protection and care of Palestine refugees." This generates a total client base of "millions."

## What does UNRWA teach?

Many UNRWA teachers are alumni of the UNRWA school system, they often perpetuate the vitriolic curriculum they were taught, vilifying Israel and the West. UNRWA teachers who publicly identify with radical groups have created a teachers' bloc that ensures the election of Hamas members and other individuals committed to Islamist ideologies. After using their classrooms as a place to refine their radical messages, these teachers gravitate to politics. As such, UNRWA's education system has become a springboard for Hamas leaders.

# Key Takeaways

- ✓ Expanded and Vague Refugee Definition: UNRWA redefined "refugee" to include millions through self-declared status, with no requirement for proof of displacement or loss, thus perpetuating refugee status indefinitely and globally.
- ✓ Shifted Mission and Mandate: Instead of facilitating resettlement, UNRWA transitioned from relief work to long-term education and political representation, entrenching refugee identity rather than resolving it.
- ✓ Politicized Education System: UNRWA's schools promote anti-Western and anti-Israel narratives, with many teachers affiliated with radical groups like Hamas, using education to foster militancy and obstruct peaceful integration.

*The views expressed by the speaker don't necessarily reflect Chai Mitzvah's official position.*

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