EVALUATION OF UNRWA SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE WORK

Department of Internal Oversight Services
Evaluation Division

June 2025

unrwa
الاونروا

Team members

Anshuman Bhargava, DIOS Evaluation Officer
Katherine Garven, Lead Evaluation Consultant
Sadeem Mustafa, Construction Technical Specialist
Delawar Barekzai, Risk Management Specialist

DIOS/EVAL/2025/1

About UNRWA

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to a population of over 5.7 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, and microfinance. UNRWA is financed almost entirely by voluntary contributions.

Table of Contents

Annexes

Acknowledgements

The DIOS Evaluation Division would like to thank all members of the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) for their support and guidance throughout the Evaluation, as well as all UNRWA staff who participated in and supported the data collection. Special thanks are extended to school principals who completed the online survey in Jordan and the West Bank as well as all stakeholders who participated in evaluation interviews including students, teachers, principals, parents, and community members of the case study schools. These insights were very valuable, and the evaluation would not have been possible without this level of stakeholder engagement.

Reference group members

UNRWA Staff & Management

Ms. Rafika Amira, Chief, Evaluation Division, DIOS, ERG Chair
Ms. Maria Alvarez, Senior Protection Officer, Child Protection, Protection Division, HQ - Amman
Ms. Hala Alasir, Chief Architecture Division, Infrastructure & Camp Improvement Programme, HQ - Amman
Ms. Hanadi Darwish, Chief ICIP, Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme, West Bank Field Office
Mr. Kunal Dhar, Deputy Director, Jordan Field Office
Ms. Dorothee Klaus, Director, Lebanon Field Office
Mr. Sean McGreevy, Senior Programme Officer, Department of Planning, HQ - Amman
Mr. Unai Sacona, Deputy Director, Education, HQ - Amman
Ms. Georgina Stickels, Senior Environmental Manager, Department of Planning, HQ – Amma

External

Ms. Muna Al Banna, Regional Advisor, Infrastructure and Project Management, Jordan, UNOPS
Mr. Farid Ashour, Sector Coordinator, KFW
Mr. Carlos Beteta, Senior Technical Advisor/Portfolio Manager, KFW
Ms. Reem Halaseh, Jordan, UNDP
Mr. Felix Neugebauer, Portfolio Manager, KFW

List of Acronyms

DIOS: Department of Internal Oversight Services

ERG: Evaluation Reference Group

FGDs: Focus Group Discussions

HQ: Headquarters

ICIP: UNRWA's Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme

IDP: Internally Displaced People

KIIs: Key Informant Interviews

PSO: Programme Support Office

OECD/DAC: Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development/ Development Assistance Committee

ToC: Theory of Change

UFE: Utilization-Focused Evaluation

UN: United Nations

UNEG: United Nations Evaluation Group

UNRWA: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

WASH: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Executive Summary

Introduction

Background and Evaluation Purpose

UNRWA's Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme (ICIP) was created to improve the quality of life of Palestine refugees by providing, maintaining, and improving infrastructure both within and outside the refugee camps. The UNRWA Evaluation Division at the Department of Internal Oversight Services (DIOS) conducted an evaluation of UNRWA's ICIP school construction and maintenance work that serves the dual purpose of accountability and learning. This is the first evaluation focused on ICIP's school construction and maintenance work across UNRWA's five fields of operation and therefore provides important knowledge to guide the Agency's work and inform future decision-making for ICIP's school construction and maintenance as well as other areas of ICIP's work.

Evaluation Scope, Criteria, and Questions

The evaluation scope covers construction and maintenance of UNRWA schools carried out between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2023. This includes the entire programming process from stakeholder consultation to end-user feedback. While all of UNRWA's fields of operation are considered as part of the assessment, the evaluation specifically focused on the Jordan and West Bank fields[1] as case studies with in-person and in-depth virtual visits due to limited evaluation resources and limited access to other fields that were experiencing extreme conflict and instability during the evaluation period.

The evaluation used the standard Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development / Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability in line with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) standards and answered the following evaluation questions:

1. To what extent is the ICIP's school construction and maintenance work meeting the most urgent needs and priorities of Palestinian refugees, including the most vulnerable and those with intersecting vulnerabilities? (Relevance)
2. To what extent were key stakeholders, including Palestinian refugees, engaged

3. in the selection, design, planning, and implementation of ICIP's school construction and maintenance initiatives? In what ways was end user feedback gathered and acted upon? (Relevance)

[1] Syria was initially selected as one of the two case study fields. However, stakeholders became unavailable to participate in the evaluation due to the sudden political changes and instability that took place in December 2024. The evaluators thus shifted the case study to the West Bank where stakeholders were more readily available to participate.

4. To what extent is the ICIP's design and operations regarding its school construction and maintenance work aligned with UN, national, regional, and international school construction
5. standards and best practices? (Coherence)
6. To what extent is the ICIP's design and operations regarding its school construction and maintenance work aligned with the work of other UNRWA departments and other actors in the camps? (Coherence)
7. To what extent has the ICIP built and maintained UNRWA schools using the most cost-effective approaches? (Efficiency)
8. To what extent are ICIP's management systems and processes to build and maintain UNRWA schools efficient and effective (Efficiency)
9. To what extent have planned results of ICIP's construction and maintenance of UNRWA schools been achieved across UNRWA's five fields of operation? What unplanned results, if any, have been achieved? What are the primary factors that have enabled and/or hindered the achievement of results? (Effectiveness)
10. To what extent has the ICIP's construction and maintenance of UNRWA schools led to more inclusive quality education facilities that are accessible, safe, secure, healthy, emergency responsive, 'green' and risk-adverse? (Effectiveness)
11. In what ways has ICIP's construction and maintenance of UNRWA schools influenced the teaching and learning environment? To what extent has ICIP's construction and maintenance of UNRWA schools supported improved quality of life for Palestinian students as well as the wider community across fields of operation? (Impact)
12. To what extent are results achieved by ICIP's school construction and maintenance work likely to be sustainable? (Sustainability).

Evaluation Methodology and Limitations

To meet the evaluation's purpose and objectives, the Evaluation Team drew on mixed quantitative and qualitative methods, using both primary and secondary quantitative and qualitative data, which included an extensive document review of ICIP and external documents, an online survey with school principals[2] across the Jordan and West Bank fields, and interviews[3] with 159 stakeholders (55 women and 104 men). In addition, a risk management specialist was hired to conduct a Risk Management Assessment of ICIP's school construction and maintenance work whose main findings and recommendations were then incorporated into the evaluation report. The evaluation also used a theory-based approach based on the reconstructed theory of change (ToC) of ICIP's construction and maintenance work along with a participatory and transparent approach. In addition, since the evaluation will be used as a forward-looking

[2] Both principals were invited to participate in the survey for those schools with double shifts.

[3] This includes the number of stakeholders interviewed by the evaluation team and excludes any additional interviews conducted by the Risk Management Specialist since many stakeholders who had already been consulted by the evaluation team were consulted again by the Risk Management Specialist. In order to avoid any duplication in numbers, the total number of stakeholders interviewed by the Risk Management Specialist is presented in the following paragraphs.

tool by UNRWA to inform future ICIP school construction and maintenance work, it was utilization-focused[4] by engaging key stakeholders to provide feedback on the evaluation design and to validate recommendations[5] to ensure that the evaluation findings, conclusions, recommendations, and lessons learned are as useful as possible to the evaluation users. The evaluation also used a human rights, gender equality, disability inclusive and equitable approach and was in line with the Ethical Code of Conduct for Evaluation on the UN System and the updated UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (2020).

The evaluation faced a number of limitations that included limited accessibility to stakeholders due to conflict in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria during the data collection phase. To mitigate this challenge, the Evaluation Team conducted virtual interviews with available UNRWA staff in these fields. Limited and fragmented documentation on UNRWA school construction and maintenance across departments and fields was also a limitation which was mitigated by drawing on primary data collected through the survey and stakeholder interviews. In addition, since there is currently no universal "gold standard" or benchmark against which the UNRWA ICIP school construction and maintenance work can be evaluated, the Evaluation Team constructed its own benchmark to use for the evaluation analysis that is relevant and responsive to the unique characteristics of UNRWA by drawing on 1) a document review of UN-wide standards and good practices[6] related to infrastructure construction and ICIP priorities; 2) the views, perspectives, and priorities of UNRWA staff including teachers, Palestinian students and parents; and members of the Palestinian community; 3) and national, regional, and international standards and good practices on school construction and maintenance.

Summary of Key Findings

Relevance

UNRWA's school construction and maintenance work is relevant to and deeply valued by the Palestinian refugee community as educational infrastructure provides Palestine refugees with a sense of hope for the future. There is a considerable need to build, rehabilitate, renovate, and maintain schools across UNRWA's five fields of operation. The prioritization process used by ICIP and the Education Department at the field level to select those schools that most require major maintenance, upgrading/renovation, reconstruction, and/or new construction is largely standardized and transparent to stakeholders. However, strategic decision-making on where to allocate resources is currently primarily based on donor interests and is hindered by limited consolidated data on school infrastructure at the ICIP HQ level and lack of resource

[4] Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE), developed by Michael Quinn Patton, is an approach based on the principle that an evaluation should be designed and executed to enhance its usefulness to its intended users.

[5] Key stakeholders that include ICIP staff, other UNRWA staff, and external donors were invited to participate in an Evaluation Reference Group that provided feedback on the Evaluation Inception Report and Draft Report and who participated in a virtual Inception Meeting and Recommendations Workshop to validate the evaluation recommendations.

[6] Good practices will include examples of school construction and maintenance approaches that are working well across the region and/or globally that promote efficiency, effectiveness, and financial, environmental, and social sustainability.

mobilization collaboration across fields. While ICIP's Participatory Design Guidelines established in 2023 have formalized stakeholder consultation with end users on new school designs, more investment is required to fully implement the guidelines so that all stakeholders are meaningfully engaged, and their feedback is fully considered.

Coherence

ICIP's current construction and maintenance standards and guidelines have significantly improved over the past several years and are now much better aligned with UN, regional, and international standards particularly in areas related to gender equality and disability inclusion. There remain, however, some gaps and areas for improvement in ICIP's design standards related to health and safety, classroom size, and ambient temperature control in classrooms. Specifically, improvements in ICIP guidelines are needed regarding fire safety standards, crowd control, on-site health services, and outdoor protective covering. Current physical classroom sizes are also below OECD standards which limit the extent to which UNRWA teachers can apply active learning techniques. In addition, as most UNRWA schools do not have sufficient ambient temperature control in classrooms which include heating or air conditioning units due to limited funds to cover operational and maintenance costs, students are often required to study in near-freezing environments or in temperatures over 30 degrees Celsius. While ICIP generally demonstrates good alignment and collaboration with other UNRWA departments, including the Education Programme and Protection Division, there is room to further strengthen collaboration through improved data collection and analysis, joint strategic planning, and increased responsiveness to end-user priorities and feedback.

Efficiency

A number of issues primarily related to procurement, quality control measures, and cost analysis are negatively affecting ICIP's ability to achieve high value for money across its construction and maintenance work. A lack of varied bidders during procurement and an over-emphasis on cost savings compared to quality work during the procurement selection process are major factors that are negatively impacting value for money. UNRWA also has insufficient firewalls, risk management, and anti-corruption measures in place during the procurement of school construction and maintenance contracts which pose a significant threat to the integrity, transparency, and efficiency of schools' construction and maintenance projects. The Risk Management Analysis found that ICIP does not have a sufficient risk management framework in place to identify and manage strategic, programmatic, and operational risks. In addition, quality control and monitoring measures are insufficient with ICIP HQ struggling to collect, analyze, and disseminate consolidated data on school construction and maintenance needs and priorities across fields. This is negatively impacting its ability to support cross-field collaboration or strategic planning.

Effectiveness

The degree of effective implementation of ICIP's construction and maintenance standards varies across fields and projects, thus affecting the degree to which ICIP is able to achieve its objectives. Limited

resources to build new school construction and maintain existing school infrastructure coupled with minimal community ownership and usage of school premises are negatively impacting ICIP's ability to achieve planned outcomes. While most new school construction projects are strong at supporting more inclusive and accessible educational facilities, many fall short particularly on implementing ICIP's environmental sustainability and greening standards. While students, parents, and teachers largely appreciate ICIP's more modern school designs, they are calling for greater adaptation to local contexts and the needs of end users along with a stronger focus on safety and the protection of students. Due to extensive conflict and instability across most of UNRWA's fields of operations, there is also a need for UNRWA school designs to better prepare some schools to serve as IDP shelters when necessary.

Impact

UNRWA construction of new schools has increased the morale of students and teachers and is providing a more conducive learning environment. At the same time, some persistent problems across case study schools are reportedly having a negative impact on their learning and performance. Small classroom size is often hindering teachers' ability to apply active learning techniques; concerns among students, parents, and teachers regarding the safety of students is creating learning distractions in some case study schools; and a lack of adequate ambient temperature control in classrooms is affecting students' ability to concentrate on their studies. In addition, the value of UNRWA's school infrastructure to the Palestinian refugee community could be further enhanced by encouraging the school to become the center of the community by facilitating community members to further use the school infrastructure after school hours while continuing to ensure its security and neutrality.

Sustainability

ICIP is attempting to integrate elements into its new construction designs to promote financial sustainability and reduce operational costs in the long-term. However, its limited investment in school maintenance is causing premature decay of UNRWA school infrastructure. Further resource mobilization focused on maintenance is required to sustainably maintain UNRWA school infrastructure.

Conclusions

Conclusion #1. Improved school construction and learning environment: Over the past five years, UNRWA has made considerable improvements to the quality of its school construction work by using child friendly designs; engaging stakeholders and end-users in consultation; and integrating cross-cutting priorities primarily related to accessibility and disability inclusion, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. While continued efforts are required to further implement and strengthen this work, these improvements are resulting in more user-friendly schools that better facilitate learning.

Conclusion #2. Further customization of school construction designs to meet end user needs: UNRWA's efforts to strengthen its centralized school design function has improved standardization and quality

control across fields. However, while some customization and adaptation of school designs occurs across fields, further efforts are needed to adapt school designs to local contexts and end user needs to better reflect the diversity of local contexts and stakeholder needs and priorities across fields. Without further adaptation to local contexts and stakeholder priorities, UNRWA school construction risks not fully meeting the needs of its end users.

Conclusion #3. Improvements to further strengthen the quality of education: There remains room to further strengthen UNRWA's school construction standards and implementation particularly in the areas of health and safety, school size per number of students, adequate ambient temperature control in classrooms, child protection, and providing more green spaces for students and teachers. The overall quality of construction and maintenance work and its value-for money can also be further strengthened through improvements to the Agency's procurement practices, quality control measures, and risk management practices. By addressing these areas for improvement, UNRWA has the potential to significantly improve the learning environment and quality of education provided to Palestine refugees.

Conclusion #4. Community engagement and ownership of UNRWA schools: UNRWA school installations are currently not reaching their full potential to be used by and benefit the Palestine refugee community. Due to budget limitations that don't currently facilitate the hiring of security guards and the installation of CCTV cameras across all schools as well as a desire by UNRWA staff to protect the integrity of school property and uphold the Agency's principal of neutrality, schools across fields are primary closed to the public after school hours and can only be used for organised purposes with special permission. This reduces their value to the community and hinders community engagement in the upkeep and protection of UNRWA schools. For relatively little investment, UNRWA has the potential to make a bigger impact on the wider community by making its school infrastructure more accessible. In addition, there is a need for UNRWA's school design guidelines to include elements that help schools serve as shelters for IDPs during times of conflict.

Conclusion #5. Strategic decision-making and resource mobilization: UNRWA requires consolidated data on school construction and maintenance across fields and strengthened leadership from ICIP HQ in close collaboration with ERCD to facilitate strategic decision-making around prioritization and resource mobilization for school construction and maintenance. This is particularly urgent with respect to school maintenance which is severely under-funded and is causing premature decay of UNRWA infrastructure and higher school operating costs. Without this holistic approach, the ICIP Programme will remain fragmented with fields competing against one another for school construction and maintenance funds.

Recommendations

The evaluation identified *five recommendations* that stem from the evaluation findings and conclusions and are designed to strengthen UNRWA's school construction and maintenance work. Each one includes an overall strategic recommendation as outlined below followed by suggested operational recommendations that are included in the main body of the evaluation report.

Recommendation #1 ICIP should consider further deepening its stakeholder consultation process and demonstrating greater flexibility in its school construction designs to better reflect end-user feedback during the design phase to ensure that new school constructions are responsive to stakeholder needs and priorities as well as local operating contexts across fields.

Recommendation #2 ICIP should further strengthen its design standards and guidelines to be more aligned with regional and international standards and good practices and to further facilitate a positive school learning environment.

Recommendation #3 (a) ICIP HQ and ICIP Field Chiefs should strengthen monitoring, risk management, and quality control measures to ensure that ICIP standards and guidelines are being properly and fully implemented and maintained and to further improve value for money and the quality of contractors' work. (b) In addition, UNRWA procurement processes should be modified to create stronger firewalls.

Recommendation #4 ICIP HQ and Field Chiefs should support the Education Department to further strengthen community usage of UNRWA's school infrastructure and should collaborate with procurement units to identify opportunities for involving Palestine refugees in the implementation of construction and maintenance contracts to increase community engagement in and ownership of UNRWA schools.

Recommendation #5 The Executive Office should provide ICP HQ with the mandate to play a stronger role in supporting Agency-wide prioritization and resource mobilization for school construction and maintenance.

Al Zeeb school in Ein el Tal camp, Aleppo ©2024 UNRWA photo

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 with a mandate to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to registered Palestine refugees in the Agency's area of operations, namely the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. As of 2023[7], 6.7 million women, men, and children were registered as Palestine refugees with UNRWA, and 543,077 students were enrolled in UNRWA schools[8]. The total registered population is expected to exceed 7.3 million by 2028.[9]

UNRWA's Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme (ICIP) was created to improve the quality of life of Palestine refugees by providing, maintaining, and improving infrastructure both within and outside the refugee camps. ICIP's core functions are a) Participatory Urban Planning and Implementation for Camp Improvements; b) Construction and Rehabilitation of Shelters; c) Social Infrastructure (health centres, schools and other UNRWA premises); d) Environmental Infrastructure (such as water and sanitation) and Environmental Health; and e) Emergency Preparedness and Response. See Annex 1 for the Theory of Change of the ICIP Strategy 2016 – 2021 to understand more about ICIP's overall goals, objectives and change logic.

Construction and maintenance work forms the bulk of ICIP activities and cuts across the Programme core functions with school construction and maintenance forming a large portion of this investment. See Annex 2 for a summary of ICIP expenditures per field. UNRWA's operating context varies considerably across fields and is subject to rapid changes. For instance, while UNRWA operations experience relative political and economic stability in Jordan, operations in the four other fields of Gaza, West Bank, Syria, and Lebanon have recently experienced conflict and economic insecurity, which has at times affected ICIP's ability to access these areas and has negatively impacted the costs of construction and maintenance work in these fields. See Annex 3 for a detailed description of ICIP's operating contexts in relation to its school construction and maintenance work across UNRWA's five fields of operation. Below is the reconstructed theory of ICIP's school construction and maintenance work which was developed by the Evaluation Team to guide the evaluation's data collection and analysis[10].

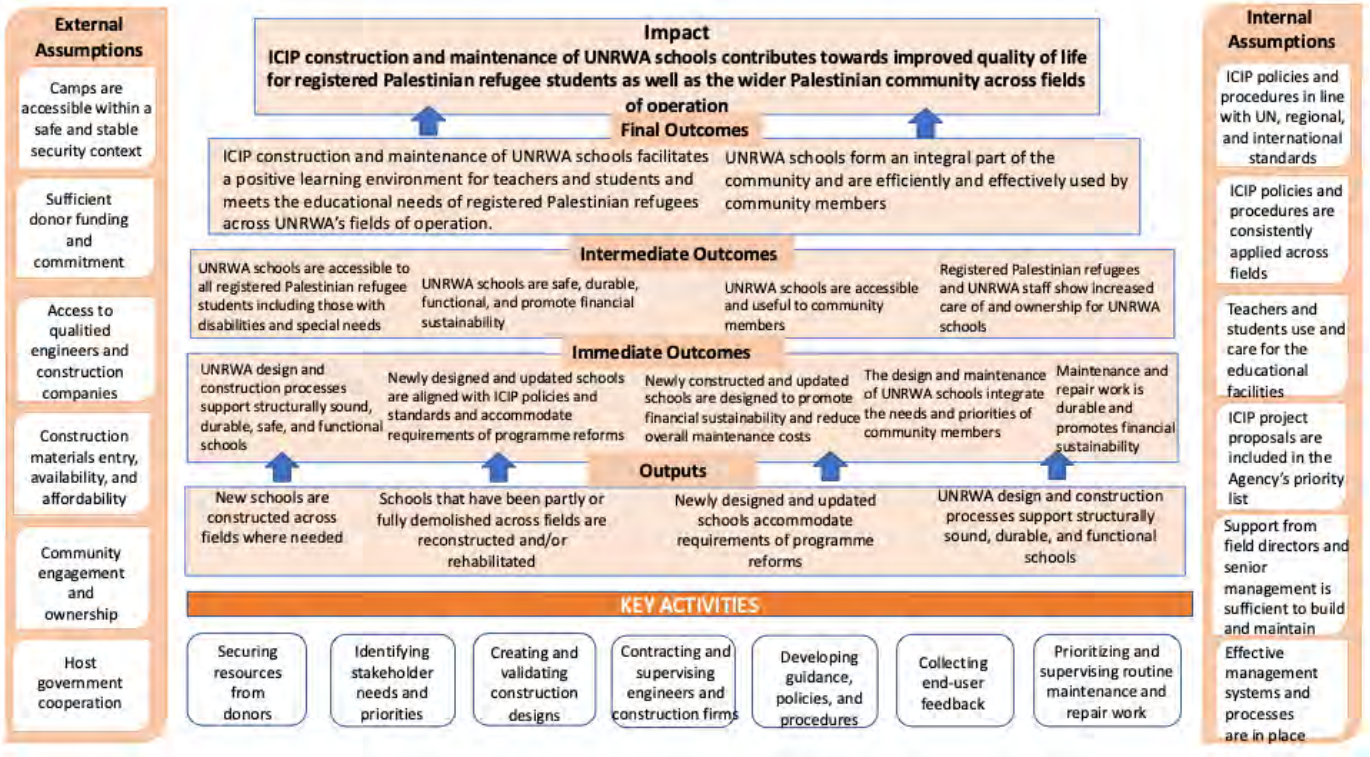
[7] These numbers come from the UNRWA Annual Operational Report, which is the most reliable statistical source. The 2024 UNRWA Operational Report has not yet been published.

[8] 2023 UNRWA Annual Operational Report https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/aor_2023_-_english_-_final.pdf

[9] Source: UNRWA Strategic Plan 2023-28 https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/strategic_plan_2023-2028.pdf

[10] The reconstructed ToC is intended only to guide the evaluation design, data collection, and analysis and is not meant to serve as an official ToC for ICIP's school construction and maintenance work. Designing an official ToC would require a more intensive process with considerable stakeholder participation.

Figure 1. Reconstructed Theory of Change of ICIP's School Construction and Maintenance Work



1.2 Evaluation Purpose and Scope

The UNRWA Evaluation Division at the Department of Internal Oversight Services (DIOS) conducted an evaluation of UNRWA's ICIP school construction and maintenance work that serves the **dual purpose of accountability and learning**. School construction and maintenance was chosen as an evaluation theme due to high interest among UNRWA senior staff to understand how improvements could be made to educational infrastructure, the large financial investment made by UNRWA to build and maintain schools across fields, and the common relevance of school construction and maintenance across all fields of operation. In addition, insights and lessons learned on ICIP's management arrangements and procedures gained from this evaluation will be applied to other areas of ICIP work such as health, camp improvement, and shelter rehabilitation. This is the first evaluation focused on ICIP's school construction and maintenance work across UNRWA's five fields of operation and therefore provides important knowledge to guide the Agency's work and inform future decision-making for ICIP's school construction and maintenance work as well as other areas of ICIP's work.

The evaluation is designed to meet the following **evaluation objectives**:

1. Assess the extent to which results have been achieved regarding the Programme's work on the construction and maintenance of UNRWA schools and identify the factors that have contributed or hindered the achievement of results.
2. Identify targeted and actionable lessons learned and recommendations to inform and further strengthen future ICIP's work related to school construction and maintenance.

The **primary evaluation users** will be UNRWA HQ and ICIP staff to inform future ICIP work. Donors may also use the evaluation results to inform decisions around future funding. **Secondary evaluation users** will include UNRWA staff from other departments and programmes, host governments, and rights holders (i.e. Palestinian refugees) to strengthen their understanding of and meaningful participation in the Programme.

The **evaluation scope** covers construction and maintenance of UNRWA schools carried out between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2023. This includes the entire programming process from stakeholder consultation to end-user feedback. While all of UNRWA's fields of operation are considered as part of the assessment, the evaluation specifically focuses on the Jordan and West Bank fields[11] as case studies with in-person and in-depth virtual visits due to limited evaluation resources and limited access to other fields that were experiencing extreme conflict and instability during the evaluation period. While the evaluation assessed the relevance of ICIP's allocation of funds towards school construction and maintenance, thus taking into consideration other programming needs, its work outside of school construction and maintenance was not included in the evaluation scope (please refer to the Limitations section for information on mitigation measures).

1.2.1 Evaluation Questions

The evaluation used the standard Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development / Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability in line with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) standards. Evaluation questions used to guide the evaluation are presented below, while **Annex 4** presents the full evaluation matrix that includes evaluation sub-questions and that outlines how data collection methods and sources were used to answer the evaluation questions and sub-questions using assessment indicators.

1. To what extent is the ICIP's school construction and maintenance work meeting the most urgent needs and priorities of Palestinian refugees, including the most vulnerable and those with intersecting vulnerabilities? (Relevance)
2. To what extent were key stakeholders, including Palestinian refugees, engaged in the selection, design, planning, and implementation of ICIP's school construction and maintenance initiatives? In what ways was end user feedback gathered and acted upon? (Relevance)
3. To what extent is the ICIP's design and operations regarding its school construction and maintenance work aligned with UN, national, regional, and international school construction standards and best practices? (Coherence)

[11] Syria was initially selected as one of the two case study fields. However, stakeholders became unavailable to participate in the evaluation due to the sudden political changes and instability that took place in December 2024. The evaluators thus shifted the case study to the West Bank where stakeholders were more readily available to participate.

4. To what extent is the ICIP's design and operations regarding its school construction and maintenance work aligned with the work of other UNRWA departments and other actors in the camps? (Coherence)
5. To what extent has the ICIP built and maintained UNRWA schools using the most cost-effective approaches? (Efficiency)
6. To what extent are ICIP's management systems and processes to build and maintain UNRWA schools efficient and effective (Efficiency)
7. To what extent have planned results of ICIP's construction and maintenance of UNRWA schools been achieved across UNRWA's five fields of operation? What unplanned results, if any, have been achieved? What are the primary factors that have enabled and/or hindered the achievement of results? (Effectiveness)
8. To what extent has the ICIP's construction and maintenance of UNRWA schools led to more inclusive quality education facilities that are accessible, safe, secure, healthy, emergency responsive, 'green' and risk-adverse? (Effectiveness)
9. In what ways has ICIP's construction and maintenance of UNRWA schools influenced the teaching and learning environment? To what extent has ICIP's construction and maintenance of UNRWA schools supported improved quality of life for Palestinian students as well as the wider community across fields of operation? (Impact)
10. . To what extent are results achieved by ICIP's school construction and maintenance work likely to be sustainable? (Sustainability)

1.3 Methodology

To meet the evaluation's purpose and objectives, the Evaluation Team drew on **mixed quantitative and qualitative methods**, using both primary and secondary quantitative and qualitative data, which included an extensive **document review** of ICIP and external documents, an **online survey with school principals**[12] across the Jordan and West Bank fields, and **interviews**[13] with 159 stakeholders (55 women and 104 men), as outlined in Table 1 below. See Annex 5 for a full list of stakeholders interviewed.

[12] Both principals were invited to participate in the survey for those schools with double shifts.

[13] This includes the number of stakeholders interviewed by the evaluation team and excludes any additional interviews conducted by the Risk Management Specialist since many stakeholders who had already been consulted by the evaluation team were consulted again by the Risk Management Specialist. In order to avoid any duplication in numbers, the total number of stakeholders interviewed by the Risk Management Specialist is presented in the following paragraphs.

Table 1. Interviewed Stakeholders

Stakeholder Group	UNRWA HQ	Jordan	West Bank	Syria	Lebanon	Gaza	Other	Total
ICIP Staff	11	6	5	3	5	2		32
Other UNRWA Staff	5	6	4	2	2	1		20
Teachers and School Principals		10	11					21
Students		34	8					42
Parents		27	8					35
Community Members		4						4
Donors							3	3
Contractors			1					1
UN staff from other agencies							1	1

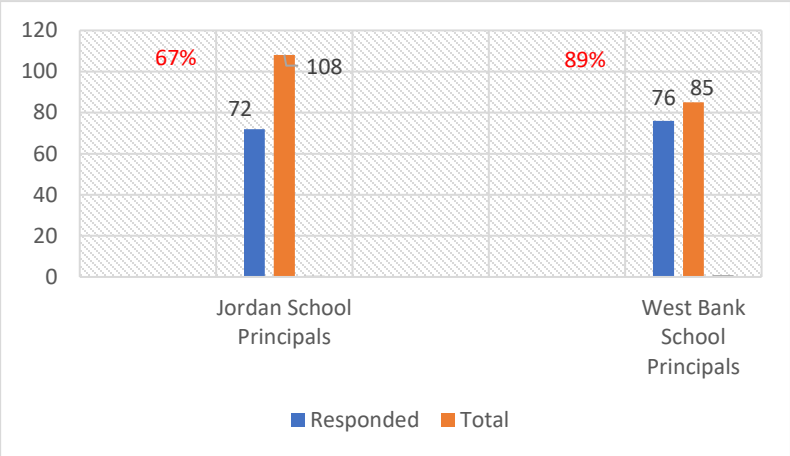
As part of the evaluation's **case study approach**, the Evaluation Team conducted in-person school assessments in Jordan of the new school construction of the Talbiyeh Boys' School and an extension built onto the existing Manshiyat Bani Hashim Boys School[14]. Virtual school assessments in the West Bank were conducted for the newly constructed Beit Ula Girls' School and the Tulkarem Basic Boys' School[15]. As part of these assessments, the Evaluation Team conducted interviews with school principals, students, teachers, parents, and community members (where feasible). They also conducted a physical inspection (in-person or virtually) of the school infrastructure. The evaluation scope and budget permitted an assessment of four schools as part of the case studies. The selection of schools was based on those that were constructed during the evaluation scope as well as accessibility to the evaluation team. The severe instability across the region during the data collection period meant that no schools in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and parts of the West Bank were available to be included in school assessments.

The evaluation **survey** with school principals from UNRWA schools operating from UNRWA owned premises across Jordan and the West Bank facilitated the gathering of stakeholder views regarding the quality of school construction and usability, the status of regular and major maintenance works and needs, and areas for improvement. This included schools selected for school assessments as part of the case studies but excluded schools that are using rented facilities or government facilities. Most respondents (over 80%) are users of UNRWA schools that were built before 2019 and that have not received any major maintenance or reconstruction since 2019. As outlined in Figure 2 below, the survey experienced a good response rate of 66.7%; 72/108 in Jordan and 89.4%; 76/85 in the West Bank. See Annex 6 for a summary of the survey results.

[14] Only three schools in Jordan were newly constructed or received extensions during the evaluation scope from 2019 – 2023. The third school in Zohour was evaluated by the Jordan Field Office in 2023. Therefore, the other two schools were selected for this evaluation.

[15] These two schools were selected due to their ability to participate in the evaluation amid a challenging security situation across many areas in the West Bank.

Figure 2. Survey response rates



In addition, a risk management specialist was hired to conduct a Risk Management Assessment of ICIP's school construction and maintenance work. As part of this assessment, the specialist conducted an in-depth document review of key ICIP and UNRWA documentation related to risk management, held interviews with 11 ICIP and other UNRWA staff (6 women and 5 men), and prepared a Risk Assessment Brief whose main findings and recommendations were then incorporated into the evaluation report. The risk management methodology and analysis were aligned with the UN Enterprise Risk Management Framework, UN suppliers code of conduct, and the ISO 31000 standard that provide principles and guidelines for risk management assessments. See Annex 5 for the list of stakeholders interviewed and Annex 7 for a list of documents consulted as part of the Risk Management Assessment.

The evaluation also used a **theory-based approach** based on the reconstructed theory of change (ToC) of ICIP's construction and maintenance work along with a **participatory and transparent approach**. In addition, since the evaluation will be used as a forward-looking tool by UNRWA to inform future ICIP school construction and maintenance work, it was **utilization-focused**[16] by engaging key stakeholders to provide feedback on the evaluation design and to validate recommendations[17] to ensure that the evaluation findings, conclusions, recommendations, and lessons learned are as useful as possible to the evaluation users. The evaluation also used a **human rights, gender equality, disability inclusive and equitable approach** by making every effort possible to engage an equal number of women and men in the evaluation as well as stakeholders from diverse stakeholder groups, including Palestinian students, parents, and members of the community. The evaluation **analysis** drew on a theory of change analysis, contribution analysis, cross-field comparison analysis, quantitative data analysis, coding and triangulation, gender equality and equity analysis, and process mapping. The evaluation followed the UNEG Norms and

[16] Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE), developed by Michael Quinn Patton, is an approach based on the principle that an evaluation should be designed and executed to enhance its usefulness to its intended users.

[17] Key stakeholders that include ICIP staff, other UNRWA staff, and external donors were invited to participate in an Evaluation Reference Group that provided feedback on the Evaluation Inception Report and Draft Report and who participated in a virtual Inception Meeting and Recommendations Workshop to validate the evaluation recommendations.

Standards[18] and its approach is in line with the Ethical Code of Conduct for Evaluation on the UN System and the updated UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (2020).

1.4 Limitations

The evaluation faced a number of challenges and limitations with the Evaluation Team attempting mitigation measures as outlined below.

1.4.1 **Limited accessibility to stakeholders in several fields:** Due to the current conflict in Gaza, most of UNRWA's school facilities have been destroyed and could therefore not be observed or inspected. In addition, stakeholders have been widely displaced and/or killed and were therefore largely unavailable to participate in this evaluation during the data collection phase. Due to the conflict in Lebanon, all UNRWA schools were closed with many serving as shelters during the data collection period. Many of UNRWA's staff have turned their attention towards the humanitarian response and were unavailable to participate in this evaluation. Increasing conflict and instability in the West Bank has also resulted in some school closures and has diverted attention from UNRWA staff towards a humanitarian response. In Syria, changes in political stability that occurred in mid-December 2024 during the data collection period meant that most stakeholders became unavailable to participate in the evaluation. To mitigate this challenge, the Evaluation Team worked with ICIP staff in Gaza, Lebanon, and the West Bank to reach those stakeholders who were available virtually. In addition, the Evaluation Team rapidly shifted the planned virtual Syria case study to a virtual West Bank case study. While this approach helped to capture some stakeholder views from Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank, the fact that most stakeholders from Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria were absent from this evaluation is a significant limitation that has affected the quality of the evaluation findings and recommendations.

1.4.2 **Limited and fragmented documentation on UNRWA school construction and maintenance across departments and fields:** Information on UNRWA's school construction and maintenance (including activities conducted, results achieved, and financial resources) are scattered across UNRWA departments and fields and are often not consolidated at HQ level. In some cases, such as in Gaza and Lebanon, ICIP field staff were unable to send through all requested data as they were busy responding to emergency crises. This hindered the Evaluation Team's ability to collect and assess comprehensive data on UNRWA's school construction and maintenance. To mitigate this challenge, the Evaluation Team worked with UNRWA staff from across departments and fields to collate data to the greatest extent possible and also relied on primary data collected through the survey and stakeholder interviews.

1.4.3 **Lack of a "gold standard" or universal benchmark for assessing the quality of school construction and maintenance:** There is currently no universal "gold standard" or benchmark against which the UNRWA ICIP school construction and maintenance work can be evaluated. To

[18] The UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation (2016) include the following 10 norms: 1) Internationally agreed principles, goals and targets; 2) Utility; 3) Credibility; 4) Independence; 5) Impartiality; 6) Ethics; 7) Transparency; 8) Human rights and gender equality; 9) National evaluation capacities; and 10) Professionalism

mitigate this challenge, the Evaluation Team constructed its own benchmark to use for the evaluation analysis that is relevant and responsive to the unique characteristics of UNRWA by drawing on three data sources that include:1) a document review of UN-wide standards and good practices[19] related to infrastructure construction and ICIP priorities including environmental sustainability, inclusion, accessibility, and gender equality[20]; 2) the views, perspectives, and priorities of UNRWA staff including teachers, Palestinian students and parents; and members of the Palestinian community; 3) and national, regional, and international standards and good practices on school construction and maintenance obtained through a document review. The evaluation findings describe this benchmark, assess the extent to which UNRWA's current school construction and maintenance standards are meeting the benchmark, and outline what actions would be required to fully achieve the benchmark and integrate additional good practices.

Before & After: Al Zeeb School in Ein el Tal Camp, Aleppo ©2024 UNRWA Photo

[19] Good practices will include examples of school construction and maintenance approaches that are working well across the region and/or globally that promote efficiency, effectiveness, and financial, environmental, and social sustainability.

[20] The UN does not have an established set of UN-wide standards or guidelines for the construction and maintenance of school buildings. However, the UN does have standards in different areas that correspond to ICIP school construction priorities. For instance, the UN has a Building Performance Manual for the Design and Construction of UN Common Premises Office Buildings that can provide some insight into UN construction standards. In addition, the UN has UN-wide policies on gender equality, inclusion, and sustainability that can also provide some insights into these priority areas.

2.Findings

2.1 Relevance

Overall Assessment

UNRWA's school construction and maintenance work is relevant to and deeply valued by the Palestinian refugee community as educational infrastructure provides Palestine refugees with a sense of hope for the future. There is a considerable need to build, rehabilitate, renovate, and maintain schools across UNRWA's five fields of operation. The prioritization process used by ICIP and the Education Department at the field level to select those schools that most require major maintenance, upgrading/renovation, reconstruction, and/or new construction is largely standardized and transparent to stakeholders. However, strategic decision-making on where to allocate resources is currently primarily based on donor interests and is hindered by limited consolidated data on school infrastructure at the ICIP HQ level and lack of resource mobilization collaboration across fields. While ICIP's Participatory Design Guidelines established in 2023 have formalized stakeholder consultation with end users on new school designs, more investment is required to fully implement the guidelines so that all stakeholders are meaningfully engaged, and their feedback is fully considered.

Finding #1: ***Stakeholders across UNRWA fields widely agree that ICIP's investment in school construction and maintenance is highly needed and deeply valued by the Palestinian refugee community and should be prioritized.***

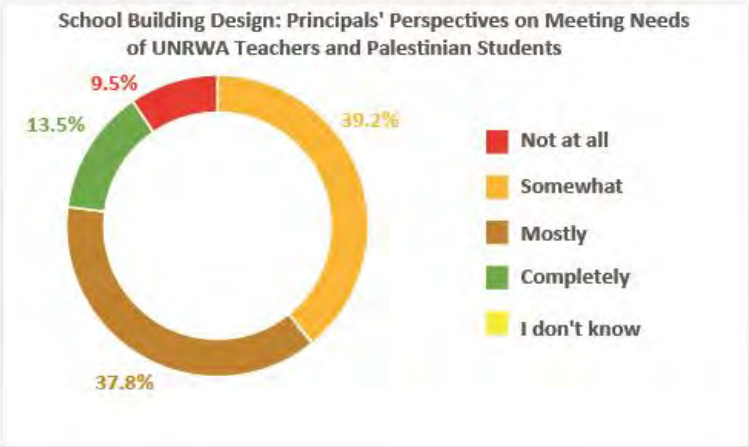
Interviewed UNRWA staff, parents, teachers, and community members agree that investing in educational infrastructure is a top priority for Palestine refugees. These stakeholders indicated that even though other needs such as shelter and health infrastructure are also important, it is key to prioritize educational infrastructure since education provides Palestine refugees with a sense of hope for the future, and having a school in the community gives refugees a sense of permanency and well-being. This is particularly the case in recent and current conflict zones such as Gaza or Syria where the school building often serves as a place of stability.

UNRWA's investment in school infrastructure and maintenance[21] is relevant and highly needed as there is a considerable need to build, rehabilitate, renovate, and maintain schools across UNRWA's five fields of operation. Indeed, new school construction is required to resolve over-crowding and to eliminate double-shifts and even triple shifts in some schools. New school infrastructure is also required to eliminate

[21] School construction refers to the building of new schools, the replacement of old deteriorated school buildings, the re-construction of demolished schools (caused by conflict or natural disaster), and any major construction initiatives such as the construction of school extensions. School maintenance refers to both regular routine maintenance to ensure the upkeep of the school premises as well as major maintenance initiatives that provide major and urgent repair to the school premises when necessary.

"floating classrooms[22]", avoid the use of costly rented premises, upgrade or rebuild old infrastructure that is no longer safe, reconstruct demolished buildings due to war and conflict, and respond to increasing numbers of students due to population growth and increased enrolment by Palestine refugee students moving from private schools to UNRWA schools in response to economic difficulties. Renovation and rehabilitation of older schools is also required to ensure that all UNRWA-owned schools are aligned with ICIP's current standards regarding accessibility and inclusion, especially for students with disabilities; classroom size; and appropriate WASH facilities such as bathrooms that are attached to the main school building; etc. As outlined in Figure 3 below, a total of 39 per cent (58/148) of surveyed principals from schools in Jordan and the West Bank state that their school building design only somewhat meets the most important needs and priorities of UNRWA teachers and Palestinian students, thus reflecting a significant need for further investment in UNRWA's school infrastructure.

Figure 3. Extent to which surveyed school principals believe that their school building design meets the most important needs and priorities of UNRWA teachers and Palestinian students



In addition, UNRWA schools require regular, minor, and major maintenance work to keep the infrastructure in good condition and to address any needs for repairs. School construction and maintenance are co-dependent, as regular maintenance and repair work are essential to sustain the lifespan of the building and to reduce the need to construct new schools to replace those that have been worn down due to poor maintenance and upkeep. At the same time, the quality of the initial construction will heavily impact the need for major maintenance and repair work as those buildings that are built with higher quality materials and more sustainable designs will likely require less investment in maintenance and repair. As outlined in Findings #2 and #7, ICIP struggles to collate up-to-date information across fields on the current status of school infrastructure and required maintenance and repair work. It also does not have a minimum threshold of infrastructure quality to identify how many schools are currently in urgent need of repair.

[22] Floating classrooms are when a class of students does not have a permanent learning space but instead uses whatever available classroom may be present in the moment.

Finding #2: ***The prioritization process used by ICIP and the Education Department at the field level to select those schools that most require major maintenance, upgrading/renovation, reconstruction, and/or new construction is largely standardized and transparent to stakeholders. However, strategic decision-making on where to allocate resources is currently primarily based on donor interests and priority areas and is hindered by limited consolidated data on school infrastructure at ICIP HQ level and lack of resource mobilization collaboration across fields.***

Most interviewed UNRWA staff, teachers, parents, and community members understood the prioritization process used by ICIP and the Education Department to identify the most urgent school construction and maintenance needs within each field and felt that the process was sufficiently transparent. As explained by ICIP and Education Department staff, the prioritization process typically occurs on an annual basis in most fields where the Education Department submits a list of construction and maintenance issues to be addressed and ICIP engineers conduct technical assessments to confirm these needs and to indicate what action needs to be taken to address them. Those issues on the list that pose an immediate safety or protection threat to students are highlighted and prioritized. Other major considerations for prioritization include a desire to eliminate double-shifts and floating classrooms and the need to re-build conflict-affected schools that have been demolished or severely damaged. This list is then shared by ICIP with colleagues who are typically located within the Programme Support Office (PSO) in each field to look for funding to address the issues. However, due to challenges in securing funding, UNRWA staff have reported that most of the issues on the list go unaddressed each year. Stakeholders at the school level such as teachers and parents also demonstrated a good understanding of the prioritization process thus suggesting relatively good transparency.

Although ICIP field staff share a list of priority construction and maintenance issues with ICIP HQ, the list is not shared widely with ERCD colleagues or prioritized across fields of operation, making it impossible to understand most pressing priorities across its fields of operation. In addition, interviewed UNRWA staff largely feel that the final decision-making on which schools will receive funds for new construction, rehabilitation, upgrading/renovation, or major maintenance is primarily based on donor-driven interests. However, ICIP's lack of an overall school construction and maintenance prioritization list can make it challenging to know where UNRWA's priorities lay. ICIP and UNRWA staff at HQ and field levels have explained that the extent to which information on school construction and maintenance needs is systematically collected, consolidated, and clearly costed varies across fields which hinders ICIP HQ's ability to prepare a holistic cross-field prioritized list of school construction and maintenance projects.

UNRWA resources allocated towards fundraising are limited with some UNRWA staff reporting that even when donors have shown interest in funding school construction and maintenance projects, UNRWA staff have been unable due to limited internal capacity to submit proposals and secure the funding. It is currently outside the mandate of ICIP staff at HQ and field level to engage in resource mobilization or support resource mobilization colleagues even though their technical knowledge and communications capacities would likely be a great support to UNRWA's resource mobilization teams. Fields conduct their own prioritization process and reach out to potential donors in a non-coordinated fragmented manner

that encourages competition as opposed to collaboration between fields. This hinders UNRWA's ability to strategically mobilize resources for school construction and maintenance in a holistic manner to meet its most urgent prioritized needs. It also limits the Agency's ability to support those fields most in need of donor funding, such as Syria which is experiencing severe donor shortages, and negatively influences UNRWA's ability to promote equity among Palestinian refugees across fields. The Risk Management Assessment also identified fragmented and competitive resource mobilization as a programmatic risk with high likelihood and impact ratings that can delay critical projects, create disparities in school infrastructure quality, and hinder long-term planning.

Finding #3: ***The creation of the ICIP-GL-13 Participatory Design Guidelines in 2023 formalized stakeholder consultation with communities and end-users during the design and upon completion of new school construction projects, which is helping to ensure that schools are designed to meet the needs and priorities of the end-users. However, the Guidelines are being applied to varying degrees across fields and formal stakeholder consultation requires further effort to be fully rolled out and effectively implemented.***

Since 2010, ICIP has been gathering user feedback six months after completed school construction projects through Post Occupancy Assessments (POAs) and has been consulting with stakeholders on the school construction design wherever feasible with available resources. However, in December 2023, ICIP HQ formalized its stakeholder engagement process by issuing the ICIP-GL-13 Participatory Design Guidelines, which stipulate that end users and community members should be systematically consulted on the school design through multiple consultation sessions and that stakeholder feedback should be integrated to the greatest extent possible into the school design. This is a very positive development as the engagement of end-users early on during the construction design can help to ensure that schools are constructed to meet the needs and priorities of the end users, which vary considerably across fields and local circumstances.

While the evaluation found that a strong effort is being made by ICIP staff across fields to effectively implement the Participatory Design Guidelines, it also found that stakeholder engagement is not being equally rolled out across all fields and schools. For instance, while all key stakeholder groups (principals, teachers, students, parents, and community members) were consulted on multiple occasions on the design of the Talbieh Boys School in Jordan, interviewed stakeholders from these same stakeholder groups reported never having been consulted during the design of the Beit Ula Girls School and Tulkarem Basic Boys School in the West Bank. This includes stakeholders such as teachers who were present during the school construction design phase but who state that they have never been consulted. It should be noted, however, that ICIP in the West Bank confirmed that a community consultation session did take place for the construction of the Beit Ula Girls school. However, meaningful engagement with the school principal and teachers was more limited for that school. In addition, for some schools, certain stakeholders appear to have been consulted while others may have not. For instance, for the extension built onto the existing Manshiyat Bani Hashim Boys School in Jordan, stakeholders stated that fathers were consulted while mothers were not equally consulted.

In addition, while it is natural that not all stakeholder ideas and feedback can be taken into consideration during the school design and construction process due to technical and budget considerations, it is essential that stakeholder consultation be meaningful and contribute to decisions on school design and that stakeholders do not feel as though their engagement has not been taken seriously. For most schools, stakeholder feedback was taken into consideration by the ICIP design team for elements such as the number of classrooms as identified by the Education Department and aesthetic considerations such as paint colour as identified by students and teachers. However, stakeholder priorities in terms of the school design have been less integrated even though ICIP guidelines encourage customization of school design based on the needs and priorities of stakeholders and the unique circumstances of each field and school. Inadequate stakeholder consultation was identified by the Risk Management Assessment as a cause for the programmatic risk of community resistance and a diminished sense of ownership over the school infrastructure which has a high impact as communities may be less likely to maintain or protect the facilities, undermining the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of the investment.

At the Talbieh Boys School, principals and teachers asked for a closed school design where corridors are inside the school structure to protect the school from external elements including extreme cold and sandstorms but were surprised to see that the designers had gone ahead with a more open design where the corridors are on the outside of the structure with the classrooms facing into the courtyard. When asked why their needs and feedback were not reflected in the school design, they received a standard response from ICIP engineers stating that their feedback was not compatible with ICIP guidelines even though the Guidelines specify that more detailed justifications for not including stakeholder suggestions are required by the ICIP design team.

2.2 Coherence

Overall Assessment

ICIP's current construction and maintenance standards and guidelines have significantly improved over the past several years and are now much better aligned with UN, regional, and international standards particularly in areas related to gender equality and disability inclusion. There remain, however, some gaps and areas for improvement in ICIP's design standards related to health and safety, classroom size,and ambient temperature control in classrooms . Specifically, improvements in ICIP guidelines are needed regarding fire safety standards, crowd control, on-site health services, and outdoor protective covering. Current physical classroom sizes are also below OECD standards which limit the extent to which UNRWA teachers can apply active learning techniques. In addition, as most UNRWA schools do not have sufficient ambient temperature control in classrooms which include heating or air conditioning units due to limited funds to cover operational and maintenance costs, students are often required to study in near-freezing environments or in temperatures over 30 degrees Celsius. While ICIP generally demonstrates good alignment and collaboration with other UNRWA departments, including the Education Programme and Protection Division, there is room to further strengthen collaboration through improved data collection and analysis, joint strategic planning, and increased responsiveness to end-user priorities and feedback.

Finding #4: ***ICIP's current construction and maintenance standards and guidelines have significantly improved over the past several years and are now much better aligned with UN, regional, and international standards particularly in areas related to gender equality and disability inclusion. There remain, however, some gaps and areas for improvement in ICIP's design standards related to health and safety, classroom size, and adequate ambient temperature control in classrooms.***

ICIP's current design standards are particularly well aligned with UN norms and standards on gender equality and disability inclusion, as outlined in Table2 below

Table.2 Examples of alignment between ICIP school construction and maintenance guidelines and key UN norms and standards on gender equality and disability inclusion

Key UN norms and standards on gender equality and disability inclusion	Examples of alignment between ICIP guidelines and UN standards on gender equality and disability inclusion
Gender Equality • **1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** • **1995 Beijing Platform for Action** • **UN Sustainable Development Goal #5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**	• ICIP school construction and maintenance guidelines stipulate that the same infrastructure and standards should be applied to girls' schools and boys' schools, thus promoting non-discrimination between girls' and boys' access to education. • ICIP school construction and maintenance guidelines take into consideration differences between the needs of girls and boys to facilitate an equitable learning environment and to create safe and inviting school facilities for both girls and boys. For instance, ICIP standards for new school constructions require bathrooms to be gender disaggregated and attached to the main school building to increase the safety and comfort of all students but particularly female students who are more at risk of harassment.
Disability Inclusion • **UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS)** • **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**	• ICIP school construction and maintenance guidelines require newly constructed schools to be accessible to students with physical disabilities to ensure that all students have equal access to UNRWA's education facilities. This includes, for instance, creating ramps for wheelchairs, using tactile surfaces for visually impaired students, installing elevators where feasible, and creating bathrooms that are accessible to students with physical disabilities.

The only key gap in ICIP's design standards regarding gender equality and school infrastructure raised by female students and teachers from case study schools is that there is a need for indoor sports facilities across all newly constructed girls' schools or mixed schools so that girls can feel more comfortable participating in sports. Currently, all physical activity in the case study schools takes place in the outdoor playgrounds or basketball courts (which are often used as soccer fields) where some girls from case study schools reported feeling watched and observed by boys and men from outside the school yard despite efforts by ICIP to visually protect the yard. This makes some girls feel uncomfortable and less keen to participate in physical activity. While some newly constructed schools such as the Jerash Girls' School in Jordan reportedly include an indoor sports facility, not all newly constructed schools. for girls include this element as it is subject to the availability of funds and physical space. More systematic prioritization of this element would help to further strengthen gender equality across newly constructed schools.

ICIP design standards on disability inclusion have created newly constructed schools that are more inclusive and accessible to children with physical disabilities. Indeed, efforts to strengthen accessibility were witnessed across all four of the case study schools. However, it should be noted that in some cases, solar panels were used to run elevators, which is a sustainable solution to power this important and yet often costly function. However, this being said, many schools lack batteries or alternative power saving devices/systems to store solar energy which can cause problems when there are blackouts

> Interviewed teachers and parents from the Tulkarem Basic Boys' School in the West Bank explained that their school elevator which is charged by solar energy often isn't functional due to common electrical blackouts and that there have even been instances when students and teachers have gotten trapped in the elevator during a blackout.

Despite positive advancements related to gender equality and disability inclusion, there remain some gaps in ICIP's design standards particularly in areas related to health and safety, classroom size per number of students, and adequate ambient temperature control in classrooms. With regards to health and safety, fire safety is not being sufficiently addressed to meet international best practices across all UNRWA schools. For instance, during the school inspection of the Talbieh Boys' School, the evaluators found that there were no smoke detectors installed inside the classrooms as the school was designed to only include smoke detectors in the hallways and communal rooms such as the library and the computer lab[23]. In addition, a review of ICIP documentation found that unsafe heaters have been installed in some schools in Syria, as seen in the photo below.

[23] The evaluation also found that the smoke detectors were still covered in their original plastic casings and that the fire extinguisher was missing from the wall cabinet and was locked with a key. While these are not design issues, they do highlight important operational and maintenance issues related to fire safety.

Figure 4. Photo of an unsafe heating system in an UNRWA - owned school in Syria

Overcrowding and crowd control is another safety issue that needs to be better addressed by UNRWA school designs.

While the extension constructed onto the Manshiyat Bani Hashim Boys School in Jordan included an extension of the emergency exits and the construction of six (6) additional toilet units, stakeholders (teachers, students, and parents) explained that the additional number of students brought into the school through the new extension has placed greater pressure on the school's communal areas such as the main school entranceway, the canteen, and the recreational areas. Teachers, students, and parents expressed concern over a shared perception that the new extension has led to the overcrowding of these communal spaces.

While the Beit Ula Girls' School in the West Bank which was constructed to eliminate floating classrooms and to reduce overcrowding in the previous school, students, teachers, and parents expressed disappointment that the new school design has unfortunately not addressed either issue as floating classrooms still exist, and overcrowding remains a concern among the school's 1,600 population density where all students are simultaneously present in one single shift.

Large schools also require a designated and sufficiently staffed health room or nurse's station to provide immediate care to students with minor injuries or health related problems. School construction standards used by UNICEF, the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) require schools to have a health room or nurse's station. However, this was not commonly seen across study schools often due to a lack of resources in the
UNRWA Education Department to sufficiently staff such a space.

In addition, most study schools do not have any protective covering over the outdoor recreational areas thus limiting the school's

ability to protect students from sun, rain, and snow. While the entire outdoor area would not necessarily need to be covered, students, parents, and teachers from most case study schools expressed considerable concern that no protective covering had been installed and that
as a result, students could not be protected from harmful UV rays, extreme heat, rain, or snow.

Another area requiring improvement in ICIP's current design standards is in relation to its suggested classroom size. Currently, ICIP's class size guidance calls for 57m2 to accommodate a maximum of 50 students per classroom, which provides each student with 1.14m2 of space. In contrast, OECD standards call for 2 meters per student. UNRWA standards are similar but generally slightly below host standards.

For instance, the Ministry of Education in Jordan calls for a minimum of 1.2m2 per student[24].Interviewed UNRWA teachers have expressed concern that ICIP's current classroom size design standards do not create classrooms that are physically big enough to allow them to easily walk around the space and apply active learning techniques, which can include moving desks and furniture into alternative formations to facilitate group work. A major reason why the physical size of newly constructed classrooms is often limited is due to restricted space and financial resources for school construction as well as the need for UNRWA to prioritize the building of additional school recreational space versus increased classroom size.

Finally, another important area that is not sufficiently addressed in UNRWA's design standards is with respect to classroom temperature. OECD standards call for indoor classroom temperatures to remain between 22 and 26 degrees Celsius. While recently constructed schools from the case studies typically have heating and cooling systems installed in communal areas such as the library, most of UNRWA's schools do not have heating or air conditioning units installed in the classrooms or adequate ambient temperature in classrooms with some classrooms falling to near freezing temperatures in the winter and temperatures over 30 degrees Celsius in the summer. While the maintenance of heating and cooling systems fall under the responsibility of UNRWA's operations and maintenance work and require financial resources to operate and maintain, ICIP HQ currently does not have standards or guidance in place to ensure that newly constructed schools include the necessary adequate ambient temperature control systems in place within the classrooms to facilitate quality learning. Although host governments also do not have such standards, heating and cooling devices are used in host government schools ad hoc depending on the severity of the ambient temperatures needs and available resources.

Environmental best practices[25] suggest that classroom temperatures are best controlled through building envelope/design elements so that the size, cost and environmental impact of any mechanical systems can be minimised. ICID design guidelines for new construction already include some passive design features, such as double walling, double glazing, and ceiling insulation that help control classroom temperatures.

[24] https://www.nchrd.gov.jo/assets/PDF/Studies/En/163.pdf
[25] https://www.globalpartnership.org/node/document/download?file=document/file/2023-04-gpe-toward-climate-smart-education-systems-rev_0.pdf; https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10897086; https://coolcoalition.org

However, there is room for ICIP to further include other features such as solar reflective paint, green walls/roofs and increased building shading, and exterior window shades and / or solar film. Ongoing climate change is expected to continue to create challenges in regulating school temperatures, which can fundamentally affect children's ability to learn, as outlined in Finding #10. The question of balancing priorities is inherently linked to these challenges as building larger classrooms and providing heating and cooling systems within each classroom have associated financial costs.

Finding #5: ***ICIP generally demonstrates good alignment and collaboration with other UNRWA departments, including the Education Programme and Protection Division. At the same time, there is room to further strengthen collaboration through improved data collection and analysis, joint strategic planning, and increased responsiveness to end-user priorities and feedback.***

Interviewed UNRWA staff from across the Education Programme and Protection Division at HQ and field levels expressed overall satisfaction with the level of collaboration and open communication between the departments and ICIP. Indeed, Education Programme staff appreciated the level of collaboration with ICIP to prioritize construction and maintenance projects while Protection Division staff highlighted productive collaboration to implement trainings to ICIP staff on protection issues across fields.

There were, however, some areas for improvement highlighted by interviewed

UNRWA staff regarding communication between ICIP and the Education Programme. Some interviewed ICIP staff highlighted instances of poor communication from Education Programme end users regarding their design needs and priorities as well as requests made by end users for design changes to take place after the school design had already been finalized. These requests have been impossible to accommodate as changing the design after the fact would have significant cost repercussions. At the same time, interviewed Education Programme staff identified a need for better communication and responsiveness from ICIP regarding end user needs and feedback on new school construction projects during the design phase, as discussed in Finding #3. In addition, interviewed Education Programme staff identified a need for increased responsiveness from ICIP towards end user concerns during the one-year warranty period at the end of new school construction projects to ensure that problems with the contractor's agreed-upon work are addressed within this warranty period.

While no major instances of overlap across departments was observed by the evaluation, there is an overall lack of synergies across departments at both the HQ and field levels. At HQ level, lack of consolidated data across fields that is analyzed and shared with other departments on a regular basis, as further discussed in Finding #7, limits the extent to which departments can engage in joint strategic planning. At the field level, there is limited evidence of joint efforts between departments to mobilize resources for common priorities as further discussed in Finding #12.

2.3 Efficiency

Overall Assessment

A number of issues primarily related to procurement, quality control measures, and cost analysis are negatively affecting ICIP's ability to achieve high value for money across its construction and maintenance work. A lack of varied bidders during procurement and an over-emphasis on cost savings compared to quality work during the procurement selection process are major factors that are negatively impacting value for money. UNRWA also has insufficient firewalls, risk management, and anti-corruption measures in place during the procurement of school construction and maintenance contracts which pose a significant threat to the integrity, transparency, and efficiency of schools' construction and maintenance projects. The Risk Management Analysis found that ICIP does not have a sufficient risk management framework in place to identify and manage strategic, programmatic, and operational risks. In addition, quality control and monitoring measures are insufficient with ICIP HQ struggling to collect, analyze, and disseminate consolidated data on school construction and maintenance needs and priorities across fields. This is negatively impacting its ability to support cross-field collaboration or strategic planning.

Finding #6: ***A number of issues primarily related to procurement, quality control measures, and cost analysis are negatively affecting ICIP's ability to achieve high value for money across its construction and maintenance work***

UNRWA currently has several procurement practices in place that are negatively affecting the cost effectiveness and quality of its construction and maintenance work. One of the primary challenges raised by ICIP staff across fields to ensuring cost-effective high-quality construction and maintenance work is a regular lack of varied bidders during procurement. Indeed, interviewed ICIP staff and UNRWA procurement staff explained that they often will receive only a small handful of bidders for construction and maintenance projects, partly due to eligibility requirements, and that these bidders are frequently the same contractors who have previously worked with UNRWA, thus reflecting a lack of variety and choice among contractors. This results in low competition among contractors which typically leads to higher prices and lower quality work. Furthermore, ICIP has seldom documented poor vendor performance in its evaluations, limiting its ability to use this information to disqualify underperforming vendors from future opportunities.

In addition, UNRWA relies heavily on ITB (invitation to bid) procurement process that favors the lowest bidder and does not fully capture the quality of the product offered. In some cases, where the requirements of the process are complex and cannot be easily specified, an RFP (request for proposal) is used where more emphasis is placed on the technical bid by using a 70:30 weightage for technical and financial proposals respectively. For the ITB, UNRWA's current evaluation process to assess contractor bids uses a pass/fail system for the technical bid where then the lowest bidder who passes the technical bid is awarded the contract. This positions UNRWA to accept the lowest financial bid of any technically qualified contractor regardless of differences in the quality of approach used. This was identified by the Risk Management Assessment as an operational risk that could lead to poor value for money.

Also, most ICIP stakeholders and UNRWA staff interviewed agree that during the procurement process, UNRWA does not conduct a sufficiently detailed or robust analysis of the cost breakdown per budget item. This limits the Agency's ability to understand what factors are driving cost differences across bids. A more detailed examination of a cost breakdown per budget item also facilitates risk management as the reviewer can more easily identify specific areas where risks and challenges may be located. In addition, UNRWA does not conduct or require bidders to conduct a modelling of the total cost of ownership of major plant and equipment (such as green building features, heating/cooling/lighting systems, WASH systems, etc.). Environmentally sustainable building design and equipment is often less expensive to run over the life of the item/asset and can create significant savings in terms of operations and maintenance. This is also important in settings where UNRWA may have funding available for new construction but does not have certainty of operating costs, which should therefore be reduced to the extent possible.

For both construction and maintenance projects, UNRWA regulations require the procurement teams to only select contractors who are registered firms with the national governments
across fields due to a shared belief that these contractors are more reliable and can be better held accountable by national laws and mechanisms. This reduces risk to UNRWA that projects may not be completed or properly executed. It also facilitates UNRWA's ability to enforce contracts; reduces the amount of time that UNRWA staff have to spent on vetting and due diligence; and can result in lower transaction costs and less political risk. However, it also considerably elevates costs associated with smaller maintenance work as UNRWA is obliged to work through registered contractors as opposed to individuals for small-scale school maintenance work. The use of contractors for small-scale maintenance work also reduces the degree of direct engagement of community members in small maintenance contracts which Education Department staff and community members believe may limit employment opportunities and a sense of school ownership among community members. Diminished sense of community ownership over the school infrastructure was also identified as a programmatic risk by the Risk Management Assessment. Engaging individuals would be covered by UNRWA's HR processes.

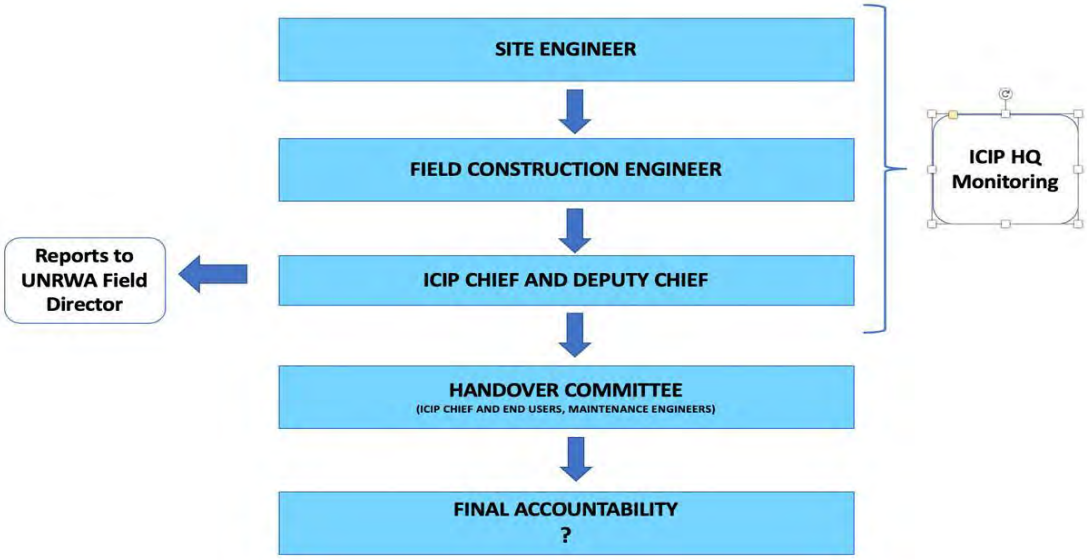
Finally, the Agency has insufficient firewalls, risk management, and anti-corruption measures in place during the procurement of school construction and maintenance contracts. As explained by ICIP field staff and procurement departments and validated by the Risk Management Assessment, ICIP engineers are involved in the preparation of the tendering documents to ensure that the instructions in the documents

are technically sound and reflect ICIP's design and construction plans and priorities. During the procurement process, the same ICIP engineers are also often involved in evaluating the technical bids submitted by contractors as UNRWA's procurement units across fields rarely if ever have sufficiently qualified independent engineers who can conduct this assessment without ICIP assistance. Once a firm is selected, those same ICIP engineers may also be involved in supervising the construction work. The Risk Management Assessment identified this as an operational risk and states that "inconsistencies, irregularities, or potential conflict of interest in the development of bidding documents and the evaluation of bids poses a significant threat to the integrity, transparency, and efficiency of schools' construction and maintenance projects".

Further, the agency relies on the UN, EU, and World Bank sanctions lists, along with the LexisNexis platform, to mitigate the risk of engaging high-risk suppliers. However, the evaluation team found no evidence of an independent body, separate from ICIP, responsible for conducting quality control activities, including final assessments to verify that the work meets ICIP standards and contractual agreements. This lack of oversight presents a significant risk, as highlighted in the Risk Management Assessment, which suggests establishing an autonomous quality control mechanism to enhance accountability and ensure compliance.

ICIP has an internal quality control structure in place where the Site Engineer supervises the day-to-day work of the contractor. However, site engineers are currently hired on a contract basis for specific construction projects and therefore may not have full knowledge of ICIP's standards or institutional loyalty to defend the Agency's interests with regards to quality control. This was raised as a risk by the Risk Management Assessment where the use of a site supervisor instead of a project manager for each construction project risks diluting accountability. The Site Engineer is then supervised by the Field Construction Engineer, who is then supervised by the Deputy ICIP Field Chief and the ICIP Field Chief. ICIP HQ also provides some monitoring and quality assurance support through periodic assessments and on-site visits to construction sites where feasible. However, while ICIP HQ is intended to play the role of providing monitoring across fields and a more independent assessment of construction quality, ICIP HQ and Field staff have explained that ICIP HQ colleagues they are often limited in terms of time as they have varied responsibilities, financial resources to travel to construction sites, and accessibility to construction sites (due largely to insecurity across fields) and are unable to completely fulfill this role across all fields.
At the end of the construction phase, a hand-over committee is formed that consists of the ICIP Chief and end users from the Education Department. While the hand-over process through the hand-over committee to the end users includes a final inspection of the construction work, it is unclear who is ultimately accountable for the quality of the construction work. Indeed, there is no direct reporting line between ICIP Field Chiefs and ICIP HQ as Field Chiefs report to their Field Directors who are typically not construction specialists and may not be well positioned to fully understand the construction work that occurred or how to take corrective action. This internal structure can pose a risk to the overall quality of the work as the ICIP staff involved in supervising the construction work through this long line of supervisors may be resistant to highlighting problems during the final inspection in order to avoid accountability or to raise any red flags that could then be later examined and/or questioned.

Figure 5. ICIP's internal quality control structure for school construction projects



Another area where quality control measures are lacking is in the area of health and safety on the construction site. Currently, UNRWA lacks permanent and certified health and safety engineers to be deployed across its fields of operation. In some cases, stakeholders have reported that when project funding is availability to hire project-specific health and safety engineers, UNRWA has struggled to fill the posts. When health and safety representatives from HQ visit construction sites and raise alarms over safety issues, they are currently not empowered to halt the work until corrective actions are implemented. Health and safety considerations are often not taken seriously by contractors as they are not typically required to include a certified health and safety engineer as one of the key personnel in their bid submissions or to develop a detailed Health and Safety Plan to guide their work. Stakeholders have explained that in those cases where UNRWA has required contractors to prepare a Health and Safety Plan, the quality of the plan is often below standard therefore reflecting limited contractor capacity in this area. Penalties for health and safety violations are also not sufficient enough to serve as meaningful deterrents to contractors who attempt to reduce costs by cutting corners related to health and safety.

Other areas that are reducing the cost effectiveness of UNRWA's school construction and maintenance work include missing requirements to conduct formal cost analyses at the beginning of construction projects to search for ways in which construction costs can be reduced. Cost saving strategies can include choosing construction sites wherever feasible that don't require extensive landscaping prior to construction or using construction methods that take advantage of less expensive materials for top floors that don't require the same level of loading capacities as bottom floors. Some engineers have explained that when formal cost analyses have taken place in collaboration with donors, UNRWA school construction projects were able to save hundreds of thousands of dollars. Along the same line, it is

common for UNRWA school construction projects to incur variation orders[26], which can increase the overall cost of the project. Engineers have explained that long project durations and insufficient cost and risk analysis conducted by ICIP at the beginning of construction projects are two of the biggest factors that lead to variation orders.

The Risk Management Analysis found that ICIP does not have a sufficient risk management framework in place to identify and manage strategic, programmatic, and operational risks. While the 2016 ICIP Strategy states that a comprehensive risk management plan will be developed and an external evaluation on risk management will be conducted, neither has taken place due to limited resources. Interviewed ICIP staff have explained that risks are identified in each project during the proposal development stage and relevant mitigation measures are included in the project documents to address those risks. However, the Risk Management Analysis concludes that these efforts are insufficient, particularly due to the high-risk nature of the construction industry. In 2024, UNRWA established an independent Risk Management Unit which will provide some technical support to ICIP to better integrate risk management throughout its work. However, the Risk Management Analysis found that this unit is underfunded and does not have the capacity needed to fully support ICIP with this endeavor. Figure 6 below highlights the main risks facing ICIP as identified by the Risk Management Analysis.

Figure 6. Main risks facing ICIP as identified by the Risk Management Analysis

Strategic Risk #1	**Policy Instrument[27] Failure: the inability or inadequacy of ICIP's school construction and maintenance work to achieve its intended goals and objectives.**
Strategic Risk #2	Inability to access target populations to conduct needs assessment, or inability to operate on the field
Strategic Risk #3	Association with the perpetrators of rights violations/abuses, particularly suppliers with alleged rights violations in the course of implementing construction and maintenance work, including politicisation of the subject area by individual donors or donor community
Strategic Risk #4	Deteriorating social and economic conditions create additional vulnerabilities and impact operations and implementing partners
Programmatic Risk #1	Fragmented and competitive resources mobilisation
Programmatic Risk #2	Community resistance and a diminished sense of ownership over the school infrastructure
Operational Risk #1	Unattended red flags in the procurement processes as outlined in Finding 6
Operational Risk #2	Poor Value for Money
Operational Risk #3	Premature deterioration of schools' buildings and facilities
Operational Risk #4	Underutilised school facilities that could otherwise serve as hubs for community engagement

[26] Variation orders are modifications to the original contract to account for changes incurred during the project implementation. These changes can include modifications to supplies used, project timeline, etc.

[27] Policy instrument in this context refers to ICIP interventions with reference to school construction and maintenance objectives.

Finding #7: ***ICIP HQ provides varying degrees of monitoring and technical support to ICIP colleagues at field level. However, it is struggling to collect, analyze, and disseminate consolidated data on school construction and maintenance needs and priorities across fields and is not sufficiently supporting cross-field collaboration or strategic planning.***

ICIP HQ is playing a strong role in establishing technical guidance on school design and construction as well as policies and procedures to further standardize school construction and maintenance work across fields. As part of these efforts, guidance is regularly shared by ICIP HQ with Field Chiefs and trainings are organized with ICIP field staff to support a stronger understanding of these policies, procedures, and guidance. Interviewed ICIP staff at HQ and in the fields largely believe that this support has resulted in a more coherent approach across fields as well as higher school design quality as outlined in Finding #4.

While this support is largely appreciated by ICIP field staff, they have also identified areas where further improvements would be useful to enhance HQ's supportive role. For instance, while training offered by ICIP HQ to field staff is largely focused on understanding and implementing HQ guidance, policies, and procedures, stakeholders have identified a need for ICIP staff at the field level to receive more technical training in areas such as cost analysis and quality control, as discussed in Finding #6. While ICIP HQ has provided some training and support in this area to its field-level staff through responsive technical support on a needs-basis (i.e. through phone calls, email exchanges, etc.) as well as staff workshops that occurred in 2023 and 2024, ICIP field staff believe that more standardized guidance and regular training in this area would be useful to strengthen staff capacities in these important technical areas. Some ICIP Chiefs at the field level have also articulated a need for clearer communication on updates to HQ guidance, policies, and procedures as well as more regular training on how to implement them. In addition, while technical support is provided by ICIP HQ to the field regularly, it is done on a needs basis as no regular ICIP team meetings are conducted across fields on a scheduled basis. This limits communication across fields as ICIP HQ is well positioned to play a leadership role in fostering cross-field collaboration and problem-solving.

ICIP HQ is also mandated to support data collection and monitoring across fields. To support this, ICIP HQ is using the Facilities Information Management System (FMIS), which is an online database where fields are required to upload data on school construction and maintenance on a regular basis. While this is a good initiative, crucial information is often missing and is not uploaded regularly. In some instances, information is also not collected and uploaded in the same way across fields making cross-field comparisons very difficult. While ICIP HQ sends out reminders and requests for information, staff at the field level are often over-burdened with other activities and place less priority on information-sharing with HQ. In addition, ICIP staff at the field level report to the Field Deputy Directors which means that ICIP HQ has very little authority to demand compliance with its information-sharing requests. This was identified as a risk by the Risk Management Analysis where the lack of direct reporting lines between ICIP Field Chiefs and ICIP HQ risks leading to reduced accountability.

This situation results in very fragmented data across fields that, without proper consolidation and analysis, limits the Agency's ability to assess and strategically plan for its school construction and maintenance work. While ICIP collects and analyzes data from the fields to report against a limited number of indicators[28], further data consolidation and analysis of UNRWA's school construction and maintenance work across fields is rarely done at HQ level. For instance, ICIP HQ is unable to provide basic consolidated data on questions such as how many UNRWA schools exist across fields, how many have solar panels, how many are using double shifts, etc. Lack of consolidated data across fields also hinders ICIP's ability to engage in Agency-wide prioritization and resource mobilization for school construction and maintenance, which is badly needed as further discussed in Findings #2 and #12.

2.4 Effectiveness

ICIP and procurement staff identified the following main reasons why contractors are often hesitant or unwilling to bid on UNRWA school construction and maintenance projects:

1. UNRWA's construction tendering documents are published exclusively in English which excludes those contractors who are more comfortable reviewing the documents in Arabic.
2. UNRWA's construction tendering documents are often accompanied by hundreds of pages of technical instructions which can be complicated and intimidating for contractors.
3. UNRWA's construction tendering documents use UN jargon and UN concepts that are often unfamiliar to contractors which can in some cases lead to an over-estimation of the costs required to execute the assignment.
4. Some contractors are hesitant to work in Palestine refugee camps due to some camps being located in remote locations and/or a perceived heightened risk of challenges or conflict within the camps.

Finding #8: ***The degree of effective implementation of ICIP's construction and maintenance standards varies across fields and projects, thus affecting the degree to which ICIP is able to achieve its objectives. Limited resources to build new school construction and maintain existing school infrastructure coupled with minimal community ownership and usage of school premises are negatively impacting ICIP's ability to achieve planned outcomes. While most new school construction projects are strong at supporting more inclusive and accessible educational facilities, many fall short particularly on implementing ICIP's environmental sustainability and greening standards.***

An analysis of the reconstructed ICIP theory of change demonstrates that ICIP's ability to achieve its planned results has been mixed. In terms of achieving planned outputs, most newly designed and updated schools accommodate requirements of programme reforms by implementing in large part ICIP's construction and maintenance standards. In addition, newly constructed schools assessed as part of the case studies are structurally sound, durable, and functional. However, due to limited resources and poor

[28] These indicators include:
1. Percentage of schools meeting UNRWA facilities protection design standards
2. Percentage of buildings in VTCs/ESF/FESA meeting UNRWA facilities protection design standards
3. Degree of user satisfaction with newly constructed or renovated schools

resource mobilization, ICIP is unable to meet the demand for new school construction, rehabilitation, and maintenance. Limited investment in maintenance particularly impedes UNRWA's ability to achieve its immediate outcome of promoting financial sustainability by ensuring sufficient upkeep of existing school infrastructure.

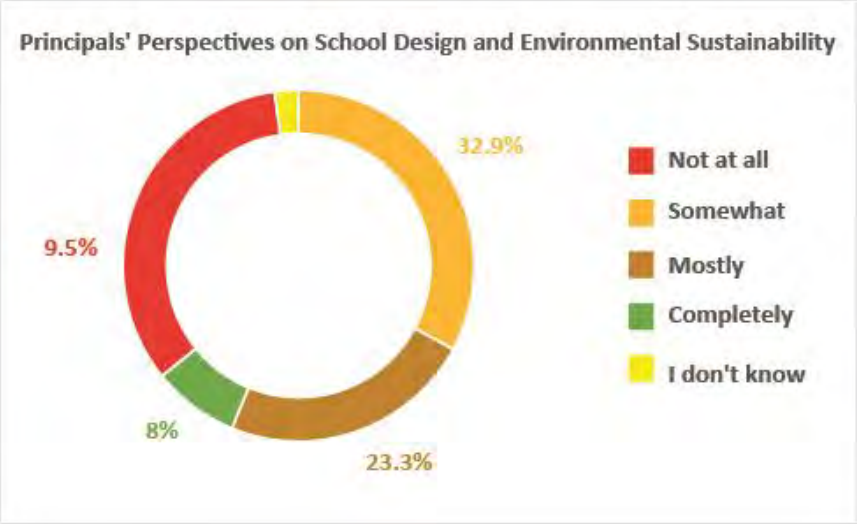
ICIP's efforts to promote inclusiveness by strengthening its gender equality and disability inclusion standards have facilitated its achievement of intermediate outcomes focused on increased accessibility. At the same time, the general lack of use of school infrastructure by community members is hindering the achievement of intermediate outcomes focused on ensuring that the schools are useful to the Palestinian refugee community and that community members demonstrate care and ownership for UNRWA school infrastructure. Due to these factors, the achievement of ICIP's final outcomes are also mixed where updated standards have helped to improve the school learning environment in newly constructed schools while older schools receive insufficient maintenance, repair, and renovations. Due to limited community access to UNRWA schools, the final outcome of ensuring that UNRWA schools form an integral part of the community is largely unmet. At the impact level, while ICIP construction and maintenance of UNRWA schools is improving the quality of life of registered Palestinian refugees, there is considerable scope to further strengthen this by securing resources to better support existing school infrastructure and by further engaging community members in the usage and care of UNRWA schools.

While ICIP is making an effort to effectively implement all of its cross-cutting priorities, it is struggling to implement environmental sustainability and greening standards throughout its newly constructed schools. While many newly constructed schools include solar panels to independently generate electricity, few have ways to store solar energy to be used once the sun has gone down or if there is a power cut on the central grid. Power cuts on the central grids are quite common across many fields and are particularly frequent and problematic in Syria. Being able to store energy and having independence from the power grids where needed is key across fields but especially in those where double shifts mean that students are in school after sunlight hours and in those with limited access to electricity such as Syria or where electricity is particularly expensive such as in Lebanon. In addition, electrical independence is crucial when schools are used as shelters. Another area where environmental sustainability could be improved is through the use of water harvesting. Some schools have tried to implement this but have discovered that constant maintenance of the water is essential to keep it clean even over the holidays and throughout the summer when the school is closed. It has also been challenging to harvest water when there is low rainfall and when financial resources are limited to invest in this system. Due to these challenges, all of UNRWA's school water harvesting initiatives have reportedly been suspended[29]. As outlined in Figure 7 below, a total of 33 per cent (48/146) of surveyed principals in Jordan and the West Bank believe that their school's design only somewhat contributes to environmental sustainability while 34 per cent (49/146) believe that it does not at all. Further research and analysis is required to assess the

[29] Water harvesting is also a priority for some host governments such as Jordan where UNICEF is carrying out greywater harvesting for Jordanian schools : https://mirra-jo.org/wash-in-schools/ ; https://www.jordannews.jo/Section-109/News/MoU-signed-to-implement-water-harvesting-projects-in-Jordan-35699

extent to which construction materials and technologies used in ICIP's school construction projects and maintenance activities promote environmental sustainability.

Figure 7. Extent to which surveyed school principals believe that their school's design contributes towards environmental sustainability.



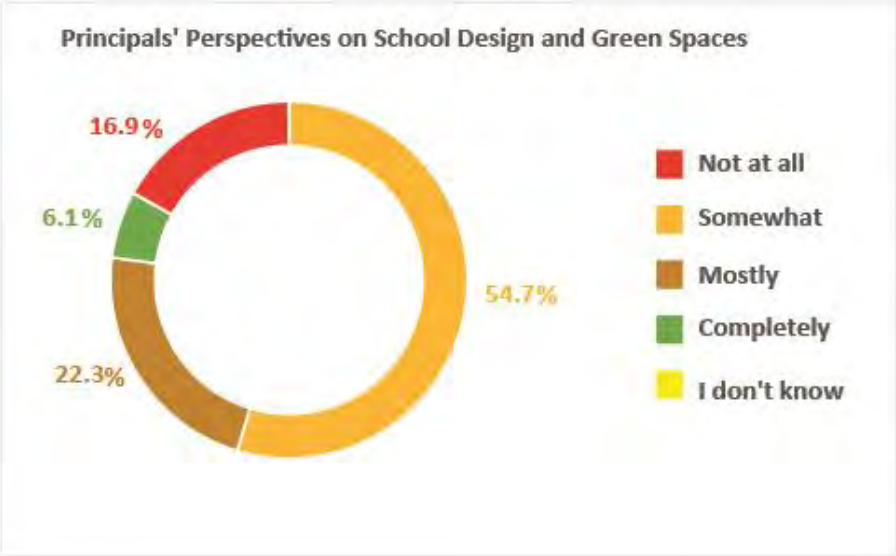
Perhaps the biggest gap between UNRWA's design standards and implementation at the school level is in the area of providing green spaces for students and teachers to enjoy. Interviewed teachers, students, and parents have complained that most of UNRWA's newly constructed schools are heavily reliant on the use of concrete in outdoor spaces and that new school designs don't include many if any green spaces for students and teachers to enjoy. Outdoor areas rarely include trees, gardens, or shaded spaces where students can connect with nature and relax. In addition, very few if any UNRWA schools are using the rooftops as rooftop gardens even though there is considerable interest from students and teachers across case study schools to do so. Indeed, there is huge potential to make use of rooftops as green spaces as long as the necessary safety precautions such as safe stairs and railings are implemented to protect students and as long as the resources needed to maintain them (including over the weekend and holiday periods) are sufficient.

Overall Assessment

The degree of effective implementation of ICIP's construction and maintenance standards varies across fields and projects, thus affecting the degree to which ICIP is able to achieve its objectives. Limited resources to build new school construction and maintain existing school infrastructure coupled with minimal community ownership and usage of school premises are negatively impacting ICIP's ability to achieve planned outcomes. While most new school construction projects are strong at supporting more inclusive and accessible educational facilities, many fall short particularly on implementing ICIP's environmental sustainability and greening standards. While students, parents, and teachers largely appreciate ICIP's more modern school designs, they are calling for greater adaptation to local contexts and the needs of end users along with a stronger focus on safety and the protection of students. Due to extensive conflict and instability across most of UNRWA's fields of operations, there is also a need for UNRWA school designs to better prepare some schools to serve as IDP shelters when necessary.

As outlined in Figure 8 below, a total of 55 per cent (81/148) of surveyed principals in Jordan and the West Bank believe that their school design somewhat promotes green spaces while 17 per cent (25/148) believe that it does not at all.

Figure 8. Extent to which surveyed school principals believe that their school's design promotes green spaces.



Principals and teachers from several case study schools also identified an unexpected result where the inclusion of green spaces has led to increased school vandalism. In the Talbieh Boys' School in Jordan, the garden area that was included in the school design has been closed off due to vandalism that has occurred while trees that were planted in the Manshiyat Bani Hashim Boys School in Jordan school were cut down by vandals outside of school hours and have not been replaced. While students and teachers would like to have more green spaces, these schools have highlighted some of the challenges that teachers and principals often face in maintaining the spaces.

Finding #9: ***While students, parents, and teachers largely appreciate ICIP's more modern school designs, they are calling for greater adaptation to local contexts and the needs of end users along with a stronger focus on safety and the protection of students. Due to extensive conflict and instability across most of UNRWA's fields of operations, there is also a need for UNRWA school designs to better prepare some schools to serve as IDP shelters when necessary.***

There is a common perception among ICIP staff at HQ and across fields that it is useful to have a central design unit which helps to standardize school designs and provide a level of consistency across fields. However, while ICIP guidance stipulates that schools should be designed in consultation with end users and adapted to the greatest extent possible to the local circumstances, interviewed students, parents,

and teachers agree that school designs need to be further adapted to meet the unique contexts across each field and the specific needs and priorities of end users. As discussed in Finding #3, there is a need to further roll-out and implement ICIP's Participatory Guidelines to meaningfully engage stakeholders and end users in the design of new schools to ensure that they are sufficiently adapted to the local context and to reflect the most important needs and priorities of end users.

There is also a need to design and construct schools to better adapt to the characteristics of actual users that will be using the installations. For instance, across all boys' schools among the case study schools, teachers explained that many of the door handles and water taps immediately broke following the opening of the school due to extensive and rough usage. They explained that the materials and designs used by the contractors for these types of fixtures do not sufficiently take into consideration the huge number of usages that the fixture will experience each day as well as the degree of rough use by the students. As mentioned in Finding #12, schools are making efforts to raise awareness among students on how to better care for their schools. However, at the same time, there is a clear need for UNRWA to ensure that construction contractors better adapt their materials and designs to further respond to the behaviour of end users.

School teachers, students, and parents across case study schools expressed appreciation for UNRWA's new modern designs which they widely agree are beautiful and aesthetically pleasing. This aligns with the intentions of ICIP HQ school designers who explained that their new construction designs are intended to be child friendly and to give students a sensation that they are free and not constrained in a prison-like environment. However, in several case study schools with open school designs, stakeholders identified a need to further adapt the design to better protect students and secure their safety.

In both the Tulkarem Basic Boys' School in the West Bank and the Talbieh Boys' School in Jordan, students, teachers, and parents felt that the height of the railings in the open corridors is too low and poses a risk that students may fall from the second floors. Stakeholders from the Talbieh Boys' School also raised concerns about students being insufficiently protected from sandstorms and other extreme elements in the open corridors while stakeholders from the Tulkarem Basic Boys' School in the West Bank stated that the open corridors do not sufficiently protect the students from rain.

These examples highlight a need for open school designs to better integrate protection and safety issues and for school designs in general to be better adapted to the specific local contexts and stakeholder needs and priorities of each school. They also show that the right balance must be struck between open and closed design elements to best protect students and teachers from external dangers while also deterring militant groups to take over school infrastructure. Only with careful consideration of local realities and extensive end-user consultation can such a balance be achieved.

In both the Beit Ula Girls' School and Tulkarem Basic Boys' School in the West Bank, teachers raised the concern that the open corridors do not sufficiently protect students from bullets or smoke bombs if conflict were to occur with the Israeli Security Forces (ISF) on the main streets facing the school. They also raised concerns about the design and construction of the school windows, which often face the streets where conflict could occur and that don't include a sufficient protective covering to protect students from bullets or smoke bombs. In the Tulkarem Basic Boys' School, the need for a renovated basement or some other safe room to serve as a safe hiding place was mentioned by teachers and students while teachers and students from the Beit Ula Girls' School explained that the school needs additional emergency exits off the back of the school that could be used for quick evacuations if conflict were to occur at the front of the building.

Another pertinent example of the need to further adapt school designs to the local contexts and to balance open and closed design elements with safety considerations can be seen in Lebanon where militants have taken over the school infrastructure of the UNRWA school in the Ein Elhelweh camp causing the school to close as it has become inaccessible to UNRWA staff and students. In this case, UNRWA staff from Lebanon have described the school as using a "fortress-like design". While this was intended to protect students from external harm, UNRWA staff have explained that it actually made the school more attractive to militants to use as a base where they can shoot through small openings and yet remain protected from external elements.

Finally, due to rapidly shifting insecurity and conflict across most of UNRWA's fields of operation, UNRWA schools are increasingly being used as shelters for internally displaced persons (IDPs). However, ICIP has yet to establish guidelines on what elements should be included in new school designs to make them fit for purpose to serve as shelters if needed.

Based on interviews with ICIP and Education Department staff across fields, the following elements are key to include in school designs to facilitate their function as emergency shelters:

- Increased number of toilets (waterless, if possible) with the potential to disaggregate based on gender
- Inclusion of water facets in the bathrooms that can serve as showers
- Inclusion of rainwater harvesting systems
- Inclusion of solar panels with an independent battery so that schools can provide electricity that is independent from a power grid
- Inclusion of an independent water source such as a well so that schools can provide water irrespective of the surrounding circumstances
- Integration of additional common areas such as a multi-purpose room and communal kitchen
- Installation of biodigesters to manage waste and generate gas for communal cooking

There is wide acknowledgment across stakeholders that these key features should be integrated into new school designs for those schools that are likely to serve as shelters as well as existing schools that are likely to be used in this way.

2.5 Impact

Overall Assessment

UNRWA construction of new schools has increased the morale of students and teachers and is providing a more conducive learning environment. At the same time, some persistent problems across case study schools are reportedly having a negative impact on their learning and performance. Small classroom size is often hindering teachers' ability to apply active learning techniques; concerns among students, parents, and teachers regarding the safety of students is creating learning distractions in some case study schools; and a lack of adequate ambient temperature control in classrooms is affecting students' ability to concentrate on their studies. In addition, the value of UNRWA's school infrastructure to the Palestinian refugee community could be further enhanced by encouraging the school to become the center of the community by facilitating community members to further use the school infrastructure after school hours while continuing to ensure its security and neutrality.

Finding #10: ***UNRWA construction of new schools has increased the morale of students and teachers and is providing a more conducive learning environment. At the same time, some common problems persist across case study schools regarding insufficient class size, protection and safety issues, and inadequate ambient temperature control in classrooms which can cause students to become distracted and can negatively influence their learning and performance.***

Students, parents, and teachers from the case study schools adamantly expressed gratitude for their new school constructions and explained that having a new school or extension has raised the morale of both students and teachers, leading to enthusiasm to come to school and a more positive overall school dynamic. The new school designs also provide students and teachers with a more open feeling, better ventilation, and increased sunlight. In addition, they provide more communal spaces which typically include a library, a computer lab, and a science room as well as bigger outdoor play areas, which

encourage student engagement and interactive learning at school. In some cases, smart TVs are also installed in the library to facilitate digital learning.

At the same time, there are some common problems with the school infrastructure observed across case study schools that can cause students to become distracted from their studies and have the potential to negatively influence their learning and performance. This includes insufficient class size in the new schools, which as discussed in Finding #4, as classrooms as often too small to facilitate the use of active learning techniques where students need space to move around, gather in groups, and place their desks in alternative formations.

As discussed in Finding #9, another major issue raised by students, teachers, and parents across case study schools is the perception of insufficient protection and safety measures for students in newly constructed schools. Feeling unsafe or poorly protected when at school can create a significant distraction for students and teachers and can have a negative effect on the quality of their education. In addition, parents and teachers in several schools mentioned the need to have a designated school councilor room in an accessible and yet private part of the school where students can feel safe to receive counseling services. They explained that this would also help students to feel more comfortable and safer when at school. While some new school constructions have a councilor room integrated into the school design, some others do not.

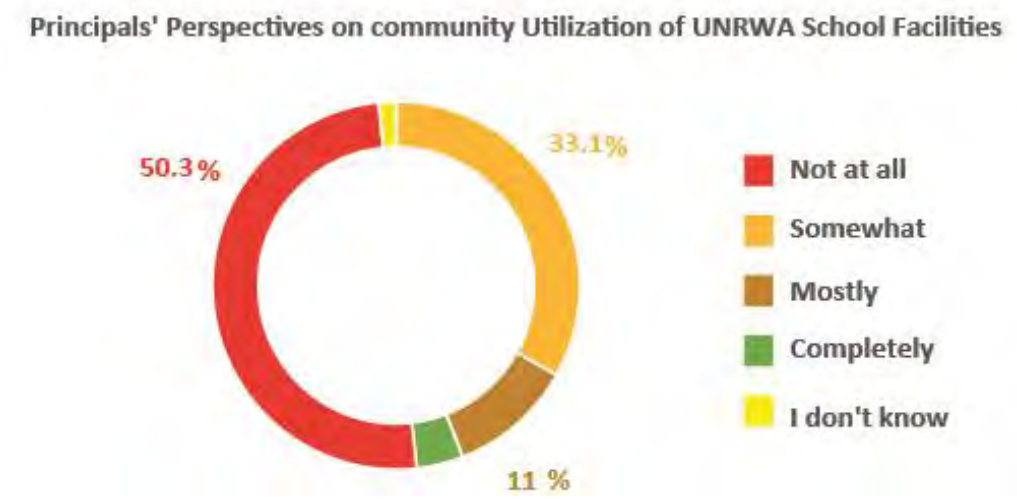
Finally, as discussed in Finding #4, none of the newly constructed case study schools have heating or air conditioning units in the classrooms and many have inadequate ambient temperature control in classrooms, which was raised by students, teachers, and parents as a major factor affecting the quality of education at school as students who are too cold or too hot often lack the ability to concentrate on their studies. This problem is likely to only intensify as ongoing climate change creates more extreme temperatures. While heating and cooling each classroom can certainly has cost implications in terms of installation but also operations and maintenance, interviewed stakeholders were clear that improved ambient temperature control in classrooms is priority area as the classroom temperature directly influences one's ability to learn.

Finding #11: ***The value of UNRWA's school infrastructure to the Palestinian refugee community could be further enhanced by encouraging the school to become the center of the community by facilitating community members to further use the school infrastructure after school hours while continuing to ensure its security and neutrality.***

Currently, UNRWA schools are primarily locked after school hours, over the weekend, and throughout the summer holidays, making the school infrastructure largely inaccessible to community members. In some cases, special permission is given to the community to use the school premises for community events and is open for a limited time during the summer to facilitate UNRWA-run summer camp activities. However, these instances remain infrequent as the school premises are largely closed to the public. This includes the outdoor play areas and soccer fields which are also locked and not officially open for community usage. However, in most cases across case study schools, children and adolescents jump over the external

school wall or gate and use the outdoor play areas and soccer fields without permission. This is causing some concern in schools such as the Talbieh Boys' School in Jordan where young people have gotten hurt from jumping over the wall. As outlined in Figure 9 below, surveyed principals across the Jordan and West Bank fields confirm this information where 50 per cent (73/145) of principals state that their school infrastructure is not at all used by community members while 33 per cent (48/145) indicate that it is somewhat used.

Figure 9. Extent to which community members use UNRWA school facilities according to surveyed principals



UNRWA's current policy across fields to keep school premises closed after school hours is the result of two primary concerns: 1) insufficient funds to securely monitor the premises and ensure the integrity of the school infrastructure and 2) concerns over breaches to UNRWA's principal of neutrality by community members. Indeed, although principals, students, teachers, and parents all agreed that it would be beneficial to the community to be able to use the school infrastructure after school hours, they also agreed that adequate safety and monitoring tools would need to be put in place to ensure the safety of the users, the security of the premises, and uphold the principal of neutrality. Specifically, stakeholders suggested installing CCTV cameras, hiring a security guard, and ensuring some degree of supervision by UNRWA staff. In addition, they suggested that UNRWA establish Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and other forms of agreements with community organisations who would use the school to ensure shared responsibility over the care of the school. They also explained that if the school infrastructure was to be opened to the community, that UNRWA would still need to carefully monitor and approve requests for its usage to ensure that it is being used in a neutral way in line with the Agency's principal of neutrality. In addition, these stakeholders emphasized that any move towards allowing greater community usage of the school premises should be done in close consultation with school

representatives and community members to ensure that it is done in a way that ensures sufficient protection for the school premises, safety of its users, and neutrality.

While increasing community access to UNRWA's school infrastructure would require a small amount of additional resources to ensure the integrity of the premises and the safety of users, increased access presents a number of benefits for both the community as well as the school. Firstly, it would provide access to much-needed space for community members in situations where space is often very limited. In some camps, the school yards and the school soccer fields are the only open-air play areas for children and adolescents. It would also provide access to much-needed community spaces for community meetings and events as such community spaces are also very limited within the camps.

Secondly, it would strengthen the connection between UNRWA schools and the wider Palestine refugee community, helping to better position the school as a central element of the community. This strengthened connection would very likely result in increased engagement in and ownership of the school by the community and would facilitate increased care and maintenance of the school by community members. In some cases where communities have felt particularly connected to their UNRWA schools, community members have provided financial donations and volunteer support to maintain and upkeep the school. A stronger connection between the school and the community would likely lead to more of this type of behaviour, which is essential for maintaining the school's infrastructure especially when UNRWA resources are limited. A stronger sense of ownership by the community over the school would also likely help to reduce illicit use of the school by militants who have at times taken over the school for political purposes. Education Department staff have explained that community resistance to militant use of the schools is key to ensuring school neutrality. The Risk Management Assessment also identified underutilized school facilities that could otherwise serve as hubs for community engagement as an operational risk as it risks diminishing the value of UNRWA schools to the community and limiting opportunities for engagement and ownership.

2.6 Sustainability

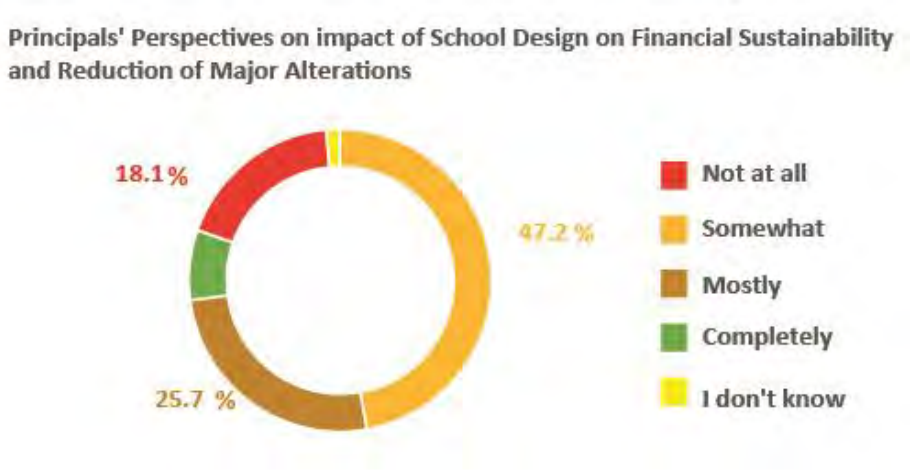
Overall Assessment

ICIP is attempting to integrate elements into its new construction designs to promote financial sustainability and reduce operational costs in the long-term. However, its limited investment in school maintenance is causing premature decay of UNRWA school infrastructure. Further resource mobilization focused on maintenance is required to sustainably maintain UNRWA school infrastructure.

Finding #12: ***ICIP is attempting to integrate elements into its new construction designs to promote financial sustainability and reduce operational costs in the long-term. However, its limited investment in school maintenance is causing premature decay of UNRWA school infrastructure. Further resource mobilization focused on maintenance is required to sustainably maintain UNRWA school infrastructure.***

ICIP is making concerted efforts to integrate sustainable elements into its new school construction designs to promote environmental and financial sustainability and to reduce operating costs by using solar energy in some of its schools, sensor water taps to reduce water usage, LED lights to reduce electricity usage, and double-paned windows and double walls to reduce the costs of heating. There remains, however, room to further strengthen these practices by consistently integrating motion sensors for lighting, building gardens on rooftops to promote greening and heat insulation, investing in rainwater harvesting systems, creating shaded areas in outdoor spaces to help students and teachers cool off during warm temperatures, using low-flow fixtures for toilets, planting trees in and around the school premises, and installing signage to educate students and teachers about sustainable practices. As outlined in Figure 10 below, a total of 47 per cent of surveyed principals (68/144) believe that their school design only somewhat contributes to financial sustainability and reduces the need for major alterations and renovations while 18 per cent (26/144) believe that it does not at all.

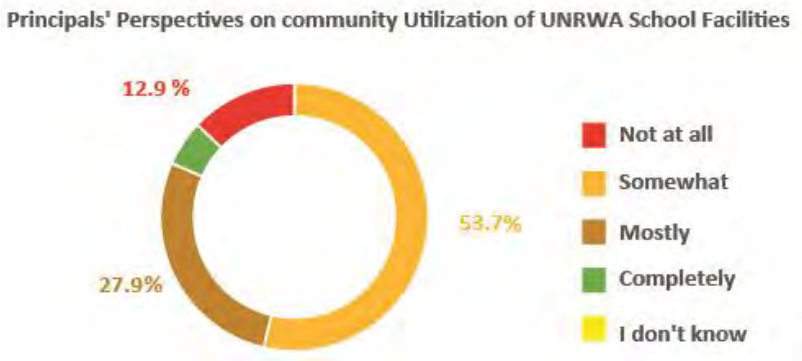
Figure 10. Extent to which the school design contributes to financial sustainability and reduces the need for major alterations and renovations according to surveyed principals



Across case study schools, vandalism and misuse of school premises were cited by ICIP staff and school principals as major factors contributing to an increased need for maintenance and repair work, which elevates maintenance costs. Indeed, in both case study schools in Jordan, vandalism and misuse of school infrastructure by students was cited as a problem and was being addressed by school staff through educational awareness campaigns and activities. In the West Bank, ICIP staff explained that school staff in charge of caring for and maintaining the schools are often unaware of practices that can damage school infrastructure such as piling debris on the rooftops or using inappropriate cleaning products. Interviewed ICIP staff from across fields highlighted that more guidance and awareness raising among end users on how to properly care for the school infrastructure is needed.

In addition, to promote the sustainability of school infrastructure and limit repair costs, sufficient investment is needed to provide regular and minor maintenance to UNRWA schools across fields. However, ICIP staff have highlighted that this is an area where UNRWA funding is severely limited and that regular and minor maintenance can often not be done across many of UNRWA's school installations. Presently, the regular and minor maintenance of UNRWA schools is paid for through UNRWA's regular budget but interviewed UNRWA staff agree that the available funding is not sufficient to cover the basic maintenance requirements of UNRWA schools. Major maintenance works are to be funded under project funding. However, due to the severe competition for project funds, school maintenance is often not sufficiently prioritized by UNRWA or by most donors who often prefer to fund new school construction initiatives that typically provide for more donor visibility. Indeed, as outlined in Figure 11 below, 54 per cent (79/147) of surveyed principals across Jordan and the West Bank state that maintenance and repair needs of their schools are only somewhat met while 13 per cent (19/147) state that they are not at all met. This is unfortunately leading to premature decay of school infrastructure and increased costs associated with school upkeep and repairs in the medium to long terms.

Figure 11. Extent to which surveyed principals believe that the maintenance and repair needs of their schools are met



> The Risk Management Assessment identified lack of sufficient funding for maintenance and repairs as a cause leading to the operational risk of premature deterioration of school buildings and infrastructure. This risk was rated as "high" with a high impact of creating unsafe learning environments, increased long-term repair costs, and potential disruptions to education.

Since regular and minor maintenance of UNRWA school infrastructure is budgeted under UNRWA's regular programme budget and is severely under-funded, fields are asked to fundraise for additional resources to support maintenance work. However, resource mobilization for maintenance is rarely done due to a number of factors including competing priorities, limited interest among donors to fund

maintenance work as perceived by UNRWA staff, and lack of proposals issued to donors that incentivize investing in maintenance. As a result, the lifespan of UNRWA schools is reduced, operational costs are often higher, and end-users are living with damaged school premises that can pose health and safety risks.

> Teachers and principals have explained that due to insufficient funds to clean, maintain, and repair broken toilets, many of the toilets in UNRWA schools are inaccessible to users thus limiting the school's WASH capacities. In other instances, teachers have reported an inability to fix broken windows which cause a safety risk to small children who are small enough to fall through.

Increased resource mobilization to further support funding for school maintenance is necessary to prolong the lifespan of school infrastructure and to reduce operating costs.

3.Lessons Learned

Lessons learned are insights that contribute to institutional knowledge and that can be applied to similar initiatives in other contexts. The evaluation has identified the following lessons learned derived from the evaluation findings that can inform future ICIP work as well as work in other UNRWA departments.

3.1 Resource mobilization for school construction and maintenance: Cohesive leadership and strategic prioritization across fields is necessary to mobilize sufficient resources to meet the Agency's school construction and maintenance needs.

3.2 Stakeholder consultation on new school construction design: Formalizing ICIP's stakeholder engagement process through the new Participatory Guidelines has increased stakeholder engagement and is helping to better adapt school designs to local contexts. This being said, to achieve full localization, it is necessary that stakeholder feedback on substantive design issues be integrated in addition to more aesthetic aspects of school designs.

3.3 Balancing child-friendly school construction designs with safety and protection needs: While the use of child friendly school construction designs can create positive learning environments where children feel like they are not imprisoned in the school, these designs must be balanced with the need to ensure student safety and protection.

3.4 Unpredictable need to use schools as IDP shelters: UNRWA schools are increasingly being used as IDP shelters across many fields of operation, meaning that there are important opportunities to further strengthen ICIP's school design guidance to provide information on how to design schools so that they can better serve as shelters when needed.

3.5 Need for additional classroom space to support active learning: Large classroom sizes are needed to facilitate active learning techniques that are beneficial to child learning where students require room to move around and place their desks in more engaging formations.

3.6 Encouraging more competitive school construction and maintenance procurement processes: Procurement practices that are easy and accessible to potential bidders strengthen competitiveness among construction and maintenance contractors leading to higher value for money for UNRWA's school construction and maintenance work.

3.7 Importance of the usage of UNRWA school infrastructure by the wider Palestine refugee community: Allowing community members to use UNRWA's educational facilities after school hours can facilitate greater community engagement in and ownership of schools
of and care for schools as well as the protection of schools from illicit use such as occupation by armed militants. It also has the potential to significantly increase the quality of life of Palestine refugees.

3.8 Link between increased risk management and decreased community engagement and ownership of UNRWA schools: A balance must be struck between risk management and encouraging community engagement and ownership of UNRWA schools. ICIP's decision to use only registered contractors for maintenance work to reduce the risk of financial loss or poor performance has limited local stakeholder engagement in school maintenance and may be negatively impacting community ownership of UNRWA's educational facilities.

3.9 Link between environmental and financial sustainability of school construction and maintenance work: Further improved environmental sustainability measures during school construction such as integrating elements that support ambient temperature control or conducting modelling of total cost of ownership of major plant and equipment during the procurement phase have the potential to reduce operational and maintenance costs further down the line, which is essential when operational and maintenance costs are limited such as is the case with UNRWA.

4. Conclusions

The following five (5) conclusions provide a higher-level analysis of the evaluation findings and articulate the implications of the findings on the future of UNRWA's school construction and maintenance work.

Conclusion #1. Improved school construction and learning environment: Over the past five years, UNRWA has made considerable improvements to the quality of its school construction work by using child friendly designs; engaging stakeholders and end-users in consultation; and integrating cross-cutting priorities primarily related to accessibility and disability inclusion, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. While continued efforts are required to further implement and strengthen this work, these improvements are resulting in more user-friendly schools that better facilitate learning.

(Derived from findings under relevance, coherence, effectiveness, and impact)

Conclusion #2. Further customization of school construction designs to meet end user needs: UNRWA's efforts to strengthen its centralized school design function has improved standardization and quality control across fields. However, while some customization and adaptation of school designs occurs across fields, further efforts are needed to adapt school designs to local contexts and end user needs to better reflect the diversity of local contexts and stakeholder needs and priorities across fields. Without further adaptation to local contexts and stakeholder priorities, UNRWA school construction risks not fully meeting the needs of its end users.

(Derived from findings under relevance, effectiveness, and impact)

Conclusion #3. Improvements to further strengthen the quality of education: There remains room to further strengthen UNRWA's school construction standards and implementation particularly in the areas of health and safety, school size per number of students, adequate ambient temperature control in classrooms, child protection, and providing more green spaces for students and teachers. The overall quality of construction and maintenance work and its value-for money can also be further strengthened through improvements to the Agency's procurement practices, quality control measures, and risk management practices. By addressing these areas for improvement, UNRWA has the potential to significantly improve the learning environment and quality of education provided to Palestine refugees.

(Derived from findings under coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, and impact)

Conclusion #4. Community engagement and ownership of UNRWA schools: UNRWA school installations are currently not reaching their full potential to be used by and benefit the Palestine refugee community. Due to budget limitations that don't currently facilitate the hiring of security guards and the installation of CCTV cameras across all schools as well as a desire by UNRWA staff to protect the integrity of school property and uphold the Agency's principal of neutrality, schools across fields are primary closed to the public after school hours and can only be used for organised purposes with special permission. This reduces their value to the community and hinders community engagement in the upkeep and protection of UNRWA schools. For relatively little investment, UNRWA has the potential to make a big impact on the wider community by making its school infrastructure more accessible. In addition, there is a need for UNRWA's school design guidelines to include elements that help schools serve as shelters for IDPs during times of conflict.

(Derived from findings under effectiveness and impact)

Conclusion #5. Strategic decision-making and resource mobilization: UNRWA requires consolidated data on school construction and maintenance across fields and strengthened leadership from ICIP HQ in close collaboration with ERCD to facilitate strategic decision-making around prioritization and resource mobilization for school construction and maintenance. This is particularly urgent with respect to school maintenance which is severely under-funded and is causing premature decay of UNRWA infrastructure and higher school operating costs. Without this holistic approach, the ICIP Programme will remain fragmented with fields competing against one another for school construction and maintenance funds.

(Derived from findings under relevance, efficiency, and impact)

5. Recommendations

The following 5 recommendations stem from the evaluation findings and conclusions and are designed to strengthen UNRWA's school construction and maintenance work. They are presented in order of implementation. A prioritization and costing exercise by UNRWA Senior Managers when developing the evaluation management response would likely help to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations.

Recommendation #1: ***ICIP should consider further deepening its stakeholder consultation process and demonstrating greater flexibility in its school construction designs to better reflect end-user feedback during the design phase to ensure that new school constructions are responsive to stakeholder needs and priorities as well as local operating contexts across fields.***

- Aligned with Conclusion #2
- High urgency, low difficulty, high impact
- Directed to ICIP HQ in coordination with ICIP staff at field level

Rationale: School infrastructure can only meet the needs of end users if they are sufficiently consulted, and their feedback incorporated into school designs in a meaningful way.

Recommendation #2: ***ICIP should further strengthen its design standards and guidelines to be more aligned with regional and international standards and good practices and to further facilitate a positive school learning environment.***

- Aligned with Conclusion #3
- High urgency, low difficulty, high impact
- Directed to ICIP HQ

Rationale: By further strengthening its design standards and guidelines to better align with regional and international standards and good practices, ICIP can better facilitate a positive school learning environment which will support higher quality educational attainment among Palestine refugee students.

Recommendation #3: ***(a) ICIP HQ and ICIP Field Chiefs should strengthen monitoring, risk management, and quality control measures to ensure that ICIP standards and guidelines are being properly and fully implemented and maintained and to further improve value for money and the quality of contractors' work. (b) In addition, UNRWA procurement processes should be modified to create stronger firewalls.***

- Aligned with Conclusions #3 and #5
- High urgency, medium difficulty, high impact
- Directed to (a) ICIP HQ in coordination with ICIP Field Chiefs and (b) CSSD in coordination with field level procurement staff

Rationale: Some of UNRWA's current monitoring, procurement, and quality control measures require modifications to further support the implementation of ICIP standards and guidelines, attain higher value for money, better manage risk, and achieve improved overall construction and maintenance quality.

Recommendation #4: ***ICIP HQ and Field Chiefs should support the Education Department to further strengthen community usage of UNRWA's school infrastructure and should collaborate with procurement units to identify opportunities for involving Palestine refugees in the implementation of construction and maintenance contracts to increase community engagement in and ownership of UNRWA schools***.

- Aligned with Conclusion #4
- High urgency, medium difficulty, high impact
- Directed to ICIP HQ and field chiefs, in coordination with the Education Department, CSSD, and field level procurement staff

Rationale: By providing schools with the necessary infrastructure to support community usage, community members would be able to better engage in and take ownership of UNRWA schools. This would help fundraising efforts for regular and minor maintenance works as community members would feel more motivated to donate money towards the schools, support better caretaking of the school by students and parents, and limit illicit uses of the schools by groups such as militants as community resistance to school occupation would be greater if community engagement and ownership were strengthened. In addition, school construction and maintenance contracts are excellent avenues to support the employment of Palestine refugees and develop community engagement and buy-in of these projects.

Recommendation #5: ***The Executive Office should provide ICP HQ with the mandate to play a stronger role in supporting Agency-wide prioritization and resource mobilization for school construction and maintenance.***

- Aligned with Conclusion #5
- High urgency, medium difficulty, high impact
- Directed to the Executive Office and ICIP HQ
- in coordination with ERCD

Rationale: Currently, UNRWA does not have an agency-wide prioritization or strategic planning process to mobilize resources for school construction and maintenance. As limited resources are regularly cited as the biggest challenge in providing adequate school infrastructure to Palestine refugee students, there is a strong need for ICIP to play a bigger supportive role in this area.

Management Response

evaluation of UNRWA school construction and maintenance work

date of management response:	22 May 2025	reference number:	[INSERT]

Office and person coordinating the management response / recommendation follow up:

ICID: Chief Architectural Division, Ms. Hala Alasir, h.alasir@unrwa.org

CSSD: Chief Central Support Services Division, Ms. Hanane Chreki, h.chreki@unrwa.org

ED: Education Department: Director, Ms. Julia Dicum, J.DICUM@UNRWA.ORG; Mohammad Salameh, Chief, Strategic Planning, Monitoring & Reporting.
ERCD: Department of External Relations and Communications: Karim Amer, Director of Partnerships, KA.AMER@UNRWA.ORG

How has this evaluation influenced the Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme (ICIP):

This is the first ever evaluation of ICIP's school construction and maintenance work activities covering a five-year period from 01/2019 to 12/2023. Overall, this evaluation has assisted the department with appreciating the purpose and relevance of our educational infrastructure interventions as well as providing a palate to drive improvement. The evaluation has offered a structured opportunity to view Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Department's (ICID's) school construction and maintenance work through the lens of others including numerous stakeholders who were involved in the surveys, interviews or worked as members of the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) as well as the Evaluation consultants. This has also facilitated aligning ICID practices more closely with the expectations and priorities of our end-users the wider Palestinian community as well as allowing a focus on continuous improvement. Through highlighting both success stories and areas for improvement, ICID gains a sense of pride in our work as well as opportunities to improve through modified designs, enhanced collaborations and more flexible inclusive approaches.

The impact of on-going wars and conflicts in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria on school infrastructure and the physical environment of camps where they exist, has led to the emergence of competing priorities which influence ICID's capacity to address growing refugee infrastructure needs. Such high demands for educational infrastructure, coupled with shrinking resources often implies only being able to support basic learning environments. The impact of conflict on school infrastructure has also shifted our focus towards strengthening contingency planning highlighting the need to learn from schools being used as collective sites (designated emergency shelters – DES) and improve relevant guidance accordingly.

ICID is keen to address all recommendations in this evaluation promptly however, due to the current crises within the organization, a lack of donor funding and numerous on-going high-level strategic reviews, we anticipate some delays. In addition, the security situation in several field locations severely restricts our monitoring and oversight capacity.

response to specific recommendations:

recommendation (more details on suggestions to operationalize the recommendation are included in the report)	management response (agree, partially agree, disagree):	action planned / taken / reason for partially agreeing or disagreeing	planned date for implementation
Owner: ICIP HQ in coordination with ICIP staff at field level **Recommendation #1:** ICIP should consider further deepening its stakeholder consultation process and demonstrating greater flexibility in its school construction designs to better reflect end-user feedback during the design phase to ensure that new school constructions are responsive to stakeholder needs and priorities as well as local operating contexts across fields.	agree	ICID will redistribute our previously developed "Participatory Design Guidelines" to the Field Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Porgammes (FICIPs) and the Education Programm (EP), emphasizing their importance for school construction projects, we will conduct online training on the guidelines to FICIPs staff, and will monitor the application of these guidelines as part of the design clearance process. ICID will provide online training to the Design Section staff to ensure that school designs are responsive to stakeholder needs and priorities. The Design Section (DS) will request all FICIPs to provide periodic feedback (annual) on material durability issues based on the recently constructed projects, this will be highlighted in ICID procedure.	*Q2,2026*
Owner: ICIP HQ **Recommendation #2:** ICIP should further strengthen its design standards and guidelines to be more aligned with regional and international standards and good practices and to further facilitate a positive school learning environment.	agree	ICID will work with relevant field offices to document measures for preparing schools as "Designated Emergency Shelters (DES)" for IDPs during conflicts and will include a session during the upcoming ICIP annual meeting to capture the relevant lessons learned. The Design Section will include the identified measures in the design of any new school assigned as DES by the Fields. The DS will consider heating and air conditioning systems in the design of classrooms solely in schools equipped with adequate photovoltaic systems, upon request by the relevant field, after confirming the availability of funds for initial, operational, and maintenance costs. ICID will collaborate with EP to revise the Safety Procedure to ensure the most effective approach to protection (safe sites) are applied and emphasize areas where standards can be adjusted	*Q1,2026*

		to meet stakeholder requirements and expectations. ICID will also direct the DS to integrate these needs during the design phase.	
<u>Owner:</u> (a) ICIP in coordination with ICIP field chiefs and (b) Central Support Services Division (CSSD) in coordination with field level procurement staff **<u>Recommendation #3:</u>** (a) ICIP HQ and ICIP Field Chiefs should strengthen monitoring, risk management, and quality control measures to ensure that ICIP standards and guidelines are being properly and fully implemented and maintained and to further improve value for money and the quality of contractors' work. (b) In addition, UNRWA procurement processes should be modified to create stronger firewalls.	agree	ICID will provide increased monitoring visits to oversee school construction and maintenance projects where it is feasible, subject to the availability of funds, resources and depending on the security situation at the fields. ICID will review the efficiency and effectiveness of its organizational structure (at HQ and the fields) to explore strengthening of technical reporting lines between ICIP Field Chiefs and the ICIP Director at HQ to enhance accountability. ICID will continue providing training and capacity development to all FICIPs to strengthen the supervisory roles of Field Construction Engineers and Chiefs of FICIP, as well as training and guidance to site engineers on UNRWA's policies, standards, and procedures. In addition, ICID will conduct training on subjects related to cost analysis procedures and assessments for new construction and major maintenance works. To enhance the robustness of the UNRWA procurement process, CSSD will ensure that the Technical Evaluation Team includes staff from other Divisions and Field offices and will provide training on Technical Evaluation at least once a year. Additionally, CSSD will conduct an orientation on performance evaluation for FICIP in coordination with ICID. CSSD will strengthen the Performance Evaluation Form by adding a signature panel for User Departments to confirm the evaluation done by FICIP and to include any comments they may have. ICIP will strengthen its monitoring practices to ensure that a representative number of maintenance projects are monitored subject to resource constraints and ground realities in the UNRWA Fields.	*Q3/2026 (some activities are Ongoing*

		ICIP will capture the risks identified through the Risk Management Analysis in its departmental risk register, which will be developed by the end of Q2 2025, as part of an Agency-wide effort to embed its new Risk Management Policy and Framework. ICIP will collaborate closely with UNRWA Risk Management Unit who are leading on these efforts supporting departments through training provision and by leading risk analyses. The risk register will serve ICIP as a core tool to monitor identified risks, agree on suitable risk treatments, oversee implementation of these, and assign risk ownership to further drive accountability. In line with the UNRWA Risk Policy & Framework. ICIP will appoint a departmental Risk Champion to support the wider department in consistent risk monitoring and oversight.	
Owner: ICIP HQ and field chiefs, in coordination with the Education Department, CSSD, and field level procurement staff ***Recommendation #4:*** ICIP HQ and Field Chiefs should support the Education Department to further strengthen community usage of UNRWA's school infrastructure and should collaborate with procurement units to identify opportunities for involving Palestine refugees in the implementation of construction and maintenance contracts to increase community engagement in and ownership of UNRWA schools.	agree	In accordance with the "Third Party Use of UNRWA Installation" procedure, and in collaboration with EP, ICIP will identify design elements to facilitate monitoring of school infrastructure usage by third parties. Additionally, ICIP and EP will collaborate with Field Maintenance Engineers, Field legal office, and Chief Area Officers to develop an awareness brochure providing guidelines for the "Third Party" on the proper use of the school's infrastructure. The Standard Building Contract, General Conditions article 10 a), Conditions of Employment of Labour states that – "The Contractor agrees to employ Palestine refugee workers to the maximum extent possible. The wages paid to such refugee workers shall not be less than the prevailing wages paid to non-refugee workers for comparable work". CSSD will highlight this article in the solicitation document and FICIP will request the contractor to provide the number of Palestine refugees employed on site. Noting that hiring Palestine Refugees can't be a mandatory requirement as the contractor may try to absolve	*Q1/2027*

		themselves of performance and /or quality issues by saying that it is because of UNRWA's requirement to include Palestine Refugees.	
<u>Owner:</u> Executive Office and ICIP HQ in coordination with ERCD **<u>Recommendation #5:</u>** The Executive Office should provide ICP HQ with the mandate to play a stronger role in supporting Agency-wide prioritization and resource mobilization for school construction and maintenance.	agree	ICID will enhance our Facilities Management Information System (FMIS) to be used as a reporting tool on school construction and maintenance projects and a tool to gather and analyze data on school construction and maintenance needs, supporting a comprehensive prioritization process across fields and helping FICIPs create standardized lists of school construction and maintenance essential requirements. ICID will discuss with the Executive Office the roles of Director ICID and Chiefs of FICIP in supporting UNRWA resource mobilization.	*Q4/2026*