

Background

In follow up to an audit on neutrality inspections (NIs) at HQA and Jordan field office in 2020, DIOS conducted a review and assessed the NIs practices in four UNRWA fields of operation: Gaza, West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria in 2021. The review's focus was on the preparation of neutrality inspections' operational plans, categorization of the installations for purposes of determining the number of inspections per year needed, and utilization of the UNRWA NIs manual.

What DIOS observed

During the years 2019 and 2020 several significant issues, including the COVID pandemic, negatively impacted the Protection and Neutrality team's ability to conduct NIs, resulting in reduced frequency, change in the approach applied in conducting NIs, and the postponement of the usage of the manual.

DIOS noted that improvements to BERT (an enterprise application used to maintain the database for the overall neutrality activities, including NIs), as observed and recommended, were made. These improvements enhanced BERT functionalities and data quality, which in turn improved data management and reporting in the fields.

The approach to NIs at UNRWA underwent a key change during 2021. While previous NIs and related SOPs focused primarily on upholding the principle of neutrality, UNRWA decided to broaden the Agency's approach to all

upholding Humanitarian Principles, considering humanity, impartiality, and independence alongside neutrality. The SOP "Mainstreaming Protection and the Humanitarian Principles into UNRWA Installations and Integrated Checks" was drafted in December 2021 and has been rolled out during the first quarter of 2022.

What DIOS concluded

Given the transition to a broader Humanitarian Principles approach, DIOS did not consider it necessary to make further recommendations out of observation from the current follow-up review. Nevertheless, DIOS reiterates the prior observation on the need to, i.e., ensure monitoring and quality assurance measures are in place and conduct a meta-analysis identifying trends and consistencies across the fields for effective implementation of the revised approach and methodology.

Progress made in the implementation includes key roles and added value of data analysts and managers for meta-analysis and quality assurance, respectively. DIOS looks forward to the full implementation of the recommendations.

Neutrality risks have been considered in the comprehensive risk assessment conducted in Q3 2021, informing the 2022 work plan. They will continue to be re-assessed to determine future audit coverage and work plan, including on the new Humanitarian Principles approach to NIs.