

**Professionals of Rehabilitation.  
UNRRA Officers in Postwar Europe  
(abstract)**

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Between 1944 and 1947 about 8,700 men and 6,500 women worked in Europe for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). They dealt with the distribution of supplies, medical assistance, vocational training and – particularly in Germany – the administration of displaced persons in the camps. Although UNRRA officers came from more than thirty different countries, most of them were American and British, given the leading role the United States and Great Britain played inside the organization. Yet, all UN employees – as one of them recalled in her memoirs – were requested to act as «volunteers [who] no longer consider[ed] themselves as nationals of their homeland but as internationals responsible for the saving of the lost and abandoned».

This research explores how UNRRA personnel «gave life and reality» to the principle and objectives laid down in the UNRRA mandate, which was conceived by Franklin Delano Roosevelt as a milestone in his plan to internationalize the New Deal. Most studies of UNRRA have focused on the issue of agricultural and industrial supplies transferred to Europe thanks mainly to American funds. My research focuses instead on the transmission and diffusion of a specific pattern of social and moral rehabilitation which was pursued by UNRRA through the implementation of specific welfare programs. This pattern of rehabilitation was one of the main points of the «global New Deal» planned by the first UN agency and it played a key role in shaping the relationship between Western Europe and the United States in the aftermath of World War II.

The aim of my research is to explore the meanings ascribed to the idea of welfare in its connection to internationalism. By analyzing welfare in the context of UNRRA's international mission, it is possible to shed new light on the history of the emergence of welfare policies in the post-war period, which coalesced around the new Western European democratic states. UNRRA's definition of the term «welfare» as a service covering special provisions to victims of war as well as any action «for the personal rehabilitation of individuals requiring special help» left enough space for re/interpretations on the field, in different countries or in response to different care recipients. My research also aims to investigate the emergence of new professional personnel, which embodied the humanitarianism and internationalism promoted by the post-war intergovernmental agency. These personnel represented continuity with the relief workers who had been active in the aftermath of World War I. Most importantly, this staff included American social workers who had experienced techniques of modern public welfare during the Depression period. At the same time, it introduced a new international corps devoted to relief, which partly still exists today under the auspices of the United Nations.