

Ex post evaluation

UNRWA schools in Gaza, Palestinian territories



Title	UNRWA schools in Gaza, Phase 2		
Sector and CRS code	Primary education 11220		
Project number	2012 67 277		
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)		
Recipient/project-executing agency	UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East)		
Project volume/ Financing instrument	EUR 3 million/BMZ budget funds		
Project duration	December 2012 – December 2017		
Year of report	2021	Year of random sample	2020

Objectives and project outline

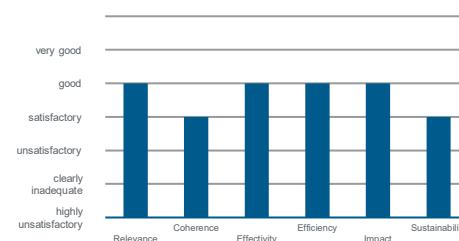
The project objective at outcome level was to make appropriate use of the better quality and quantity of school infrastructure. At impact level, the objective was to contribute to improving the educational level of the target groups through improved access to education in qualitative and quantitative terms, and to contribute to stabilising and improving living conditions in the Gaza Strip through better opportunities for economic and political participation. The construction of two new primary schools helped to overcome the shortage of school places for children with refugee status.

Key findings

Despite difficult political conditions and a precarious security situation in the Gaza Strip, the project goals were mostly achieved; however, the risk to lasting, regular school operation is high. Nonetheless, the project was rated as “successful”.

- Relevance is rated as good because the project created additional enrolment capacity for refugee children of school age. The Palestinian society, plagued by poverty, unemployment and conflict, attaches great importance to education – these needs were taken into account in this project.
- Coherence was rated as satisfactory. In UNRWA schools, the criteria and standards of primary education are the same as those in state schools, which ensures a smooth transition into secondary state education. The project also contributed to ensuring inclusive, equitable and quality education (SDG 4 of the 2030 Agenda). Lack of coherence among the international donor community led to a rating downgrade.
- In terms of effectiveness and efficiency, the project was also successful. The quantitative objective of providing additional school places for children - and especially girls - of primary school age was achieved; the project also had a stabilising effect and promoted employment temporarily. The two new schools were built and equipped at a lower cost compared to similar schools in the Palestinian territories.
- Sustainability is at risk as UNRWA relies on voluntary annual payments from UN member states and is therefore unable to finance day-to-day school operations and maintenance on its own.

Overall rating:
Successful



Conclusions

- UNRWA standards-based school construction saved costs, but this did not take sufficient account of climate and environmental requirements.
- Considering budget constraints, future projects for school construction should focus on low-maintenance design and operating concepts.
- The creation of employee days should be factored into the design of similar projects. The link to UNRWA's Job Creation Programme in the maintenance and servicing of the schools should be given more consideration in the design phase.
- The specific conditions in the Gaza Strip require schools to be able to protect students and teachers, as schools serve as shelters in emergency situations (conflicts, earthquakes etc.). This needs to be taken into account.

Rating according to DAC criteria

Overall rating: 2

Ratings:

Relevance	2
Coherence	3
Effectiveness	2
Efficiency	2
Impact	2
Sustainability	3

General conditions and classification of the project

The project “UNRWA Schools Gaza II” (BMZ no. 2012 67 277) was implemented from 2012 to 2017 in the part of the Palestinian territories where Hamas, considered a radical Islamist group, took power in 2007. Since then, the Gaza Strip has largely been cut off from the outside world by Israel. The granting of work permits outside the Gaza Strip to Palestinian residents is restricted by the Israeli authorities, who must also approve all exports and imports. In the Gaza Strip, which is only about half the size of the city of Hamburg (365 km²), 1.9 million inhabitants live in a very small area. The economic stagnation that has persisted for years has led to high unemployment, especially among young people who have no discernible prospects of a better future. With continued high demographic growth of 2.4 % per year, there is a shortage of schools for Gaza’s predominantly young population. The German FC project, which is part of a number of other projects to support Palestinian refugees, constructed and equipped two new primary schools under the auspices of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Relevance

More than half of all students in Gaza go to one of the schools built by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for the more than 5 million Palestinian refugees in the Middle East over the past few decades. UNRWA aims to ensure equal access to basic education for the descendants of Palestinians who were forced to flee after the state of Israel was founded in 1948 and the Israeli-Arab wars of 1967 and 1973. For this reason, UNRWA has created school infrastructure for the children of the approximately 1.3 million Palestinian refugees registered in Gaza, who account for about three-quarters of Gaza’s total population. UNRWA also operates schools in the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

At the time of the project appraisal, the educational opportunities of Palestinian refugee children in Gaza were severely impaired. Due to the high population growth in Gaza of an average of 2.4 % per year and the shortage of land for building, the schools were generally extremely overcrowded; teaching was mainly only possible in two shifts. The increase in the number of students in UNRWA schools alone was estimated at 7,000-8,000 students per year. In the 2018/2019 school year, 274 UNRWA schools in the Gaza Strip provided approximately 279,000 places for pupils in grades 1 to 9. Most of the UNRWA schools in Gaza teach in multiple shifts: only 84 schools operated in one shift, 177 schools in two shifts and 13 schools in three shifts. In addition, building materials were no longer available in Gaza after the radical Islamist group Hamas came to power in 2007, as the Israeli government prohibited the import of building materials as a result of the economic blockade of the Gaza Strip; starting in 2010, only international organisations like UNRWA were allowed to import building materials for specific projects, but subject to approval.

The FC project aimed to create urgently needed additional enrolment capacity for Palestinian refugee children of primary school age (grades 1-9) by financing and commissioning UNRWA to build 2 schools of an UNRWA standard prototype in Phase II. Children were to benefit from greater access to fully functional schools, with the aim of improving the personal and economic development opportunities of Palestinian refugees in Gaza. Given the fragile context, the project was also intended to contribute to the preservation

of peace and stability. It is reasonable to assume that through higher education and by providing structure for the everyday lives of young people through school attendance, the willingness to engage in conflict decreases and general confidence increases.

The relevance of the project is high, as it had the potential to address the shortage of school places resulting from the ongoing increase in refugee pupils by building additional schools. At the same time, it took into account the needs of the Palestinian society, plagued by poverty, unemployment and conflict, and which attaches great importance to education.

Relevance rating: 2

Coherence

UNRWA followed the curricula of the Palestinian Ministry of Education (MoE) and used the same textbooks as the government schools. This has enabled criteria and standards in basic education to be comparable between UNRWA and government schools in the Palestinian territories, although UNRWA pays particular attention to the political neutrality of the teaching content. It was also intended to ensure that UNRWA primary school pupils (grades 1-9) made a smooth transition into the secondary education system, for which the Palestinian MoE was solely responsible. This means that in the Palestinian education sector - despite duplicate structures in basic education - coherence between UNRWA and the MoE has been achieved in recent years.

The measures of German FC in the education sector, which cooperated with both UNRWA and the Palestinian Authority to achieve SDG 4 “Inclusive, equitable and quality education”, can also be considered coherent. The FC measures were also integrated into several other German DC programmes that address core economic and social problems of the Palestinian territories.

However, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the rift between the Fatah government in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza, as well as diverging views on the Middle East peace plan had a negative impact on the coherence of the international donor community. Under Trump, for example, the USA stopped its payments to UNRWA completely; other donors are also reconsidering their contributions to UNRWA.

However, since there is a fundamentally coherent approach in the Palestinian education sector despite these limitations at international level, we rate the coherence as satisfactory.

Coherence rating: 3

Effectiveness

The project objective at outcome level was to make appropriate use of the better quality and quantity of school infrastructure.

At the time of the ex post evaluation (EPE), a total of 2,785 girls and boys attended the two schools financed from FC funds; of these, 1,869 girls attended the girls’ school in Gaza City in two shifts, while 683 girls and 233 boys attended the co-educational school in Dier-El Balah in one shift.¹

¹ At the time of the EPE, schools were closed due to restrictions to control the COVID-19 pandemic in Gaza; however, schools were in regular session until March 2020.

Indicator	Appraisal 2012	Final review 2017 Evaluation 2020
(1) Utilisation of school capacity	Target: at least 35 pupils per classroom	2017: Girls' school: 39-41 → achieved Co-educational schools: 37 → achieved 2020: UNRWA schools: Ø 41 → achieved
(2) Teacher-pupil ratio	(N/A)	2017: Girls' school: 1:27.8 Co-educational school: 1:28.4 2020: Girls' school: 1:26.7 Co-educational school: 1:30.6
(3) Percentage of schools in operation and in good condition	min. 80 % in operation and in good condition	2017: 100 % → achieved 2020: 100 % → achieved

The capacity of both schools is fully utilised. In the classrooms of the girls' school in Gaza City, an average of 39-41 girls were being taught per room at the time of the final review; in the co-educational school in Dier-El Balah, the rooms were filled with an average of 37 students - with the trend rising. UNRWA schools in Gaza now have an average of 41 pupils per classroom.

This development is accompanied by an increasing ratio of teachers to pupils in schools. In the case of the girls' school in Gaza City, the ratio at the time of the EPE was 1:26.7, and in the case of the co-educational school in Dier-El Balah, 1:30.6. In an international comparison, these ratios are in the upper range²; UNRWA's lack of funds to hire additional teachers and a steady annual increase of 7,000-8,000 refugee students for many years are reasons for these rather high ratios.

UNRWA's financial constraints are also reflected in the necessary maintenance of the schools, which were designed according to an UNRWA standard prototype. According to UNRWA, the schools were in good condition nearly 5 years after commissioning, but the UNRWA programme budget will most likely be insufficient for satisfactory maintenance and renovation of the schools in the planned 5-year cycle. To address this problem, FC suggested to enable the schools to perform smaller maintenance and servicing measures independently and on a regular basis, as well as to store smaller spare parts in the schools. UNRWA has not followed this recommendation; however, minor maintenance work is carried out by the UNRWA maintenance crew in Gaza, which includes staff employed under UNRWA's Cash for Work Job Creation Programme. Parts of this programme are supported by FC.

One positive side effect of the project is the employment generated for the working-age population living in Gaza - not just in the maintenance of schools. During the construction of the schools an average of 35,000 employee days were created per building; a further 12,000 employee days were created by using the remaining funds to rehabilitate and modernise 17 other schools. The extent to which the various employment effects benefit poorer population groups cannot be quantified in detail. However, a benefit can be assumed given the prevalence of poverty. It is also not possible to make any statements about the

² Comparison of OECD countries averaging 1:15 in basic education in 2019, global average at 1:23 according to World Bank 2018 data.

level of wages, as the labour costs were covered by the local companies that were awarded the contract to carry out the construction, rehabilitation and modernisation measures via a public tender process.

In short, we rate the effectiveness of the project as successful and in line with expectations, although qualitative aspects such as a higher quality school design were not taken into account. The evaluation is largely dominated by the employment effect and the quantitative fulfilment of the project's objective, namely providing additional school places for children of primary school age.

Effectiveness rating: 2

Efficiency

The implementation of the project, including implementation of the remaining funds, was delayed by 36 months relative to the original plans due to massive delays and restrictions in the necessary approval procedures on the part of the Israeli administration; despite these difficult conditions, the allocation efficiency and production efficiency of the project can be rated as good. The allocation of funds for the construction of the new schools was appropriate from a financial standpoint given the circumstances in the Gaza Strip. The two new schools were built and equipped at a lower cost compared to other school buildings in the Palestinian territories. The pure construction costs of EUR 202 per m² of new building space for the UNRWA schools were around three-quarters of the m²-cost of a comparable donor-funded school construction project in the Gaza Strip. However, the two UNRWA schools are only for classes up to grade 9, without additional rooms for specialised classes as is the case in secondary schools. In addition, the special climate conditions and environmental criteria were largely disregarded in the school buildings.

If implementation and administrative costs are taken into account as well, the construction costs of the UNRWA schools also scored comparatively well at EUR 224 per m².³ However, the construction costs of nearly EUR 41,000 per classroom for the two UNRWA schools did not offer a comparative advantage over the reference project; with the small number of classrooms, cost-reducing economies of scale could not be achieved. The implementation costs (including management fees) were slightly higher in the UNRWA schools than in a reference project, accounting for 10.1 % of the total costs of the new school buildings (excluding the use of residual funds for renovation amounting to approximately EUR 0.5 million, which was not planned in the appraisal).

Only local construction companies were allowed to participate in the tenders for the construction measures, which restricts competition and theoretically leads to higher bidder prices. However, the complete blockade of Gaza also made it difficult to award contracts to non-local contractors. In fact, bids were submitted and accepted, and the bids were lower than the costs calculated at the time of the appraisal. As a result, it was possible to use remaining funds of around EUR 0.5 million for the rehabilitation or modernisation of 17 other UNRWA schools in the Gaza Strip.

In short, we rate the efficiency of the project as good and fully in line with expectations.

Efficiency rating: 2

Impact

The objective of the project at impact level was to contribute to improving the educational level of the target groups through improved access to better education in qualitative and quantitative terms, and to contribute to stabilising and improving living conditions in Gaza through better opportunities for economic and political participation.

In terms of access, the literacy and net enrolment rates have developed positively in the Gaza Strip since 2012, the time of the project appraisal, even though this cannot be attributed to the construction of the two schools. Completion rates of primary school are high and UNRWA schools in Gaza have succeeded in reducing the dropout rate in the 2 primary levels (elementary/preparatory schools) over the last 8 years.

³ However, it must be taken into account that some of the reference projects were based on more elaborate architectural, environmental and educational concepts that focused on the learning environment.

However, it has not been possible to increase the percentage of pupils who successfully complete lower or upper secondary education.⁴

Indicator	Appraisal 2012*	Final review 2017; EPE 2020
(1) Literacy rate (in all of Gaza, 15 years and older)	2012: 96.4 % (female: 94.5 %; male: 98.3 %)	2017: 97.0 % (female: 95.7 %; male: 98.3 %) 2019: 97.8 % (female: 96.7 %; male: 98.9 %)
(2) Net enrolment rate (all schools) (a) Primary level (b) Secondary level	2009: (a)** female: 92.9 %; male: 92.2 % (b)** female: 76.4 %; male: 69.3 %	2017 (last available year): (a) 98.9 % (female: 99.7 %; male: 98.2 %) (b) 80.7 % (female: 88.4 %; male: 74.3 %)
(3) Dropout rate (UNRWA schools) (a) elementary (1-4) (b) preparatory (5-9)	2012 (a)** female: 0.77 %; male: 2.44 % (b)** female: 2.33 %; male: 4.68 %	2019 (last available year): (a)** female: 0.2 %; male: 1.04 % (b)** female: 0.5 %; male: 2.32 %
(4) Completion rate (all schools) (a) Primary level (1-4) (b) Secondary level I (5-9) (c) Secondary level II (10-12)	2009: (a) 99.2 % (female: 99.4 %; male: 98.9 %) (b) 92.7 % (female: 95.9 %; male: 89.7 %) (c) 65.3 % (female: 71.9 %; male: 59.1 %)	2019 in % (last available year): (a) 99.2 % (female: 99.5 %; male: 98.9 %) (b) 92.7 % (female: 96.8 %; male: 88.7 %) (c) 64.5 % (female: 73.2 %; male: 56.2 %)

* or last available year; ** Total number N/A

In terms of the educational level, various studies and data indicate that the level of education among Palestinian refugees is slightly higher than among non-refugee children. For example, in 2018, the percentage of Palestinian refugees aged 15 and over who earned a bachelor's degree or higher was 16 %, compared to 14 % for non-refugees. The illiteracy rate among Palestinian refugees in 2018 is also slightly lower at 2.5 % for individuals aged 15 and older, compared to 3 % for non-refugees.⁵

A 2014 World Bank study also found that pupils in UNRWA schools performed better than pupils in state schools. The study found that this was due to, among other things, the intensive supervision and training of carefully selected teaching staff, measures for the intensive participation of pupils in the teaching units (time-on-task), the involvement of parents as well as effective and efficient administrative processes. In addition, the schools are well integrated into the local community, which sees education as a key factor for improving living conditions.⁶

⁴ Secondary schools are operated exclusively by the Palestinian Authority; UNRWA is only responsible for primary education.

⁵ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2020. Accessible online at <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?lang=en&ItemID>

⁶ Abdul-Hamid et al. 2016: Learning in the Face of Adversity. The UNRWA Education Program. Accessible online at <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/6833861468000250621/pdf/100532-PUB-Box393232B-OUO-6-PUBDATE-11-11-15-DOI-10-1596978-1-4648-0706-0-EPI-146480706X.pdf> (01.12.2010).

Surveys among Palestinian youth show that, in principle, education plays a stabilising role. It is shown that the higher a person's level of education, the lower the percentage who say they feel insecure because of the occupation and the lack of employment opportunities. At the same time, the higher a person's level of education, the better they rate their own economic situation.⁷ With regard to the economic living conditions, the employment measures as part of the school construction have also had a short-term effect on the economic situation of workers. However, the fundamental persistence of poverty in Gaza and the incidence of poverty continue to apply to many Palestinian refugees in Gaza.

Overall, we assess the impact of the project, which is unfolding in an extremely complex political environment, as good, and fully in line with expectations.

Impact rating: 2

Sustainability

With ongoing conflicts in the Gaza Strip and the security situation worsening to dangerous levels at times, the risk to the regular operation of the schools in the long term is considered very high.

UNRWA does not have a fixed, institutional budget, but must finance itself annually through voluntary payments from UN member states. UNRWA's financial insecurity has worsened dramatically in recent years, with increasing funding shortfalls since 2013. The agency's reserves are exhausted, there is no working capital fund and the repeated stop-gap measures do not offer a sustainable exit strategy. UNRWA's 2020-2021 budget plan shows a funding shortfall for 2020 and 2021 of USD 248 million and USD 268 million respectively, against budgeted expenditure of USD 881 million and USD 911 million (UNRWA total). As a result, financing for ongoing operations, maintenance work and renovations planned every five years cannot be guaranteed without restrictions (see Effectiveness).

Given the political tensions within the Gaza Strip, it is not possible to assess the extent to which this sustainability risk can be mitigated through increased civil society involvement of refugees in maintenance and repair from today's perspective.⁸ However, to minimise the sustainability risk, the longer-term financial security of the operating and maintenance costs of the UNRWA schools, which make a substantial contribution to improving the educational level of the target group (Palestinian refugees of primary school age), would be necessary.⁹

Given the existing risks, it cannot be ruled out that the positive effects of the project achieved with the schools will decline, but they are likely to remain positive. From today's perspective, the sustainability of the project is rated as satisfactory.

Sustainability rating: 3

⁷ Khatib 2018: Abkehr von der Politik. Eine Umfrage unter jungen Menschen in Palästina. Accessible online at <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/14420.pdf> (11.11.2010).

⁸ Capacity building to strengthen the processes and structures of the existing Camp Service Committees could, for example, help to encourage refugees to participate more and to determine their own course of action.

⁹ It remains to be seen whether the USA will resume the funding of UNRWA after the change of government.

Notes on the methods used to evaluate project success (project rating)

Projects (and programmes) are evaluated on a six-point scale, the criteria being **relevance, effectiveness, efficiency** and **overarching developmental impact**. The ratings are also used to arrive at a **final assessment** of a project's overall developmental efficacy. The scale is as follows:

Level 1	Very good result that clearly exceeds expectations
Level 2	Good result, fully in line with expectations and without any significant shortcomings
Level 3	Satisfactory result – project falls short of expectations but the positive results dominate
Level 4	Unsatisfactory result – significantly below expectations, with negative results dominating despite discernible positive results
Level 5	Clearly inadequate result – despite some positive partial results, the negative results clearly dominate
Level 6	The project has no impact or the situation has actually deteriorated

Rating levels 1-3 denote a positive assessment or successful project while rating levels 4-6 denote a negative assessment.

Sustainability is evaluated according to the following four-point scale:

Sustainability level 1 (very good sustainability): The developmental efficacy of the project (positive to date) is very likely to continue undiminished or even increase.

Sustainability level 2 (good sustainability): The developmental efficacy of the project (positive to date) is very likely to decline only minimally but remain positive overall. (This is what can normally be expected).

Sustainability level 3 (satisfactory sustainability): The developmental efficacy of the project (positive to date) is very likely to decline significantly but remain positive overall. This rating is also assigned if the sustainability of a project is considered inadequate up to the time of the ex post evaluation but is very likely to evolve positively so that the project will ultimately achieve positive developmental efficacy.

Sustainability level 4 (inadequate sustainability): The developmental efficacy of the project is inadequate up to the time of the ex post evaluation and is very unlikely to improve. This rating is also assigned if the sustainability that has been positively evaluated to date is very likely to deteriorate severely and no longer meet the level 3 criteria.

The **overall rating** on the six-point scale is compiled from a weighting of all five individual criteria as appropriate to the project in question. Rating levels 1-3 of the overall rating denote a "successful" project while rating levels 4-6 denote an "unsuccessful" project. It should be noted that a project can generally be considered developmentally "successful" only if the achievement of the project objective ("effectiveness"), the impact on the overall objective ("overarching developmental impact") and the sustainability are rated at least "satisfactory" (level 3).