



demystifying the unrwa approach to curriculum

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The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) operates an educational system for over 530,000 girls and boys at its 709 schools in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. The Agency provides students with a quality education, the centrepiece of which is **the commitment of UNRWA to the delivery of an education in its schools that is consistent with the values and principles of the United Nations (UN) and promotes human rights, tolerance, equality and non-discrimination of race, gender, language and religion** in line with the broader UN development goals.

The achievements of the UNRWA education system are reflected in the achievements of its students, who consistently out-perform their peers in public schools and attain above-average results on international assessments, according to a World Bank report.

Since its establishment, and consistent with UN practice in refugee situations globally, UNRWA uses the curriculum of the “host country”. This ensures Palestine refugees can integrate into host secondary and tertiary educational systems and more broadly participate in the social and economic life of the host country.

As an independent UN Agency providing humanitarian and development assistance, UNRWA has no mandate to alter any host government curriculum or textbooks which are a matter of national sovereignty.

Nevertheless, UNRWA regularly reviews all newly issued textbooks by hosts and is committed to ensuring that what is being taught in UNRWA schools adheres to UN values and principles. This robust system of review of host countries’ textbooks is instrumental to ensure that UNRWA can continue with its policy of zero tolerance to all forms of racism and discrimination.

1. UNRWA Curriculum Framework

UNRWA uses its **Framework for Analysis and Quality Implementation of the Curriculum**, referred to as the ‘Curriculum Framework’, to review classroom materials and practices and ensure that UNRWA schools meet the evolving learning needs of Palestine refugee students.

The Curriculum Framework helps ensure that the inclusive education approach is consistent with UN humanitarian principles of neutrality and respect of human rights and applied throughout the teaching and learning process in UNRWA schools. The Curriculum Framework also includes tools to guide the review and enrichment approaches to using host country curricula, textbooks, and other learning material, which is undertaken by curriculum specialists within UNRWA. In 2014, UNRWA enhanced its field-level professional support structure, with the establishment of Professional Development and Curriculum Units in all fields to further strengthen the implementation of the Curriculum Framework and better monitor its use.

2. UNRWA Rapid Review Process

The Curriculum Framework is the overarching framework for the review and enrichment approaches for the use of educational materials used in all UNRWA schools, whilst the Agency remains committed to providing more rapid reviews of any newly issued textbooks across the five fields of operations, including new Palestinian textbooks.

To accommodate these urgent reviews, UNRWA developed a **Rapid Review Process**, which ensures textbooks align with UN values against three main criteria:

- **Neutrality/Bias** – The text does not take sides or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious, or ideological nature
- **Gender** – The text does not present or reinforce gender stereotypes
- **Age-appropriateness** – The materials do not include content that is violent, frightening, or inappropriate for the child's age

It is important to bear in mind that the Rapid Review Process does not replace the Curriculum Framework process, as the textbooks reviewed through the Rapid Review Process are also subject to the regular Curriculum Framework review at the field and school levels.

3. UNRWA Teacher-Centred Approach

This new approach, the **Teacher-Centred Approach**, seeks to empower teachers to address the specific identified issues of concern in a way that is in line with UN values and promotes students' critical thinking. To this effect three key documents have been produced:

- the 'Teacher-Centred Approach - A Guide for Educators': it describes the approach and the eight domains into which the issues have been categorised. Against each domain, examples and ideas are provided to enable teachers to select one which they deem the most appropriate for the lesson
- the 'Teacher-Centred Approach - Teacher Reference Grid': it lists all the textbooks, by grade and by subject, and provides all the page numbers where an issue has been identified
- the 'Teacher-Centred Approach - Teacher Training Manual': it will directly support anyone training educators on the teacher-centred approach

4. 2019 US GAO Report

The de-classified **US Government Accountability Office (GAO)** report of February 2019, which reviewed US education assistance in West Bank and Gaza, affirms the unwavering UNRWA commitment to UN values. GAO confirmed the UNRWA Curriculum Framework emphasizes neutrality, human rights, tolerance, equality and non-discrimination with regard to race, gender, language, and religion throughout the teaching and learning process. Through the report GAO validated the scrupulous UNRWA textbook review process, that the Agency's Curriculum Framework emphasizes UN values, and the textbook review is a proactive process that facilitates the promotion of UN values in Agency schools.

5. Human Rights in UNRWA Schools

Since 2000, UNRWA has also explicitly incorporated human rights education into the school curricula through its **Human Rights, Conflict Resolution, and Tolerance (HRCRT) education program** as well as through its overall teaching practices. The vision of the HRCRT is to provide a human rights education which empowers Palestine refugee students to enjoy and exercise their rights, uphold human rights values and contribute positively to their society and the global community. In 2001, UNRWA began introducing **student parliaments** in its schools as part of its human rights education programme. School parliaments help to promote a culture of respect and tolerance and play an effective role in schools and in the community. In 2017 UNRWA set up the first-ever Agency-wide UNRWA student parliament, representing all of the Agency's fields of operations.

Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the Curriculum of the State of Palestine

The CERD Committee – an independent Committee to oversee the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – has recently reviewed the State of Palestine's implementation of the CERD. The Committee has issued a number of concluding observations addressing hate speech in school curricula and textbooks.

These concluding observations are addressed to the State of Palestine. While UNRWA uses the Palestinian curriculum, it reiterates that it has a robust system in place to ensure that the education it delivers in its classroom, including through the use of textbooks, is in line with UN values and principles and addresses any bias through the curriculum review process and teacher-centred approach.



united nations relief and works agency
for palestine refugees in the near east

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UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and is mandated to provide assistance and protection to a population of some 5.5 registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip to achieve their full potential in human development, pending a just solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance and emergency assistance. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions.