

United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA)

Organization created by the Allies to assist refugees who were displaced as a result of World War II and to aid countries in poor economic shape due to the war.

The UNRRA was established in November 1943. It was run by a council that consisted of one delegate from each of the United Nations' member states, and a Central Committee that was made up of representatives from the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China. The four member states of the Central Committee committed themselves to funding 75 percent of the UNRRA's budget, while the United States assumed the responsibility of providing a director-general for the agency.

The UNRRA council held its first meeting in mid-November 1943, at which its members set up advisory committees for Europe and East Asia based on region, as well as committees to deal with finance control, agriculture, health, rehabilitation of industry, welfare, and displaced persons (DPs). Until the war ended in 1945, the UNRRA was unable to accomplish much in the way of restoration and rehabilitation. It had to get the approval of the Allied Forces Supreme Command before moving into liberated areas, and the operation was slow going.

In May 1944 UNRRA teams were able to begin fulfilling their function of rehabilitating refugees and displaced persons; at that time they joined the administration of refugee camps in Palestine, Syria, and Egypt, which were filled with some 37,000 refugees from Greece, Albania, Italy, and Yugoslavia. By the end of 1944 the UNRRA was taking care of 74,000 refugees located in refugee camps all over the Mediterranean, Africa, and the Middle East. In Italy, the UNRRA was responsible for two hospitals and 6,000 refugees in four camps.

When the war ended in 1945, the UNRRA was faced with overwhelming responsibilities. Millions of homeless refugees and DPs were lost in Europe and needed care, both physical and emotional. Thousands of children had been orphaned, and families had been torn apart. There were great shortages

of clothing and food, the possibility of disease loomed, and UNRRA workers and the DPs had trouble communicating due to the language barrier. After months of enlisting the appropriate staff, the UNRRA found that those they had hired were not nearly prepared enough to deal with the survivors.

After several months, the UNRRA became better organized and was able to assist the DPs. Based on agreements with the American, British, and French authorities in Europe, the UNRRA was put under the control of each country's military command in the zone it occupied. The military occupiers and the UNRRA then divided responsibilities: the military was in charge of housing, maintaining the peace, and obtaining and giving out basic supplies, while the UNRRA was responsible for running the DP camps, providing welfare and health services, entertainment, and job training, and contributing whatever supplies the military did not. By the end of 1945, the UNRRA was running two-thirds of the transit centers and DP camps in West Germany.

The UNRRA also provided food, clothing, raw materials, medical supplies, farming machinery, and more to various recovering countries and regions. These included Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Italy, Poland, Austria, the Ukraine, Belorussia, Albania, Greece, China, the Dodecanese islands, and to a smaller extent, Finland, Hungary, Ethiopia, and the Philippines. In addition, the UNRRA was responsible for the operation of 23 volunteer welfare agencies, including various Jewish organizations (such as the Joint Distribution Committee and HIAS). By September 1946 the UNRRA had spent about \$3.67 billion.

In 1947 the UNRRA's role in Europe was gradually dissolved; the responsibility for some 643,000 DPs was assumed by the Preparatory Commission for the International Refugee Organization. By 1948 the UNRRA closed its remaining offices in Europe, Asia, Australia, and Central and South America. (see also displaced persons, Jewish.)