Correcting the Palestinian Refugee Distortion

written by Dr. Adi Schwartz | 29.05.2025

Executive Summary:

- UNRWA's *sui generis* criteria for defining Palestinian refugee status fundamentally diverges from the approach employed by the international community with regards to other refugee populations around the world. UNRWA's approach has inflated the number of individuals classified as Palestinian refugees, **by a factor of nearly 1,000.**
- UNRWA's definition serves only to perpetuate conflict and entrench rejectionist attitudes among much of the Palestinian population, threatening Israel's security, encouraging terror, and undermining the chances for advancing regional stability.
- Palestinian refugee status must be brought into alignment with internationally-accepted standards. The current exceptionalism runs counter to U.S. foreign policy interests.
- In order to advance U.S. interests, and promote regional stability, the U.S. should:
    - **Apply internationally-accepted standards:** Ensure that Palestinian refugees are treated under the same criteria as all other refugee populations.
    - **Establish an official position on refugee numbers:** The U.S. should adopt a formal position recognizing that, under international standards, **approximately 7,500 individuals** today qualify as refugees from the 1948 conflict.
    - The status of additional descendants should be assessed individually, based on dependency and other criteria, in line with global practices.
- The U.S. decision to cease funding of UNRWA was an extremely important step. By helping shape a new international norm whereby Palestinian refugee status is aligned with international standards, the U.S. can help remove one of the key obstacles to lasting stability in the region.

Read the Full Policy Brief