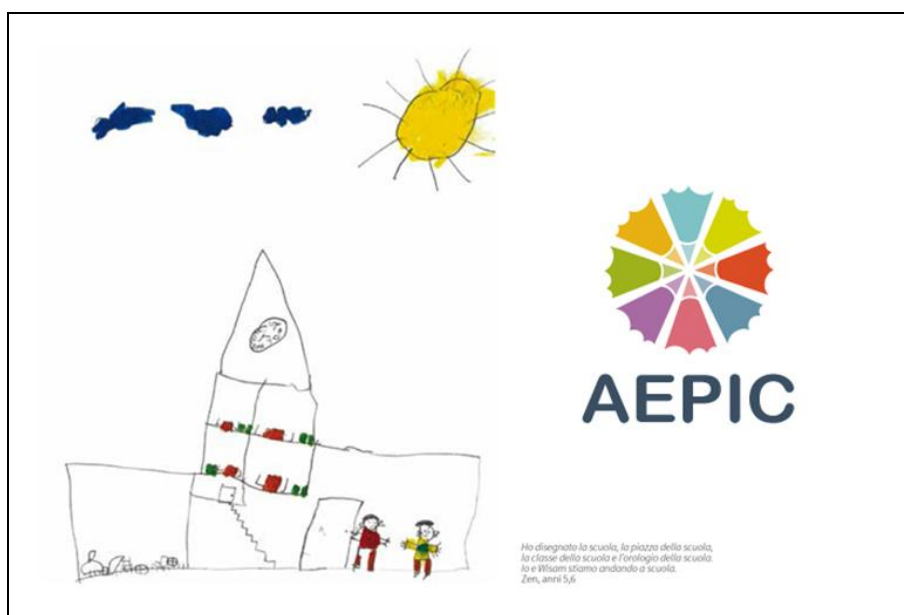


Impact evaluation of the initiative:

“AEPIC - Alliance for Inclusive and Quality Education”

AID N. 010327/RTM/TOC



EVALUATION REPORT

18/02/2022



AGRISTUDIO S.r.l.
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This independent evaluation has been commissioned by Office no. III of the Directorate General for Development Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation to the Company Agristudio s.r.l by means of a competitive bidding procedure as per art. 36 of the Code of Public Procurement.

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The opinions expressed in this document represent the point of view of the evaluators and do not necessarily coincide with those of the commissioning body.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AEPIC – Alleanza per un'Educazione Inclusiva e di Qualità della Prima Infanzia in Cisgiordania
ANERA - American Near East Refugee Aid
BECRC – – Bethlehem Educational Creative Reuse Centre
ECD – Early Childhood Development
ESDP - Education Sector Development Plan
ESSP- Education Sector Strategic Plan
ELDS - Early Learning Development Standards
EFA – Education For All
GER – Gross Enrolment Rate
JFA – Joint Financing Agreement
KG – Kindergarten
KTM – Kindergarten Teacher's Manual
MOEHE – Ministry of Education and Higher Education
M&E – Monitoring and Evaluation
NIET – National Institute for Educational Training
NPA - National Policy Agenda
PA – Palestinian Authority
PACE – Partnership for a new Approach to early Childhood Education
TES - Teacher Education Strategy
PT – Palestinian Territories
TVET – Technical and Vocational Education and Training
PCBS – Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PTWG – Preschool Technical Working Group
SMART – Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound
RTM – Reggio Terzo Mondo
SROI – Social Return on Investment
SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals
ToC – Theory of Change
UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA - United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
OPEC – Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
WB – World Bank

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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«My experience with the AEPIC Project has been extraordinary. I had never been exposed to such training in my whole academic and professional life. The Project gave me the opportunity to depart from traditional patterns to reach creativity and excellence ».

Teacher, pilot school

«I think that this Project's most valuable contribution is to have helped us understand and focus on the great relevance of early childhood education».

Supervisor

«We understood that the child is not a passive recipient of information, but rather a participant in the process of education »

Teacher, pilot school

«The parents themselves have witnessed the difference in their children's attitude. We are talking about Palestine, not Reggio Emilia or Italy, here conflict poses additional challenges to children: they are exposed to violence, occupation, to their parents' stress and all this reflects upon their behaviours. The space that we now manage to give to their imagination has been decisive to improve the children's attitudes».

Principal, pilot school

«The RTM Project was very cooperative, there were regular meetings, every two weeks, and when we needed they came to us and answered our questions. They have been very caring. Despite our fear to fail in this Project, in the end we made it thanks to their constant presence».

Teacher, pilot school

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the result of the external impact assessment of the Project *Alliance for Inclusive and Quality Early Childhood Education in the West Bank* (AEPIC) (AID No. 010327/RTM/TOC), carried out in the West Bank between 2015 and 2018 by the NGO Reggio Terzo Mondo (RTM) -whose current name is "Volontari nel Mondo RTM"- in partnership with the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, the Reggio Children Foundation, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education of the Palestinian National Authority (MOEHE), the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Greek Catholic Patriarchate and the IBDA Association. The project was financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), the Municipality of Reggio Emilia and local partners, for a total budget of 1.78 million euros. By law no. 125/2014 the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) was subsequently established. Operational since January 2016, AICS has inherited responsibility for the implementation and financing of initiatives under the previous cooperation law (l. 49/1987).

The AEPIC Project aimed to improve the quality and inclusiveness of services in the field of pre-school and early childhood education. The design strategy has aimed on the one hand to improve and strengthen capacities at various levels (MOEHE at central and decentralised level, teaching staff and principals) on the other hand to increase the inclusiveness of preschool education services through the opening of new classes in disadvantaged areas (already involved in the MOEHE-UNESCO *Education for All* -EFA-Programme) and the inclusion of families in school activities. A central role has been assigned to **strengthening the public-private partnership in the Bethlehem Governorate and the dissemination of good practices in the rest of the West Bank**.

The impact assessment was commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Directorate-General for Development Cooperation, Office III, Evaluation Section. After completion of the negotiated procedure referred to in the Notice published on the MAECI website on 27 March 2019, with Ministerial Decree **D.M. MAE00427002021-03-30 dated 30 March 2021**, the evaluation was entrusted to Agristudio S.r.l.

The evaluation covered both the **Project implementation period (2015-2018)** and the **subsequent period (2018-2021)**. The analysis of the latter period has allowed to examine the effects of the initiative in the field of intervention and beyond the direct beneficiaries. The evaluation exercise aimed to integrate **summative and accountability aspects with training and policy learning aspects**.

The evaluation activities were conducted between October and December 2021, through a series of qualitative and quantitative tools administered both in virtual mode and in presence. In particular, the following evaluation activities were carried out:

- revision of documents relevant to the AEPIC Project and the follow-up Project called *Partnership for a new Approach to early Childhood Education* (PACE); review of the existing literature in the field of early childhood education and the strategies and sectorial action plans of the MOEHE and other Ministries;
- 38 semi-structured in depth qualitative interviews (see matrix of the questions, Annex F);

- administering of a questionnaire to the 7 pilot schools of the AEPIC Project and to 14 schools of the Education For All Programme (EFA), also involved in the AEPIC Project (see questionnaire "Schools, Field visit and Questionnaire", Annex I);
- visits to the 7 pilot schools and 14 schools of the EFA Program, conducted with the use of a checklist of observable criteria in the school facilities;
- administering of a questionnaire through the MOEHE *E-School* Platform, which has reached to totality of early childhood schools and preschool classes of the West Bank, with a response rate of 253 schools (see Questionnaire matrix "Online Questionnaire for Kindergartens and Pre-schools West Bank", Annex J);
- *focus groups* in two schools of the Governorate of Tulkarem, one addressed to teachers (7 participants) and the other to the parents of the children attending the two schools in the period 2015-2021 (48 participants) (cf. Annex H);
- administering of a questionnaire of *Social Return on Investment* (SROI) analysis to the parents participating to the *focus group* referred to in the previous point (38 questionnaires filled out, see Questionnaire "AEPIC- SROI Questionnaire", Annex K).

The evaluation exercise allowed to identify the conclusions, good practices and recommendations that follow. For further information, a synthetic version is available in the final report.

RELEVANCE and COHERENCE

The AEPIC Project was very relevant to the needs of the country in the field of preschool and early childhood education in the implementation period (2015-2018), with particular reference to the situation in the public sector. The Project has contributed to the **opening and qualification of new preschool classes**, thus encouraging the **increase in the enrolment rate**, objectives set by the sectoral strategies of the MOEHE. The Project activities included several **low-income areas** where enrolment in preschool classes was poor, thus facilitating access to preschool education in areas where the MOEHE has priority interest.

The Project has appropriately responded also to the need for **teaching qualification** in kindergartens and preschool classes, problem caused by the lack of properly qualified teachers, the insufficient number of educational supervisors and the lack, at the time, of a curriculum that could guide teachers in carrying out activities. Other needs addressed by the Project concern the **poor coordination capacity of the MOEHE**, the **scarce interaction between schools**, the need for **greater involvement of families and the community** in educational issues, the need for **adaptation and qualification of facilities and spaces** and the need for **equipment and teaching materials**.

The Project has been fully aligned with the priorities, policies and strategies of the MOEHE in place at the time of the design and with those most recently issued. Moreover, given that the preschool sector had been neglected until 2015, the **AEPIC Project has assumed a particular importance, in line with the progressive interest that was being built in the country around the issues addressed**. The *Reggio Emilia approach* introduced through the initiative has contributed significantly to the **development of the Palestinian approach to early childhood education**. This has given a specific added value, made possible also by the **peculiarities of the method, which is configured as an educational approach that can be adapted to the context**.

However, **some of the priority themes in the context of the national education objectives relating to gender and inclusion of children with special needs have been taken into account in a very limited way**.

The project was also consistent with the approaches and strategies of the donor and the main international players (UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank). **The local partners of the Project have also been able to catalyse a new approach in the country that is based on the centrality of children, the value of active learning and the recognition of the plurality of factors that intervene in the educational process.**

The **design phase** was accurate and allowed a good participation of local actors, as well as the enhancement of the experiences accumulated by the Italian partnership. However, the intervention logic of the Project has shown several weaknesses, in particular with regard to the vertical and horizontal logic of the Logical Framework and with regard to an approach that should have been based more on *outcomes*.

EFFECTIVENESS

The **AEPIC Project has triggered a number of significant changes in the schools involved.** The changes observed relate to the areas of design and organization of school spaces, the pedagogical approach and teaching methodologies, the interaction between school and the surrounding environment and the involvement of families in the educational process. **The MOEHE has been aware of the added value of the approach proposed by the Project,** both at decentralized level (supervisor) and at central level, and has actively supported schools in the application of the new method.

The AEPIC project also represented an important opportunity for comparison and interaction between public and private schools and the added value of these exchanges was fully recognised by the stakeholders, as well as their innovative character in the Palestinian context. However, the Forum of Early Childhood Schools of the Governorate of Bethlehem remained limited to the 7 pilot schools and the project did not make any further contributions to the creation or expansion of national networks.

EFFICIENCY

The project management has been efficient and it was based on international standards. A clear and fluid system of coordination and internal communication was put in place and the project team was responsive and punctual in responding to the needs of local partners. However, although a monitoring plan including monitoring missions and a final external evaluation had been planned, **no robust monitoring system for outputs and outcomes has been adopted,** nor has an evaluation and accreditation mechanism been put in place for the skills acquired by teachers and supervisors through the Project's training.

From the point of view of **synergies**, the design was not based on a review of existing good practices in Palestine in the field of preschool education, nor has the Project established significant synergies that could offer an opportunity to strengthen the results achieved, beyond synergy with Palestinian institutional players and the EFA UNESCO Programme. **Important synergies have later been developed, between the results of the AEPIC Project and the activities of the PACE Project.**

IMPACT

According to the actors interviewed, the project has made an important contribution **to the increase in the enrolment rate**, thanks to the opening of new preschool classes and the rehabilitation of existing schools; it has led to a **change of mindset regarding the educational approach of many schools**; it has promoted **greater awareness of the importance of involving families** in the educational process; it has promoted **greater interaction between schools and families**. In addition, at the central level, the Project has made a strong contribution to raising awareness of the

importance of early childhood and preschool education. The contribution in terms of **drop-out** reduction was only indirect.

The pedagogical approach proposed by the Project is currently well embedded in the educational facilities of the majority of the 7 pilot schools, with a lower impact in 2 of the public schools, mainly due to external conditions. The main aspects introduced through the Reggio Emilia approach are found in the schools of the EFA Programme, although there is a limited awareness.

The impact of the Project on the capacities of the MOEHE was evident at the decentralized level, where there was a clear strengthening of the role and pedagogical and training skills of supervisors, who were then active agents of dissemination of the new method. At the **central level**, the Project has fostered the process of coordination for the 7 pilot schools and greater interaction with the private sector, however, no appreciable results have been observed with regard to the more general and transversal capacities in terms of planning, programming, management, monitoring and evaluation of educational interventions. The PACE Project subsequently intervened on this issue.

The dissemination of the Reggio Emilia approach in schools not involved in the AEPIC Project was good. The level of knowledge and recognition of the added value of the Reggio approach within the MOEHE is good and covers several Directorates and Departments, as well as the Department of Early Childhood Schools of the Directorate General for Education. This dissemination within MOEHE was initiated by AEPIC and further strengthened through PACE.

The AEPIC Project and subsequently PACE have made a significant contribution to the promotion of a favourable environment for early childhood education. The Reggio Emilia approach is now complementary to the MOEHE Strategy, that is, the new method has not replaced other methods nor been institutionalized, but has helped to disseminate an approach based on the centrality of the children and active learning, concepts that in turn have influenced the new *Palestinian Curriculum Framework for preschool education*. Although the latter refers to a variety of educational practices centred on the concept of active learning, which are the result of a path that schools and the Ministry have begun to mature since 2015 with the support of several international partners, it is interesting to note that many of the themes dear to the Reggio Emilia Approach have been integrated.

The Forum on Early Childhood of Bethlehem, which should have strengthened the public-private partnership, has instead remained very limited in its objectives. As it turns out, there is no other similar Forum, nor has the public-private partnership model introduced by the project been extended to the management of preschool services or in other areas of education.

SUSTAINABILITY

The continuity of the Reggio approach in the 7 pilot schools is good and the level of sustainability is high in 3 schools (two private and one public), good in 1 private school and weaker in 2 other public schools. The latter are also affected by factors arising from limited school spaces and their location in particularly vulnerable areas. In particular, **the Reggio approach is currently fully integrated into the Public School of Early Childhood of Bethlehem, which is also the model school of the attached Training Centre. The sustainability in the schools of the EFA Program is less evident but can be supported through the training of supervisors.** The latter are an important sustainability factor and their competences have been further strengthened through the PACE Project.

Regarding to the sustainability of the **Forum** on Early Childhood of Bethlehem, the pandemic had a very negative effect on the continuity of meetings and events, as well as the lack of follow-up and the turnover of teachers at the schools that are part of it. From this point of view, the *Bethlehem Educational Creative Reuse Centre* (BECRC), established through the PACE Project, can offer support

for the continuity of meetings between members of the Forum and the implementation of joint activities.

The state of refurbishment work carried out and the equipment provided was found to be "rather sufficient" to "good" in most schools.

The Kindergarten Teacher's Manual, considered the cornerstone of the new preschool curriculum, will contribute greatly to the dissemination of the principles and methods of active learning in the country, although there is evidence of complementarity rather than explicit official adoption of the method. *The Training Centre of Bethlehem*, which deals with in-service teacher training, with which RTM has just launched a new project funded by the Emilia-Romagna Region, is a further factor of sustainability of the method introduced through the initiative.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Despite the high participation of women in Project activities, the gender dimension has not been adequately taken into account. Similarly, the issue of the inclusion of children with special needs has not been addressed, excluding some work to facilitate access to buildings for disabled children. The inclusion of vulnerable groups has, on the other hand, been well integrated with regard to children from disadvantaged and highly conflicting areas. The socio-cultural aspects have been strongly integrated and the Project has fostered a context of collaboration with Christian minorities who manage private schools. The environmental dimension has been well integrated in terms of approach, methodologies and space renewal.

The following chart is a synthesis of the conclusions of the evaluation with regards to the different evaluation criteria adopted. The colour coding used is as follows:

Green – Very positive; **Orange** – Positive but with some weakness found; **Yellow** – Sufficient but with weaknesses found; **Red** – Insufficient

EVALUATION CRITERIA	EVALUATION
RELEVANCE	VERY POSITIVE
COHERENCE	VERY POSITIVE
EFFECTIVENESS	VERY POSITIVE
EFFICIENCY	POSITIVE WITH SOME WEAKNESS
IMPACT	POSITIVE WITH SOME WEAKNESS
SUSTAINABILITY	POSITIVE WITH SOME WEAKNESS
CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES INTEGRATION	SUFFICIENT BUT WITH WEAKNESSES FOUND

GOOD PRACTICES

- 1. Relevance of the Project.** The issues addressed are very relevant in the context of the Country and to a certain extent have anticipated processes that led to a new focus on early childhood education and that have been accompanied by the development of *policies* and laws.
- 2. Focus on the process.** Coherently with what is specified in the Reggio Emilia Approach, the players responsible for its dissemination have done so in respect of the principles supported by the approach itself, giving importance to the process and not limited to the result.
- 3. Participation and belonging.** The process was characterized by a strong participatory spirit and the strong sense of ownership that has resulted lays the foundations for greater sustainability of the project.

4. **Technical support and organizational efficiency.** The development of “personal method” starting from the one proposed, was also possible thanks to the strong technical support of the project experts. Apart from the content, the organization was also highly appreciated for the punctuality and regularity of meetings and for the availability and flexibility offered.
5. **Union of diversities.** The project has had the merit and the capability to work with different types of schools, institutions, cultures and religious backgrounds, activating previously non-existent exchange processes, especially at the level of "government schools having a dialogue with private schools".
6. **Effectiveness of the proposed educational approach.** The new method has allowed to revise the role of the different elements in the educational context: that of the child, the teacher, the parent, the school space and the surrounding environment, placing the child and the relationship between the teacher and the child, at the centre. The specific value of a similar educational approach is highly relevant in a context where on a daily basis children are exposed to a situation of conflict and to the personal and family stress that this entails.
7. **Involvement of parents and non-violent education.** The school-family interaction has facilitated an indirect *parent training* exercise, which is particularly relevant in a context where 87.5% of children experience forms of psychological aggression in the domestic context, according to UNICEF data.
8. **Inclusion of supervisors.** Work with supervisors has been crucial given their role, namely the institution closest to schools at the territorial level, and also considering that they represent a pillar from the point of view of sustainability of the introduced method.
9. **Environmental sustainability.** Using the environment as “third teacher”, the use, dissemination and subsequent increased awareness of environmental waste and the importance of recycling have broadly been implemented in the project. These aspects were then further strengthened through the PACE Project.
10. **Opening of public preschool classes and inclusion of vulnerable groups.** Through the opening of public pre-school classes in synergy with the MEAE-UNESCO EFA Program, the Project has promoted the extension of public pre-school services in disadvantaged areas, at risk of conflict and characterized by low schooling. In this way, the project has fostered the inclusion of children from disadvantaged areas in preschool education.
11. **Support for the development of an early childhood education center in Bethlehem.** The AEPIC Project has launched an intense collaboration with the Public Kindergarten in Bethlehem. At the same time, the PACE Project later established the BECRC - annexed to the Bethlehem Public School -. In addition, one of the training centers for in-service teachers is also active at the school premises, the Bethlehem Training Center (TCB), currently being supported through funding from the Emilia-Romagna Region. The AEPIC Project thus launched the process of creating an educational center of national importance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Develop a Project Theory of Change in relation to the Country Program of the Implementing body, which may explain the underlying logic of individual projects and the contribution made to the general objectives- Responsible Body: Implementing body / Donor**

2. **Develop the Logical Framework more accurately, with specific reference to clarifying the outcomes and to the indicators which must be relevant and measurable** -Responsible Body: Implementing body / Donor
3. **Strengthen synergies with other international actors active in the sector of preschool education in the Country, both at the design and execution stage-** Responsible Body: Implementing body /Local counterparts
4. **Overcome the ah-hoc project approach in favour of a programmatic Country approach especially in the case of initiatives with the aim of triggering cultural changes.** -Responsible Body: Implementing body / Donor
5. **Develop ongoing monitoring and evaluation tools for development initiatives and actions** - Responsible Body: Implementing body / Donor /Local counterpart
6. **Enhance the inclusion of children with special needs and greater focus on gender in the projects of international cooperation-** Responsible Body: Implementing body /Donor

USEFUL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTINUING THE INITIATIVE

1. **Promote strategies for the dissemination of the Reggio Emilia Approach; in particular, support the process related to the dissemination and implementation of the Licensing criteria introduced through the PACE Project and widen access to training on the Reggio approach through existing structures** (Training Centres for in-service teachers; the National Institute for Educational Training (NIET); the Universities; the BECRC; the recent Project of the World Bank). - **Responsible Body: Implementing body / Local counterparts**
2. **Reflecting on sustainable ways of continuous training and updating for supervisors and teachers trained in the two Projects** - **Responsible Body: Implementing body /Local counterpart**
3. **Reconsider the role and functioning of the Forum of Early Childhood of Bethlehem based on actual cooperation opportunities, rather than on programs and strategic action plans which could be hardly sustainable** - **Responsible Body: Local partners**
4. **Study and plan the involvement of primary schools in the RE Approach** to avoid the gap that can be created between early childhood schools that apply the approach and the teaching method of primary schools. **Responsible Body: Implementing body / Italian partners and counterpart**
5. **Reconsider the selection criteria concerning the classes to involve in future projects**, giving preference to the involvement of “entire” schools, rather than only one class per school, so as to guarantee greater sustainability and institutionalization of the method.- **Responsible Body: Implementing body**
6. **Continue the awareness-raising initiatives addressed to families-** **Responsible Body: Local counterpart and local partners**
7. **Increase the networking and coordination from the MOEHE with regards to the stakeholders in the educational sector, with specific reference to teachers' training.** **Responsible Body: Local counterpart.**

1. INTRODUCTION

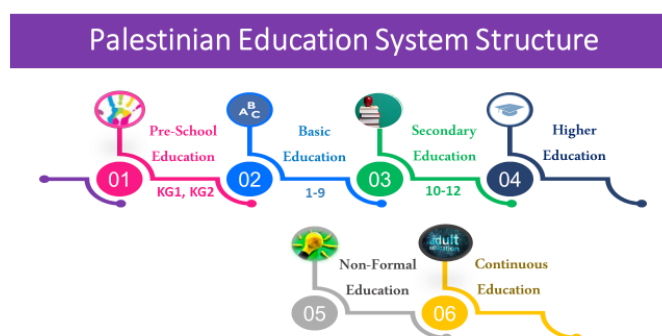
1.2 CONTEXT OF THE EVALUATED INITIATIVE: DATA, POLICIES, STRATEGIES AND INTERVENTIONS

Foreword: introduction information and structure of the Palestinian education system

The Palestinian education system consists of three main cycles, as follows:

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION (KG1, KG2)
Duration: 2 years Age: 4-5 years
SCHOOL EDUCATION (1-12)
Duration: 12 years (grades 1-12), divided as follows: compulsory basic education (grades 1-10) + secondary education (grades 11-12) academic or vocational-technical education (TVET), culminating in a General Secondary School Certificate Exam (Tawjihi). Age: 6-16 years for basic education; 16-17 years for secondary education
HIGHER EDUCATION
Supplied by TVET institutions, universities, <i>community colleges</i>

Informal education (conducted outside the school system outlined above, e.g. through NGOs, professional associations, or in the workplace, etc.) and continuous adult education (e.g. further education in the workplace, etc.) complete this picture.



Source: ESDP III, p. 27

Although the Palestinian education system is essentially centralised and foresees ministerial programmes designed to apply to all public and private schools in the Palestinian Territories (TP), many schools in the West Bank are currently managed by UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East), through its education office located in Jerusalem and reporting to the regional office in Amman, Jordan. However, according to official Palestinian government statistics, UNRWA does not run any kindergartens in any part of the Palestinian Territories¹.

The Education Law issued in 2017 by the Palestinian Authority² currently includes preschool ("preschool education-kindergarten", art. 7) in the general education cycle, although it is not yet compulsory, as will be explained below.

¹ Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/Rainbow/Documents/Education2020_E.html

² State of Palestine, Law by Decree No. (8) of the year 2017 on general education, Palestinian Gazette volume (132).

The preschool enrolment rate for boys and girls aged 5 years is currently 76.5% (school year 2021/2022), while the total enrolment rate considered on both preschool classes (KG1 and KG2) and for the reference age group (4-5 years) reached 62.3%.

GER for pre-school (KG2, age 5)			
	M+F	M	F
Palestine	76.5	76.2	76.8
West Bank	81.6	80.7	82.6
Gaza	69.9	70.4	69.4

Source: MEAE 2021, General Administration of Planning/Statistical Database of the Ministry of Education

In the school year 2020/2021, there were **1488 kindergartens** (KG1: age 4) and pre-schools (KG2: age 5) in the West Bank, enrolling **80,594 children in 4,515 classes**. The data show a marked preponderance of public schools, which account for more than 75% of all kindergartens in the country.

Level of Education	Indicator	Scholastic Year	Palestine	West Bank	Gaza Strip
Pre- School Education (1)	Number of Kindergartens	2020/2021	2,125	1,488	637
	Number of Children in Kindergartens	2020/2021	136,705	80,549	56,156
	Number of Classes	2020/2021	7,110	4,515	2,595

Source: Palestinian Bureau of Statistics https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/Rainbow/Documents/Education2020_E.html

With more specific reference to the West Bank, **at the request of the Evaluation Team**, the MOEHE provided the following data for the school year 2020/2021, comparing it with the 2012/2013 AEPIC pre-project year chosen as a benchmark:

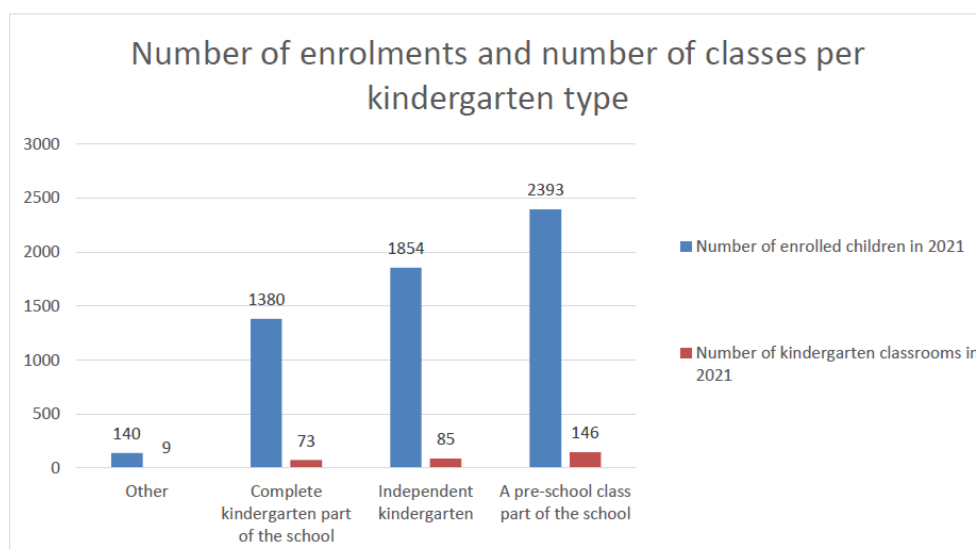
INDICATOR	2012/2013	2020/2021
Number of private early childhood schools (including kindergarten and pre-school) in the West Bank	965	1123
Number of public early childhood schools (including pre-school and kindergarten) in the West Bank	4	365
Number of licensed private pre-school and kindergarten classes in the West Bank	3037	4037
Number of licensed public pre-school and kindergarten classes in the West Bank	3	478
Total number of boys and girls enrolled in pre-school and kindergarten in the West Bank	69588	80549
Number of girls enrolled in kindergarten and pre-school in the West Bank	33906	39521
Number of boys enrolled in kindergarten and pre-school in the West Bank	35682	41028

Source: Processed from MEAE data

The following graph, derived from the evaluation questionnaire administered through the MOEHE E-School platform, shows the number of enrolled children and classes by school type on a sample of schools.³

Graph no. 1

³ The E-School Platform is a communication tool managed by the MOEHE and connects the institution to all schools, public and private, in the West Bank. During the evaluation, a questionnaire was developed and sent to all schools via the Platform.



As already noted in 2014 by the MOEHE [National Assessment Education for All 2014], there is still a **lack of adequately qualified pre-school teachers** and, as a result, a significant *gap* in the possibility of active participation in the development of the sector. These shortcomings are reflected in both pre-service training and further professional training. This is mainly due to the lack of *Bachelor's degree* programmes specifically focused on early childhood education: to date, there are BA or undergraduate degree programmes at Bethlehem University, An-Najah University (Nablus), Al-Quds University and Jerusalem University, while the Licensing Commission for Higher Education encourages other universities to start similar programmes. Although the current ministerial regulation requires educators to have at least a university degree (in line with what was originally suggested by the TES 2008), there is still a high percentage of teachers with only a high school diploma: according to the latest *Monitoring and Evaluation report to the newly updated strategic plan 2021-2023* of the MOEHE [M&E Report Strategic Plan 2021], **only 42.3% have academic qualifications at university or higher level in educational specialities, while the remaining 57.7% have only a high school diploma. The MOEHE, in collaboration with the NIET, is following up with unlicensed teachers in obtaining a specialised diploma in childcare** [Semi-Annual Report 2021].

It should be noted that **in 2020, the entire teaching staff was made up of women**, recently joined by 3 male teachers.

Recently, ministerial **training centres** have been set up to provide *in-service* training for pre-school teachers. **A 'model kindergarten' is attached to each of them, where teachers carry out internships and field observation activities.** Of particular relevance is also the **National Institute for Education and Training (NIET)**, the ministerial structure in charge of the specialised training of teachers and educators of all levels in Palestine. It works in agreement with the other general directorates of the MOEHE for the purposes identified by the latter in its strategic documents.

A key role in the management, monitoring and development of the early childhood education system in the Palestinian Territories is played by the relevant ministerial **educational supervisors** (directorate).

Supervisors (it should be noted that all of them are women) have the essential task of supporting pre-schools, administration and teachers in the process of qualifying and acquiring appropriate professional skills, as well as monitoring the compliance of individual institutions with ministerial requirements. Furthermore, they monitor and support schools in the licensing process at the MOEHE. To date, there are 33 ministerial supervisors. **However, the number is not commensurate with the number of schools, so that each supervisor may have responsibility for a large number**

of institutions, often between 50 and 90, spread over an often-vast territory, where travel is made even more complex by the division into areas. [Evaluating the MoEHE 2017].

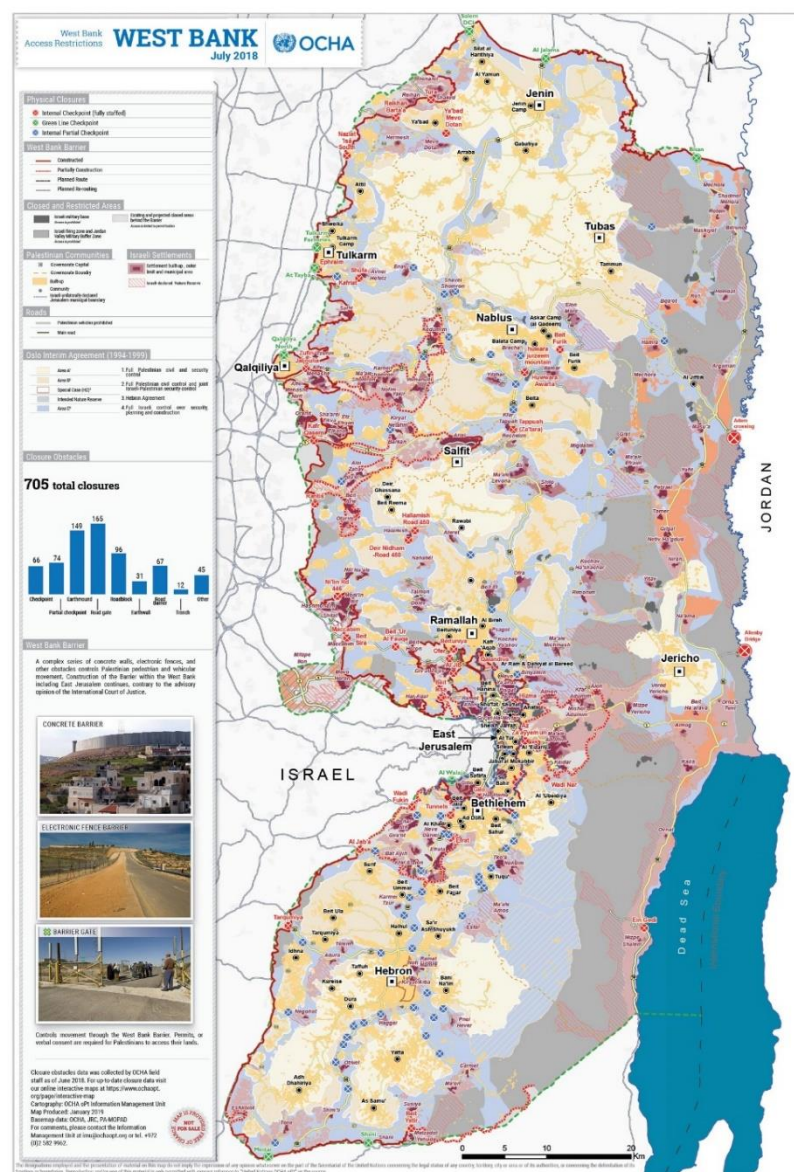
The 1995 Oslo II Accord established the administrative division of the West Bank into three areas, A, B and C⁴, under a transitional arrangement that was due to end upon the entry into force of a final agreement. However, no such agreement was ever reached and the division persists.

Area A: The territories included in Area A are entirely subject to the Palestinian Authority (AP).

Area B: The PA exercises administrative control over the territories in Area B, but security checks are carried out jointly with the Israeli authorities.

Area C: Area C comprises more than 60% of the West Bank and is under the control of Israel as far as security, planning and urban construction are concerned.

Passage from one area to another is subject to security checks.



Source: <https://www.ochaopt.org/atlas2019/wbclosure.html>

⁴ <https://peacemaker.un.org/israelopt-osloii95>

While most Palestinians live in Areas A and B, 300,000 people live in the 532 residential areas totally or partly located in Area C, along with 400,000 Israeli settlers spread across some 230 settlements. Approximately 1/3 of Palestinian communities living in Area C do not have access to primary schooling nor to basic health and emergency services⁵. In this context, access to kindergarten is also particularly difficult.

Other problems are still significant and concern an enrolment rate that has yet to be increased and which is affected by limited public provision, especially in rural areas, and the low awareness of families with regard to pre-school education; inadequate facilities and a still weak coordination capacity of the MOEHE.

However, since 2015 there have been a number of significant advancements made by the Palestinian Government, with contributions from the private sector and the international community. These concrete advancements have been accompanied by an increased emphasis on pre-school education which has been progressively embraced as one of the pillars of Early Childhood Development, as evidenced by a number of strategies that have followed over.

The beginnings: 2008-2014

Following the creation of the Palestinian National Authority (hereafter AP) by the Oslo Accords of 1994, the **Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE)** was established in August of the same year, to which the competences in the field of education and the educational system, until then retained by the Israeli authorities, were transferred. After an initial five-year period during which a wide-ranging internal reorganisation process developed in parallel, the development of the first nationally unified curricula for the West Bank and Gaza, and the day-to-day management of the education system, in 1999 the MOEHE began the participatory process that led to the approval of the first **Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP I) for 2001-2005**. **In the early 2000s, preschool enrolment data are not particularly encouraging. The official Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) for the year 2004/2005 was 29.9% (30.6% for males, 29.3% for females), but this rose to 53.3% in the year 2006 [ESDP II 2008, p. 30]. The management of pre-schools is almost exclusively in the hands of the private sector, which provides (or should provide) the service following ministerial accreditation. However, the available data confirms the large presence of non-accredited informal private pre-school services (kindergarten), for which it is therefore impossible to trace the actual number of enrolments and possible drop-out rates, as well as the level of education and qualifications of teachers. During this period, the MOEHE directly managed only two pre-schools [National Assessment Education For All, 2014, p. 57].**

⁵ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs occupied Palestinian territory (OCHA), *West Bank Area C: Key Humanitarian Concerns*, https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/area_c_key_humanitarian_concerns.pdf

أعداد الطلبة في المدارس ورياض الأطفال حسب المنطقة والجهة المشرفة، 2021/2020-1995/1994
Number of Students in Schools and Kindergartens by Region and Supervising Authority, 1994/1995-2020/2021

Region and Scholastic Year	المجموع Total	خاصة Private		الوكالة UNRWA		حكومية Government		المنطقة والعالم الدراسي
		رياض الأطفال Kindergartens	المدارس Schools	رياض الأطفال Kindergartens	المدارس Schools	رياض الأطفال Kindergartens	المدارس Schools	
West Bank								الضفة الغربية
1994/1995	418.715	35.768	34.632	-	43.969	-	304.346	1995/1994
1995/1996	446.977	43.804	36.889	-	44.672	-	321.612	1996/1995
1996/1997	475.585	44.020	40.055	-	47.735	-	343.775	1997/1996
1997/1998	508.101	49.020	43.863	-	49.492	-	365.726	1998/1997
1998/1999	537.694	52.204	48.172	-	51.774	-	385.544	1999/1998
1999/2000	567.503	50.788	50.787	-	53.738	-	412.190	2000/1999
2000/2001	587.576	46.728	53.585	-	55.667	-	431.596	2001/2000
2001/2002	608.095	44.589	51.102	-	58.150	-	454.254	2002/2001
2002/2003	622.628	40.321	48.366	-	58.992	-	474.949	2003/2002
2003/2004	651.349	49.408	52.411	-	59.909	-	489.621	2004/2003
2004/2005	670.576	52.015	53.781	-	59.849	51	504.880	2005/2004
2005/2006	689.015	55.468	56.143	-	58.812	65	518.527	2006/2005
2006/2007	694.904	51.467	61.340	-	59.225	93	522.779	2007/2006
2007/2008	710.287	55.981	66.753	-	58.445	89	529.019	2008/2007
2008/2009	709.067	51.895	69.937	-	56.574	115	530.546	2009/2008
2009/2010	717.293	56.609	73.569	-	55.473	119	531.523	2010/2009
2010/2011	726.871	60.013	77.124	-	53.495	121	536.118	2011/2010
2011/2012	731.761	62.883	80.343	-	52.463	124	535.948	2012/2011
2012/2013	742.760	69.466	84.065	-	51.584	122	537.523	2013/2012
2013/2014	750.379	72.739	88.428	-	51.270	636	537.306	2014/2013
2014/2015	762.582	76.523	91.980	-	50.026	1.360	542.693	2015/2014
2015/2016	771.886	77.447	95.569	-	48.776	1.274	548.820	2016/2015
2016/2017	783.871	78.055	100.458	-	48.772	1.853	554.733	2017/2016
2017/2018	793.222	78.362	101.702	-	48.238	2.954	561.966	2018/2017
2018/2019	803.009	77.307	103.951	-	46.339	4.759	570.653	2019/2018
2019/2020	828.225	86.570	110.197	-	45.703	7.339	578.416	2020/2019
2020/2021	827.418	71.037	108.938	-	45.770	9.512	592.161	2021/2020

Source: Processed from Palestinian Bureau of Statistics data, 2021.

The number of kindergartens in the West Bank remained rather low throughout the first decade of the 2000s. In fact, the data show negligible fluctuations, before a sharp, steady increase from the 2013/2014 school year.

أعداد المدارس ورياض الأطفال حسب المنطقة والمرحلة، 2021/2020-1995/1994
Number of Schools and Kindergartens by Region and Stage*, 1994/1995-2020/2021

Region and Scholastic Year	Schools		مدارس		رياض أطفال Kindergartens	المنطقة والعام الدراسي
	المجموع	ثانوية*	أساسية			
	Total	Secondary*	Basic			
West Bank						الضفة الغربية
1994/1995	1.136	294	842	423	423	1995/1994
1995/1996	1.162	333	829	519	519	1996/1995
1996/1997	1.193	368	825	505	505	1997/1996
1997/1998	1.244	398	846	570	570	1998/1997
1998/1999	1.308	427	881	617	617	1999/1998
1999/2000	1.362	440	922	606	606	2000/1999
2000/2001	1.415	448	967	596	596	2001/2000
2001/2002	1.477	478	999	579	579	2002/2001
2002/2003	1.527	518	1.009	538	538	2003/2002
2003/2004	1.603	556	1.047	651	651	2004/2003
2004/2005	1.665	594	1.071	694	694	2005/2004
2005/2006	1.715	627	1.088	729	729	2006/2005
2006/2007	1.755	653	1.102	688	688	2007/2006
2007/2008	1.809	684	1.125	712	712	2008/2007
2008/2009	1.848	714	1.134	671	671	2009/2008
2009/2010	1.917	736	1.181	731	731	2010/2009
2010/2011	1.975	760	1.215	782	782	2011/2010
2011/2012	2.019	770	1.249	862	862	2012/2011
2012/2013	2.059	780	1.279	965	965	2013/2012
2013/2014	2.094	786	1.308	1.057	1.057	2014/2013
2014/2015	2.144	807	1.337	1.137	1.137	2015/2014
2015/2016	2.194	809	1.385	1.147	1.147	2016/2015
2016/2017	2.249	822	1.427	1.195	1.195	2017/2016
2017/2018	2.269	994	1.275	1.263	1.263	2018/2017
2018/2019	2.300	1.004	1.296	1.332	1.332	2019/2018
2019/2020	2.323	1.009	1.314	1.452	1.452	2020/2019
2020/2021	2.343	1.013	1.330	1.488	1.488	2021/2020

Source: Processed from Palestinian Bureau of Statistics data, 2021.

Again, with reference to the West Bank, simultaneously, the catchment area and the consequent number of members see a **steady annual increase, again more markedly from the early years of the 2010-2020 decade.**

أعداد الطلبة في المدارس ورياض الأطفال حسب المنطقة والمرحلة*, 1994/1995-2020/2021
Number of Students in Schools and Kindergartens by Region and Stage*, 1994/1995-2020/2021

Region and Scholastic Year	Schools			رياض أطفال Kindergartens	المنطقة والعام الدراسي
	مجموع Total	ثانوية Secondary	أساسية Basic		
West Bank					الضفة الغربية
1994/1995	382.947	27.678	355.269	35.768	1995/1994
1995/1996	403.173	30.647	372.526	43.804	1996/1995
1996/1997	431.565	33.993	397.572	44.020	1997/1996
1997/1998	459.081	36.190	422.891	49.020	1998/1997
1998/1999	485.490	38.121	447.369	52.204	1999/1998
1999/2000	516.715	42.041	474.674	50.788	2000/1999
2000/2001	540.848	45.484	495.364	46.728	2001/2000
2001/2002	563.416	50.970	512.446	44.589	2002/2001
2002/2003	582.307	55.612	526.695	40.321	2003/2002
2003/2004	601.941	59.421	542.520	49.408	2004/2003
2004/2005	618.510	66.486	552.024	52.066	2005/2004
2005/2006	633.482	72.498	560.984	55.533	2006/2005
2006/2007	643.344	76.532	566.812	51.560	2007/2006
2007/2008	654.217	82.921	571.296	56.070	2008/2007
2008/2009	657.057	85.209	571.848	..	2009/2008
2009/2010	660.565	88.962	571.603	56.728	2010/2009
2010/2011	666.737	90.162	576.575	60.134	2011/2010
2011/2012	668.754	88.051	580.703	63.007	2012/2011
2012/2013	673.172	86.825	586.347	69.588	2013/2012
2013/2014	677.004	83.676	593.328	73.535	2014/2013
2014/2015	684.699	82.671	602.028	77.883	2015/2014
2015/2016	693.165	83.077	610.088	78.721	2016/2015
2016/2017	703.963	85.361	618.602	79.908	2017/2016
2017/2018	711.906	135.878	576.028	81.316	2018/2017
2018/2019	720.943	137.312	583.631	82.066	2019/2018
2019/2020	734.316	140.944	593.372	93.909	2020/2019
2020/2021	746.869	146.206	600.663	80.549	2021/2020

Source: Processed from Palestinian Bureau of Statistics data, 2021.

The table below summarises the preschool enrolment rate data for TPs:

Preschool enrolment rate for the years 2005/2006 - 2010/2011				
	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012
M %	34.6	36.5	41.2	43.7
F %	35.0	36.9	34.7	43.0
M+F %	34.8	36.7	38.1	43.4

Source: Annual Report, 2011-2012, Ministry of Education, General Administration of Planning

In relation to this, the national report *Education for All, Part I: Reality and Challenges* (2014)⁶, noted a number of critical issues: the **need to activate coordination between the public and private sectors** for the preparation of strategic plans, as well as **to expand the role of the MOEHE in monitoring the quality of pre-school education, training of staff and the definition of the unified national curriculum**; the urgency of **including early childhood needs among the priority areas of intervention in government development plans**; the **increase in preschool enrolment rates and the greater involvement of communities and families in the process**; and finally, the need to

⁶ Come citato dal *National Assessment Education for All 2000-2015* (2014), p. 59.

increase service delivery by the MOEHE. Further critical issues were the **poor quality of teaching** and the **lack of a monitoring system with adequate and uniform indicators**. [ESDP II, pp. 31-32].

Thus, shifting the focus from “*access to*”, which was the subject of ESDP I (2001-2005), to the “**quality of**” education, the **Education Sector Development Plan 2008-2012** [ESDP II 2008] sets the following objectives, intended to apply to all school cycles [ESDP II 2014, p. 52]:

Goal 1: To increase access of school-aged children of all education level and improve the ability of the education system to retain them (**Access**)

Goal 2: To improve the quality of teaching and learning (**Quality**)

Goal 3: To develop the capacity for planning and management and to improve the financial and management systems used (**Management**)

With specific reference to pre-schools, **ESDP II** specifically sets the target of a ceiling of **25 students per class and a teacher-student ratio of 1:25** [ESDP II 2008, p. 56], **an increase in the enrolment rate** across all TPs, **to be achieved through an increase in public facilities, the development of greater collaboration with the private sector** to ensure at least one pre-school per community and **the upgrading of existing facilities to accommodate children with special educational needs** [ESDP II 2008, p. 111]. In addition, the ESDP II proposes to **reduce the number of teachers “entrusted” to each supervisor from 165 to 100** to allow for better supervision and support [ESDP II 2008, p. 114].

In **2008**, the **Teacher Education Strategy** [TES 2008] was also drafted with the support of UNDP and Norwegian cooperation. Cross-cutting to the whole education sector, the TES aims to improve the quality of teaching through the specialised qualification of operators (teachers and educators). With specific reference to **pre-school education**, the TES recommends in particular that the **qualification required to teach 4–6-year-old students should be a Bachelor's degree in educational sciences, with a specialisation in early childhood education, from a university or community college**, while providing a transitional framework that allows teaching with a two-year degree [TES 2008, p. 22]. However, the subsequent *Review of Implementation Status of the Teacher Education Strategy 2008* [TES Review, 2011] conducted in 2011 by the NGO AMIDEAST at the joint request of the MOEHE and UNDP does not seem to show significant progress in this regard.

Finally, it is worth noting that, at this early stage, **the main international agencies operating in Palestine and the main institutional donors do not seem to pay particular attention to early childhood education needs**. The *UNRWA Education Reform Strategy 2011-2015* [UNRWA ERS 2011] focused mainly on teacher professional development, *curriculum*, student assessment, inclusion, technical and vocational education, research and education data management, while the *UNRWA Curriculum Framework* [UNRWA CF 2013] developed in 2013 did not provide specific guidance on pre-school education or early childhood development. Similarly, the strategic reference document for relations between the EU and the Palestinian Authority for the period under consideration [EU-PA Action Plan 2013], does not contain any specific reference to early childhood education within priority objective no. 7 “Enhance quality of education, research and innovation, information society in the PT” (p. 12 ss.).

The Education Sector Development Plan III 2014-2019 [ESDP III 2014] of March 2014 marks a stronger programmatic intention aimed at developing early childhood education. For the 2013-2014 school year, the document points out that 43.1% of Palestinian children between the ages of 4 and 6 attend **preschools that are administered in different ways**, stressing that this lack of homogeneity in management and internal organisation leads to the **coexistence of different curricula and educational approaches**. Further difficulties of intervention are also highlighted due to the **lack of a ministerial planning and management system as well as an adequate M&E mechanism**⁷.

However, there are some notable initiatives, such as the opening of 8 'grade 0' (i.e. KG2) classrooms in the West Bank and the establishment of **4 training centres** (see below) **for the provision of in-service training for preschool teachers** (two of them in Nablus and Bethlehem), the acquisition of a further centre in Jerusalem, which was under construction at the time, and the intention to open two further centres (Hebron and Jenin) [ESDP III 2014, p.81].

The **expected outcomes** of the strategic interventions called for by ESDP III 2014-2019 are:

- The reform and unification of the pre-school *curriculum* by the end of the school year 2018/2019
- The increase in the Global Enrollment Rate (GER) for children in pre-school from 45.3% in 2012/2013 to 60% at the end of 2018/2019
- The increase in the percentage of preschool teachers and supervisors qualified to TES standards from 65.2% to 70% by the end of the year 2018/2019
- The provision of quality educational services with an annual average of 32 public kindergartens per 800 children [ESDP III 2014, p. 82].

In this context, a further push to the implementation of policies and actions for the development and strengthening of early childhood education is given by the **formal accession of the Palestinian Government to the 2030 Agenda and the pursuit of the SDGs in 2016**. Of particular relevance here is **SDG No. 4 "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."** and **sub-goal 4.2 "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education"**. The adherence to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda is also reflected in the **National Policy Agenda 2017-2022** [NPA 2016, p. 10], which in fact, includes **National Priority 8 "Quality education for all"** within its third pillar devoted to "Sustainable development". **Among the main sectoral interventions, early childhood and pre-school education, which represent "new frontiers for building a solid foundation for learning and creativity", and the need to modernise school curricula are specifically mentioned.**

The NPA 2017-2022 also stresses that the strategy for the education sector must be outlined through **cooperation between all stakeholders** in order to ensure "coherence and excellence" of the relevant institutions. In particular, the NPA lists the future development of a number of policies to support priority no. 8, among which **National Policy no. 20 'Improving Early Childhood Education'** stands out, which envisages interventions in **two key areas: the development of early**

⁷ This is also clearly reflected in the lack of baseline data related to the "General Programme Goal (Outcome): Services for all children of kindergarten age to attend pre-school offered and prepared to move to the basic education stage and their holistic development enhanced" of "Programme 1: Preschool Education" of ESDP III, whose specific objectives are detailed on pp. 97 and following.

childhood education programmes and the **development and improvement of pre-school education** [NPA 2016, pp. 23-24].

Consistently with what was established in the NPA 2017-2022, the **European Joint Strategy in Support of Palestine 2017-2020** [EJS 2017] foresees, under general objective no. 3 "**Sustainable service delivery**", a first sub-objective **devoted to support the education sector**. At the heart of the strategy is **access to inclusive and quality education at all levels (specific objective SO 1), together with the need to improve the quality of education through the development of pedagogical methods and student-centred learning and teaching environments (SO 2)**. An essential precondition for achieving these two objectives is **the strengthening and accountability of the sector governance, which needs to be results-based management (SO 3)** [EJS 2017, pp. 33 and 36]. With reference to general objective no. 3 (*Sustainable service delivery*) and the related specific objective no. 1 (*Safe, inclusive and equitable access to education at all levels of the system is ensured*), the following indicators, baseline data and targets are specified [EJS 2017, p. 41]:

- Percentage of *Gross Enrolment Rate (GER)* in pre-schools
Baseline (2016): 56.1% - Target (2020): 70% Baseline (2016): 56.1% - Target (2020): 70%
- Approval of a new *curriculum* framework integrating cross-cutting priorities
Baseline (2016): 0 - Target (2020): 1

Further and even more detailed indications on the strategic objectives of the MOEHE can be found in the **Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2022** [ESSP 2017-2022], which is an elaboration of ESSDP III for the period after the one it covers.

Recalling that among the key objectives of the strategy for the education sector are the development of a preschool curriculum and an increase in the number of licensed preschools that meet health, safety and professional standards, the ESSP 2017-2022 highlights that **the GER for classes KG1 and KG2, relative to a target school population aged 4-5 years has increased from 55.1% in 2014 to 57.3% in 2015, estimating a target for 2019 of 70%**, foreseen moreover by the *Dakar Framework for Action* of 2000, a key document of the UNESCO *Education for All* programme [ESSP 2017-2022, p. 56].

In order to achieve its objectives, the MOEHE makes a number of specific commitments, including: opening preschool classrooms in marginal areas and promoting access to children with disabilities; urging private sector investment in the sector and the opening of new schools, as well as encouraging private preschools to accept children with disabilities; raising awareness among families and local communities about the importance of early childhood education and care, particularly for children with special needs; and developing specific studies on the Government's experience in opening preschool classrooms in public schools [ESSP 2017-2022, pp. 56-57].

Regarding more specifically the role of the MOEHE in opening new preschool classes, the ESSP 2017-2022 notes that **the percentage of students enrolled in government preschool programmes increased from 0.7% in 2014 to 1.24% in 2015. However, this is far from the 4.2% target set for 2019**. However, while there were only 2 preschools directly managed by the MEAE as of the mid-2000s, it is worth noting that this number increased to 96 (for KG2/grade 0 classes) in 2016 [ESSP 2017-2022, p. 56].

Particularly necessary is the opening of new pre-school classes in the northern West Bank governorates, where the number of licensed public and private pre-schools has increased - though still not enough to meet the needs of the population - from 956 in 2013 to 1137 in 2015 [ESSP 2017-2022, p. 57].

The middle years of the past decade are therefore particularly fruitful for the development of policies in the sector and for the expansion and consolidation of the early childhood education system in Palestine, although critical issues remain numerous and significant.

This also seems to be reflected in the data collected in the **MOEHE M&E Report for the year 2017** [M&E Report 2017], which analyses the situation against the targets set by the ESSP 2017-2022. According to the report, the GER for kindergarten reached 72.5% for KG2/grade 0, and 58% for the two classes KG1 and KG2 taken together. For the West Bank, the 2017 M&E Report [p. 17] also reports a slightly higher GER for KG2/grade 0 for females (73.5%) than for males (72.3%) and a target GER for 2022 of 93.6% for females and 92.8% for males (93.2% overall for KG2, compared to a national target of 92.7%). The next table shows GER figures for both pre-school classes (KG1 and KG2) [M&E Report, p. 17]:

Table (2): Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) in Preschool's KG1 and KG2						
	Baseline year 2017			2022 Targets		
	Male	Female	M&F	Male	Female	M&F
Palestine	57.8%	58.2%	58%	73%	75.1%	74.6%
West Bank	55.7%	56.3%	56%	70.7%	72%	71.3%
Gaza Strip	60.5%	60.6%	60.6%	78.8%	79.6%	79.2%

Source: Processed from M&E Report 2017

As of 2017, the percentage of children in the relevant age group (5 years old) enrolled in KG2 class is 69.7% for the TPs, while for the West Bank the figure is slightly lower (68.3%), with a figure of 67.5% for boys and 69.2% for girls [M&E Report, 2017, p. 18].

However, the enrolment rate in public schools is still very low (2.2% overall, 3.6% for the West Bank), not least in view of the fact that there are only 159 public preschools in the West Bank and Gaza [M&E Report 2017, p. 19], which is intended to be increased to 464 by 2022.

Table (4): Percentage of students enrolled in governmental pre-school programs						
	Baseline year 2017			2022 Targets		
	Male	Female	M&F	Male	Female	M&F
Palestine	2 %	2.4%	2.2%	3.75%	3.79%	3.77%
West Bank	3.4%	3.93%	3.6%	6.37%	6.28%	6.37%
Gaza Strip	0.4%	0.6%	0.5%	0.4%	0.6%	0.5%

Source: Processed from M&E 2017

The report therefore recommends opening more state schools to encourage free enrolment and attendance, especially in economically disadvantaged areas and where there are no other preschools. In addition, with regard to the development of early childhood skills (such as physical, mental, verbal, psychological, social and self-care expression skills), measured on the *Early Learning Development Standard* scale developed by UNICEF in collaboration with the Ministries of Health and Labour, together with partners from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the results also show a score of 62.2 for age 4-5 and 68.1 for age 5-6 [M&E 2017, p. 9].

The M&E Report 2017 also provides a set of adequacy standards for pre-school classroom facilities. These are specifically parameters related to the suitability of pre-school classrooms, extracurricular activity centres and other facilities according to educational standards relating to classroom areas, courtyards, playgrounds, facilities, ventilation and lighting, the availability of furniture appropriate to the needs of students that meet quality and safety standards, as well as the availability of educational games for the pre-school phase that meet quality and safety standards [M&E Report 2017, p. 20].

Based on these standards, the M&E Report 2017 measures the adequacy of public and private preschools by assigning a score in hundredths. The results and related targets for 2022 are summarised in the following table:

Table (7): Degree of appropriateness of a preschool building and its achievement of standards according to supervisory authority				
	Baseline year 2017		2022 Targets	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Furniture	73	57.6	83	68
Ed games/tools	66.1	58.3	76	68
Building	83.41		85.4	

Source: M&E Report 2017

Finally, as of 2017, 31.6% of the total number of teachers were qualified according to the TES 2008 standards (91% of public pre-school teachers, who are in any case small in number compared to accredited private pre-school teachers, and 29.2% of private pre-school teachers), with a further 27% of teachers having followed the Ministry's annual qualification programme (see below, section 3.2) [M&E Report 2017, pp. 21-22].

Within the framework of an integrated approach, repeatedly invoked by the documents reviewed so far, the first inter-ministerial strategy dedicated to early childhood development is also of particular importance. In fact, in 2017, the MOEHE, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Development drew up the **Early Childhood Development National Strategy 2017-2022** [ECD Strategy 2017-2022]. With reference to pre-school education, after recalling the main challenges facing the sector [p. 21], the Strategy provides, for each of its specific objectives, a series of interventions, some of which highlight **the role of pre-school as an essential vehicle and accelerator of early childhood development**⁸.

Also, the **improvement of health services** goes through a greater involvement of kindergartens, where it is intended to carry out regular basic medical check-ups, also in order to detect possible disabilities or health problems at an early stage [ECD Strategy 2017-2022, pp. 21-22].

⁸ A detailed description of the strategic objectives defined in this respect and the specific objectives identified for each of them can be found on pp. 26 ff. of the ECD Strategy 2017-2022.

The 2017 law on education

2017 is a key year in the process of building the early childhood education sector. It witnessed the approval of the first general education law, which for the first time regulates certain aspects, including programmatic ones, related to the purpose and articulation of pre-school, while the MOEHE published the **Kindergarten Teacher's Manual**, containing guidelines for teachers and considered the first Palestinian "curriculum" for pre-school, and the **Professional Standards for Kindergarten Teachers**, which describe the professional competencies, rights and ethical duties of teachers, including continuous education obligations.

The **general law on education of 6 April 2017 is the first piece of legislation to regulate the education sector in the PT.** Indeed, the 2017 law repeals and replaces in its entirety (Art. 56) the previous disciplines, namely the Jordanian Law on Education of 1964 for the West Bank and the Egyptian law of 1933, as amended in 1981, for the Gaza Strip. The law regulates numerous aspects related to the components of the educational process, from the definition of educational objectives to the role of the MEAE in supervising and supporting the implementation of sector policies (Art. 20 ff.), to the licensing (accreditation) of private and foreign educational institutions (Art. 15 and 16), to the recruitment process of teaching staff (Art. 25 ff.).

First of all, **the law defines "kindergarten" as "Every education institution which provides education service for children prior to primary education stage".**

Of particular relevance is the inclusion of pre-school education in the general education cycle. **Article 6** states that "the general education system consists of the following stages: 1. Kindergartens (not more than 2 years before basic education stage); 2. Basic education (9 years); 3. Secondary education (3 years)". However, **it should be remembered that pre-school education is not yet fully compulsory⁹. To date, therefore, compulsoriness is de facto a programmatic objective**, as is also inferred from the **ESSP 2017-2022, which in fact indicates among the crucial challenges for the early childhood education sector precisely the fact that its compulsoriness, although provided for by the 2017 law, has not yet been implemented as required by the new legislation** [ESSP 2017-2022, p. 59].

The need to make the legislation fully operational is also **underlined by the recent UNICEF report Children in the State of Palestine**, which includes among the recommendations related to SDG No. 4 the development of a strategy to implement the legislative provision of compulsory completion of the last year of pre-school [UNICEF 2021, p. 9].

The triennium 2018-2021: the current situation and accreditation criteria (*licensing criteria*)

In 2019, it is the Aide Mémoire **Annual Sector Review** [ASR 2019] that analyses progress in ESSP 2017-2022 implementation. With reference to pre-school, it first highlights that 83 public pre-school classrooms were opened in Basic schools during 2018. **The new curriculum was disseminated to 1,800 kindergartens** (1,100 in the West Bank, 500 in Gaza and 100 in Jerusalem) **and 640 public and private kindergarten teachers and headmasters were specially trained on it, while 23 teachers were trained on early diagnosis and inclusive teaching practices.** Furthermore, the MOEHE granted accreditation to 1117 private pre-schools. **In the West Bank, the awareness campaign on the importance of early childhood development and kindergarten enrolment reached more than 600**

⁹ In fact, Article 7(4) reads as follows "The Ministry works to expand its kindergarten services **for the aim of making this education stage free and compulsory**, in accordance with a standardized systemic framework approved by the Ministry". This is also confirmed by ESDP III, which states: "It is noteworthy that the two-year pre-school education stage is not compulsory. However, the new Law of Education stipulates that the one year of preschool education (KG2, sometimes called Grade 0) is compulsory".

parents. In the outskirts of Jerusalem, the training and *model kindergarten* centre was under construction [ASR 2019, p. 16].

The entire chapter 7 of the ASR is then devoted to an in-depth discussion on the topic of **"Inclusive, Quality Preschool Education for All"**. Particular emphasis is placed on the need for continuity between pre-school and classes 1-4 of the basic school cycle, as well as the need to develop unified training for all pre-school staff. With reference to the implementation of compulsory pre-school education (KG2 class), an action plan is needed to address the qualifications of private school teachers and the opening of kindergartens and KG2 classrooms in the Gaza Strip. Finally, a review of the working conditions of pre-school staff and the definition of unified minimum quality standards for infrastructure are suggested.

In light of this, one of the most relevant developments in the last two years concerns the approval of the **Licensing Instructions For Private Preschools 2020/2021** [LIPP 2020], drafted with the contribution of the PACE project (implemented by RTM) and containing ministerial criteria and procedures for the licensing of private preschools.

The Licensing Instructions provide for a **standard procedure for licensing**. The procedure is activated on application by the owner of the nursery school, accompanied by all the required documentation and addressed to the Education Directorate of the Ministry. Subsequently, the supervisor responsible for the area and an engineer from the Education Directorate carry out a visit to the school, following which, having ascertained compliance with the requirements and standards prescribed by the LIPP, a geometric examination is completed by the Education Directorate and an environmental examination by the Ministry of Health. The Education Directorate may, by written and reasoned decision, refuse to licence a pre-school if it finds serious shortcomings in the quality of the service, or if the documentation submitted is incomplete. However, if the pre-school meets all the necessary requirements and has provided evidence of this in the documentation, it will receive a **one-year licence that can be renewed annually** [LIPP 2020, p. 12].

In addition to the one-year licence (further detailed in point 1.2, p. 14), the LIPP also provides for the **possibility of a five-year licence** (p. 13, point 1.3), for those schools that meet the requirements defined therein.

Within the broader framework of a global policy aimed at enhancing the value of pre-school education and the full implementation of the legislative requirement that it be compulsory at least for class KG2, the approval and entry into force of the LIPPs¹⁰ represent a particularly important achievement. In this context, it should be noted that one of the stated objectives of the LIPPs is to support the Ministry in developing and consolidating effective monitoring, follow-up and evaluation systems that allow for the collection of detailed data on pre-school programmes and services, as well as the monitoring of children's development and growth. The Licensing Instructions will then allow for the regular collection and reporting of the necessary data in the prescribed timeframe and manner, as a prerequisite for receiving services and thus being accredited [LIPP 2020, p. 13].

¹⁰ In addition to defining the procedures and requirements for obtaining accreditation, the LIPPs are then divided into a series of chapters, each of which is dedicated to a specific topic and defines the requirements and characteristics that a pre-school must have in order to receive accreditation: identity, administration, quality of the building and learning, learning environment, facilities and services, pedagogical project and respect for the curriculum, recruitment of teaching and non-teaching staff, parental participation and parenting projects. Finally, complaint and withdrawal procedures are outlined.

The approval of the Kindergarten Teacher's Manual (2017)

Due to the absence of textbooks collecting and systematising the ministerial programme or *curriculum* for KG1 and KG2 classes, the MOEHE has long adopted the *Interactive Curriculum Book for Kindergarten Teachers* already used and tested in Jordan. Rather than a true ministerial programme, this document was conceived as a guide for planning and carrying out learning units and daily activities, for preparing worksheets for activities related to public health and safety, children's social relationships with family and surroundings, as well as basic concepts of language and mathematical logic and how to convey them through specific educational activities that exploit the potential of the surrounding environment [Education reality, 2015].

In implementation of the objectives already outlined in ESDP II and reiterated in subsequent policy documents [ESDP III, but also EJS 2017, see above], with the support of institutional *donors* and NGOs such as UNICEF, Save the Children, World Vision, RTM, ANERA and Right to Play the MOEHE drafted the **Kindergarten Teacher's Manual** [KTM 2017]. Significantly referred to as a 'manual', it is the methodological and content framework designed to serve as a reference for pre-school teachers in their work. It therefore has characteristics of flexibility and adaptability of the activities proposed that differentiate it at least in part from the ministerial programmes (or *curricula* for the basic school cycle).

In continuity with the decision to make the *curriculum* for pre-school a flexible and adaptable document, but in contrast to the traditional approach that considered pre-school as a mere antechamber to primary school, aimed at conveying almost exclusively the basic skills of reading, writing and calculation, the KTM takes more account of the characteristics of the child's growth and development and of his or her specific needs, promoting expressive abilities and creativity, proposing to transmit attitudes and skills that can help the child adapt to the environment and social relations. It consists of **two sections**:

- **Section I** is the professional 'handbook' for teachers. It includes guidance on organising the school environment, strategies, planning and methods for personalising activities and suggestions for carrying out activities. It includes references to additional resources and materials;
- **Section II** comprises four educational units, each of which is articulated in objectives, learning outcomes and activities, which teachers can adapt to the level, age and interest of the class, also making use of additional resources [KTM 2017, p. 7].

The KTM also includes indications for organising the educational environment in "learning centres" dedicated to active learning and experimenting with particular knowledge or skills (nature corner, arts corner, construction corner, music corner, home corner, material recycling corner, science corner, reading and writing corner...). The KTM also promotes children's use of educational materials and objects produced by teachers from everyday materials, through which they can convey concepts of mathematical logic, linguistic concepts, science, and social relations.

The handbook has recently been updated with an addendum for the school year 2019/2020 [KTM Addendum 2019].

Preschool teacher training

Moreover, the current contractual standards and conditions do not seem to be particularly attractive, so much so that the pre-school teaching profession is often considered to be a temporary profession, with all the consequences that this entails for the development of the system and for the planning of in-service teacher training activities.

In 2017, the MOEHE published a guide to the **Professional Standards for Kindergarten Teachers** [PSKT 2017], developed in collaboration with a number of institutional partners and NGOs. Among the topics covered, the rights, duties and characteristics of the teacher stand out, as well as the pedagogical, substantive, methodological competences related to the transfer of knowledge and interaction with pupils, and those related to the stimulation of learning through the educational environment.

It should also be mentioned that **Article 25(1) of the Education Act 2017 requires possession of a university degree in order to enter the teaching profession.**

In order to provide continuous training for pre-school teachers, since the beginning of the last decade, the MOEHE has established training centres with 'model kindergartens' where trained teachers can carry out observation and training. To date, there are six ministerial training centres in the TP: two in Gaza, four in the West Bank (Bethlehem, Nablus, Jenin, Jerusalem), and more centres are being prepared for Gaza and Hebron.

These centres provide annual training for 150 pre-school teachers, using the following methodologies:

- Group work training workshop
- Reference to experience and collection of collective experiences
- Connections between course topics and procedures and case studies, references and reflections based on experience

The **contents** of this programme are specified by the M&E 2017 [p. 21]:

1. Child developmental characteristics during the preschool stage.
2. Organising the educational environment for preschool and classroom vision and regulations.
3. The importance of drama in preschool.
4. Daily routine in preschools.
5. Annual, monthly and weekly plans for preschools.
6. Working with parents to spend quality time with their children.
7. Assessment in preschools.
8. Creating games and teaching aids from environmental raw materials.
9. The importance of nutrition, and how to alter the nutritional habits of children in preschools.
10. Counselling in preschool and changing children's behaviour in cooperation with parents.
11. How to implement activities inside preschools.
12. Specification of working papers appropriate for the child in preschool.

The training centres monitor the pre-schools and support the professional skills of the teachers through a course organised centrally by the MOEHE for 300-350 participants including supervisors, headmasters and teachers. Each supervisor runs courses for headmasters and teachers in her area, supplemented by visits to individual schools, during which the supervisor provides feedback to the teacher after following the implementation of a specific activity. The supervisor then submits a report on the visit and observation. In addition, an annual exchange programme is carried out between

nursery school supervisors, whereby each supervisor puts her professional experience at the service of the others, and supervisors carry out training for headmasters and teachers in their places of residence.

The MEAE also organised a training course for pre-school supervisors on the new teachers' guide, after which they will each give a course to head teachers and teachers in their area. Due to the small number of supervisors (see introductory section above), the courses are often theoretical in nature, focusing mainly on school law and legislation, and schools rarely attend them. Among the main obstacles to raising the level of training and qualification of school staff as a whole are the cost of courses and training programmes and the related need to find adequate funding, and the high turnover of teachers, due to which those who have been trained often leave in the absence of adequate contractual conditions [Educational Reality 2015].

The need to take action to strengthen the professional qualifications of pre-school teachers is still an open challenge, as highlighted by the UNICEF report *Children in the State of Palestine* [UNICEF 2021, p. 9].

Main donors and development partners in the education sector, with a focus on early childhood education (2010-2021)

The table below aims to provide an overview of the main interventions carried out by other *donors* and partners of the Palestinian Authority in the education sector during the last decade, with a particular focus on early childhood education. .

INTERVENTIONS IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR 2013-2018
EU MS+NORWAY
Joint Financing Agreement (JFA) 2010-2019
<p>Signed in November 2010 by Finland, Ireland, Norway and the German Development Bank (acting on behalf of Germany), it aims to support the implementation of the Education Development Strategic Action Plan (EDSP). The funding mechanism was linked to progress in the implementation of the EDSP. Concluded in 2019, it was structured as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JFA I (2010-2015): € 64.1 milion • JFA II (2016-2019): € 95 milion <p>The JFA mainly focused on harmonisation, coordination, joint consultations with the Palestinian Authority, sector performance analysis, common procedures for the use of funds for reporting and auditing and was a key tool for structural improvements in the management of the education system (sector M&E, resource planning and allocation, auditing).</p> <p>In this regard, the <i>Mid-term Review of the European Joint Strategy in support of Palestine 2017-2020</i> of June 2020, reports the following: “The Joint Financing Agreement (JFA) in the education sector was repeatedly referenced during field interviews as a pioneering example of joint programming and joint implementation in Palestine. Within the framework of the EJS, the JFA continues to evolve in terms of relations between partners (Germany, Ireland, Finland and Norway) and with the Ministry of Education (MoE). To support these results, the EDP financing partners and the Ministry produced a budget framework paper to develop a more strategic and results-driven dialogue on planning and budgeting education reform” [EJS MT Review 2020, p. 17].</p>
PEGASE (2008-today)
<p>Launched in 2008, PEGASE DFS is a mechanism that channels support from the EU and other non-EU donors to the Palestinian Authority in the provision of essential goods and services (including health and education). It also supports private sector initiatives in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It currently comprises 18 donors, including three non-EU states: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Spain, EUREP/EC, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Sweden, Slovenia + United Kingdom, Switzerland, Japan).</p>

UNRWA
Interventions in the education sector ¹¹
<p>In the West Bank, UNRWA provides basic education, covering grades 1-9 (and grade 10 in two schools in East Jerusalem). As reported above, UNRWA also produced its own Education Sector Reform Strategy [UNRWA ERS 2011], which focused specifically on teacher professional development (<i>School Based Teacher Development-SBTD I and II programmes</i>), <i>curriculum</i>, student assessment, inclusion, technical and vocational education, and research and education data management. In 2013, UNRWA had also developed its own <i>Curriculum Framework</i> [UNRWA CF 2013], however without specific guidance on pre-school education or early childhood development (moreover at a time in history when pre-school was not included in any way in the compulsory school cycle).</p> <p>For the next five years, UNRWA's action in the education sector is based on the <i>Medium Term Strategy 2016-2021</i> [UNRWA MTS 2016], aimed at guiding the Agency's activities as a whole. <i>Strategic outcome 3 on School-aged children complete quality, equitable and inclusive basic education</i> presents a more specific focus on early childhood (pp. 16-17) and indicates, among future challenges, the following: "UNRWA will, in particular, look into facilitating access to early childhood education through strategic partnerships. UNRWA will continue to work closely with the Ministries of Education in all fields" (p. 43, para. 158).</p> <p>It should also be noted that as of today (2021), the EU contributes 40% of the total funds available to UNRWA¹². In 2021, Italy contributed to UNRWA's budget with a total of approximately 14 million Euros, divided between voluntary contributions and interventions through the multilateral and multi-bilateral channels.</p>
UNESCO
EDUCATION FOR ALL (EFA) 2012-2016
<p>Education for All (EFA) is an international initiative coordinated by UNESCO together with UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank, aimed at reducing illiteracy and universalising education. EFA contributes to the pursuit of SDG 4 (formerly MDG 2 and MDG 3).</p> <p>The initiative was inaugurated with the Dakar Declaration of 2000, signed by 164 countries at the World Education Forum, which in turn was preceded by the World Declaration on Education for All (1990).</p> <p>The objectives enshrined in the Dakar Declaration are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children; • ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality; • ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes; • achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults; • eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality; • improving every aspect of the quality of education, and ensuring their excellence so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills. <p>To monitor the progress of the six Dakar goals, UNESCO uses its UNESCO Institute of Statistics and publishes annual thematic Global Monitoring Reports (after 2015, GEM-Global Education Monitoring Reports).</p> <p>For the TPs, the reference document is: State of Palestine, <i>National Assessment Education for All 2000-2015</i>, [National Assessment Education for All 2014], which summarises the interventions and progress recorded for each of the six core goals mentioned above.</p>
OFID (OPEC FUND FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT) + UNESCO
Agreement to Improve Education for Palestinian Children in West Bank and Gaza Strip (2013)
<p>Project based on the EFA Palestine Package (2012-2014), targeting 32 pilot schools in the West Bank and 14 pilot schools in Gaza already covered by the EFA Palestine Package. These schools benefited from an initiative on school feeding, teacher training on ICT, special education needs, educational leadership and inclusive pedagogies, as well as the implementation of early childhood development programmes. These interventions were extended to 20 additional schools (10 in the West Bank, 10 in Gaza, including 5 UNRWA schools in each locality).</p> <p>Objective: to make the education system more inclusive and specifically reach the children most vulnerable to exclusion (especially those affected by conflict, occupation and war), those with learning difficulties, disabilities, or from Bedouin and herding communities.</p>

¹¹ An overview is available here <https://www.unrwa.org/activity/education-west-bank>

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_6081

USAID
Education Development Program¹³ (concluded in 2018)
Umbrella programme under which a number of projects have been implemented in support of MOEHE and in partnership with local and/or US academic institutions, or other NGOs (e.g., AMIDEAST ¹⁴) and foundations (IREX Foundation). None is specifically focused on early childhood, but one of its objectives explicitly mentions expanding the impact of early childhood intervention programming. As mentioned <i>above</i> , in March 2011, AMIDEAST-Model Schools Network Program, at the request of USAID and MOEHE, conducted the <i>Review of Implementation Status of the 2008 Teacher Education Strategy</i> .
WORLD BANK
Improving Early Childhood Development in the West Bank and Gaza (approved 2019-conclusion expected 2025)
It is comprised of three components [WB 2019]: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Promoting early healthy development</i> (0-3 years): mainly focused on strengthening pre- and post-natal care and improving nutrition and early stimulation in the first 1000 days of life 2. Improving access to high-quality KG services: itself divided into several sub-components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subcomponent 2.1 Expanding access to KG2: (a) the refurbishment and extensions of public KG2 classrooms, (b) the design of a <u>public-private partnership</u> (PPP) model, (c) the financing of transfers to eligible KG private providers. Subcomponent 2.2 Enhancing the quality of KG services: the objective of this subcomponent is to enhance children's learning experience by improving teaching practices in Palestinian KG classrooms through: (a) development and roll-out of an in-service <u>KG teacher professional diploma</u>; (b) development, production and distribution of a KG teacher toolkit; (c) development and piloting of a KG quality assurance system (cf. para. 42, p. 18 of the document cited in footnote 5.). 3. <i>Component 3 Improving availability of ECD data</i>, also as a function of action planning and programming (for this purpose capacity building activities are foreseen also for MOEHE). 4. <i>Component 4: Project management and implementation support</i> for MoH and MOEHE
ANERA
Early Childhood Development Programme - "Right Start"¹⁵
ANERA has been active since 2003 in the field of support for early childhood education, with a wide range of interventions ranging from the provision of milk to preschool children ("Milk for Preschoolers" programme, 2003-2011) to the restructuring of preschool classes (since 2010), from teacher training (since 2010) to the involvement of families in "Positive Parenting" experiences (2012) [ANERA 2014]. Particularly interesting in this period, due to the contiguity with some of the main features of the Reggio Emilia Approach, was the pilot project "Arts for Childhood" (2011) through which the staff of 4 pre-schools in the West Bank received specific training on theatre, photography and other expressive arts, as well as the setting up of "reading corners" in some pilot schools in Gaza and the West Bank. The Right Start programme (still ongoing) is based on the following pillars: teacher training, school building (renovation or new construction of pre-school classrooms), promotion of reading (Hayya Naqra-Let's Read programme, for children, teachers and parents), expressive arts for active learning, active and positive parenting techniques targeting early childhood, child health (nutrition, health and child development).
WORLD VISION
Early Childhood Development Programme
The programme focuses on the well-being of children from 0 to 6 years old. It includes collaboration with the MOEHE and the Ministry of Health.
Learning Roots (2019-ongoing)¹⁶
<i>Learning Roots</i> addresses the development and learning needs of children aged 3 to 6 years. The aim is to prepare them for a successful transition to primary school. All components of <i>Learning Roots</i> offer support to vulnerable children with a focus on inclusion. World Vision JWG has trained over 144 teachers on effective educational techniques and best practices for child development, helped furnish and renovate 168 kindergartens, and supported them by providing the necessary tools

¹³ <https://www.usaid.gov/west-bank-and-gaza/fact-sheets/education-development-program-jan-2014> (last update: July 2021)

¹⁴ <https://www.amideast.org/west-bank-gaza>

¹⁵ <https://www.anera.org/priorities/early-childhood-development/>

¹⁶ Updated programme data are available in World Vision JWG, *Learning Roots Programme*, April 2021, <https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/LR%20Capacity%20Statement%20-%202022%20April%202021%20Lower%20Quality.pdf>

and resources, such as stationery and playground materials. As of March 2021, 23 new public kindergartens have also been established with the support of the Ministry of Education to increase children's access to education, particularly the most vulnerable. 89% of teachers completed at least 80% of the sessions offered for teacher training.

RIGHT TO PLAY

Programme for the Palestinian Territories ¹⁷

Right To Play started its work in the Palestinian Territories in 2003, after concluding an agreement with UNRWA to work with schools in refugee camps. In 2008, an after-school programme was launched with the MOEHE, which was later extended to include kindergartens. In 2019, the activity expanded to all 370 UNRWA schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with the support of the Government of Canada.

Activities:

- improving the quality of learning environments through the renovation of classrooms and provision of teaching tools and resources
- training teachers on gender stereotypes and promoting equal participation in the classroom
- supporting school officials and communities in addressing violence, including gender-based violence, both inside and outside school

Right To Play also worked with MOEHE to develop 'Minimum Standards for Active Classrooms', covering the organisation of the overall space, lighting, furniture, choice of colours and use of technology. In 2020, Right To Play focused particularly on the accessibility of schools to children with disabilities, partly through the establishment of school inclusion committees.

1.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE EVALUATED INITIATIVE

Within the context described above, the AEPIC Project decided to intervene on some of **the needs identified during the project design phase**. In particular, it was decided to intervene on the following problems: a) the backwardness and rigidity of the pre-school education system; b) the poor inclusion of disadvantaged children; c) the absence of suitable spaces for starting pre-school classes, particularly in rural areas; d) the poor skills of ministerial personnel in charge of pre-school education (officials at central level and educational supervisors of educational districts); e) the poor collaboration and synergy between public and private actors active in the pre-school education sector.

The **project strategy** aimed on the one hand to improve the quality of the services offered through strengthening capacities at various levels (MOEHE at central and decentralised level, teaching staff), and on the other hand to increase the inclusiveness of pre-school education services through the opening of new pre-school classes in disadvantaged areas (already involved in the MOEHE-UNESCO *Education for All-EFA Programme*); the inclusion of families - especially mothers- in school activities; the inclusion of children with different abilities through more child-centred education methods. A central role in the pursuit of this multi-level strategy has been assigned to the strengthening of public-private partnerships in the Governorate of Bethlehem and the dissemination of good practices in the rest of the West Bank.¹⁸

The Project's Theory of Change is reported in the "Impact" chapter. Some summary data derived from the Year 3 Project Narrative Report is provided below.

¹⁷ <https://www.righttoplayusa.org/en/countries/palestinian-territories/>

¹⁸ The choice of the Governorate of Bethlehem stems from the well-established relations between the Province and the Municipality of Reggio Emilia respectively with the Governorate of Bethlehem and the Municipality of Beit Jala. Moreover, RTM had already established partnerships with local actors such as the Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation and the Effetà Centre..

Name and acronym of the NGO: REGGIO TERZO MONDO - RTM	
Eligibility Decree for the implementation of projects in PVS: - DM no. 0102 of 21/03/1974 and DM no. 756 del 06/05/1982, confirmed by DM no. 1988/128/004187/2 of 14/09/1988; - Decree of entry in the List No. 2016/337/000262/0.	
Title of the project: AEPIC - ALLEANZA PER UN'EDUCAZIONE INCLUSIVA E DI QUALITA' DELLA PRIMA INFANZIA IN CISGIORDANIA	
Beneficiary country: PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES	AID Code: 010327/RTM/TOC
Name and acronym of the local counterparts: (1) Ministry of Education and Higher Education of the Palestinian National Authority (MOEHE), Ramallah (2) Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem - Schools Division (PL), Beit Jala - Bethlehem (3) Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem - School Division (PGO), Beit Sahour - Bethlehem (4) Greek Catholic Patriarchate - Schools Division (PGC), Beit Sahour - Bethlehem (5) IbdAA' Cultural Association (IBDAA), Dheisheh Refugee Camp - Bethlehem	
Resolution of approval's No. and date: No. 86 of 26/06/14	Commitment Decree's No. and date: Reg.1 sheet 39 of 16/01/2015 Commitment decree's date of registration and protocol number: 2014/337/001014/5 of 16/01/2015
Start date: 01/03/2015	End date: 31/05/2018
Summary of the financial situation	
Total cost: € 1.786.047,00	Deliberate contribution: € 941.540,00

2. RESULTS OF THE FINAL EVALUATION

2.1. RELEVANCE AND COHERENCE

2.1.1. Relevance of the Project in relation to the local and national context, to the needs and problems of the stakeholder and coherence with Government policies and international cooperation priorities

Evaluation question 1.1: *To what extent the Project's design and its logic of intervention is relevant to the local and national needs and challenges in the educational sector? Was it relevant at the time of Project's design and is it still relevant in the current country situation?*

Evaluation question 1.2: *To what extent is the AEPIC work and the "Reggio Emilia" approach coherent and aligned with the priorities and trends expressed in national development plans and in the Strategies developed for the Educational Sector?*

CONCLUSION 1 – The AEPIC Project was highly relevant to the country's pre-school and early childhood education needs and was able to identify priority areas of intervention to address sectoral problems. Moreover, it proved to be fully consistent and aligned with the MOEHE priorities, policies and strategies in place at the time of the Project design (ESDP II and III) and those more recently enacted (ESSP 2017-2022 and Education Act 2017), as well as with broader policies such as the National Policy Agenda 2017-2022 which considers early childhood and preschool education as one of the priorities of intervention to foster an adequate early childhood

development. In addition to having coherently responded to national indicators and objectives, the Project had also a specific added value, having contributed to the definition of the Palestinian approach to pre-school and early childhood education. The priority issues of gender and inclusion of children with special needs have been given very limited consideration.

The AEPIC Project has been consistently relevant in relation to those which were the needs of the Country as far as pre-school and early childhood education in the implementation period (2015-2018) is concerned, with specific reference to the situation in the public sector. As a matter of fact, during the school year 2013/2014, there were only 4 private kindergartens, and a very small number of children (636) resulted enrolled in public kindergartens.

The AEPIC Project has indeed contributed **to the opening and qualification of new preschool classes**, thanks to the collaboration and synergy with the United Nation Program EFA, contributing **to the increase in the enrolment rate**. Both objectives were already established by ESDP II 2008-2012.

In the year 2015, in the Governorates of Tulkarem, Qalqiya and Jenin, 5 of the schools in the sample visited during the evaluation did not have any pre-school class attached, whereas today they all have at least one, thanks to the synergy built between the AEPIC and EFA initiatives.

The Project activities have included various low-income areas, where the enrolment in pre-school classes was rather scarce because of the limited public offer and the lack of parental awareness in relation to the importance of children's education. In particular, the Project has involved various **schools located in Area C or Hebron 2** (10 schools out of the 29 involved are in Area C, while just 1 is located in the area Hebron 2), thus supporting the access to pre-school education in the areas of main interest for MOEHE. **These are areas where the improvement of existing pre-schools, the opening of new pre-school classes and the increase of awareness among families is still a priority, as reported by several MOEHE leaders interviewed.**

The same strategic documents of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) [ESDP II, ESDP III, ESSP] often underline the difficulties in accessing kindergartens in Area C, mainly due to the distances and the consequent difficulties in moving within Area C or between Area C and Areas A and B. That is because of the controls carried out at the checkpoints, as well as the lack of safety in crossing some areas, especially for children. These documents also point out several additional issues regarding the maintenance, renovation or new construction of school buildings located in area C, for which it is necessary to request permits from the Israeli authorities.

«The education sector needs to provide an adequate learning environment for children in poor areas, which is why the Ministry has a policy of opening new pre-school classes every year in poor areas and in AREA C. The AEPIC Project has contributed to this national objective».

MOEHE, Supervisor

The Project has responded in an adequate way even to the need of **teaching qualification** in kindergartens and pre-school classes, an issue already covered in the previously mentioned *Education for All, Part I: Reality and Challenges* (2014). This is mainly due to the lack of adequately qualified teachers, to insufficient number of *supervisor*, to the absence of a *curriculum* that guide teachers through the development of activities, as well as to the high number of non-accredited kindergartens and to the difficulty of providing an adequate service to children with disabilities. **By working on the training of teachers, supervisors and MOEHE staff at central level and supporting**

the process of defining the Palestinian pre-school curriculum, the Project proved to be fully relevant.

Other needs that were considered by the Project concern the **poor coordination abilities of the MOEHE**, the **lack of interaction between schools**, the need for **greater involvement of families and the community** in early childhood education issues, the need for **adaptation and qualification of facilities and spaces**, and the need for equipment and teaching materials to improve the educational offer.

The above-mentioned areas of intervention were highlighted as priorities by *Education for All, Part I: Reality and Challenges* (2014), as well as by EDSP II (2008-2012) and III (2014-2019). The latter, in particular, identifies the following **critical issues**:

- Lack of a standardised pre-school *curriculum*
- Lack of accreditation and supervision for many public schools
- Deficiencies in physical infrastructure (lack of outdoor games and gardens, poor sanitation, etc.)
- Inadequately qualified and inexperienced teaching staff

and related **intervention strategies**:

- Construction/management by the MOEHE of preschools in all [public] schools (one pre-school classroom per newly built school)
- Unifying the *curriculum* and related decision-making processes, strengthening data availability and funding strategies
- Renovating schools and providing furniture where necessary
- Designing teaching materials to update pre-school teachers' skills
- Properly training Grade 0 (KG2) teachers, first grade teachers, school managers, counsellors and parents on preschool issues

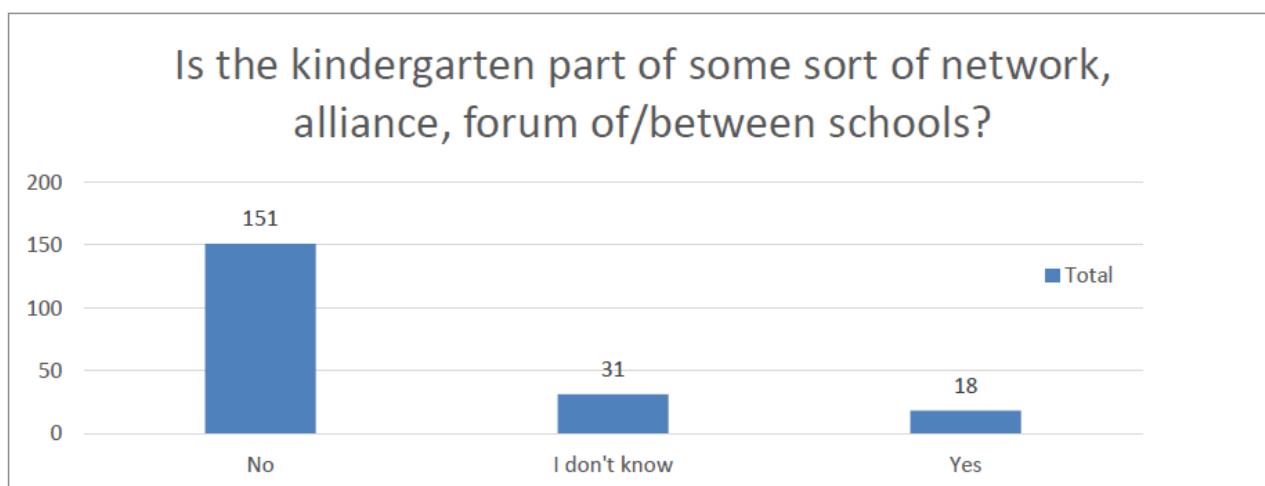
The relevance of the priorities and actions identified by the AEPIC Project is confirmed by the subsequent **ESSP 2017-2022**, which identifies among the critical issues: a still low enrolment rate in kindergartens; the need to improve the performance and professional skills of the staff employed; greater coherence between the educational approaches used in different schools; a lack of furniture, toys and computers for educational activities and the absence of adequate facilities for children with disabilities. Significantly, challenges identified by the ESSP 2017-2022 include a **still traditional technical support from early childhood organisations and inadequate teacher training in play-centred educational methodologies**. In addition, recommendations include the need to **raise awareness among families about the importance of interaction with children**.

The identified priorities for intervention are also well aligned with the strategic objectives contained in the **Early Childhood Development National Strategy 2017-2022**, which reiterates the importance of promoting pre-school enrolment rates and improving the quality of educational services offered in this field, and with the more general **National Policy Agenda 2017-2022**, which recognises pre-school and early childhood education as a priority for action.

Moreover, the above-mentioned strategic documents, as well as the 2019 *Annual Sector Review*, have repeatedly stressed the importance of promoting **public-private partnerships and of transforming the MOEHE from a mere supervisor of pre-schools to a true certifying body**, which would therefore validate schools on their compliance with certain standards and objectively verifiable qualitative and quantitative criteria. **The latter aspect was significantly discussed in the follow-up of the AEPIC Project, i.e., the PACE Project promoted by RTM, while as far as the public-private interaction is concerned, this was a priority area of intervention of the AEPIC Project, which also favoured greater opportunities for exchange and comparison between schools and, in particular, between public and public schools.**

The issue of low interaction between schools is still relevant today, as shown in the following graph, elaborated from the data collected through the questionnaire sent out by the E-School Platform, which highlights that only 9% of the sample that responded to the question is part of some form of network between schools.

Graph no. 2

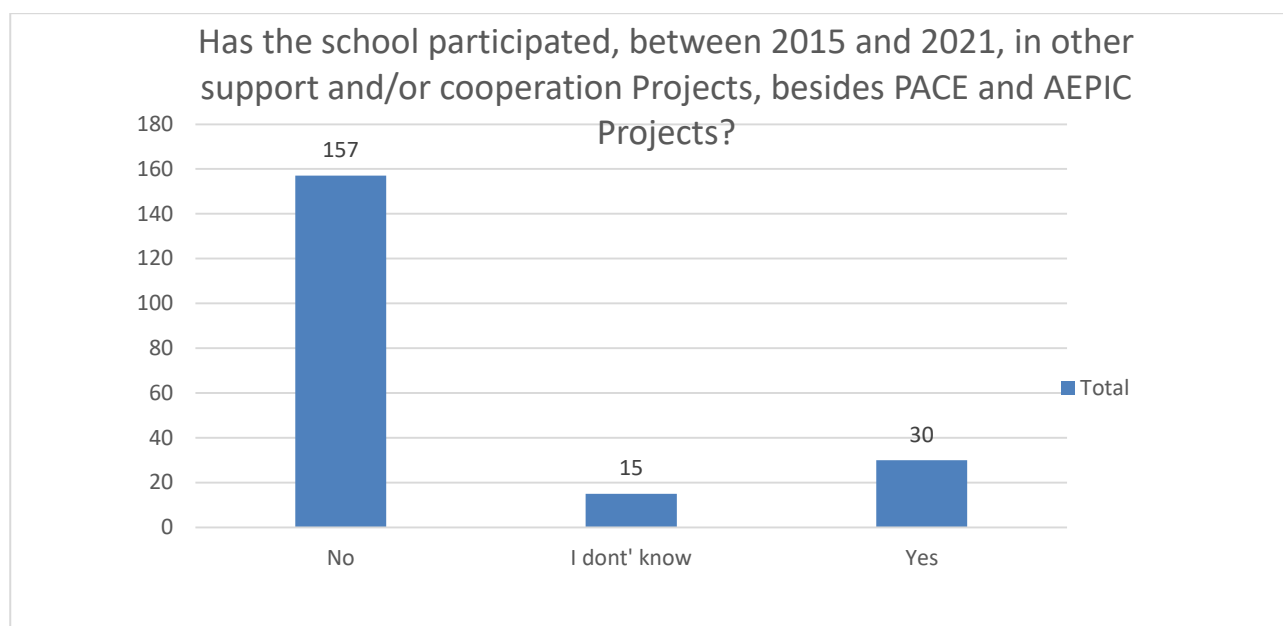


It is also important to underline that, as highlighted in Chapter 1 (Context of the evaluated initiative), **the pre-school education sector had been quite neglected until 2015** by the main international actors, if we exclude the EFA Programme and some projects of ANERA, World Vision and Right to Play. **This makes the AEPIC Project particularly relevant, in line with the growing interest that was gradually building in the country around the issues of pre-school and early childhood education.**

In light of this, the data collected by the questionnaire launched through the ministerial platform *E-School*, still confirm the lack of attention from the international community. For instance, the graph below shows that only 14% of the schools in the sample were involved in support programmes in the period 2015-2021.¹⁹

¹⁹ The main implementers of these support projects for pre-schools were - based only on the schools that answered this question in the questionnaire -: World Vision, UNICEF, RTM and other local organizations.

Graph no. 3



In conclusion, based on the document review and the data collected during the evaluation, it can be stated that the themes of the AEPIC Project were and still are of great relevance and that they contribute in a coherent way to the indicators and objectives set by the different national strategies.

The AEPIC Project and the Reggio Emilia approach proposed through the initiative, have also contributed significantly to the development of the Palestinian approach to early childhood education. According to MOEHE managers, before the AEPIC Project, there was no strategic vision of pre-school and early childhood education, and the teaching methods offered in most kindergartens were merely traditional and not inspired by any pedagogical philosophy at all. Thus, in addition to demonstrating relevance and coherence, the Project brought a significant **added value**.

According to most of the interviewed people, this added value has been possible also thanks to the peculiarities of the Reggio Emilia approach, which becomes an educational approach that can be shaped on various backgrounds, without imposing itself as a strict model to be rigidly assumed as it is. Although the suggested educational approach is clearly connected to the Reggio Emilia contexts, the majority of teachers and educational supervisors were firm in identifying in this experience an opportunity to learn and rethink elements and aspects that might have been better adapted in the Palestinian context.

«We have not been forced to accept a foreign method, to carry out the Italian method; they have been open to our ideas and they pushed us in finding our own (method)».

Principal, Pilot school

Some important issues, highlighted by stakeholders, from reference literature and the mentioned Strategies, were not adequately considered in the Project strategy. These are the gender approach

and the inclusion of children with special needs. This aspect is dealt with in more detail in the chapter "Cross-cutting issues".

Evaluation question 1.3: *To what extent the AEPIC Project is coherent with the donor's strategies and priorities in the country and with trends of other development partners and to what extent it represents an added value in regard to global concerns in the area of education?*

CONCLUSION 2 – The Project is consistent with the approaches and strategies of the donor and of the United Nations Agencies involved in the education sector, which recognise the importance of pre-school and early childhood education to the development process of children and to their future potential. The Project's local partners have also catalysed a new approach in the country based on the centrality of the child, the value of active learning and the acknowledgement of the plurality of factors -families, community, school environment, teacher-child relationship- that intervene in the educational process.

The Project is well aligned with the geographical and sectoral priorities indicated in the **AICS Three-Year Programming Document 2013-2015**. It intervenes in one of the 24 priority countries identified and supports investments for peace in the Middle East area. It also intervenes in the priority sector of education and training, contributing to the achievement of the objectives of the UNESCO Programme "Education for All". (Education for All - EFA) and contributing to the -then- Millennium Goals, with reference to Goal No. 2, aimed at guaranteeing the universality of the right to quality basic education. The Project also supports human rights and the protection of vulnerable groups - transversal themes of the programming document - and contributes to the process of institutional strengthening of the Palestinian National Authority, a priority of Italian cooperation.

The Project is also coherent with the **European Joint Strategy in Support of Palestine 2017-2020**, where, referring to the Overall Objective n.3 (Sustainable service provision) and the corresponding Specific Objective n.1 (Ensuring the access to quality education) the following indicators, baseline data and objectives are specified [EJS 2017, p. 41]:

- Percentage of Gross Enrolment Rate in pre-schools
Baseline (2016): 56.1% - Target (2020): 70%
- Approval of a new curriculum framework integrating cross-cutting priorities
Baseline (2016): 0 - Target (2020): 1

In addition, the EJS 2017-2020 (p. 94) details a set of indicators for each specific objective. For what concerns here, with reference to the specific objective "Safe, inclusive and equitable access to education at all levels of the system is ensured", the following indicators are reported [EJS 2017, p. 94]:

Expected Results	Indicators	Baseline	Means of verification
a) Pre-School Education is expanded	a1) The gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in pre-School is increased to 70% by 2019.	2016: 56.1%	EDSP M&E Progress Report (MoEHE)
	a2) The number of licensed governmental and private Kinder Garden classes is increased to 8015 by 2019.	2015: 5349	

The Project contributes to the achievement of the **Millennium Development Goals** (MDGs) (2000), focusing in particular on Goal 2, above mentioned. This goal was subsequently reaffirmed in Goal 4

of the Sustainable Development Goals (2015) as part of the 2030 Agenda: "*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*". In particular, Goal 4.2 aims to "*ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education*".

The Project is consistent with **UNICEF's** commitment to making early childhood development one of its organizational priorities, increasing its investment in pre-school education with a firm commitment to allocate 10% of its education resources to catalyse development results in this area to ensure that pre-school education is systematically integrated into education sector planning processes. Beginning in 2002, the international agency began a participatory process of co-developing measures and universal-indicators, *Early Learning Development Standards-ELDS*-also cited in the MOEHE's 2017 M&E Report, designed to provide description and guidance related to expectations for child behaviour and performance in relation to various aspects of learning and development. These reflect what the child should know and be able to do at the physical-motor, cognitive, social-emotional, and communication levels, in relation to his or her age, from birth to 6-8 years. It also suggests other countries to shape the proposed standards to their own cultural context. The expected benefit is to facilitate the transition to and success within the formal school system.

In addition, according to UNICEF (2006)²⁰, there are two main components that contribute to the positive transition to the formal education system and to successful performances in primary school:

- a) the "readiness" of families, given their willingness to include them in school, their active participation and support in the child's education, and a home environment that reinforces their learning to the extent to which they are ready to do so, by sending their children to school. This can be demonstrated by their active participation in preparing the children and supporting their transition;
- b) the "readiness" of schools, resulting in their ability to provide a safe environment, an age-appropriate learning for the child, play opportunities, and trained and prepared staff.

In light of this, the AEPIC Project, while not working directly on the pre-schooling component, is in line with the ELDS. In fact, it promotes early childhood development in the (other) areas and dimensions identified, through an approach that focuses on the child as a rights-holder, as already affirmed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), also supporting the creation of an environment favourable to development both at the school level, through teacher training, and at home, through the promotion of parental participation in the child's education. In this approach, parents are also considered an active part of children's education. According to the Reggio Emilia approach, in fact, the training and integration of parents within the process is functional in ensuring continuity of learning.

The Project is consistent with **UNESCO's** strategies which, after the Incheon Declaration adopted at the World Education Forum in 2015, took on the role of coordinator of the "Education 2030" Global Agenda and therefore actively supports the Palestinian National Authority in policies, planning and capacity building in the education sector and to ensure inclusive education with respect to even the most vulnerable communities in the West Bank. Similarly, it contributes to the UN *Education for All* (EFA) Programme, which aims to reduce illiteracy and make quality education, including early childhood education, universal for all, especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

²⁰ UNICEF (2006) Medium Term Strategic Plan (MSTP) 2006-2013

Furthermore, the Palestinian territories have been formally added to the countries to be monitored through the Early Years Initiative²¹, promoted by the **World Bank**.

All the above-mentioned agendas and the respective development agencies agree on considering the development of early childhood an important area of interest to improve results in health, well-being and education for young children. This also contributes transversally to other objectives that the respective agendas set themselves, since it represents a vital instrument for human development.

In this context, the Reggio Emilia approach, introduced by the AEPIC Project, is coherent with the international efforts to expand access to pre-school and early childhood education in an equitable manner while improving its quality. However, the approach goes beyond mere preparation for primary school and aims at the holistic development of the child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs. As a matter of fact, the Reggio Emilia approach is based on the image of the child as capable, competent, curious, active participant to his own learning (constructivist theory, centrality of the child) and as barer of rights, including quality education. According to the interviews, and as explained in more detail in the "Effectiveness" Chapter, its added value lies indeed in this broader perspective, that places the child at the centre of the educational process, considering the child as an active subject who, together with the teacher, the environment and the family, participates and outlines the educational process and the following results.

2.1.2 Quality of Project's design and Logical Framework

Evaluation question 1.4: *To what extent the Project's design was coherent and well articulated, also in terms of Results-based approach and SMART indicators?*

CONCLUSION 3 –The Project design phase was accurate and allowed for great participation of local actors, as well as the enhancement of the experiences accumulated by the Italian partnership. This is reflected in a solid and clearly focused strategy. However, the intervention logic presented is susceptible to improvement, with regard to the vertical logic (objectives, results, activities) and horizontal logic (indicators and external conditions) of the Logical Framework and with regard to an approach based more on outcomes rather than on outputs (Results-based Approach).

The analysis of needs and of the educational context in the West Bank during the Project design phase was extensive, by developing over a period of four months and using ad hoc consultancy. **The Project design was able to make the most of the previous experiences of the promoters (RTM, Municipality of Reggio Emilia and Reggio Children) and accept the MOEHE's proposals regarding the areas of intervention.** At the explicit request of the Ministry, the latter included, in addition to the Bethlehem Governorate initially selected by the RTM, several schools belonging to the UNESCO-MOEHE EFA Programme in the Governorates of Ramallah, Hebron, Tulkarem, Jenin and Qalqilya. This integration made it possible to respond to the MOEHE's priority of increasing pre-school enrolment rates within existing schools that were however exclusively reserved for primary education or in areas where there were no pre-schools at all.

The Project design phase duly considered the point of view of the promoters in Palestine, who emphasised that they had already been actively involved in the conception and elaboration of the

²¹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/earlyyears>

Project proposal. **Several stakeholders highlighted the participatory approach used by RTM both in the Project design phase and during implementation.**

The quality of the Logical Framework can be improved. In relation to the **vertical logic** (Objectives, Results, Activities) or Results Chain, the three results are relevant to the problems they are intended to address, and the activities are clearly linked to the expected results. In other words, their implementation contributes directly to the achievement of the result to which they are linked. On the other hand, the cause-and-effect logic that should link the results to the objectives is clear as far as the general objective is concerned, but less evident as far as concerns the specific objective. Strengthening Public-Private Partnerships in the Bethlehem Governorate and spreading good practices to the rest of the West Bank is an objective that does not clearly specify what benefit (outcome) is expected for the beneficiaries, but rather appears to be an action strategy. It is one of the ways chosen by the Project to achieve benefits but does not account for the expected benefits of the Project, which are almost given as implicit (What benefit/outcome is expected from the public-private partnership and the dissemination of best practices? And for which beneficiaries?). **Such wording hinders the evaluation process because it makes it difficult to measure the outcome achieved.** If the public-private partnership and the dissemination of good practices occurred as expected, one would have to conclude that the Project achieved its objective and was therefore successful, but without having a way to actually understand the positive effects generated. **This approach to the Specific Objective hinders a results-based approach even during implementation because it tends to equate an activity or action strategy (the partnership and dissemination) with the tout-court benefit to be achieved at the end of the Project.**

In relation to the **Horizontal Logic of the Logical Framework** (Indicators and External Conditions), not all indicators are developed with the **SMART²² criteria** in mind. In particular, not all of them are the most relevant (Relevant) in relation to the benefit/outcome they intend to demonstrate/measure. The indicator of R.3: *Number and type of actors participating in dissemination events in the West Bank* is an indicator of activity/output achievement, i.e. efficiency, (it indicates the completion of an activity or output) rather than being an indicator of effectiveness, able to demonstrate the benefits obtained (outcome) through the implementation of actions, as indicators at the level of results should be. Also partially affected by this limitation is the other indicator in R.3 *Frequency of meetings and number and type of actors participating in the Bethlehem Early Childhood Forum*, which seems to be more of an output indicator than an outcome one. The indicator of Specific Objective *30% increase in public funding for early childhood education in the West Bank*, in addition to not being clearly linked to the Specific Objective it intends to measure (Relevant) (Specific Objective: *Strengthen public-private partnership in the early childhood education sector in Bethlehem Governorate, with exchange of good practices in the rest of the West Bank*) seems to depend much more on external factors than on the possible contribution of the Project, which in this area could be completely negligible. In other words, it does not seem to be an achievable indicator thanks to the work of the Project (*Achievable*). Moreover, most of the target values of the indicators are expressed in % whose measurement is not possible in the absence of a baseline (absent in the Logical Framework and apparently not systematically elaborated at the beginning of the Project). In the absence of baseline data, it is always preferable to express target values in terms of units rather than percentages. Other indicators are difficult to measure (*Measurable*), such as the indicators of R.2 *The educational offer in schools has been expanded by 30% and 70% of families participate in initiatives promoted by the school*. As a matter of fact, all of the indicators in R.3 lack a final target value, making it impossible to measure whether or not they

²² SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound), OCSE/DAC, 2014, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/peer-reviews/Measuring-and-managing-results.pdf>

have been achieved (*Measurable*). The weak measurability of the indicators was partly also due to the absence, at the time of the project design, of a Logical Framework model provided by the donor envisaging the explicit indication of baseline and target value data.

In addition, it should be noted that a good Logical Framework should include both output (efficiency) indicators, to be placed at the level of the activities, and outcome (effectiveness and impact) indicators, to be placed at the level of results and objectives. In the Logical Framework and in the Project text itself, several outputs lack indicators and target values, which makes it difficult to evaluate efficiency with respect to the level of realization of the planned outputs.

For the future, it must be paid more attention to the relevance²³, measurability and feasibility of the indicators as well as to a coherent formulation in terms of: a) variable of change (what changes?), b) its quantification (how much does it change?); c) the reference target group (who is involved in the change?); d) time (in how much time or when do we expect to be able to detect the indicator?); e) localization (where will I detect the change?).

Furthermore, although the indicators combine quantitative and qualitative aspects, there is a clear prevalence of the former, while in an educational Project one might expect a **heavier presence of qualitative indicators**.

The **External Conditions** have been correctly formulated, however a more pertinent approach to each target group would have increased its importance in terms of monitoring. In general, the external conditions, in order to be useful in the Project logic and in the monitoring, should be the most detailed possible. They should be specific focusing specific to the target groups and elaborated for starters from an analysis of the intervention context. Every level (results and objectives) should therefore forecast specific external conditions, even more than one, since the factors able to influence the achievement of the results might be multiple.

2.2. EFFECTIVENESS

2.2.1 Level of achievement of results and of the specific objective at the conclusion of the Project

Evaluation question 2.1: *What was the Project's performance against indicators set in the Logical Framework for expected results and objectives?*

CONCLUSION 4 – The inconsistency of several indicators in the Logical Framework in relation to the outcomes (Results and Specific Objective) they are intended to demonstrate, does not allow for an adequate analysis of Project performance. In addition, several indicators lack prediction of the final target values, which does not allow them to be measured.

At the Project's end (2018) the target values that were identified for the Results and Objectives, as per Technical Report produced by RTM, were the following.

RESULT 1: MOEHE's professional abilities in managing the full cycle of preschool educational services have been strengthened			
LOGICAL FRAMEWORK INDICATOR: 30% increase in supervision events and training promoted by the MOEHE's education supervisors in the West Bank's kindergartens.			
EXPECTED TARGET VALUE	MEASURED FINAL VALUE	PROGRESS AGAINST THE EXPECTED VALUE %	
+30% (baseline 215: 258 events)	618 events	139%	

²³ About this topic, we can use: Do you believe me Test, <https://www.chemonics.com/blog/the-do-you-believe-me-test-for-choosing-indicators/>

LOGICAL FRAMEWORK INDICATOR: 25% increase in number of children who have access to public pre-school education in the West Bank.		
EXPECTED TARGET VALUE	MEASURED FINAL VALUE	PROGRESS AGAINST THE EXPECTED VALUE %
+25% (baseline 2015-2016:1274 enrolled in public schools)	1853	45%

Compared to **Result 1**, it can be observed that the first indicator is not in itself explanative of the Project's contribution, i.e., the selected indicator does not directly demonstrate the change triggered by the Project, since the Project did not focus on increasing supervision events. Despite the progress that the final target value demonstrates, it is therefore not possible to attribute this result to the Project.

The second indicator has been calculated on national data and it does not account for the specific contribution of the Project, which should rather have been calculated on the schools involved in the Project, with particular reference to the opening of the new preschool classes.

RESULT 2: The quality of educational services offered by the 7 public and private kindergarten selected has improved		
LOGICAL FRAMEWORK INDICATOR: The educational offer of the schools has been expanded by 30%		
EXPECTED TARGET VALUE	MEASURED FINAL VALUE	PROGRESS AGAINST THE EXPECTED VALUE %
+30% (baseline 2017, new curriculum approval date: 11)	+ 6 subjects per school	54%
LOGICAL FRAMEWORK INDICATORS: the 70% of family members participate initiatives promoted by pre-schools.		
EXPECTED TARGET VALUE	MEASURED FINAL VALUE	PROGRESS AGAINST THE EXPECTED VALUE %
70%	not measured	N/A
LOGICAL FRAMEWORK INDICATORS: Number and type of activities and promotional materials the pilot schools carry out to involve families.		
EXPECTED TARGET VALUE	MEASURED FINAL VALUE	PROGRESS AGAINST THE EXPECTED VALUE %
Not expected	16 kinds of activities fulfilled with families 32 communication tools / documentation sets made 6 different types of communication tools / documentation sets made	N/A

Compared to **Result 2**, the first indicator has been largely achieved, while the second and third cannot be measured (the second lacks the measured final value, while the third lacks the target value expected).

RESULT 3: The dissemination of knowledge and good practices among public and private preschools within the Bethlehem Governorate and the rest of the West Bank has been promoted		
LOGICAL FRAMEWORK INDICATOR: Frequency of meetings and number and type of actors participating in the Bethlehem Early Childhood Forum		
EXPECTED TARGET VALUE	MEASURED FINAL VALUE	PROGRESS AGAINST THE EXPECTED VALUE %
Number of participants: not expected	7 participants	N/A
Number of meeting and events: not expected	12 meetings + 1 launch event	N/A

LOGICAL FRAMEWORK INDICATORS: Number and type of actors participating in dissemination events in the West Bank		
EXPECTED TARGET VALUE	MEASURED FINAL VALUE	PROGRESS AGAINST THE EXPECTED VALUE %
Not present	Seminar Bethlehem: 77 Seminar Ramallah: 98	N/A
LOGICAL FRAMEWORK INDICATOR: No. of schools updating their curricula		
EXPECTED TARGET VALUE	MEASURED FINAL VALUE	PROGRESS AGAINST THE EXPECTED VALUE %
Not present	29	N/A

Concerning **Result 3**, no indicator is measurable because there are no expected end values and therefore it is not possible to check whether the indicator has been achieved.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE: Strengthening the public-private partnership in the early childhood education sector in the Bethlehem Governorate, with exchange of best practices in the rest of the West Bank		
LOGICAL FRAMEWORK INDICATOR: 30% increase in public funding for early childhood education in the early childhood education in the West Bank		
EXPECTED FINAL VALUE	MEASURED FINAL VALUE	PROGRESS AGAINST THE EXPECTED VALUE %
+30% (baseline 2014-2015: 415\$/student)	1314\$/student	216%

The indicator identified for the specific objective is not consistent with the change it aims to demonstrate (the strengthening of public-private partnerships). It is an indicator that could demonstrate other types of outcomes (e.g. "increased government interest in pre-school education") and would have been better placed at the General Objective level. The chosen indicator is therefore not indicative of the contribution made by the Project, and despite the final value highlighted, does not demonstrate the achievement of the Specific Objective.

Evaluation question 2.3: What changes can be observed in the pilot schools, in the EFA Program's schools and in general in the preschool education sector (Governorate and National level)?

CONCLUSION 5 – The AEPIC Project has triggered a series of significant changes in the schools involved. The changes observed pertain to the areas of design and organization of school spaces, pedagogical approach and teaching methodologies, interaction between school and surrounding environment, and family involvement in the educational process. The supervisors of the educational districts, the teachers and the managers of the 7 pilot schools have demonstrated a remarkable level of ownership of the Reggio Emilia approach, although this has not completely replaced the previous methodologies but rather has placed them side by side, giving them a more proportionate importance than they had in the past.

The process of change has also concerned the schools of the EFA Program, with particular reference to the organization of school spaces, where the level of appropriation regarding the pedagogical approach has been more limited, due to the lesser involvement in the Project activities. In any case, even in the schools of the EFA Program, the methodologies of the Reggio Emilia approach are implemented, although there is less awareness in this regard and in some cases very limited. The MOEHE has demonstrated its confidence in the added value of the approach proposed by the Project, both at the decentralized (supervisor) and at the central level and has supported the schools in the application of the new method.

The level of local satisfaction regarding the results achieved through the AEPIC Project is consistently high. All the interviewed stakeholders from the MOEHE (at both the centralised and

decentralised level) and from the 7 pilot schools have recognised that the initiative has given a significant contribution not only in terms of qualification of school environments, but mostly because it disseminated an effective and innovative educational philosophy in the pre-school education sector, which has been positively embraced by the actors involved and adapted to the local context.

As regards the 7 pilot schools and the schools of the EFA Program, **the first change observed concerns space planning and the furniture composition**, the so-called “third educator”, according to the Reggio Emilia approach. The Project has fostered a focus on this aspect, arranging green areas, services tailored to children and rearranging the classroom spaces in order that every activity cluster (expressiveness, logic, science and exploration, free play, nature, reading) could have its own space (corner).

The second change visible in the involved schools and deducible from the interviews conducted concerns the pedagogical approach and teaching methodologies. To a substantially different extent between the pilot schools and the EFA program schools, there has been a shift from a mnemonic approach to an active learning approach, and the various languages (drawing, construction, free play) have been emphasized, no longer as activities to be proposed to children to keep them occupied, but as modes of expression and learning while doing them. The main objectives - which before the Project were essentially linked to the development of pre-school skills related to writing, reading and calculation - have become those of encouraging critical thinking, self-esteem, management of emotions, creative and expressive abilities and a "passion" for learning in the child. **The in-depth qualitative interviews that were conducted made it possible to verify the appropriation and familiarity with the Reggio Emilia approach on the part of the teachers and principals of the 7 pilot schools and to appreciate a substantial change in their pedagogical approach and in the methodologies used in the classroom.**

«We escaped the stereotype of education, indoctrination is no longer the educational approach in this school, our approach is now discovery».

Teacher, Pilot school

«The Project had a great impact on the children and we, as teachers, when we are able to see this result, are more and more motivated to keep creating a generation capable of creativity ».

Teacher, Pilot school

The field visit also provided an opportunity to appreciate the results in relation even to the kindergarten in Dheisheh refugee camp, one of the 7 pilot schools, an aspect also highlighted through interviews.

«When you visit the Dheisheh camp, you can immediately see what the general situation is, especially in economic terms. Yet when you enter the kindergarten, you find an adequate, beautiful, well-prepared environment and highly qualified staff. If we compare the situation in this kindergarten with other kindergartens, we immediately see the big difference that the Project has made, both in terms of the approach taken, which has many potentials and strengths, and the classroom environment.».

Teacher – Pilot school

Some difficulties between pilot schools have been noticed in the school situated in Area C, the Banat Al-Tawafoq, where the spaces of the two existing pre-school classes are judged by the teacher to be too narrow to be able to grant an adequate application of the Reggio Emilia Approach.

All the schools in the sample visited - both 7 pilot and EFA schools - are active in producing **documentation** of the work done with the children, another pillar of the Reggio Emilia approach. This documentation can take the form of drawings, photos, videos, handicrafts and can include the use of Facebook and Whatsapp for feedback to families. In all the schools, the documentation produced is displayed in the classrooms and is also sent to the families, in 76% of the schools in the sample it is displayed at specific events, in 33% of the cases it is posted at the main entrance to the school and 19% of the sample it is disseminated through social media.

«As a supervisor, I carried out some activities using the resources available to us to create activities similar to those I had seen in Italy, such as light tables, the school also provided an aquarium and then we documented the activities with the children».

Supervisor

The Project has also contributed to focusing the attention not only on the centrality of the child but also on the **teacher-child interaction** and on the emotional and relational aspects of the teachers themselves. According to many teachers, the Project has contributed to clarifying the role of the teacher, on how his personality and predisposition towards the child actually manages to shape the child himself and to promote or limit his potentiality and expressive skills. **One of the abilities, learnt throughout the Project concerns the ability to plan the activities relying on the interests of the child, that is strategies such as dialog and brainstorming, which allow to spot the interests of the child and to plan an activity accordingly.** The focus on the educational processes and not only on the results has been a key-topic, according to the interviewed teachers and supervisors, as well as the new conceptualisation of the child not as a “blank paper” that the teacher must fill and shape, but as a subject of the relationship, able himself to determine the modalities of the educational process. The third change triggered by the Project concerns a greater interaction with the surrounding environment and the elements of nature. Apart from green areas, which were present in all the pilot schools and in 84% of the EFA schools visited, many teachers emphasised the shift from using ready-made toys, used before the AEPIC Project, to toys made from materials from the surrounding environment and recycled materials.

«If we compare a pre-school class implementing the Reggio Emilia approach with a more traditional one, we can immediately observe the differences: in the first one, most of the time is dedicated to creative activities and play, in the second one to the teaching of calculations and writing. In addition, schools that are inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach have lower costs for the educational materials used, because they take them directly from the surrounding environment or through reuse and recycling».

MOEHE

A fourth change triggered by the AEPIC Project concerns a greater interaction with families, although the parent’s approval to the Reggio Emilia Approach has been one of the main obstacles

encountered along the Project's development. Families have had serious difficulties in approving the new method since their expectation focused more on the the learning of reading, writing and calculation. Such issue has been reported by a variety of interviewed involved actors: MOEHE at a central level, Educational District supervisors, teachers, principals.

«At first I was not convinced that we would succeed in this. It was a constant discussion with the parents about how to educate the children, as the parents wanted the children to learn to read and write already in kindergarten. It was a great challenge. I organised regular meetings with the parents to explain to them about how to teach the children colours through cube colours, how to teach measurements through corks, how to teach reading and writing through pictorial reading and not in the traditional way. Convincing parents of the child's developmental characteristics, for instance the fact that the child is unable to write because his muscles are weak».

Teacher, Pilot school

«The point of view of the children's parents was strongly focused on the need for their children to learn to read and write and not through the development of skills and the use of surrounding materials and interaction with the environment. This was a big challenge for us, so we conducted several meetings and workshops for the parents and showed videos of the activities carried out in the kindergarten in order to try as much as possible to convince them that this is the correct way to prepare the child for the next stage, and we also invited the parents to participate in the educational activities with their children, so that they could observe their reactions and well-being. Also, when the team from Reggio Emilia arrived, we invited the families to participate and they explained the learning by doing approach, which of great help».

MOEHE

«The biggest challenge was the interference and non-sharing of the method carried out by the families. The attitude of the parents was mainly that they wanted their child to be able to read and write a little at the end of the year, in short, to be prepared for primary school. This was their method to evaluate whether the school was efficient or not».

MOEHE

«The Project has frozen the idea of dialogue and confrontation with parents, by telling them all the details of the activities that took place at the kindergarten, we gathered with parents and the community, and we established the goals together. ».

Teacher, Pilot school

Also in the three public schools, although interaction with families was an aspect already considered before the Project, an increased focus on the importance of family involvement and an increase in the number of opportunities for interaction (regular formal meetings, participation of families in educational activities, dissemination of information material to families, different types of support to the kindergarten according to the parent's skills) was reported.

Although the level of skills acquired is very well established in the 7 pilot schools and to some extent in the 22 EFA Programme schools, several interviews confirmed the risk posed by turnover, limited opportunities for further training and the lack of a specific formalised training module within the MOEHE. Although the supervisors interviewed all reported that they carry out regular training for school staff that includes the principles and methodologies of the Reggio Emilia approach, the adoption of the approach in school life is much more evident in Bethlehem Governorate than elsewhere.

The AEPIC Project trainings, and in particular the exchange trips to Italy, proved to be particularly effective in promoting new knowledge and skills on behalf of the supervisors of the Educational Districts. All the supervisors interviewed showed a very good knowledge and involvement in the Reggio Emilia approach. The Project contributed to give them not only a different vision of educational work with children but also a different conceptualisation of their role with respect to the schools to be supervised and the teachers to be trained.

Evaluation question 2.4: To what extent has AEPIC's work effectively supported capacities through knowledge brokering, the sharing of psychological know-how and peer to peer learning?

CONCLUSION 6 – The changes observed in the schools involved in the Project were possible not only through the training activities and exchange visits that took place during the implementation of the initiative but, to a considerable extent, through the pedagogical exchange between teachers and the training/dissemination activities carried out by the supervisors of the Educational Districts.

The peer-to-peer exchange between teachers and the work of the supervisors of the Educational Districts played an important role in the development and sharing of local knowledge in relation to the Reggio Emilia approach. **Knowledge exchanges** between teachers were documented in all the pilot schools involved, and to some extent in those of the EFA Programme. **These exchanges took place both during the course of the AEPIC Project, through feedbacks from teachers who had taken part in the trainings and visits to Italy, and after its closure through informal exchanges.** The interviews showed that the three schools of the patriarchates had always organised feedback opportunities after returning from their exchange trips to Italy. In the public schools, too, the feedback was guaranteed, especially in the Bethlehem Public School, although in a less structured way. A central role in the dissemination and training of other teachers was played by the **educational supervisors**, who organised various training sessions for in-service teachers and the dissemination of experiences. In this case, the regularity and professionalism of these knowledge transfers varied, depending on the motivation and skills of the various supervisors.

Although no official module on the Reggio Emilia approach has been developed by the MOEHE and disseminated to the Educational Districts, this knowledge continues to be disseminated through the work of the supervisors and with support from the Ministry.

«When we were in Italy, the concept was not clear enough because it was far from the active learning approach we were used to. In fact, we were

doubtful about whether we could apply this approach back in Palestine. But the ministry always made it clear to us that this approach is based on the concept of gradual, exploratory learning and the child's abilities, and as teachers we received constant support from the Government in taking forward what we learned».

Supervisor

The impact of these dissemination activities through the supervisors and peer-to-peer exchange is discussed in the Chapter "Impact", here it is worth mentioning that to the question "How did those teachers who did not participate in the AEPIC Project acquire the skills to put the Reggio Emilia approach into practice?" the answer given by 85% of the pilot schools and 40% of the EFA schools was "Through exchange of information with colleagues who participated in the trainings during the AEPIC Project". For EFA schools, there is also a clear prevalence (60%) of the answer "Participation in trainings organised by the MOEHE and/or educational supervisors".

«There is a WhatsApp group specifically for the seven schools that took part to the Project and travelled to Italy, through which the latest new and ideas regarding the Reggio Emilia Approach and other topic are spread ».

Teacher, Pilot school

Evaluation question 2.5: To what extent has AEPIC's work effectively brokered public/private collaboration and/or supported creation of national (or international) networks?

CONCLUSION 7- The AEPIC Project represented an important opportunity for comparison and interaction between public and private schools, and the added value of these exchanges was fully recognized by stakeholders, as well as their innovative character in the Palestinian context. However, the Bethlehem Kindergarten Forum has remained confined to the 7 pilot schools and the Project has not made any further contributions to the creation or expansion of national and international networks. The stakeholders involved in the Forum recognise it as a space for continuity of exchanges between schools and as a useful tool for promoting joint initiatives, but its capacity for strategic planning is limited and restricted to the opportunities that arise.

The interviews with the 7 pilot schools in Bethlehem Governorate confirmed that the AEPIC Project has promoted greater interaction between schools in general and between private/public schools in particular. **The latter is particularly significant because it came from a situation of a complete lack of communication and interaction between public and public schools, and the school in the refugee camp run by IBDA was in a situation of real isolation.**

«Many meetings were held to discuss problems together; although we are a private school, we also participated in the discussion on how to address some of the challenges in the government schools and in the refugee camp. We worked together and learned from each other. This was very atypical, we were used to thinking like in a silo, only about our schools».

Principal, Pilot school

«One of the most important achievements was the opening of communication channels with the Ministry and the public schools. We usually did not have this kind of communication with our colleagues in public

schools. Meeting colleagues we had never met before opened up perspectives for exchange and cooperation. This is one of the most important results of the AEPIC Project and it was even more important and wider than the change made in resources and teaching methods».

Principal, Pilot school

Although this aspect was particularly appreciated, particularly by public schools, the level of interaction was mainly between teachers in the various schools, an aspect that was further strengthened through the recent launch of the Bethlehem Educational Creative Reuse Centre (BECRC), created through the PACE Project, as a place for educators to meet and exchange.

As far as collaboration at a management level is concerned, the exchange was actually more significant between the different private denominational schools and less tangible at the level of public-private school interaction, if we exclude the reciprocal visits organised through the Project and the experiences linked to the **Bethlehem Children's Schools Forum**, set up by the Project itself. The latter continued to function through periodic meetings, which were then interrupted due to the Covid-19 emergency.

The added value of the Forum at the time of the evaluation relates exclusively to the fact that it represents a space for collaboration between the different schools of the AEPIC Project, with some limitations related to planning, availability of resources and conditions due to the pandemic. Its working range remains that of the 7 pilot schools and does not seem to be known outside the Bethlehem Governorate, not even by the schools of the EFA Programme, nor by the supervisors of the other Governorates included in the Project.

The effects of the Project in this field are therefore quite limited. No specific formal agreements between public and public schools involved in the Project were found to have been developed beyond the Forum itself, nor were any joint events organised beyond the two implemented through the AEPIC and PACE Projects. Moreover, there was no evidence of networks beyond the Bethlehem area covered by the Project.

2.2.2 Analysis of external conditions

Evaluation question 2.2: Was there any external condition impacting (positively or negatively) the Project?

CONCLUSION 8 – The external conditions described in the Logical Framework occurred to a good extent, thus favouring the achievement of the expected results. The assumed risks occurred to some extent, in particular with regard to staff turnover, the implications of the cultural and religious diversity of the participating schools and the security conditions in some of the Project areas. However, these risks did not substantially affect the achievement of results.

Here below are shown the external conditions and risks foreseen in the Logical Framework and it is described the extent to which they have occurred or not.

External Conditions

Implementation of the national strategy for the development of early childhood education by the central authorities in charge

As explained in Chapter 1 (Context of the Evaluated Initiative), the country has seen a progressive interest grow around pre-school and early childhood education issues, as witnessed in the ESSP 2017-2022 and the National Strategy on *Early Childhood Development and Intervention 2017-2022*. The external condition has therefore already occurred during the implementation of the initiative, not affecting the achievement of the results.

Implementation of the process of decentralisation of competencies in early childhood education from central authorities to local governorates

Although there have been no formal acts on behalf of the Ministry of Education regarding the decentralisation process, the tendency is towards an increased strengthening of the administrative functions of the local Educational Directorates. This trend is confirmed by the enhanced tasks of the educational supervisors, as well as by their number, which has been progressively increasing in recent years. The external condition has therefore already occurred during the implementation of the initiative and has not affected the achievement of the results.

Risks

Threats to the personal safety of the Project team/beneficiaries arising from the deterioration of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

No particular critical issues were found thereupon. However, as already mentioned (Chapter Relevance), the location of some of the schools involved in AREA C and Hebron 2 continues to represent an obstacle both in terms of access to education and in terms of hindering the harmonious development of the children of the areas. This risk has therefore partially occurred and, to some extent, it may represent an obstacle to the full impact of the expected results of the implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach in schools.

In addition, it should be noted that an important difficulty concerned the bureaucratic issues related to visas and passports of expatriate staff, which may risk compromising the efficiency of the Project. In this regard, it would be important to foresee ways of communicating with the Israeli authorities, while respecting existing procedures, in order to facilitate the work of Project staff.

The financial constraints of the ANP are jeopardising the smooth running of education services provided by selected public pre-schools

Although no official data was found on the budget allocated to the pre-school and kindergarten education sector in the West Bank, the opening of several new schools in recent years (see Introduction, paragraph Context of the Evaluated Initiative) suggests that it has gradually increased during the Project's implementation and thereafter. However, through the evaluation questionnaire sent out through the E-Schools Platform, it emerged that 19% of the sample felt that the financial constraints of the Ministry of Education could be an obstacle to quality education in pre-school and kindergarten schools. It can be assumed that this risk has only partially occurred and has not had a decisive influence on the achievement of the expected results.

High turnover of educational staff in public kindergartens for reasons of economic interest.

The turnover of educational staff in the pre-schools, as well as in the educational districts, has been significant. In particular, 7 of the teachers trained through the Project - 4 of whom came from the pilot schools and 3 from the EFA programme - are no longer working in the same schools. In particular, 2 teachers from the pilot schools were promoted to the role of supervisor and 2 were hired by the BECRC; while of the 3 teachers from the EFA Programme, 2 are currently serving in other schools and 1 was promoted to the role of supervisor. In addition, during the course of the

Project, 3 Directors-General changed, and several managers changed roles. Turnover is a problem in the various Palestinian ministries.

«The constant change of teachers is a problem for all our schools, and this causes serious problems for many kindergartens, especially in rural areas. Any skills we transfer to teachers are threatened by the very real possibility that the teacher will leave the school or move elsewhere. Kindergarten teachers are often not paid regularly and adequately so we do not know how long they will stay. The challenge is that we do not have a constant number of people who are employed in kindergartens and what is taught risks being lost.».

MOEHE, NIET

«In the Ramallah Governorate, some teachers moved to other kindergartens, which affected the level of implementation of the approach, so the tools remained, but the idea and approach were not effectively applied by the new teachers. »

Supervisor

If on the one hand turnover has undoubtedly been a difficulty during implementation and can be a challenge for the sustainability of the Reggio Emilia approach, on the other hand it can represent an opportunity for educational districts which can have at their disposal qualified staff who have already had experience of the approach in their teaching work in their home schools. This also strengthens their role in terms of training future teachers and monitoring schools. The hypothesized risk therefore occurred and had an impact during implementation as regards the consolidation of the new methodologies in schools. However, it did not represent a decisive obstacle in the achievement of results and, to a certain extent, it also favoured greater dissemination of the Reggio Emilia approach.

The high degree of social, cultural and religious fragmentation undermines dialogue and cooperation between the target groups.

In the initial phase of the Project, the different social, cultural and religious identities of the schools involved caused some difficulties in terms of peer comparison and coordination. However, as already mentioned, the Project gave a strong boost to opportunities for meeting and exchange and this aspect was judged by several stakeholders as one of the main achievements of the Project. Therefore, it can be argued that the risk did not occur to an extent that would jeopardise the achievement of the intended results.

2.3. EFFICIENCY

2.3.1 Tools for coordination, internal management, monitoring and communication

Evaluation question 3.1: *To what extent the coordination and management system established through the Project was efficient?*

Evaluation question 3.3: *To what extent indicators linked to outputs, results and objectives have been adequately monitored through the Project's implementation?*

Evaluation question 3.4: *To what extent, has the Project's partnership provided internal capacity development (for the staff and for local partners and stakeholders) to support efficient and effective Project's implementation?*

CONCLUSION 9 – The Project management was efficient and based on international standards. A clear and smooth system of internal coordination and communication was put in place and the Project's team was responsive and punctual in responding to the needs of local partners. The latter demonstrated a clear understanding of the Project strategy and the Project proved to be flexible in accommodating their proposals. However, although a monitoring plan including field missions and a final external evaluation was planned, a robust system for monitoring the Project's outputs and outcomes was not adopted, nor was a mechanism for evaluating and accrediting the skills acquired by teachers and supervisors. This latter mechanism would have been useful according to some stakeholders, especially if aligned with the national accreditation system.

In implementing the Project, RTM applied key international methodologies, such as the use of results-based management, monitoring of logical framework indicators, chronogram, and periodic management committees. The latter also included extended Italy-Palestine committees during study visits to Italy and on-site monitoring.

Collaboration and coordination between the different levels - HQ, Palestine HQ, MOEHE, Schools - proved to be efficient and the **intervention strategy well focused on each level**. Support from HQ was rated positively as well as that provided by local staff to various partners and stakeholders.

All local partners reported that they were constantly guided in their clear understanding of the Project goals and proposed pedagogical approach. The Project's team was found to be very responsive and punctual in providing clarification and support, and internal communication was found to be very efficient. An example of efficient coordination and communication was given in relation to the mechanism for the identification, selection and execution of the upgrading works in the schools of the EFA Programme, a process in which a plurality of actors (RTM, Department of Construction of the Ministry, General Department of Education, UNESCO, Educational District) intervened in a synergetic and coordinated manner. The ability of the Project's team to coordinate with the MOEHE was particularly appreciated, as well as a good efficiency in terms of respecting timelines and what was agreed.

«The RTM team had a clear vision and clear objectives and it worked very closely with us. There were periodical meetings - at least two meeting per month – aside from other many means of communication. What caught my attention was their ability to always actively listen and respond to the teachers' requests. »

MOEHE

«Consultation with the team was a constant feature, and the team documented all work, seeking prior approval to publish any material, and demonstrating a high sense of respect for privacy, human rights, and respect for children, parents and their wishes».

Principal, Pilot school

As far as monitoring is concerned, although monitoring missions and a final external evaluation were carried out, there was no evidence of the use of a real *in itinere* monitoring system. Such a system, which can be easily implemented by means of a monitoring matrix linked to a data collection system (*opens ource* ones are also available), should always be used in projects, and possibly shared with partners. In this way, at any point in the existence of the Project, it is possible to take stock of what has been achieved for outputs and outcomes compared to what was planned. The monitoring process was also impacted by the difficulty in accessing consolidated data in the Palestinian context and the fact that, as explained in the Relevance chapter, several Project indicators were not very relevant to the monitoring of the initiative.

In this context, it would also have been useful to prepare questionnaires to evaluate the skills learned by teachers and supervisors, and questionnaires on the satisfaction of the activities carried out, which do not appear to have been administered. Although the method could be contrary to the principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach, some form of evaluation of what was learned was considered useful by some stakeholders. In this regard, some stakeholders pointed out the absence of **a framework for the evaluation of skills learned** that was aligned with the existing formal evaluation and accreditation system in the country. According to these stakeholders, the training offered through the international cooperation projects would need a more solid framework in line with the Palestinian system, with training modules prepared also with a view to follow-up, evaluation of the trainee and the issuance of an official certification. In fact, the certificates released by the Project were not countersigned by the MOEHE.

«I can say that Reggio Emilia is an exciting and new approach that focuses on children's rights but does not have a specific methodology and monitoring framework in our government schools».

Supervisor

There were no difficulties from a financial management point of view, but the budget allocated for some activities was not always consistent with the expected outputs. In this context, it should be mentioned that local stakeholders were able to collect additional contributions from the community to complete the renovation works. The budget allocated for renovation and furnishing of schools was not considered adequate, especially for schools located in particularly disadvantaged areas, where the community could not participate in the expenses for renovation. This observation was adequately taken into account in the subsequent planning. In fact, in the PACE Project the expenses limit for each school was raised.

The Project proved to be flexible and capable of adapting to circumstances, also favouring the adaptation of the proposed approach to the local context and to the realities of the various schools, as already specified in the chapter Effectiveness.

«They did not implement any decisions. Every doubt was discussed and resolved. We expressed our opinions and were very much helped in fully understanding the approach and adapting it to our context. They had the ability to work with different mentalities, religions and different types of schools. It was difficult, but in the end, we learned to work together and share information.».

Principal, Pilot school

2.3.2 Correspondence between actual and expected outputs

Evaluation question 3.2: *Were the Project's outputs delivered as planned?*

CONCLUSION 10 – From the point of view of the correspondence between the planned quantitative indicators for the outputs and what was actually achieved, the project proved to be extremely efficient, with few indicators slightly below the expected final values and most exceeding the planned values by far. From the point of view of the correspondence of the qualitative characteristics of the outputs produced against what was planned, the evaluation could not go into the details of the individual outputs, given the time elapsed since the conclusion of the activities.

The following tables show a comparison between the expected values for output indicators for the various activities and what was actually achieved. **The target values were largely met, with slight deficits for some indicators and a large number of indicators exceeding the expected values.**

Due to the time elapsed between the end of the project and the evaluation, it was not possible to carry out a detailed analysis of the quality of the outputs produced and to go into the details of the individual activities. However, many elements have already been described in the chapter "Effectiveness", especially regarding the quality of the training provided. In this context, the only deviation noted from the Project Text concerns Activity 1.1 "On-site training of MOEHE staff on planning, monitoring and evaluation of pre-school education services". The Ministry's staff was trained on the Reggio Emilia pedagogical Approach and on the system of public-private educational services in place in Emilia Romagna. Therefore, the training did not include the mentioned training dimensions related to planning, monitoring and evaluation of pre-school educational services and did not foresee any kind of coaching in this specific field.

R.1.1 On-site training of MOEHE staff on planning, monitoring and evaluation of pre-school education services

PLANNED EFFICIENCY INDICATORS	PLANNED VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE	PROGRESS COMPARED TO WHAT WAS PLANNED %
Training course	2	2	100%
Days of training (4*2)	8	8	100%
Follow-up days	Not expected	135	N/A
Training exchanges	Not expected	3	N/A
Trained ministerial officials	16	14	87%
Trained educational supervisors Bethlehem, Ramallah, Tulkarem, Hebron and Jenin	3	5	166%

R.1.2 Study visit to Reggio Emilia for MOEHE staff

PLANNED EFFICIENCY INDICATORS	PLANNED VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE	PROGRESS COMPARED TO WHAT WAS PLANNED %
Study visit to Italy	1	2	200%
Days of study visit	7	12	171%
Study visit participants	4	7	175%
Follow-up meetings	Not expected	29	N/A

R. 1.3 Support to the start-up of pre-school classes in 25 public schools in the West Bank

PLANNED EFFICIENCY INDICATORS	PLANNED VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE	PROGRESS COMPARED TO WHAT WAS PLANNED %
Classes launched	25	25	100%
Trained teachers of EFA schools (through activities 1.4, 2.1, 2.2)	22	22	100%
Restoration work, expected value	Euro 2.400,00 * 25 schools = 60.000,00 Euro	61.529,66	N/A
Teaching materials	Euro 900,00 x 25 schools = 22.500,00 Euro	19.401,91	N/A
Furnishing set, expected value	Euro 1.600,00 * 25 schools = 40.000,00 Euro	39.745,19	N/A

R.1.4 On-site technical assistance to MOEHE staff for the supervision of pre-schools and training of pre-school staff

PLANNED EFFICIENCY INDICATORS	PLANNED VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE	PROGRESS COMPARED TO WHAT WAS PLANNED %
Training days	4	11	275%
Follow-up meeting	Not expected	213	N/A
Trained educational supervisors	3	5	166%

R.2.1 On-site training of staff in the 7 pilot public and public schools in the Bethlehem Governorate

PLANNED EFFICIENCY INDICATORS	PLANNED VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE	PROGRESS COMPARED TO WHAT WAS PLANNED %
Training days	8	14	175%
Follow-up meetings in schools	Not expected	183	N/A
Trained directors	7	7	100%
Trained teachers	14	15	107%

R.2.2 Study visit to Reggio Emilia for the staff of the 7 public and private pilot schools of the Bethlehem Governorate

PLANNED EFFICIENCY INDICATORS	PLANNED VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE	PROGRESS COMPARED TO WHAT WAS PLANNED %
Study visits to Italy	2	2	100%
Days of study visit of the teachers	28	28	100%
Days of study visit of the principals	14	14	100%
Number of participating principals	7	7	100%
Number of participating teachers	14	13	92%
Feedback meetings	7	12	171%

R.2.3 Supply of equipment and teaching materials to 7 pilot public and public schools in the Bethlehem Governorate

PLANNED EFFICIENCY INDICATORS	PLANNED VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE	PROGRESS COMPARED TO WHAT WAS PLANNED %
Methodological manual	1	1	100%
Printers	7	4	
Camera	7	7	100%
Videocamera	7	0	
PC	7	7	100%
Outdoor spaces for schools built	0	2	N/A

R.2.4 Provision of new services to children and families by the 7 pilot public and private schools in the Bethlehem Governorate

PLANNED EFFICIENCY INDICATORS	PLANNED VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE	PROGRESS COMPARED TO WHAT WAS PLANNED %
Days of technical assistance provided	3 pedagogical exchanges	3 pedagogical exchanges	100%
Number and type of promotional material	7 materials	13 promotional materials 7 types of promotional materials plus: 32 types of documentation produced by schools 6 types of documentation produced	185%

R.3.1 Creation and development of a Forum between schools in Bethlehem Governorate

PLANNED EFFICIENCY INDICATORS	PLANNED VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE	PROGRESS COMPARED TO WHAT WAS PLANNED %
Forum coordination meetings	Not expected	4	N/A
training/awareness rising events promoted by the Forum	Not expected	1	N/A

R.3.2 Production and distribution of a publication on early childhood education in the West Bank

PLANNED EFFICIENCY INDICATORS	PLANNED VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE	PROGRESS COMPARED TO WHAT WAS PLANNED %
Publication	1	1	100%
People reached by the dissemination of the publication	1.000 (hard copy)	1.000 (hard copy) + 200 (electronic version, estimate)	100%
People reached by the communication material	N.A.	Not detected	N/A

R.3.3 Implementation of 3 seminars in the West Bank

PLANNED EFFICIENCY INDICATORS	PLANNED VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE	PROGRESS COMPARED TO WHAT WAS PLANNED %
Seminars	3	2 seminars + 1 exhibition	100%
Seminar participants	150	175	116%

2.3.3 Synergies with other initiatives

Evaluation question 3.5: *To what extent has the Project's partnership cooperated with other national institutions, international organisations, donors, and private sector to achieve the Project's goals?*

CONCLUSION 11 - AEPIC's Project design was not based on a review of existing good practices in Palestine in the pre-school education sector, nor did the Project establish significant synergies that could offer an opportunity to enhance the results achieved, beyond synergy with Palestinian institutional actors. Participation in the Preschool Technical Working Group allowed for some dissemination of the Reggio Emilia approach, but no significant interaction was produced. Important synergies were rather developed later, between the results of the AEPIC Project and the activities of the PACE Project. Interesting areas of collaboration can be explored with the World Bank Project on training in-service teachers in private pre-schools.

The relevance of the AEPIC Project's objectives to national policies and strategies fostered considerable synergy with Palestinian institutional actors (MOEHE at the central level and Educational Districts) and the Project was synergistically embedded in the process of redefining policies and preschool curriculum.

Regarding possible **synergies between projects implemented in the same schools as AEPIC**, from the questionnaire administered during the field visits to the pilot and EFA Programme schools involved in the AEPIC Project, it was found that in the period 2015-2021, only one school was involved in other support programmes. According to the school referent, no synergies or interactions were noted between this Project and the AEPIC Project.

Collaborations with **international organisations** were limited to the synergy created, at the request of MOEHE, with UNESCO. This synergy concerned the inclusion of 25 schools from the MOEHE-UNESCO EFA Programme as beneficiary schools of the qualification and teacher training interventions of the AEPIC Project. However, this synergy did not result in an effective exchange between RTM and UNESCO on pedagogical approaches, nor in joint actions, for example in the area of teacher capacity building. In this area, it was emphasised by both RTM and UNESCO that the educational approaches of the two organisations are quite different and that more intensive collaboration would have been difficult to achieve. In addition, an interaction with the Belgian Cooperation was reported for the intervention in the pilot school of Jaba ', where the Belgian cooperation took care of the structure and the AEPIC project of the interiors of the school.

There was no interaction with the other **NGOs** that during the AEPIC Project were engaged in the country in the pre-school education sector, such as ANERA, Right to Play, World Vision, OFID (see Chapter "Introduction - Context of the evaluated initiative"). Furthermore, there were no comparisons or exchanges of experiences with the two Italian NGOs working in Palestine at that time (AVSI and VIS), even though continuity and complementarity with those initiatives was mentioned in AEPIC's Project Document. In this regard, during the evaluation, it was pointed out

that AVSI was engaged in a project on primary education, while VIS was engaged in an initiative on vocational training, and that therefore no possible areas of comparison had been identified.

The interaction with other organisations has been more consistent since RTM began participating in the **Preschools Technical Working Group (PTWG)** chaired by MOEHE and the Finnish Cooperation. However, the PTWG is not a programming space but a rather punctual opportunity to exchange information about the work of each actor, which is done through regular meetings (about 4 per year) convened by MOEHE. Although the PPTWG provided an opportunity to spread the Reggio Emilia approach among the actors involved in the working group, no significant synergies emerged. Rather, the PTWG was involved in the various strategic revisions of the MOEHE and the development of the Kindergarten Teacher's Manual.

Significant synergies were created between the AEPIC Project and the subsequent **PACE Project** which continued the work begun with the 7 pilot schools (but not with those in the EFA Programme), intensified the training of supervisors, and produced the Licensing Instructions for Private Preschools 2020/2021. The pilot schools in the AEPIC Project were taken as a model in the PACE Project, for example in developing pedagogical exchange activities with other schools and in making the experiences of change understood through the Reggio Emilia approach. In addition, through the PACE Project, the BECRC was launched as a tool to strengthen pedagogical exchanges between schools, thus supporting the results achieved through the AEPIC Project.

From the interviews and the questionnaire administered during the field visits, it emerged that all 7 pilot schools are making use of the BECRC, first of all for the use of recycled materials in teaching activities, but also to learn how to use these materials didactically in activities with children. Compared to the questionnaire sent to all schools through the E-School Platform, to which 253 schools responded, only 13 responded to the question regarding the interaction with the BECRC. Among these 13 schools, none of those ever involved in the RTM Projects is interacting with the BECRC. The relatively recent opening of the BECRC, as well as the difficulties generated by the pandemic, may have had a role to play here.

An important area for future synergies relates to the ongoing **World Bank Project**, implemented together with MOEHE's NIET, which concerns the professional training of 1,000 in-service teachers from private schools without a university degree and therefore without the qualification required by the Education Act of 2017. It will be interesting to identify areas for collaboration on teacher training and for joint work on *Licensing Instructions for Private Preschools 2020/2021*. In this regard, RTM mentioned that the guidelines have already been sent to the Technical Coordinator of the World Bank.

2.4 IMPACT

2.4.1 Theory of change and effects triggered by the Project between stakeholders and beneficiaries

Evaluation question 4.1: What are the expected and unintentional effects - both positive and negative – that the project has had on the target groups and final beneficiaries?

CONCLUSION 12 – The project has given disadvantaged communities a service which did not exist before, thus fostering the increase of the enrolment rate and a greater inclusion to preschool education services. The contribution in terms of drop-out rate reduction was only indirect and given by families' increased awareness. The pedagogic approach proposed by the Project is well incorporated in most of the 7 pilot schools' systems and with a reduced impact in 2 of the public

schools, mainly due to external conditions. In the schools of the EFA Program we find the main aspects introduced with the Reggio Emilia Approach, although there is a limited awareness of this. The exposure to the Reggio Emilia approach of untrained teachers during AEPIC implementation is moderate in some schools and very strong in others. Overall, the new approach was adapted to the context and complemented pre-existing teaching methodologies. None of the schools involved in the Project has become part of the Reggio Children International Network.

Theory of Change

The Project Document did not envisage a Theory of Change which was not required when the call for tenders was launched. The Project's ToC was processed during the evaluation through document review and an online validation workshop with the Italian stakeholders.

Expected impact

The ToC was developed starting from the premises that the final aim of the project, that is the expected impact, is ***a better quality of preschool educational services in the West Bank and their greater inclusiveness*** in terms of the ability to include:

- children in disadvantaged areas
- children with different abilities (included in the Project Document but not confirmed by the stakeholders during the workshop)
- the students' families (greater interaction).

Better quality and greater inclusion can then have effects on the increase of the ***percentage of children enrolled to preschools and on the reduction of the drop-out rate in preschool age.***

Preconditions (intermediate outcomes)

According to the project's logic, reaching the expected impact entails a series of intermediate steps in terms of outcomes to achieve and outputs to produce.

The necessary outcomes in order to reach the expected impact are the following:

- a) Increased ability of the MOEHE in planning, management, monitoring and evaluation of the preschool educational services, at the level of both central officers and supervisors of the educational districts;
- b) Improved quality of the educational services provided by 7 pilot schools;
- c) Enhanced public-private partnership in the preschool education sector;
- d) Good practices in other schools of the Bethlehem Governorate and other areas of the West Bank.

The necessary ***outputs*** to reach the outcomes are the following:

- a) MOEHE and pilot schools' trained staff - teachers and principals;
- b) New educational services provided in the 7 pilot schools;
- c) 25 new preschool classes initiated in the West Bank;
- d) A Forum created among the preschools in the Bethlehem Governorate;
- e) Publication on preschool education prepared.

Variables

A series of **variables inside the Project** may facilitate the expected impact. We particularly refer to active stakeholder participation; cooperation among partners, including the cooperation between subjects belonging to different cultures and religions; the level of skills and abilities of the staff involved in the project implementation.

There are also a series of **variables that are not under the Project's control** and that can positively or negatively influence the attainment of the expected impact. In this regard, a crucial variable is the commitment of the competent institutions, first of all the MOEHE, in drafting and implementing preschool education strategies. In terms of implementation of action plans the Governorates' educational Districts of the MOEHE will play an important role at a decentralized level. Therefore, an actual decentralization process appears to be a factor which can facilitate the Project's expected impact.

The limited availability of national resources to carry out interventions in the preschool education sector may also slow down or limit the expected impact; the same is true due to a high turnover of the staff trained within the selected schools.

Impact indicators developed in the ToC workshop and with document review:

INDICATORS:

- 1. reduction of school abandonment/drop out;**
- 2. Increase in the rate of enrolment and inclusion,** defined as the enrolment of children coming from disadvantaged communities, but also in terms of interaction with the children's families and the communities they belong to. This latter aspect is also used to measure the quality of services provided;
- 3. Increase of quality,** defined as the preschool education focus change, shifting from expectations and requests towards the child to:
 - a. putting the focus on the child** and on his/her needs, with the resulting shift from programming to planning and the inclusion of product and also process indicators. An overturning and broadening of the preschool system's educational offer, conceived as a place where to learn how to read, write and count. The same can be measured observing the pilot schools and those in the EFA program which fall under the responsibility of the several supervisors who participated to the training activities.
 - b. Differentiation of school areas** (settings), ex.: books section, construction section, creativity/workshop section, free play section + any other: light table, etc.; use and availability of informal or recycled materials.
 - c. Active role of families,** no longer seeing school as a "parking space" expecting it to teach the children how to read, write and count, but actively participating to the training experience and living school life as a "place of community".

This aspect can be measured by observing the

- documents addressed to parents as a tangible sign of communication between the school and the families;

- Parent-school meetings where the children's educational development is dealt with beyond their school performance;
 - Documentation about the learning and development process and availability of such documents for the families;
 - **Ownership of the new approach**, which may vary depending on the contexts (pilot schools; other schools, lower grade).
- d. Number and type of activities carried out by the **Forum for Early Childhood of Bethlehem** and number of participants to the Forum.

Changes observed

Besides the **observations included in Conclusion n°5 (Chapter on Effectiveness)** regarding the changes observed in the pilot schools, in the EFA Program schools and in the preschool sector, other changes which were observed are taken into consideration here, in the intent of linking them to the Project's Theory of Change.

According to several officers of the MOEHE, the Project has given an important contribution to the enrolment rate thanks to the opening of new preschool classes and to the rehabilitation of already existing schools; it has produced a change in mentality in the educational approach of many schools; it has promoted a greater awareness towards the importance of involving families in children's educational path; it has promoted a greater interaction between schools and families, which in turn has produced very positive effects on families' greater awareness on preschool education. Moreover, at a central level, the Project has provided a strong contribution to the increase of awareness on the importance of early childhood and preschool education, as witnessed by most of the principals that were interviewed.

«The Ministry has observed a clear impact of the Project on kindergartens and preschool classes in public schools. This is what has motivated us to continue with the second project (PACE) in order to be able to strengthen the Reggio Emilia Approach and extend it to other schools».

MOEHE

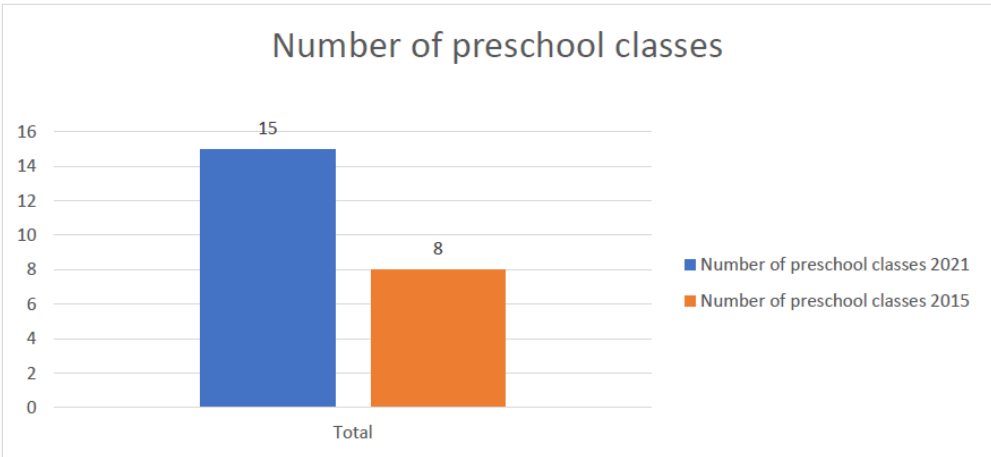
The Project's impact, compared to the issue of **school drop-out** is hardly measurable in the absence of official and updated statistical data, particularly with regard to the schools involved in the Project. When visiting schools we have tried to extract this data, but what was gathered does not always seem to be reliable and very often the teachers and principals interviewed did not have such data available. From this point of view, **the project has given an important contribution through the awareness of the families and indirectly of the communities, creating awareness on the importance of early childhood education and encouraging the prevention of the drop-out phenomena.**

With regards to the **increase in enrolments**, the Project has undoubtedly contributed through the start-up of preschool classes together with the EFA Program. **To this date, based on the sample of schools visited during the evaluation, there are 112 children enrolled in the 5 classes which did not exist before the AEPIC Project. The project has also enabled the availability – and child-friendly use of – other 10 classes belonging to the EFA Program, two of which belong to the Project's pilot schools, thus fostering the enrolment of another 257 children from vulnerable areas.** This data

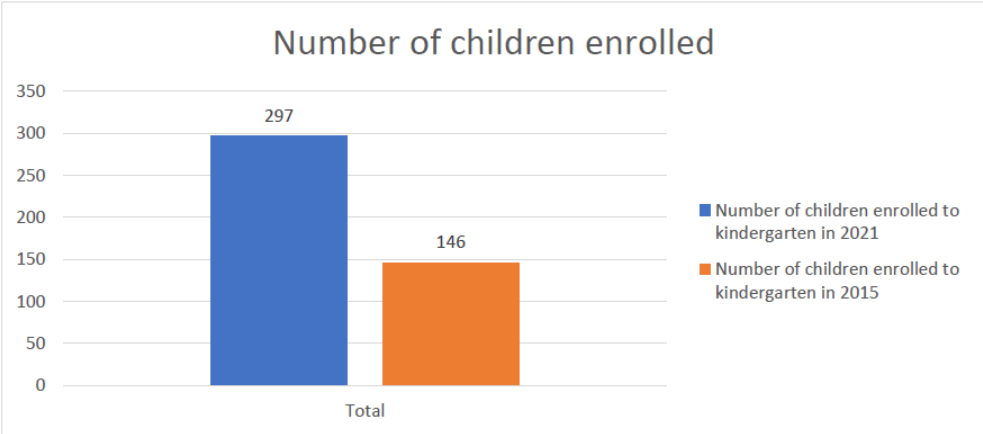
should be complemented with the one from the EFA schools that were not visited during the evaluation.

The following graphs show the trend from 2015 to 2021 with regard to the number of preschool classes and the number of children enrolled in the sample of EFA Program schools visited during the evaluation and in the 7 pilot schools involved in AEPIC.

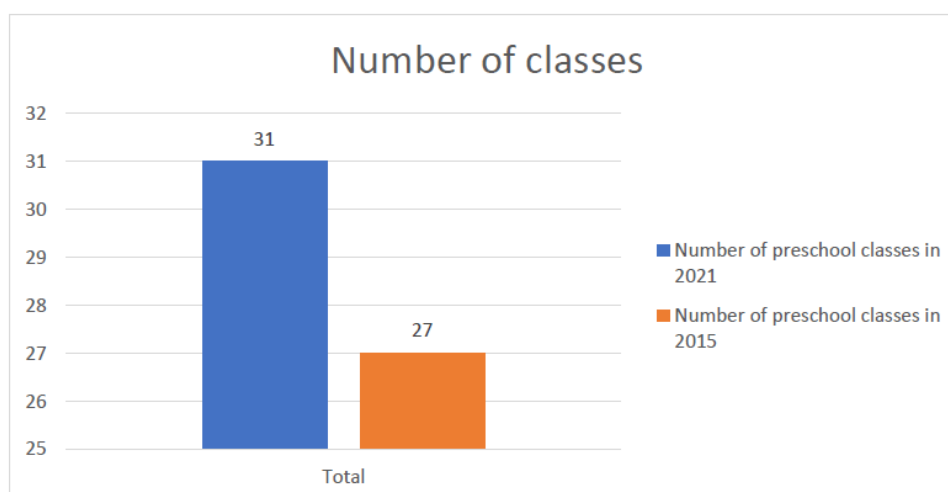
Graph no. 4 - Preschool classes in 15 (out of 22) EFA Program Schools



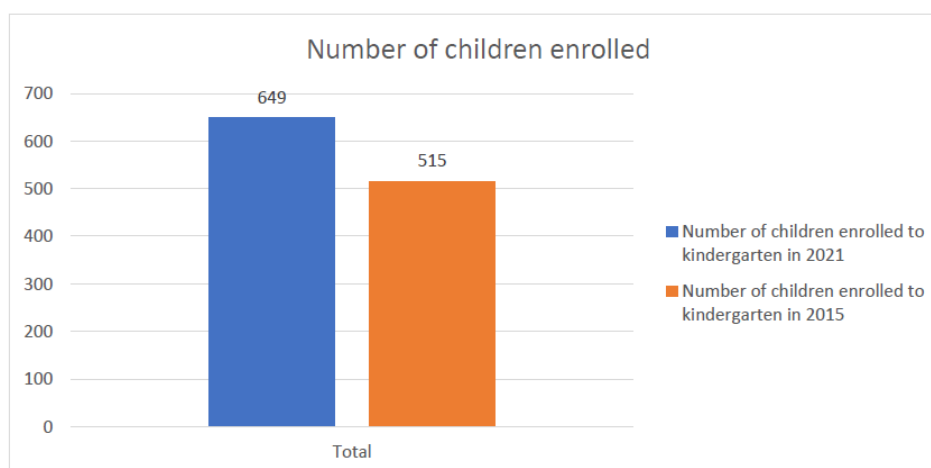
Graph no. 5 - Number of enrolled children in 15 (out of 22) EFA Program Schools



Graph no. 6 – Number of classes in the 7 Pilot Schools



Graph no. 7 – Number of children enrolled in the 7 Pilot Schools



Today, all the EFA Program schools have at least 1 preschool class and two of these schools (one in the Jenin Governorate and one in the Qaliqya Governorate) have 2 classes. Moreover, in the EFA schools of the visited sample during the evaluation, there are **151 more children** enrolled compared to 2015.

The three Patriarchates have agreed in stating that the AEPIC Project has given a remarkable contribution to improving the quality of teaching in the respective schools. The quality of teaching has also been appreciated by the reference communities, and according to the people interviewed this has determined an increase in the requests for enrolment.

Also the public schools among the 7 pilot schools acknowledge that the AEPIC Project has had an impact on the enrolment rate.

«The AEPIC Project has promoted the involvement of parents who have better understood the importance of preschool education and are so more keen on enrolling their children».

Pilot School Teacher

«The improvement of the setting and environment and increase in classroom space thanks to the support of AEPIC encourage parents to enrol their children.»

Pilot School Teacher

With regards to the increase in the **inclusion rate**, this did not concern children with special needs and different abilities but the inclusion to preschool education of children coming from rural areas, disadvantaged areas, and, as already specified, mostly located in Area C and Hebron 2 (see Chapter “Cross-cutting issues”).

The **quality of teaching** improvements have already been described in Conclusion 5. In this section there is an analysis of the impact of such changes on the schools visited during the evaluation.

The Reggio Emilia Approach ended up being well integrated in the teaching methodologies and in educational approaches of the **7 pilot schools**, specifically with regards to the three private schools and the Public School of Early Childhood of Bethlehem. The three teachers working in the latter are trained on the approach and the school is also advantaged by the creation of the BECRC in its premises, the coordinators of which have been trained by the AEPIC and PACE Projects.

«The project has entailed a remarkable change in the preschools where the AEPIC project was implemented and it has also ignited the spirit of competition among the different schools, raising many questions on the reasons for not implementing the Project in all of the public preschools. We attribute this to the fact that the Project has given teachers a heightened mentality, an engaging approach and has contributed to providing a school environment that is stimulating for children».

MOEHE

«It will take time before the actual impact is consolidated. It's not just a matter of equipment. We are now starting to see the impact of the AEPIC and PACE Projects: improved environment, teachers are able to think differently, more materials and equipment, different approaches, the attitude has changed. We no longer use the traditional teaching methodologies, children are creative, they can explore and solve problems. The same is also true for teachers. The two projects have changed the perspective».

Pilot School Principal

In the other two public schools among the 7 pilot schools the project has had more limited impact, mainly due to the turnover of trained staff as well as other external conditions related to the availability of space and materials.

As of the **EFA Program Schools**, they had a limited involvement in the Project's training activities and for the purpose of the evaluation they have been included by means of field visits and a questionnaire, and not by means of in depth interviews. A reading of the data collected allows us to state that the principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach are practised also in the EFA schools that were visited, both in terms of a result of the AEPIC Project and mainly as a result of the training activities implemented by the educational supervisors during and after the AEPIC Project. The

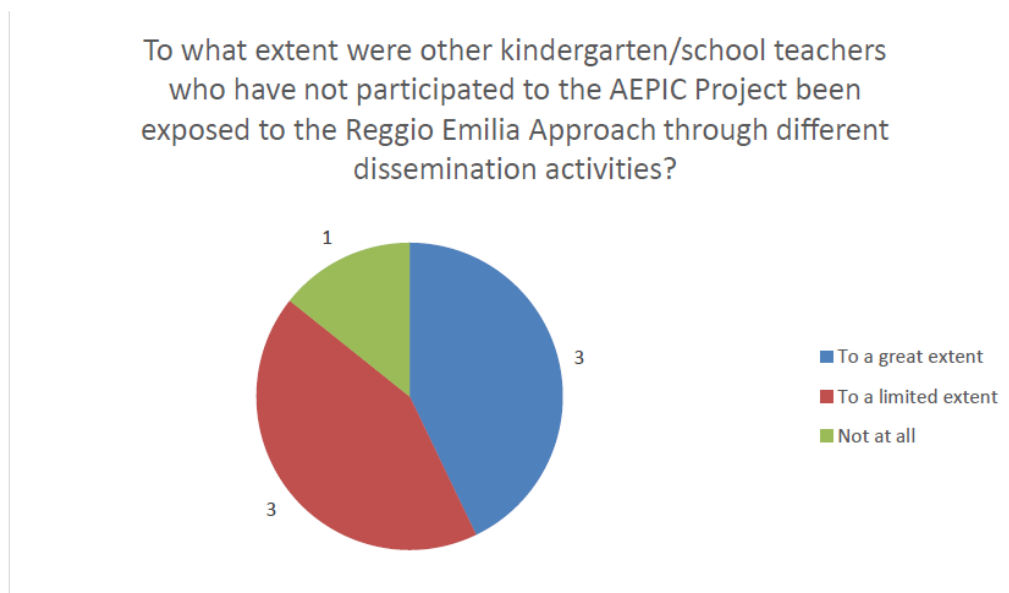
activities presented to the children during school hours are in line with the Reggio Emilia Approach (free play, creative activities, interaction with the environment) and some of the materials distributed through AEPIC are effectively used (for example 5 out of 13 schools use the light table and 12 use the mirror game). However, the teacher awareness level has been more limited. In several cases the principles and methodologies of the Reggio Emilia Approach are put into practice without being fully aware or are confused with what is considered today as the “Palestinian approach to preschool education” which includes many of the elements present in the Reggio Emilia Approach.

Some supervisors have said that the teachers in the EFA Program schools of their Governorate were not sufficiently trained and prepared to use the new settings and materials provided by RTM, meaning that some schools had a new environment without the teachers having the necessary skills to take advantage of their potential, as for example the use of the different corners.

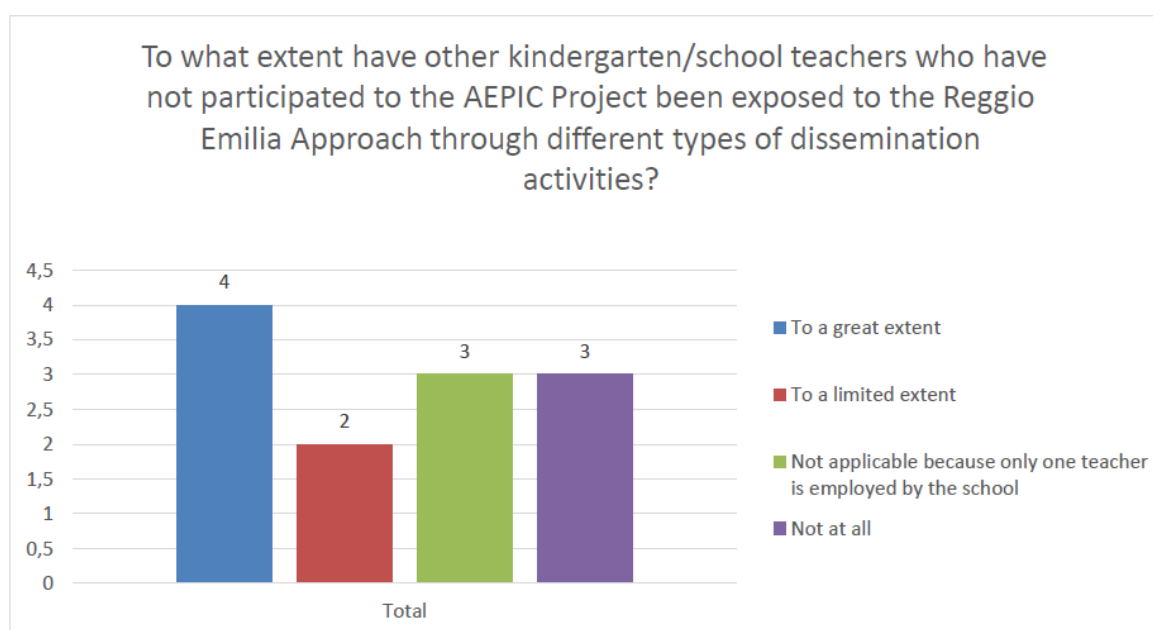
In general, **the Reggio Emilia Approach has been adapted to the context and placed side by side with the more traditional and pre-existing teaching methodologies** (reading, writing, calculation). The latter were being used in all the schools that were visited (among the 7 pilot schools and those belonging to the EFA Program) with the exception of one school in the District of Tulkarem.

As already mentioned, the exchange among peers has allowed for an internal widespread of the Reggio Emilia Approach which was good in some schools and more limited in others. In general, apart from the teachers trained by AEPIC, there are other teachers who are aware of and practice - to different extents- the new method.

Graph no. 8 - Pilot Schools



Graph no. 9 - EFA Program Schools



«In order to see to what extent the Reggio Emilia Approach has been disseminated beyond the beneficiaries directly involved in the AEPIC Project, one can visit, for example, the Bethlehem Public School for Early Childhood where there are several classes and teachers, not all of which have participated to the RTM projects. All the teachers and the Principal are however trained on the Reggio Emilia Approach. Two of them, who had participated to the AEPIC Project, have moved and have become supervisors (a teacher and the former principal) but this is not a concern because the Reggio Emilia is an approach with a strong identity inside that school. It is still there that teachers work based on this approach. I am rather concerned about those schools that had been involved in AEPIC and PACE with only one teacher and that teacher has then been transferred and the new teacher who was hired doesn't know the Reggio Emilia Approach».

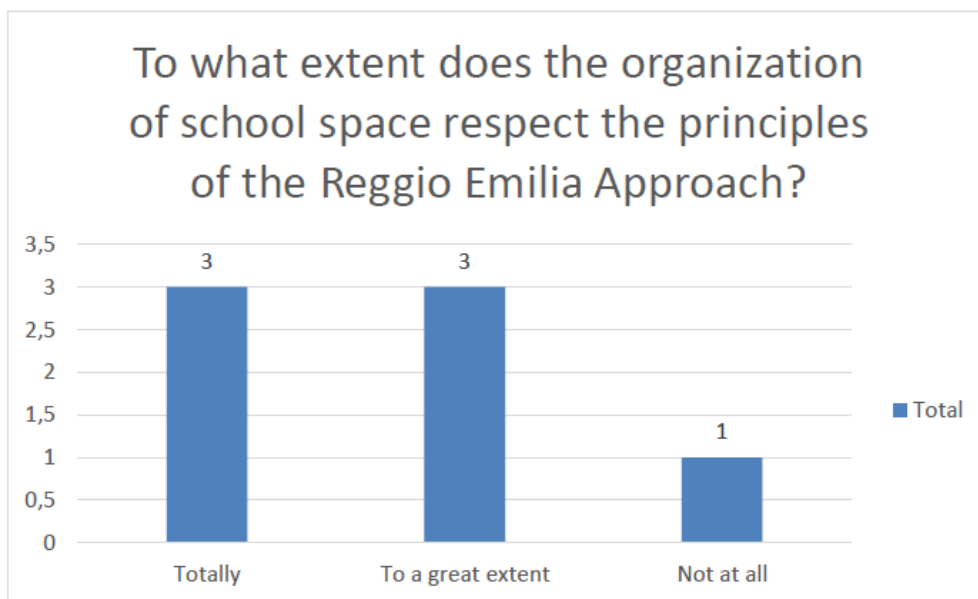
MOEHE

With regard to the **organization of spaces**, 85% of the EFA Program Schools visited during the evaluation and the all the 7 pilot schools have a central area outside the classroom, which is the main setting for games, learning, exchanges and activities. 95% of the EFA schools visited and all of the 7 pilot schools the classroom is organized so as to allow for working with medium and small groups of children and has an area devoted to books. In all cases, the classroom is divided in different areas, each of which is used for a different type of activity, or different corners, each one for a specific objective. By the same token, in all the schools that were visited there is a specific area devoted to the activities of logic and mathematics (Cognitive corner). 57% of the sample schools have a specific area devoted to creativity (Creative corner), while 8 of the EFA schools and one of the 7 pilot schools are not equipped with one. In 90% of the sample schools there is a specific area devoted to exploration activities (Scientific Corner) – only one of the EFA schools is not equipped with one-. In 80% of the cases there is an area exclusively devoted to free play (Playing corner)– 3 of the EFA Program schools do not have one. With the exception of two of the EFA Program schools,

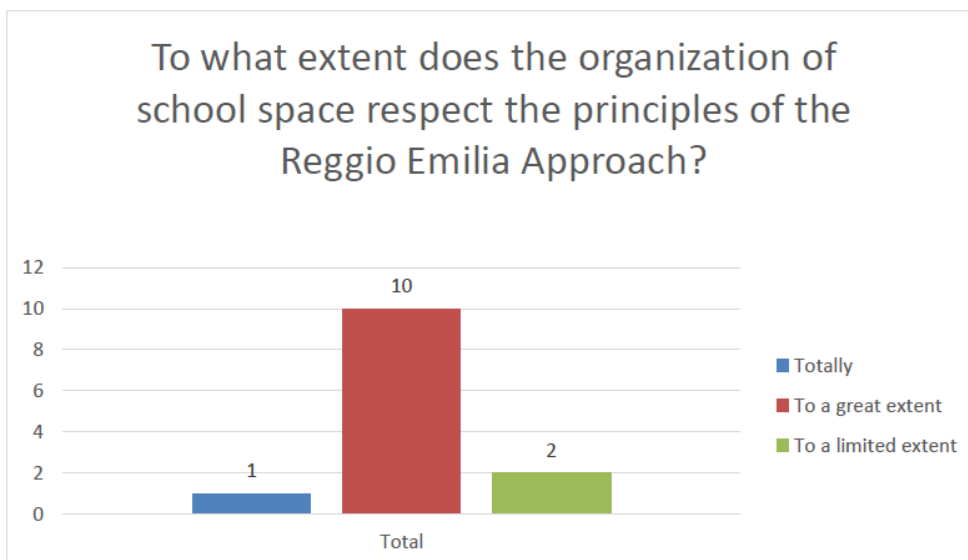
all the other schools have green areas inside or outside the classroom (Nature's corner) where to interact with nature. All the schools, except one of the EFA Program schools, use different and recycled materials for learning.

Overall, among the pilot and EFA schools visited, 19% have the organization of school spaces “Totally” organized according to the principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach, 61% of the sample schools have it organized “to a great extent” and 19% have it organized according to such principles to a “Limited” extent. The following graphs show the breakdown between pilot schools and EFA schools.

Graph no. 10 – PILOT SCHOOLS

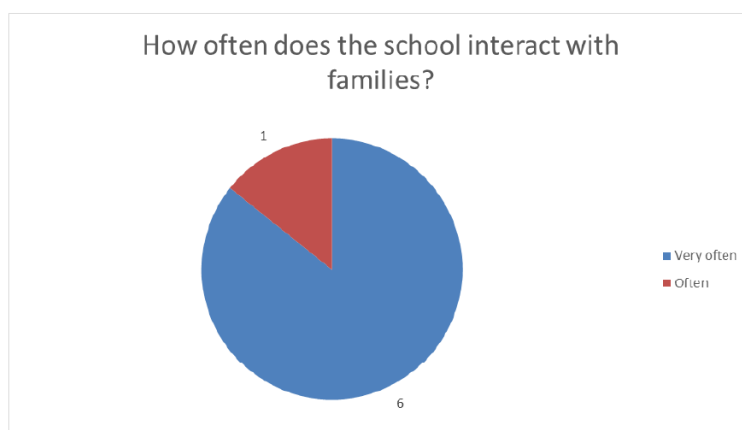


Graph no. 11 - EFA PROGRAM SCHOOLS

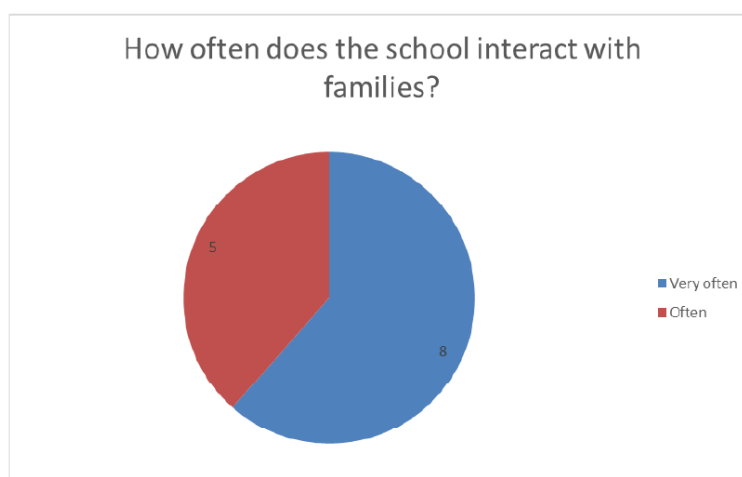


With regards to the **interaction with families**, the other pillar of the Reggio Emilia Approach, the following graphs show that this aspect is well taken into consideration by the Schools involved in the Project.

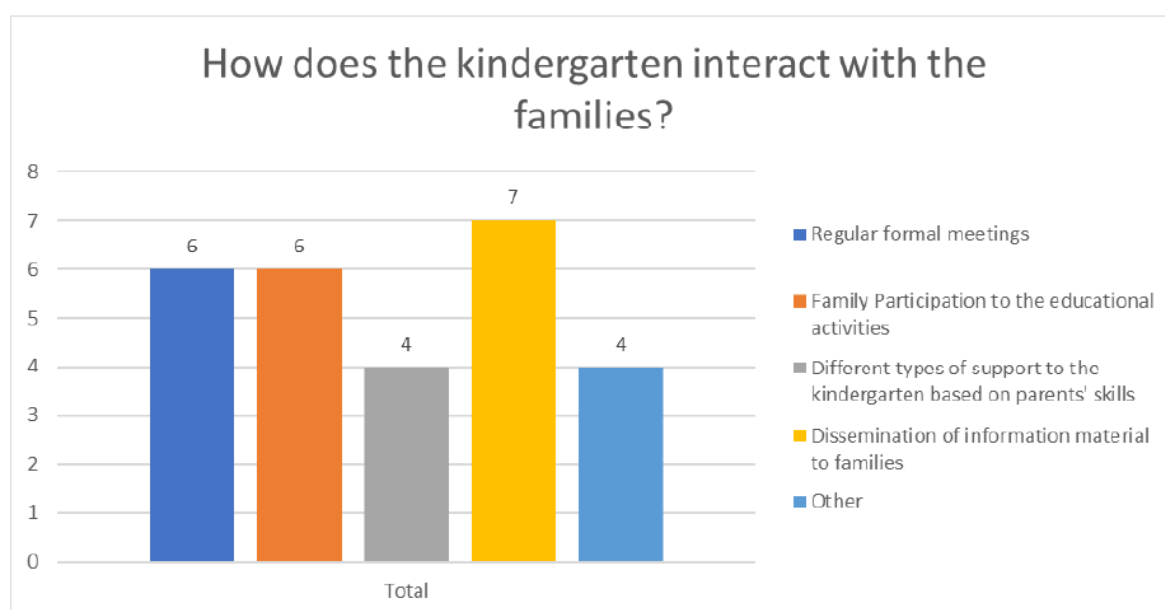
Graph no. 12 - Interaction with families in the 7 Pilot Schools



Graph no. 13 – Interaction with families in the Schools of the EFA Program



Graph no. 14 - Ways in which the school interacts with the families in the 7 pilot schools



The mothers are responsible for interacting with the school in most part of cases (over 80% of the samples) while the fathers are part of this interaction only in 4 of preschools taken in consideration.

«This approach has developed in Italy as a result of a specific need which arose after World War II, with the participation of parents allowing for the appreciation of available resources in the country, so it has grown in a setting in which families cooperate and play an active role in their children's education. One of the greatest challenges for us is still that of building bridges in the relationship with parents and increase their participation to education».

MOEHE

The **Forum of Preschools in the Governorate of Bethlehem**, as already well explained, is presently made up only of the 7 pilot schools participating to the AEPIC Project. The questionnaires handed out during the field visits confirm that there have been at least ten coordination meetings after the closing of AEPIC and two public events, one of which was carried out by AEPIC and the other one by PACE. The impact of this Forum is somehow noteworthy since it was used to exchange experiences among the 7 schools, though the organization and implementation are rather limited, as well as its impact on a larger audience of schools or its function as a partnership model capable of inspiring other partnerships.

None of the schools involved in the Project have adhered to the **Reggio Children International Network**. It seems that this option has not been proposed to the schools, probably also due to the fact that adhesion implies a fee that is then re-invested in the childcare services in the Municipality of Reggio Emilia.

Among the **unexpected changes** resulting from the Project, two of the private schools reported that most of the interaction with families, and specifically the involvement of parents depending on their professions, have allowed them to identify some children who needed medical attention (dental cavities, impaired vision) or children with special needs (delay in language development) that had not been diagnosed. Moreover, the support of a parent who is also a nutritionist have allowed for the widespread of good practices in relation to feeding among the children, the parents and the school staff.

«The families' attitude towards the preschool and the Reggio Emilia Approach that we had decided to adopt have significantly changed with time. Mothers now participate with their children to the learning activities and enjoy spending time with their children and the rest of the children in the preschool. Everyone gives their own contribution based on their specialization. Parents specialized in healthcare professions, for example, have contributed by visiting the children and having them learn about the profession».

Teacher, Pilot School

Another unexpected change was that several principals and teachers from the 7 pilot schools reported that the children who experimented with the Reggio Emilia Approach showed greater proactivity, ability for critical thinking and interaction with teachers when they went to primary school. Although this is a result envisaged by the Reggio Emilia Approach in terms of developing

children's personality, it was not an explicitly expected effect of the Project activities' implementation, which exclusively concerned the early childhood and preschool educational cycle.

One of the 7 pilot schools, the refugee camp school run by IBDA, has received a ministerial license during the AEPIC Project implementation. Although the Project did not have a direct impact, the rapport fostered by the project between the Bethlehem supervisor and the school, which was very isolated before, may have given a contribution.

Another unexpected result was the resuming of historical relations between the area of Reggio Emilia and Palestine (between the Municipality of Reggio Emilia and the Municipalities of Beit Jala and Bethlehem) which had loosened through the years. Other exchanges in different sectors were fostered thanks to the project, resulting in a twinning between Reggio Emilia and Beit Jala.

Evaluation question 4.3: *Has the AEPIC Project strengthened the strategic leadership and coordination of MOEHE in preschool education?*

CONCLUSION 13 – The Project's impact on MOEHE capabilities has been very clear at a decentralized level, where a net strengthening of supervisors' roles and skills was observed, being supervisors the active agents for the dissemination of the new method. At a central level the Project has facilitated the coordination process of the 7 pilot schools and a greater interaction with the private sector. Valuable results, however, have not been observed in terms of cross-cutting skills in the design, planning, management, monitoring and evaluation of the educational actions. The PACE Project has then intervened on this aspect, strengthening MOEHE's monitoring of school buildings and environments.

The Project's impact on MOEHE's skills in terms of design, planning, management, monitoring and evaluation of educational actions has not been noticeable besides pedagogical purposes in the planning of the educational actions and aspects in relation to greater coordination. In other words, the actions have concentrated more on the approach and the methodologies than on the management of services in a broader and more transversal manner. In this regard, the project has implemented some training on the services management system in Reggio Emilia. However, this training has neither been supported by technical support, nor by a follow-up. The actual impact in this regard, and at a central level in MOEHE, has therefore been lower than expected. .

The Project has however fostered the **MOEHE coordination process**, on one hand by launching the public private partnership through the Forum and the 7 pilot schools – though institutional participation to this Forum was rather limited and non strategic-, on the other hand by providing an opportunity for communication with the private schools.

An aspect that still represents a weakness is the coordination of MOEHE with a more marginal school, which has stated that apart from administrative issues regarding the license, they normally haven't had any interaction with the MOEHE.

Later, the **PACE** project has offered a more significant contribution from this point of view, cooperating with the MOEHE in the development of the accreditation standards for private schools (*Licensing Instructions for Private Preschools 2020/2021*), thus providing a significant contribution to the Ministry's monitoring of school environments and its ability to verify and issue licenses.

The main result in terms of strategic leadership by the Ministry has been obtained at a decentralized level, with a powerful action of strengthening the pedagogical and training skills of the **educational supervisors** and of their abilities to interact with the schools that are in their area of responsibility, including the private schools. At a territorial level, the educational supervisors are the Ministry's key

players in charge of direct relations with schools. The supervisors of 5 Educational Directorates²⁴ have constantly been involved in training sessions and have participated to the study visits in Italy, managing to acquire specific skills on the Reggio Emilia Approach. Such skills have then been transferred to other supervisors and schools through rather constant training. Moreover, according to what the supervisors and other stakeholders have stated, the Project has facilitated the development of a different conceptualization of the role, which has started being perceived not exclusively in terms of “control” but rather as a role to support teachers' and schools' qualification paths. This change in attitude has also been noticed by the private schools, which reported a change in the private school/supervisor relation.

Evaluation question 4.4: *To what extent has the AEPIC Project supported the increase of external awareness of the “Reggio Emilia Approach” by means of communication, advocacy and outreach activities?*

CONCLUSION 14 – The widespread of the Reggio Emilia Approach in the schools that are not involved in the AEPIC Project was good; from the evaluation data collected we can estimate that the approach has reached at least other 270 classrooms through the joint efforts of the supervisors, the Bethlehem Training Centre, the BECRC and the PACE Project. In the MOEHE there is a good level of knowledge and recognition of the Reggio Emilia Project's added value. This is true for different Directorates and Departments apart from the Department of Preschools and the Directorate General of Education. This widespread inside the MOEHE was started by AEPIC and further strengthened thanks to PACE.

Many schools, outside of those involved in the AEPIC Project, have been exposed to the Reggio Emilia Approach. This was done through the work of the educational supervisors who have integrated the Reggio Emilia Approach in the training sessions that were regularly addressed to active teachers; this was done through synergies with the PACE Project and the interaction of many Bethlehem schools with the BECRC and the cities' Teacher Training Centre.

According to the data collected, at least 17 workshops have been carried out in the several educational districts following the training sessions implemented by RTM which focused on the Reggio Emilia Approach. According to the Bethlehem supervisors, to date there are at least 50 classrooms in the Governorate that applying the Reggio Emilia Approach to different extents.

«I myself have trained the whole Southern region (North Central and Southern Hebron) and the outskirts of Jerusalem and Bethlehem ».

Supervisor – Bethlehem

According to the supervisor of the Governorate of Tulkarem, the 6 schools of the EFA Program involved in the AEPIC project still apply the Reggio Emilia Approach, which has extended to other 18 classes in the Governorate through the District's training activities. Some examples of the widespread of the approach in other schools not involved with AEPIC were observed in the Governorate of Qalqilya, particularly in the school in the village of Imatine. In the Governorate of Ramallah the supervisor has estimated disseminating the Reggio Emilia Approach to at least 190

²⁴Directorates of Bethlehem, Ramallah, Jenin, Tulkarem, Hebron.

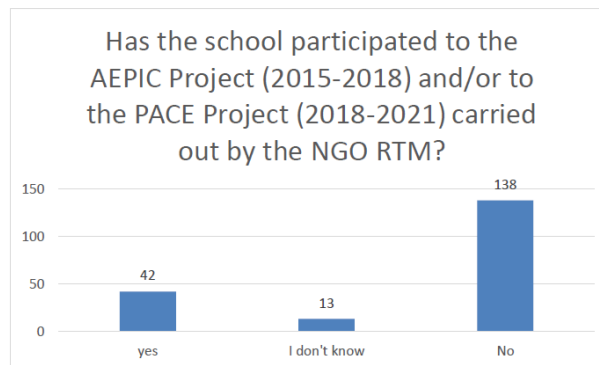
kindergartens visited from the end of the project to the present day. Moreover, thanks to her cooperation with UNHCR, the supervisor of Ramallah has used the Reggio Emilia Approach method with some of the tools (light table) in some trainer training workshops in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan.

Differently, there were greater challenges in putting into practice this approach in the Governorate of Jenin. Notwithstanding the equipment provided and the renewal of spaces, the training of teachers was considered not completely adequate.

The Latin Patriarchate preschool involved in AEPIC has been taken a role model for all the other preschools of the Patriarchate²⁵, according to the Executive Director of the Schools of the Latin Patriarchate. The Beit Jala school teachers are constantly involved in training teachers of other preschools and this has promoted a good diffusion of the Reggio Emilia Approach in the Patriarchate's school network.

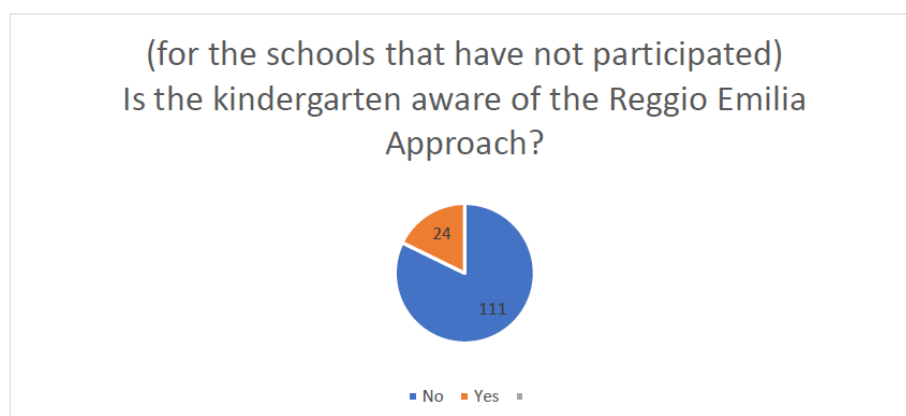
As a result of the questionnaire sent through the E-School Platform, 138 schools reported they were never involved in the RTM Projects in Palestine.

Graph no. 15 -Schools that answered the E-School Questionnaire



Among the schools that were never involved in AEPIC nor PACE, 17% reported they were aware of the Reggio Emilia Approach (some schools have not answered to this question).

Graph no. 16 - Schools that have answered the E-School Questionnaire

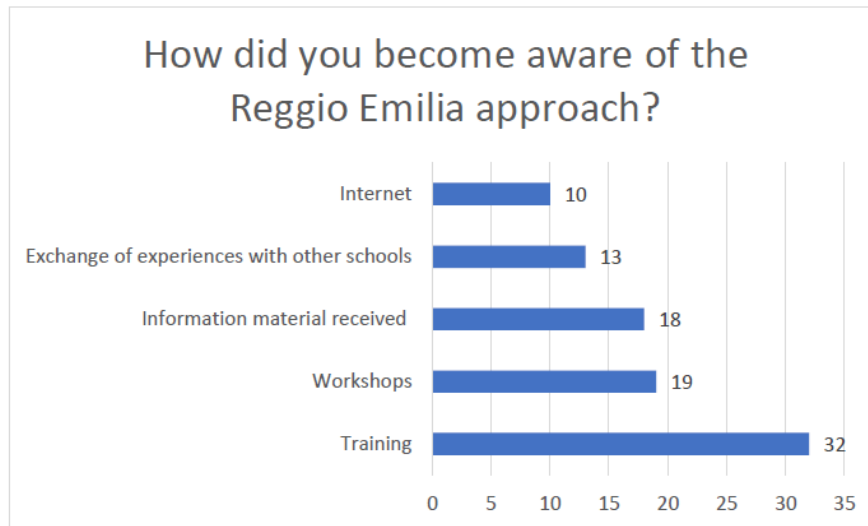


The schools that were aware of the Reggio Emilia Approach, although they have never been involved in the RTM project, reported they knew about it through the modalities illustrated in the following

²⁵ 13 preschools are part of the Latin Patriarchate, two of which are located in Gaza.

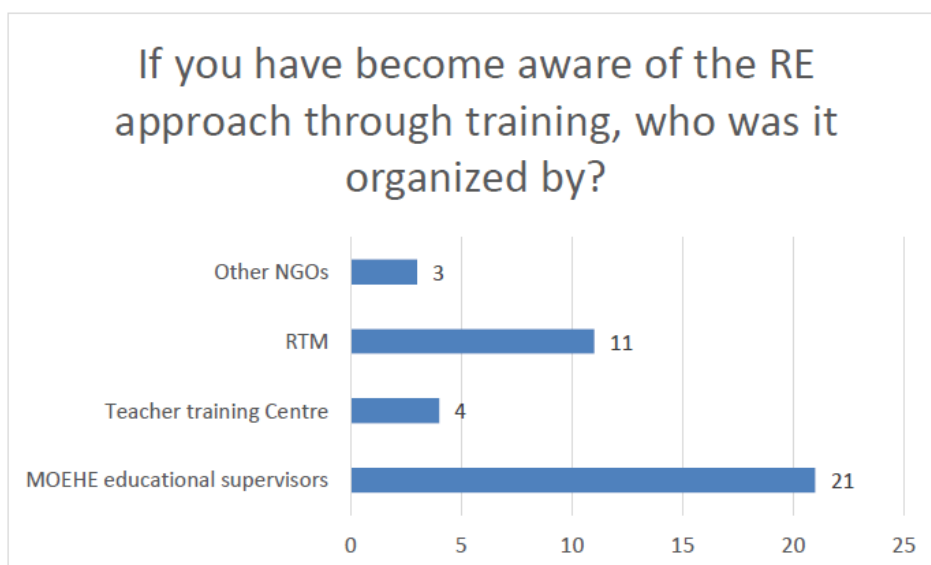
graph (some of those who said they knew the Reggio Emilia Approach have not answered this question)

Graph no. 17- Schools that have answered the E-School Questionnaire



As regards the above training, the following graph shows who it was organized by.

Graph no. 18- Schools that have answered the E-School Questionnaire



The dissemination of the Reggio Emilia Approach was good also with regards to the different **Departments of the MOEHE**, a process which has been strengthened with the PACE Project. Apart from the Department of Preschools and the General Directorate on Education, the AEPIC project has also involved other Directorates (Directorate of Construction, Directorate of Planning and the Curriculum Centre). The exposure of other directorates and departments to the Reggio Emilia Approach has clearly resulted from the interviews; the different officers who were interviewed demonstrated they know well the principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach and are aware of its added value. The PACE Project has promoted a deeper involvement of the following Departments:

Construction; General Administration of the Department of Planning; Private Schools Section; General Administration of Pedagogic Planning.

Particularly, the Officer from the Directorate of Construction has underlined that the modalities with which the school construction interventions are planned, as well as the different schools' analysis of needs, is now implemented keeping in consideration what has been learned during the AEPIC Project, in terms of child-friendly environments. **The Project has contributed to the development of a broader vision with regards to children's needs and the role of the environment in promoting a context of learning and development of potential. Such vision has an effect on the monitoring the Department carries out, although there is no standard procedure for the issuing of licenses that takes into consideration the criteria of the Reggio Emilia Approach in public schools. On the other hand, as far as the private schools are concerned, the monitoring and issuing of the licenses falls under the Directorate of MOEHE and this impact has been more institutionalised by means of the *Licensing Instructions for Private Preschools 2020/2021* developed through the PACE Project and processed with the contribution of the Directorate of Construction.**

«I've personally seen the Reggio Emilia Approach not only as an infrastructure, but as an activity and method to follow in the educational process, and I always try to reflect this approach with the people around me and with my colleagues. ».

MOEHE, Department of Construction

Also, the Curriculum Centre has been involved in the project training and the skills acquired have been important for what has later been the Curriculum Centre's contribution in the drawing up of the Kindergarten Teacher's Manual. Moreover, the Curriculum Centre is presently in a phase of consideration of the harmonization of approaches between the preschool cycle and primary school. This may, in the future, have an impact on the educational approach in the primary education cycle, although at the time of the evaluation only informal considerations were being made to this regard.

«One of our goals is now to fill the gap between the preschool curriculum and that of the primary school, we want to harmonize the skills of preschool and first grade and the main objective is that the curriculum in preschool is not conflicting with the skills that the children will have to learn in primary school. Therefore, maintaining the role of active learning, playing and creativity as crucial, we also try to provide some tools in order not to be unprepared when starting elementary school. By the same token, we are going on with considerations concerning the harmonization of the approach in the whole cycle of primary education, so that the concepts of nature, interaction with the environment and active learning, which have a fundamental role in preschool education, are preserved in the following cycle».

MOEHE, Curriculum Centre

Also the National Institute for Education Training of the MOEHE, which deals with the training of teachers of all grades, has proven good knowledge of the approach, although it has not participated to AEPIC trainings. This knowledge has been disseminated by a considerable number of supervisors (21, according to what the Officer of the MOEHE has reported during the interview) who interact

with the NIET during the preparation and drawing up of training materials for the new preschool teachers²⁶. It was not possible to review this material for the purpose of verifying to what extent the Reggio Emilia Approach has been integrated and mentioned.

Evaluation question 4.5: *To what extent has AEPIC supported the creation of an enabling environment for early childhood in Palestine?*

Evaluation question 4.6: *To what extent has the AEPIC Project contributed to the development, improvement and implementation of policies to improve the education sector at the country level?*

CONCLUSION 16 – The AEPIC Project and subsequently the PACE Project have significantly promoted a favourable early childhood education environment. Today the Reggio Emilia Approach is complimentary to the MOEHE Strategy, in fact, the new method has not replaced the other modalities nor has it been institutionalised, but it has contributed to disseminating an approach based on the central role of children and on active learning. These concepts have influenced the new *Palestinian Curriculum Framework* for preschool education. The public-private partnership model has had a limited impact and was not extended to other sectors and external knowledge of the Forum of Early Childhood Schools is rather limited. The Preschool Technical Working group has remained limited to the international players and no school participates to it. There have been no concrete efforts to extend the Reggio Emilia Approach to primary schools.

The strong coordination with the MOEHE has allowed RTM to be present to the most important meetings concerning preschool education. The 2019 *Annual Sector Review*, the MOEHE annual exercise regarding the goals set by the *Education Sector Strategic Plan* (ESSP) 2017-2022, was devoted to the topic of *Inclusive and quality preschool education for all*. RTM has participated to the revision exercise and the contribution of the Reggio Emilia Approach is mentioned in the document.

RTM, by means of its participation to the PTWG, has contributed to the drawing up of what is considered the *Palestinian Preschool Curriculum 2019/2020*. This is a manual for teachers that was created in 2017, the *Kindergarten Teacher's Manual* to which several other partners have contributed, among which UNICEF, Save the Children, World Vision, ANERA and Right to Play, and which contains a collection of educational approaches inspired to active learning and to the central role of playing.

A good part of the stakeholders who were interviewed believes that the Reggio Emilia Approach has given an important contribution to the manual's methodology, however acknowledging that other players have participated to it.

In the section about dialogic reading there are 3 links to methodological tools belonging to the Reggio Emilia Approach²⁷. Moreover, in the addendum to the Manual of 2019, RTM is mentioned among the members of the working group who have contributed to the drawing up of the document as well as mention being made about the contribution that the exchange experiences with the schools of Reggio Emilia have given to the development of the methodologies proposed in the new *Palestinian Preschool Curriculum*.

Although the manual includes a variety of educational practices focused on the concept of active learning resulting from a path started by schools and by the Ministry from 2015 with the support of

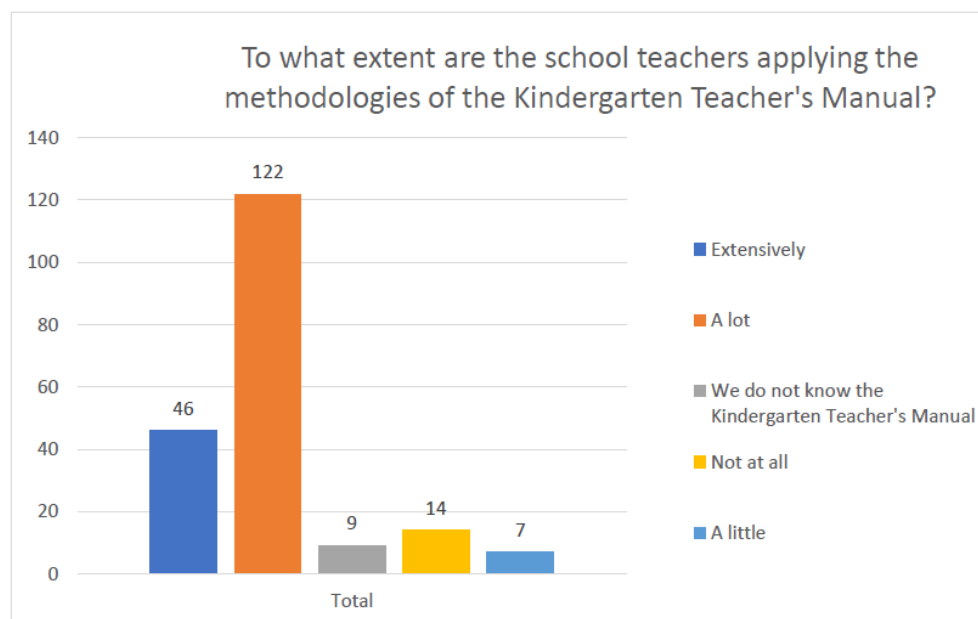
²⁶ According to the 2017 law, the opening of a preschool classroom is envisaged for each new school that is built. This implies a potential high number of new preschool teachers to hire.

²⁷ It must be reported that the hypertext links were not working at the time of the evaluation.

several international partners, it is interesting to notice that many of the topics important to the Reggio Emilia Approach are integrated. Among these is the central role of interaction with families; the principle of exchange and teacher-student dialogical relationship; the distancing from educational methods based on indoctrination and the central role of playing as an educational tool; the use of scrap materials and interaction with the environment: the central role of the school environment as an element affecting the attitude towards active learning and the organization of spaces into “learning centres”²⁸, that is distinct spaces devoted to the different teaching activities, each with a specific educational goal. To this regard, the manual underscores the need to provide for at least the following separate spaces: art and music, science and logic, constructions, language and literature, space for free play. The latter, more specifically, seem to be very close to the Reggio Emilia Approach concept of “corners”, disseminated by the AEPIC project, that is separate spaces, each of which having an educational purpose.

If we consider that the Manual is the methodological framework for all early childhood teachers who are bound to put its principles and methods into practice, we can state that the **Reggio Emilia Approach is fully supported inside the present Palestinian Preschool Curriculum**. Although a certain number of teachers still have poor knowledge of it, as we can see from the answers to the evaluation questionnaire (see the following graph), it is a reference tool at a national level which must progressively be adopted by all the early childhood teachers.

Graph no. 19 - Schools that have answered the E-School Questionnaire



On the one hand those who stated they use the manual “a lot” or “fairly enough” referred to the use of playing as an educational tool, the interaction with families, the interaction with the environment and the use of the learning centres, those who referred a “little” or “not at all” use have reported issues concerning the scarce training of teachers and the lack of adequate games and spaces to put into practice the methods included in the manual.

²⁸ The English translation speaks about “learning centres” while the Arabic translation mentions the term “corner” which is exactly the term used in the Reggio Emilia Approach.

Beyond the contribution that the Project has given to the new curriculum for preschool education, there are not any other specific AEPIC contributions to sectoral policies in the reference period.

Other factors strengthening the creation of an ideal environment for early childhood education, which also had an impact on MOEHE regulations, can be found in the PACE Project.

The **BECRC** is receiving visits from Bethlehem schools that are requested by the MOEHE itself and organized by RTM, and these represent a ground for the dissemination of the Reggio Emilia Approach. Alongside the visit to the BECRC there is usually also a visit to public schools to show how the approach is put into practice in the classrooms.

The afore mentioned ***Licensing Instructions for Private Preschools 2020-2021*** contain reference to the Reggio Emilia Approach, as for example the focus on the use of scrap materials. In the training and workshops that the PACE Project was carrying out during the evaluation, in order to promote schools' knowledge and adherence to it, it is said that the principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach were regularly mentioned. Also the educational supervisors are involved in the dissemination of *guidelines*. Adherence to the guidelines will progressively have to concern all the private schools, including those which have already received a yearly or five-year license, so we expect the Reggio Emilia Approach principles there included to be further disseminated. At the time of the data collection, the process of their dissemination was slowed down due to the pandemic and some recommendations to be presented to the Ministry were being hypothesized to allow for a broad dissemination. The impact of these guidelines could therefore not yet be observed. From information collected later, it emerged that in December 2021 the Ministry had published the document online and had carried out 18 workshops (1 per governorate) for the training of school principals on the new accreditation criteria (total 542 participants).

Data from the questionnaire sent through the E-School Platform shows that the 10 private schools that answered knew all the guidelines, although 3 thought that their level of adherence to the conformity criteria was low due to inadequate spaces and the lack of premises suited for children with disabilities.

As already stated the **Bethlehem Early Childhood Forum**, which should have strengthened the public-private partnership, has remained very limited in its goals. Of the EFA Program schools which were reached by field visits only 1 had heard about the Forum, while the others weren't aware of it, though they considered such a coordination tool as useful. The dissemination of awareness to this Forum was therefore very limited. 5 of the 7 pilot schools (one did not answer the question), therefore 83%, has considered MOEHE's participation to the Forum as "very limited", on a scale ranging from "none" to "total". This was confirmed by the interviews to the MOEHE Officials who proved they had limited knowledge about it.

As a result of the findings, **there aren't other similar Forums nor has the public-private partnership model introduced by the Project been extended to the management of preschool services or to other services in the field of education.**

The **preschool Technical Working Group** continues being a work group coordinated by the MOEHE with the participation of international players and has not opened to the contribution and cooperation of preschool service providers.

Evaluation question 4.7: What was the Project's impact on gender empowerment and inclusion of vulnerable groups?

See Chapter "Cross-cutting issues".

Evaluation question 4.2: What is the monetary value of achieved positive changes obtained through Project activity 1.3?

CONCLUSION 17 – The SROI analysis performed on a sample of parents from the two EFA Program pilot schools involved in the AEPIC Project has allowed us to quantify that for each Euro invested in activity 1.3, € 4,11 have been generated in terms of social benefit.

An SROI (*Social Return on Investments*) case study has been carried out with regard to a specific Project activity and on a group of beneficiaries with the aim of estimating the social value generated by the Project. The case study concentrated on activity 1.3 “Support to the start-up of preschool classes in 25 public schools of the West Bank” and it had the purpose of quantifying and giving an economic value to the social change generated by the selected activity.

The exercise was carried out by a focus group with the mothers of the children enrolled to two of the EFA Program schools involved in the Project in the period 2015-2021. The two schools are located in the District of Tulkarem, the Ferron School, with its preschool class opened by the AEPIC Project, and the Inshirah Al-Daddo School. Following the focus group, an analysis questionnaire with the SROI methodology criteria was been handed out.

As a consequence, thanks to the children attending the preschools, a series of personal changes occurred in their mother's lives were identified. Such changes, which are included in Annex D (SROI Case Study), concern the mothers' emotional and social sphere and represent an indirect benefit generated thanks to the opening or the improvement of the preschool educational service in their respective communities. The analysis has then tried to establish to what part of these changes was due to the Project; what was the changes duration envisaged by the beneficiaries and how would their intensity increase or decrease over time; any involuntary negative outcomes generated by the Project. Moreover, some financial proxies were identified and an economic value has been attributed to these changes according to the perception of the beneficiaries.

Finally the SROI ratio calculation was made, linking the Project's total investment (input) in activity 1.3 with the social value generated by the activity, considering the generated outcomes, the 4 SROI analysis criteria (Attribution, Deadweight, Displacement, Drop-off) and the financial proxies.

The analysis carried out showed that activity 1.3 has generated a positive net social value for the beneficiaries. **For each Euro invested in activity 1.3, € 4.11 have been generated in terms of social benefit.**

Question included in the ToR: *To what extent have the Recommendations formulated in the AEPIC Project final evaluation been taken into consideration after the end of the Project and particularly by the PACE Project?*

CONCLUSION 18 – The recommendations processed in the final evaluation of the AEPIC Project have adequately been taken into consideration after the Project completion. The PACE Project allowed for a good implementation in different aspects concerning the strengthening of the Reggio Emilia Approach in the pilot schools, the dissemination of good practices in other schools and environments and the definition of more relevant and measurable Logical Framework Indicators. Other aspects were taken into consideration in a less manifest way (strategic strengthening and broadening of the Forum of Early Childhood Schools, continuity of the support to the EFA Program schools in terms of training and capacity building).

The recommendations formulated in the final evaluation of the AEPIC Project are listed below and for each recommendation there is a description of the extent to which they were put into practice in the period following the end of the initiative.

Continuing the support (methodologies and skills) to the pilot schools and to other schools involved)

This recommendation has been taken into consideration to a good extent but not completely. The 7 pilot schools have actively been involved in the PACE Project and if not re-qualification actions they have also benefited from further training and participation to different events. On the other hand, the 22 EFA Program schools have not been involved in the PACE Project, in particular they have not been involved in training activities and strengthening the lessons learned through the AEPIC Project. However, it should be noted that all the supervisors of the various Education Districts of the EFA Schools were involved in the process of elaboration and dissemination of the Licensing Criteria and the supervisors of the Directorates of the EFA Schools in Jenin, Qalqilya, Hebron and Ramallah were also involved in the first annuality of the PACE Project in the on-site training missions of pedagogist E. Giacomini (1 day) and atelierista M. Bini (1 day). In this way, the continuity of support has been guaranteed but in a rather indirect way, without effective involvement of schools. The reason for not being involved in the PACE Project lies the request by the MOEHE *to increase the number of beneficiary schools, involving schools that had not had the opportunity to be involved in AEPIC*.

The PACE Project will have to support the Forum of Early Childhood Schools of Bethlehem, define their strategic plan and support mechanisms to involve other partners.

This recommendation has been taken into consideration to a good extent by the PACE Project but not completely. The new Project has continued supporting the Forum in different ways: teaching exchanges among the new schools of the PACE Project and the 7 pilot schools in the Forum; a public event of the Forum and a series of coordination meetings organized through the PACE Project; the institution of the BECRC standing as a meeting place and a further stimulus for the Forum's activities. The Forum, however, did not seem to have a strategic plan, a programmatic approach, nor have other partners been involved. The participation by the MOEHE has been considered as limited, as well as the Forum awareness beyond the schools that were involved. The context of the pandemic has undoubtedly affected this but different ways to conceive the Forum itself will need to be taken into consideration (see Chapter "Recommendations").

Development of a good practices dissemination plan among MOEHE engineers and the public and private schools of Bethlehem and the West Bank.

The PACE Project has fully taken into consideration this recommendation. Other 47 schools (30 public and 17 private), besides the AEPIC pilot schools, have been trained and made aware of the Reggio Emilia Approach. The processing of the *Licensing Instructions For Private Preschools 2020/2021* has seen the constant participation of the MOEHE and particularly the Department of Construction and their dissemination and implementation will contribute to the dissemination of best practices in the AEPIC Project. As already underscored, the PACE Project has involved the Al-Quds University – which has an Early Childhood course for future teachers- and this university has committed in disseminating information material on the Reggio Emilia Approach and the BECRC experience to teachers, students and operators. In such a way, the PACE Project has definitely fostered awareness of the Reggio Emilia Approach beyond the limited framework of the schools involved.

RTM will have to guarantee that the project stakeholders have adequate planning and monitoring skills.

The different stakeholders (teachers, principals, the MOEHE at a central and decentralized level) have proven significantly increased planning and monitoring skills with regard to the educational actions. From this perspective, there is greater awareness of the educational approach and increased process documentation skills. At the same time, thanks to the new curriculum on preschool education and the *Licensing Instructions For Private Preschools 2020/2021* the MOEHE has proven greater planning skills and an increased attitude to monitoring the quality of schools. However, these improvements particularly concern the pedagogical approach and the general objectives while a declination in terms of specific action plans and implementation of adequate monitoring methodologies is still not fully visible. In this respect, mostly in terms of ability to monitor and assess the results of the new Palestinian curriculum, there is margin for future improvements. The recommendation was therefore taken into consideration to a good extent but not completely.

The PACE Project must adopt the relevant indicators (input, output, outcome) and the monitoring must be used for learning purposes.

The recommendation has adequately been taken into consideration by the new Project. The quality of indicators in the Logical Framework of the PACE Project has significantly increased compared to that of the indicators included in the Logical Framework of the AEPIC Project. The new indicators, apart from having a *baseline* and *target value*, adequately combine efficiency indicators (output) and effectiveness (outcome), although the former still prevail. In the future, it will be important to ponder more on effectiveness and impact indicators able to prove the changes triggered by the Project. Just as an example: although the number of training and internship hours represent the occurring of a positive process, they are not alone proof of greater skills acquired by those participating to training. Another point of strength in the new Logical Framework concerns its alignment to some of the MOEHE indicators for childhood education, mainly in terms of general objectives (IOG1 -inclusive education-, IOG2 -student-centred pedagogical approach -) and specific objectives (IOS1 – enrolment rate- and IOS2 -number of qualified teachers-). During the evaluation, it was not possible to establish in depth to what extent the monitoring has been conceived as an ongoing learning tool.

The MOEHE must increase leadership and coordination in the sector of early childhood education.

The recommendation was taken into consideration by the MOEHE, which implemented the new Palestinian curriculum for preschool education in 2017, and by the PACE Project itself, which contributed to the drawing up of the *Licensing Instructions For Private Preschools 2020/2021*. The results obtained in terms of coordination need to be further strengthened, as explained in the “Recommendations” Chapter.

The MOEHE and the Technical Working Group (PTWG) must ensure the use of good practices, for example in the new Palestinian curriculum for preschool education.

The recommendation has adequately been taken into consideration since the *Kindergarten Teacher’s Manual*, representing the grounds of the new Palestinian curriculum for preschool education, promotes a series of good practices and pedagogical approaches resulting from the different initiatives implemented with the participation of the international organizations belonging to the PTWG.

Development of a complete analysis of the situation and needs in the preschool sector.

From the information gathered, this recommendation has been adequately taken into account, both through the feasibility study of the PACE Project (conducted between February and June 2017) that through the analysis of the legislative framework on early childhood education in Palestine. The latter was carried out in collaboration with MEAE as part of the A1.2 activity of the PACE Project and then led to the definition of the Licensing Criteria.

The PTWG must continue discussing the identity of preschool education in Palestine and how the different partners can give a contribution.

The recommendation has been adequately taken into consideration. The RTM has continued participating to the PTWG meetings and the group has given an important contribution to the drawing up of the *Kindergarten Teacher's Manual*.

2.5. SUSTAINABILITY

2.5.1 Partner and stakeholder ownership level, support of local institutions, technical and financial capability of local actors in the follow-up

Evaluation question 5.1: *To what extent has the "Reggio Emilia Approach" been owned and embedded into the local and national processes and structures and has proven to be sustainable?*

CONCLUSION 19 – The continuity of the Reggio Emilia Approach in 7 pilot schools is good and the level of sustainability is high in 3 schools (two private and one public), good in 1 private school and weaker in other 2 public schools. Regarding the latter two there are also factors due to limited school spaces and their being located into particularly vulnerable areas. Sustainability in the EFA Program schools is less noticeable but it will be supported with the training of supervisors. The latter represent an important factor of sustainability and their skills have further been strengthened with the PACE Project. The advancement of refurbishment carried out and the equipment provided resulted being from “quite sufficient” to “good” in most of the schools. The Kindergarten Teacher's Manual, considered as the pillar of the new preschool curriculum, will particularly contribute to the dissemination of the principles and methods of active learning in the Country, although in this respect there is complementarity rather than the explicit official adoption of the approach. The BECRC and the Bethlehem Training Centre, with which the RTM has just started a new Project financed by the Emilia Romagna Region, are further sustainability factors in the new method that has been introduced.

Sustainability was high in two out of the three **private schools involved** in the Project, whereas it reached a good level in the third school. Two school principals in the Patriarchates involved have confirmed that there was an intense exchange among the colleagues and an internal training process; this aspect was also confirmed by the teachers. When asked: “To what extent have the teachers that are presently involved in the school been exposed to the Reggio Emilia Approach?” two schools replied “To a great extent”. Such exposure took place thanks to internal training and exchange of experience among colleagues, as well as partially thanks to the work of the supervisors. In the third private school the Principal appeared very optimistic with regards to sustainability and reported that while the project has trained 7 teachers and only 3 are presently in force, the Reggio Emilia Approach is still practiced thanks to the training provided by the colleagues. The teacher belonging to the same school, on the contrary, seemed less optimistic and remarked the need for further training for the teachers who are not directly involved in the RTM Projects.

Overall, in the three private schools, the percentage of teachers not involved in AEPIC and/or PACE but who apply to certain extents the methodologies inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach goes from 60% to 80% according to data collected by the questionnaire.

«The project support was interrupted in 2018, but we have not stopped creating new education tools every day, because we have ideas, communication and training, all thanks to our love for children's education and the new approach that was taught us, which pushed us to demonstrate to ourselves and to the parents that we are worth the training we have received from the project.».

Teacher, Pilot school

As already said (see Conclusion n°12), **the Reggio Emilia Approach is now completely integrated in the Early Childhood public school of Bethlehem, which is also the attached Training Centre's model school and is directly linked connected to the BECRC. Such connections generate a very positive flow for the sustainability of the approach.**

It should be noticed that one of the other two public schools of the Governorate of Bethlehem is continuing its implementation of the Reggio Emilia Approach, although the present teacher has stepped in after the end of the Project and has not therefore taken part to the AEPIC activities.

However, the potential for sustainability seems less powerful than in the one observed in the Public School for Early Childhood of Bethlehem and in the private schools. As a result of the data collected through the questionnaire, these two schools seem to have been less involved in follow up and training activities; one of the two schools was also hindered by limited school spaces and both schools are drawn back by the fact of being located in difficult areas, prevailing in Zone C.

As regards the **EFA Program** schools, as already stated in Conclusion n°12, the principles and methods introduced by the Project seem to have a potential for sustainability. However, these schools have not subsequently been involved with the PACE Project and they could not consolidate what they have learnt, if not through the contributions from the supervisors.

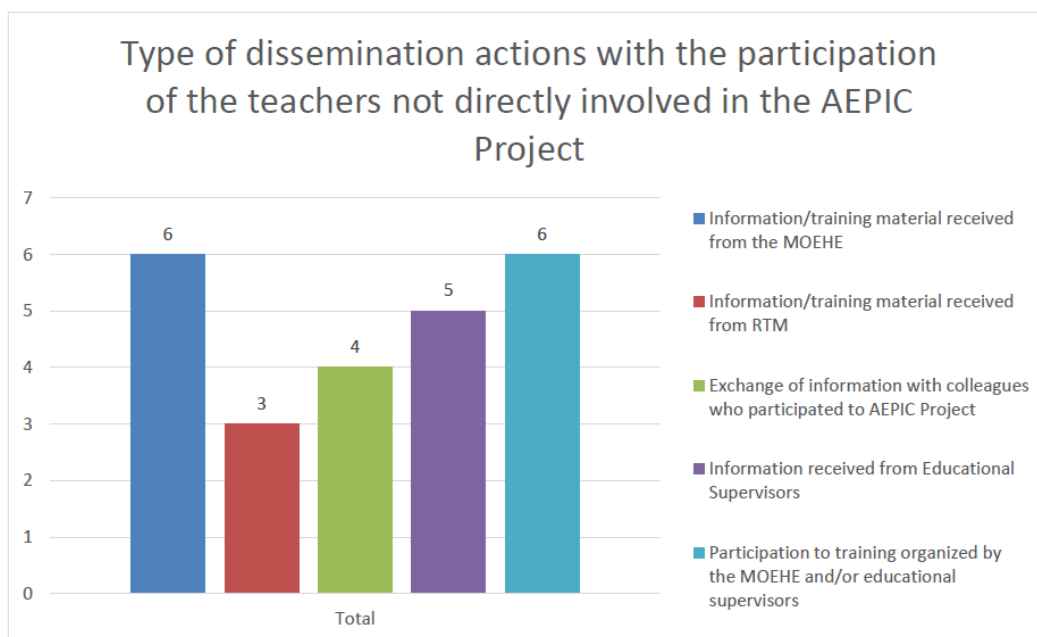
Overall, with regard to the continuity of the Reggio Emilia Approach in the 7 pilot schools, the **greatest obstacles** which arose from the questionnaire were: limited economic resources for the training and teaching activities, the lack of follow up from RTM once the Project was concluded, the pandemic which hindered group activities and interaction, the turn-over of trained teachers, the lack of adequate times in the approach and the overload of work. The greatest obstacles to approach sustainability for EFA Program schools are: some families that don't cooperate enough, the limited space in the classrooms and in some cases the lack of green areas, the lack of training opportunities for updates, some issues with conformity of approach with the school principals, in some case the limited number of teachers which in the total of field visits was of just 1 teacher for the EFA Program schools, as they are individual preschool classes.

«Just one teacher for the whole day and 25 children: this is the main issue. I feel under pressure and not able to adequately follow all students for the whole time while they are in class».

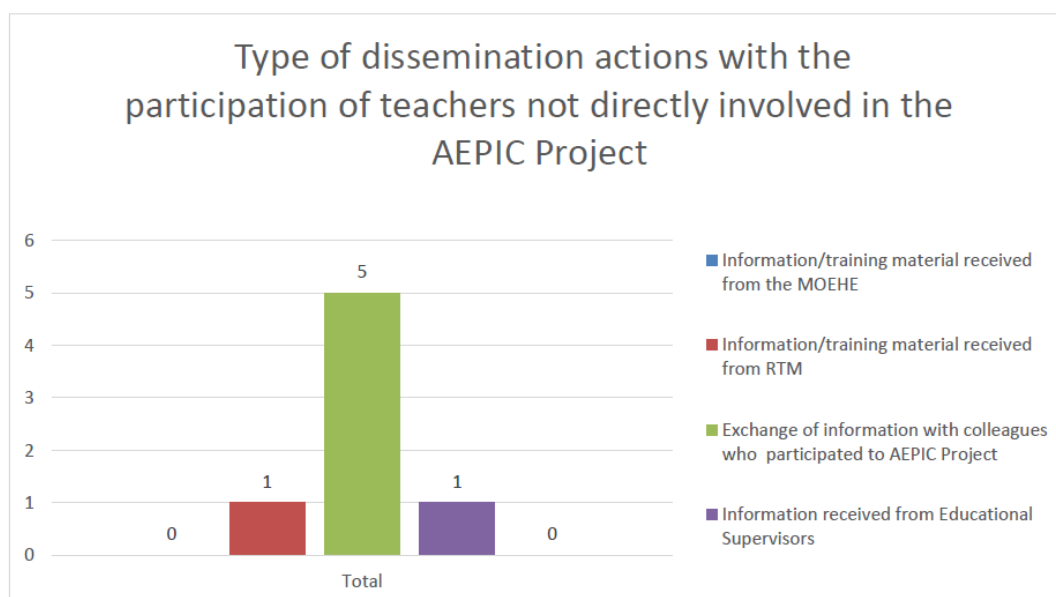
Teacher, EFA Program School

Having invested in the training of supervisors and having continued doing so through the PACE Project represented an important element of sustainability. The project had 5 of the 16 supervisors present during the AEPIC implementation period involved in training activities; a larger number was involved through dissemination events. The PACE Project has involved, with different modalities, the total number of 34 supervisors now present. This is confirmed by the data collected in the EFA Program schools, where the training organized by the MOEHE through the supervisors seems to have been the main modality with which the method has been disseminated inside schools. Differently, in the pilot schools the main modality seems to have been that of exchange among teachers.

Graph no. 20 - Schools of the EFA Program



Graph no. 21 - 7 Pilot Schools



«As a supervisor, I see that the project has reached sustainability, we still implement the Reggio Emilia Approach and I personally try to convey the approach of the project to all colleagues and teachers, always and on a

constant basis. There is no issue in terms of project sustainability because it depends on the skills and on the use of economical materials in the educational process, and it also supports the recycling of materials»

Supervisor

The PACE project has represented an important element of continuity for the AEPIC Project by strongly supporting the sustainability of the results achieved. The pilot schools of the AEPIC Project have been taken as a model during the PACE Project by means of pedagogical exchange activities. Some of the schools involved in the PACE Project are directly connected to the pilot schools of the AEPIC Project: these are the schools of the Patriarchates, which have experienced the involvement of other kindergartens besides the ones that were already involved in AEPIC and another three kindergartens in the refugee camps flagged by IBDA.

The complementarity of principles and methodologies of the Reggio Emilia Approach with what is included in the Kindergarten Teacher's Manual represents a strong element of sustainability. However, the Reggio Emilia Approach, though it is mentioned, does not seem to have been explicitly adopted, as already explained. The progressive adoption of this manual by all the teachers, and the fact it represents the core of the present day Palestinian curriculum for early childhood is an important factor that will allow the capillary dissemination of the included principles, dealing with the topic of active learning.

The aspect of dissemination, which had been underlined in the Project's final evaluation, has been recovered and strengthened through the PACE Project by mainly working on the issue of disseminating the Reggio Emilia Approach by involving the University of Al-Quds that has a course on Early Childhood dedicated to future teachers. The University has committed in the dissemination of information material on the Reggio Emilia Approach and the BECRC experience. By so doing, the PACE Project has further facilitated the new method going beyond the limited environment of schools.

With regards to the sustainability of the **Forum** on Early Childhood of Bethlehem, the schools that answered to the questionnaire have reported that the pandemic has had a very negative effect on the continuity of meeting and events, as well as the lack of follow-up, communication and the turnover of teachers in the schools participating to it. Moreover, as already stated, the effective participation of the MOEHE to the Forum has been considered limited and one of the schools considered sustainability at risk without the support of RTM in terms of launching initiatives and coordination. To this respect other pilot schools have proven more optimistic, particularly the private schools, which pointed out that RTM has not been coordinating the Forum for some time but the exchanges have continued with the support of a group coordinator who is elected on a regular basis.

From this point of view the BECRC can offer support for the continuity of the **Forum** as it represents a place to meet and exchange experiences among schools, apart from a being a tool capable of facilitating the implementation of joint activities such as the event organized in November 2021 in Beit Sahour (organized through the PACE Project). The BECRC has actually been the element allowing the pilot schools to meet again after the interruption of exchanges due to the pandemic. As a matter of fact the BECRC potential for sustainability, albeit outside the analysis of this evaluation, seems to be good in that it is an institutional initiative- the idea arose from the study visit in Italy when some representatives of the MOEHE visited the REMIDA centre of Reggio Emilia-; it is located inside the Public School for Early Childhood of Bethlehem, which bears its costs, where the Bethlehem Training Centre, one of the training centres for in-service teachers, is annexed and

can avail itself of the BECRC experience in its training activities. Moreover, the two present coordinators have been employed in 2019 and are civil servants of the Ministry.

The role of the **Training Centre of Bethlehem**, taking care of in-service training of supervisors and other teachers of the early childhood school²⁹, plays a strategic role for the sustainability of the Reggio Emilia Approach. According to the person in charge of the Centre, the Reggio Emilia Approach is an integral part of the training provided, to both public and private schools. For its training sessions the Centre always uses the presentation booklet of the early childhood school of Bethlehem created through the AEPIC Project, where the experience of change inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach is illustrated. The centre is also linked to the BECRC and many of the training activities are in relation to the use of scrap materials and visits to the public kindergarten annexed to the Training Centre. However, the involvement of the Training Centre in the Project has rather been indirect and occurred thanks to the annexed Public School's teachers themselves being present and involved in the training. **A better planned and structured involvement would have allowed for greater spillover effects.** In this respect, it must be pointed out that the Emilia Romagna region has recently approved a Project of RTM for the requalification of the Centre, in a perspective of continuity with the two Projects AEPIC and PACE.

«During each meeting in our teacher preparation courses, we provide an overview of the Reggio Emilia Approach and connect the different educational strategies that we deal with to the contents and principles of the Approach itself. When we started dissemination of the Reggio Emilia Approach, the first target group was made up of the kindergarten supervisors. All the early childhood in the West Bank have attended the training centre. We have organized workshops for them and have explained our experience and what we have seen and learnt in Italy».

Training Centre of Bethlehem

With reference to the **refurbishment carried out in the 7 Pilot Schools and in the Schools of the EFA Program**, as well as the furnishings and equipment provided and the teaching materials supplied (stationary, painting materials, toys), the schools were positively able to preserve these outputs. In particular, most of the principals and teachers that answered the questionnaire handed out during the field visits were optimistic about the financial sustainability in this respect. The preserving of work and equipment, as well as the supply of the necessary materials, are guaranteed by the budget of each school, the tuition fees paid by families in the case of private schools and the voluntary contributions from families. Moreover, emphasis was put on the importance of a correct use from staff and children, who are constantly made aware about this.

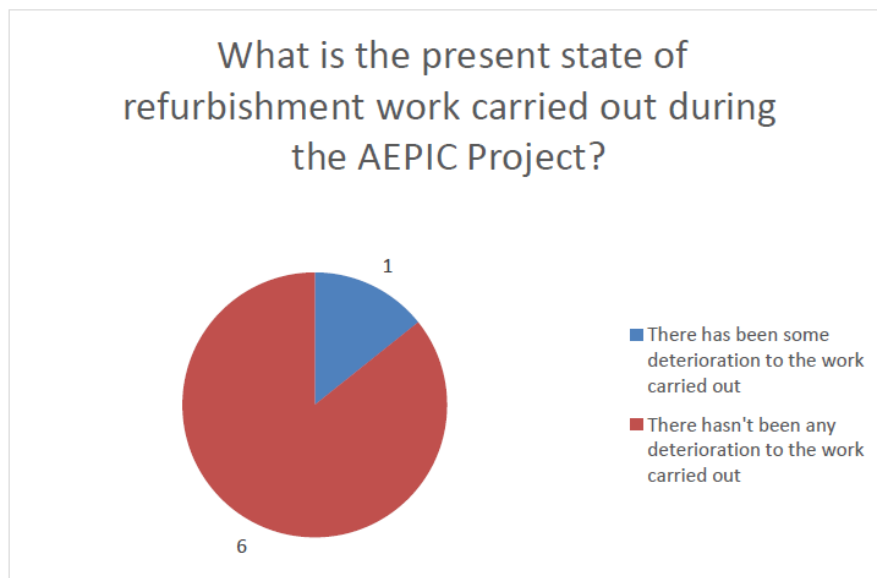
The field visits to the schools of the selected sample also focused on direct observation and the perception of the beneficiaries with regard to the **state of preservation** of the refurbishment carried out and the furnishings and equipment supplied.

As regards refurbishment, they consisted in: access ramps for wheelchairs, reorganization of the school spaces according to the principles of the Reggio Emilia Approach, renovation of toilets to make them child-friendly, extension of the existing classes, repainting, emergency exits, renovation

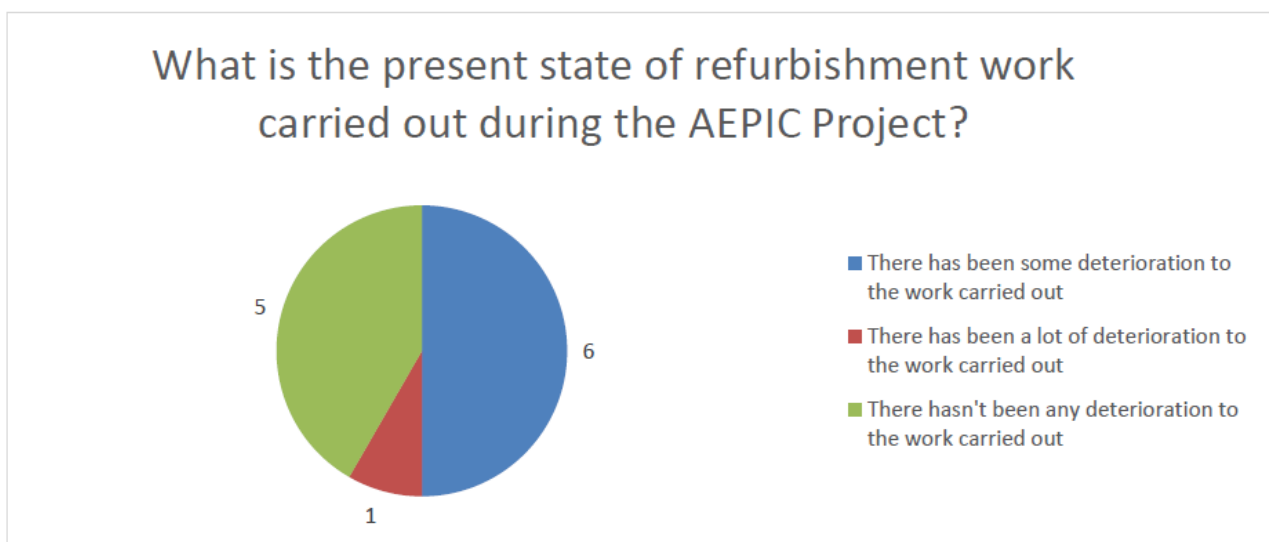
²⁹ The Training Centre of Bethlehem provides training services to the teachers of the Governorate of Bethlehem and outskirts of Jerusalem, North Hebron, South Hebron and the city of Yatta.

works to the outdoor areas. The following graph shows that the present state of works carried out is good for the pilot schools and quite sufficient for the EFA Program schools, although for the latter some deterioration has taken place. The range of options was: a) “There has not been any deterioration”; b) “There has been some deterioration”; c) “There has been a lot of deterioration”.

Graph no. 22 - Pilot Schools

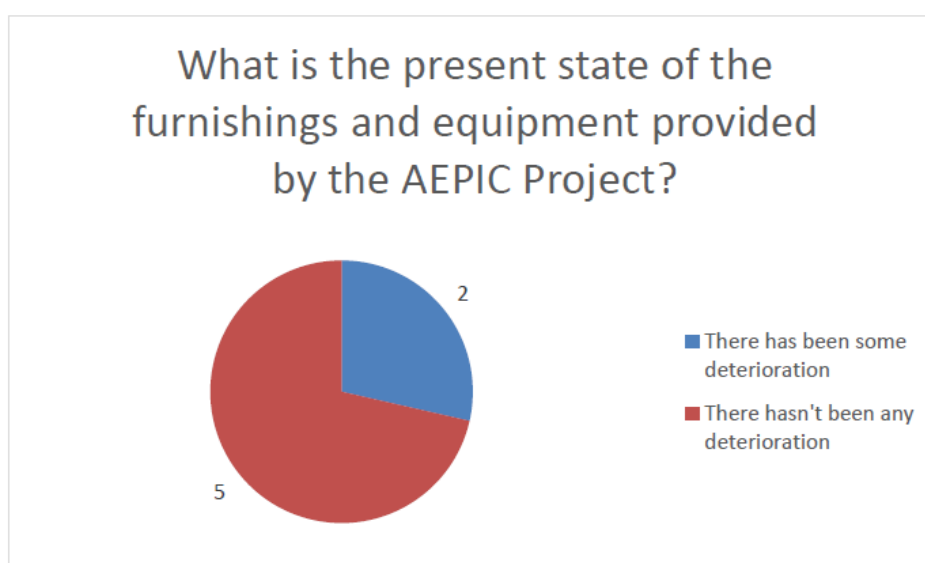


Graph no. 23 - EFA Program Schools

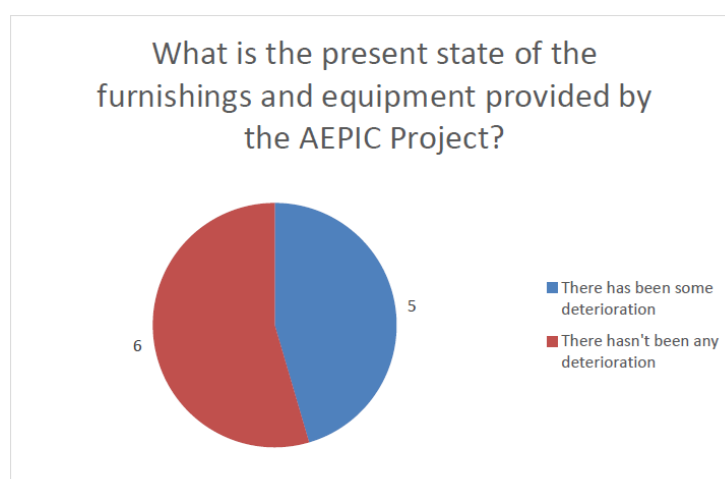


As far as the furnishings and equipment supplied are concerned (chairs, desks, benches, light tables, carpets, pillows, playground equipment, reading, painting, garden and kitchen equipment), collected data shows that the present state of preservation is good for the pilot schools and quite sufficient for the EFA Programme schools.

Graph no. 24 - Pilot Schools

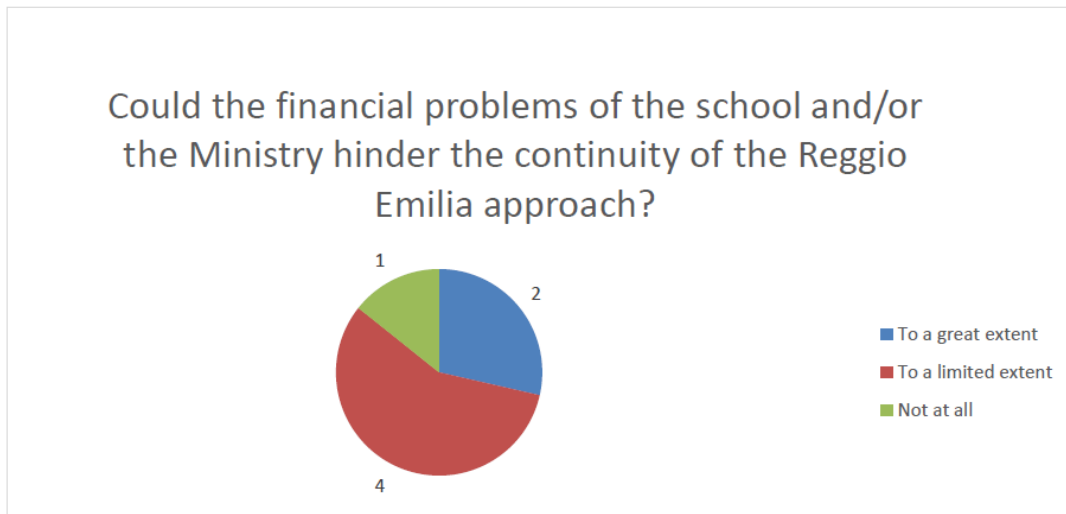


Graph no. 25 - EFA Program Schools

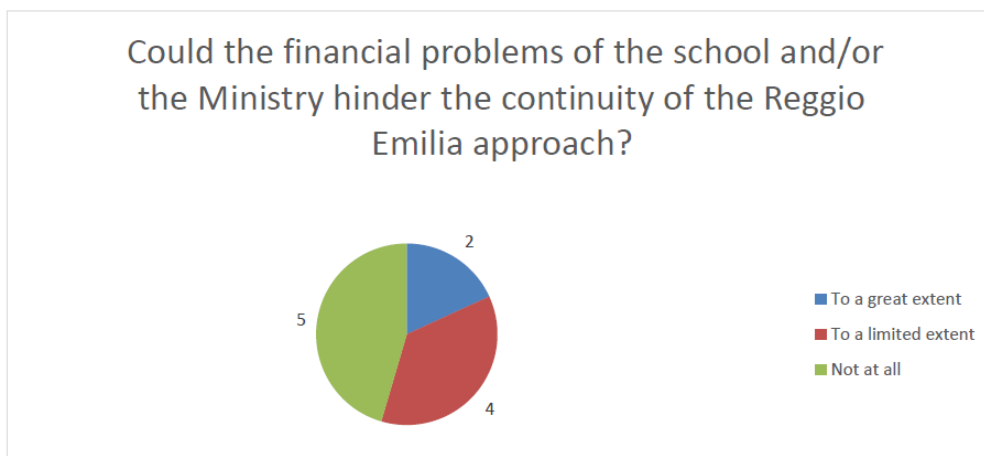


Concerning the **potential effect of the limited financial resources** of the school and/or the Ministry, these do not seem to be perceived as relevant obstacles for the continuity of the new method inside the schools.

Graph no. 26 - Pilot Schools



Graph no. 27 - EFA Program Schools



2.6 CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES: GENDER, VULNERABLE GROUPS, ENVIRONMENT

Evaluation question 6.1: *To what extent has the Project integrated gender mainstreaming?*

Evaluation question 6.2: *To what extent has the Project taken into consideration the inclusion of vulnerable groups, with specific focus on children with special needs?*

Evaluation question 6.3: *To what extent has the Project mainstreamed environmental sustainability?*

CONCLUSION 20 – Gender mainstreaming has not explicitly been taken into account, notwithstanding the large participation of women to the Project activities. The topic of inclusion of children with special needs has not been tackled, with the exception of some works carried out to facilitate disabled children's access to buildings. Instead, the inclusion of vulnerable groups was well integrated with regard to children from disadvantaged and high conflict areas. To this respect, the educational approach proposed might have positive spillover effects on the development of children exposed to violence and on the educational modalities of parents at

home. The Project strongly integrated socio-cultural aspects. The environmental dimension has been well integrated in terms of approach, methodologies and renewal of spaces.

The Government has committed to contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda Objectives. These include the achievement of gender equality (Ob. no. 5) and an inclusive education (Ob. no. 4). In 2018 the budget of the MOEHE included 356.4 million dollars for gender; and 19.8 million dollars for children with special needs³⁰.

Starting from 2005, different Gender Units have been established within all the Palestinian public institutions³¹. These units work in close contact with the Ministry for Equal Opportunities (Ministry of Women's Affairs) and promote the gender approach within the different Ministries, including the Ministry of Education. The 2017 MOEHE report³² states that the gender gap has been filled in some sectors such as the enrolment to all levels of education, where girls are more than boys, also in the preschool sector.

Table (1): Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) of students in Preschool's KG2						
	Baseline year 2017			2022 Targets		
	Male	Female	M&F	Male	Female	M&F
Pales-tine	72.2%	72.8%	72.5%	92.4%	93.1%	92.7%
West Bank	72.3%	73.5%	72.9%	92.8%	93.6%	93.2%
Gaza Strip	72%	72%	72%	91.8%	92.4%	91.8%

The above data has been confirmed during the interviews to the MOEHE and with regards to preschool education, where the issue of poor enrolment of girls is not reported. However, the same ESSP 2017-2022 believed it was necessary to establish a series of targets concerning gender in the field of education and the 2019 Annual Sector Review³³ called for several actions such as gender mainstreaming training of teachers and principals, studies on school drop-out of girls from marginalised areas and the creation of specific gender indicators for the education sector.

Gender mainstreaming has not been explicitly taken into account in the AEPIC Project. Although there was large participation of women to the activities, since all the teachers and supervisors were females, there hasn't been a specific gender approach (lack of indicators and disaggregated data, lack of gender components in the training sessions, lack of actions aimed at improving relations between men and women). The interviewed teachers mentioned some aspects in relation to gender (lack of gender categorization for games and colours; strong involvement of mothers in the teaching activities), however, specific actions on gender mainstreaming addressed to the school staff and the families could have been envisaged, mainly because it was a project with important components of training, awareness and capacity building. Notwithstanding the poor integration of a specific gender approach, the Project has in any case contributed indirectly to the improvement of the female

³⁰ Ministry of Education and Higher Education (2019) Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2017-2022: Annual Education Sector Review (ASR).

³¹ Ministry of Education and Higher Education (2014) Education Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) 2014-2019: A Learning Nation.

³² The Ministry of Education and Higher Education, The State of Palestine (2017) The Monitoring and Evaluation System for the Education Sector Strategic Plan ESSP 2017-2022.

³³ Ministry of Education and Higher Education (2019) Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2017-2022: Annual Education Sector Review (ASR).

condition, favouring equal relations between men and women in the trainings implemented and improving the professional skills of the women involved and therefore, potentially, their future job opportunities.

As far as the inclusion of **children with special needs is concerned**, the Ministry has adopted a policy of integration of students with disabilities in the schools by means of an inclusive education program based on the judicial framework of the legislation on the rights of people with disabilities (n. 4, enacted in 1999) to guarantee that people with disabilities are granted all their rights, including the right to education. The focus ranges from the adaptation of spaces to the creation of documents aimed at facilitating inclusion at the school level and at the broader community level ³⁴, to the provision of technical support (appointment and training of dedicated educational staff; consultation of experts for the curriculum review and adjustment; guidelines, etc.).

According to UNICEF data (2021), the enrolment rate of children with functional impairment to preschools³⁵ is 21.9% compared to 39.5% which is the enrolment rate for children without functional impairment belonging to the same age range. Moreover, the availability of data concerning children with different disabilities and special needs is a particularly critical aspect according to the MOEHE itself and as previously pointed out by a study from UNICEF (2018), which raised the issue of lack of data concerning children with special needs in the preschool age range and requesting the collection of data on access to preschool education by these children, given the importance of preventive diagnosis and early intervention. As reported by the MOEHE during the evaluation, several attempts to collect data in early childhood schools have not been successful due to difficulties in administering the investigations and in the interpretation of data. To this respect, the importance of cooperation with the Ministry of Health for a correct definition and diagnosis, as well as the adequate training of teachers who forward data in terms of appropriate conceptualisation of the children with different abilities and special needs.

The AEPIC Project has not adequately taken into consideration the topic of children with disabilities, if not through refurbishment in the schools which, as proven by data collected through the questionnaires, in many cases consisted in the construction of access ramps for the disabled. In addition, a reflection on the topic of inclusion of children with special needs was launched in the context of some training sessions. However, no specific actions have been taken nor has an impact been found in this area, in terms of greater inclusiveness or greater staff skills. Exception is made for the *Licensing Instructions* developed by PACE, including indications for the inclusion of children with special needs.

On the other hand, the issue of the inclusion of vulnerable categories has been taken into consideration more than that of the access to preschool education by children from disadvantaged areas and in some cases characterized by strong conflicts (Hebron 2 and Area C). The urgent need for greater inclusion in preschool education was underscored by UNICEF (2021), highlighting how the preschool enrolment rate by children from poor families is 26% compared to 44.5% being the enrolment rate of children in the same age range who come from wealthy families.

From this perspective, it is worth highlighting **the impact of an educational approach such as the Reggio Emilia Approach can have in situations of conflict**, where the children are exposed to the individual and family psychological stress that violence entails. The Reggio Emilia Approach, also in virtue of its history, gives a central role to **education to peace** and the **promotion of positive and peaceful relations** among the children, with adults, the environment and the community in a

³⁴ See the inclusive education policy adopted by the ministry in 1997 as part of the EFA policy

³⁵ According to UNICEF (2021), functional difficulties refer to a child impaired in at least one of the following areas: hearing, sight, movement, coordination, learning, playing, behavioural control

broader sense, thus contributing to develop of the ability to cooperate, respect others and conflict resolution. This approach has successfully been experimented in other post-conflict contexts such as in Kosovo.³⁶

According to UNESCO “quality education alleviates the psychosocial impact of conflict and disasters by providing a sense of normality, stability, structure and hope for the future”³⁷. It is therefore possible to say that the project has contributed to facilitating resilience in the children, namely a subject's ability to give a positive reply to stress and adverse conditions, providing them the material resources and the stimuli they need in this delicate phase of their development; promoting their emotional development; promoting the development of a supportive environment, made up of stable and positive relationships³⁸. According to a considerable body of literature, resilient children have greater abilities to deal with difficult situations in a positive way.

Finally, mention should be made of **the strong school-family interaction which the project has fostered and which has led, indirectly, to practice a kind of *parent training* that can have an impact on the educational methods used by parents in the domestic environment**. In this regard, it should be recalled that, according to a UNICEF study (2021), more than one in five children (20.1%) in Palestine suffer severe physical punishment, 87.5% experience forms of psychological violence and only 7.4% have received non-violent discipline. In this context, according to the same study, the children of refugees are more likely to suffer severe physical punishment (24.5%) than the children of non-refugees (17%). Similarly, children in poorer families are more than twice as likely to suffer severe physical punishment (29.9%) as those in richer families (11.4%).

The Project has strongly integrated **socio-cultural aspects**, fostering an environment of collaboration with the Christian minorities present in the country. In this regard, it is important to underline that the main service providers in the early childhood education sector are schools founded and managed by Christian minorities. The Project involved and supported these minorities, also fostering dialogue with public schools attended by the Muslim majority and collaboration with the competent institutions.

The project has appropriately integrated the environmental dimension. The spaces have been renovated with green areas inside and outside the school and the topic of interaction and respect for the environment has widely been taken into account through the proposed educational method. In addition, the use of recycled and scrap materials has been decisively promoted with the creation of toys for the children and in the implementation of classroom refurbishment work. These aspects have then been amplified with the institution of the BERCR through the PACE Project.

The rehabilitation of the garden outside the school has had a great impact on children's education and awareness raising towards the environment. Moreover, the environmental activities that were carried out, such as agriculture and children's follow-up on plants, have favoured their perception of nature.

Principal, Pilot School

³⁶ https://www.rtm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/PEDAKOS_ToR_Interim-Ext-Eval.pdf

³⁷ UNESCO (2015) Investing against Evidence: The Global State of Early Childhood Care and Education. UNESCO Publishing

³⁸ <https://www.child-encyclopedia.com/resilience#how-can-we-boost-resilience-children>; Werner, E. E., & Smith, R. S. (1992). *Overcoming the odds: High risk children from birth to adulthood*. Cornell University Press.

3. GOOD PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 GOOD PRACTICES

The evaluation identified the following good practices.

1. Project relevance

The issues addressed by the project and the objectives are very relevant in the context of the country and to a certain extent have anticipated processes leading to a new focus on the topic of early childhood and preschool education and that have been accompanied by the development of *policies* and laws. The needs which arose during the project design were confirmed by stakeholders during the evaluation. Therefore, the project responds to the actual and coherent needs at the time of its formulation and which are still current today. Moreover, the partners have catalysed a new approach to preschool education in the Country, integrating elements which have then converged and resulted complementary to what is defined today as the “Palestinian preschool curriculum”.

2. Focus on the process

Coherently with what is specified in the Reggio Emilia Approach, the players responsible for the dissemination of this approach in the project with all the stakeholders, have done so in respect of the principles supported by approach itself and not only based on the result, which somehow represents an epistemological revolution, not limited to those involved in the learning process but also with those responsible for measuring its results and impact and, before that, outlining its horizons. The pedagogical expertise involved has also been crucial in being able to read, select and be present in the “proximal area” of change.

3. Participation and belonging

Since the start, in the design phase, the project was characterized by a strong participatory spirit characterized by a careful analysis of needs. During the implementation phase, there was an active and participatory revision of the proposed approach, which was put into the context and then contaminated by the ideas of the participants, resulting in the formulation of a "their" method: «We have integrated Reggio Emilia into our contents». This aspect was particularly appreciated by the various stakeholders interviewed because, contrary to what sometimes happens, they did not feel obliged to adhere to a "foreign" approach "dropped from above". On the contrary, they felt they could take part in a process of exchange and mutual learning. The strong sense of ownership that has resulted lays the foundations for greater sustainability of the project.

4. Technical support and organizational efficiency

The development of “personal method” starting from the one proposed, was also possible thanks to the strong technical support of the project experts, who made their skills available during the various meetings and aimed at deepening the issues that emerged from time to time, facilitating the understanding of the approach by the various beneficiaries, from teachers to parents, as well as supporting the joint elaboration of solutions to the emerging difficulties. Apart from the content, the organization was also highly appreciated for the punctuality and regularity of meetings and for the availability and flexibility offered.

5. Union of diversities

In a fragmented context such as the West Bank and, within it, its educational context, the project has had the merit and the ability to work with different types of schools, institutions, cultures and

religious backgrounds and have them work together with one another, activating previously non-existent exchange processes, especially at the level of "government schools having a dialogue with private schools". In particular, the project brought together 3 public schools, 3 private schools - one belonging to the Latin patriarchate, one to the Orthodox patriarchate and one to the Catholic patriarchate - in addition to a school in a refugee camp. Moreover, each school has seen different generations of teachers interact with each other, more or less structured and open to change. The added value reported was learning to overcome some barriers, to work together and to share information. The involvement of the various actors along the decision-making pyramid meant that the change promoted met with support and coherence on the various fronts, favouring its success.

6. Effectiveness of the proposed educational approach

Virtually all of the people met during the evaluation reported that they appreciated the effectiveness of the proposed educational approach: from teachers to principals, from educational supervisors to MOEHE officials. The new method has allowed to revise the role of the different elements in the educational context: that of the child, the teacher, the parent, the school space and the surrounding environment, placing the child, and the relationship between the teacher and the child, at the centre. Aspects relating to the organisation of school environments, small-group work and the documentation process were considered to be innovative and of considerable educational potential. The particular value of such an educational approach should be stressed in a context in which children are exposed on a daily basis to a situation of more or less explicit conflict and to the personal and family stress that this entails.

«Now I document the children's words, for example when they describe their drawings: this allows me to understand the way they think and at the same time it gives them the opportunity to express themselves and ask questions. This activates an exchange of ideas between teacher and child, consolidating the relationship».

Teacher

«Dividing children into sub-groups allows them to interact among each other as a group and also to interact with the surrounding environment, which is also divided and organized into different educational corners. This allows them to think and work in a participatory and cooperative way, achieving new discoveries».

Teacher

7. Involvement of parents and non-violent education

Involvement of parents is one of the key aspects of the Reggio Emilia Approach and it has played a fundamental role in this project because, starting from an initial position at the opposite ends compared to that of parents, who were initially very reticent towards the new approach (many Palestinian parents perceive the preschool system as something that, coming before school, imitates its educational objectives and functions), it reaches a position of inclusion in school activities as well as in educational activities in general. The value of school-family interaction is to be sought not only in a greater participation of parents in the educational development of the child but also in an indirect exercise of parent training that is triggered and that assumes particular relevance in the Palestinian context, where more than one in five children (20.1%) suffer severe physical punishment and 87.5% experience forms of psychological aggression in the domestic environment. Thanks to the Reggio Emilia Approach and the project, not only parents were able to

understand the importance of their educational function, but to learn and experience a new educational style, purely non-violent and attentive to the evolutionary needs of the child.

8. Inclusion of supervisors

Work with supervisors, as well as with teachers, has been crucial given their role, namely the institution closest to schools at territorial level, and also considering that they are a pillar from the point of view of sustainability of the introduced method. In addition to strengthening their skills, the Project has fostered a new conceptualization of their function, which was no longer perceived solely as a function of control but also of support for schools and of identifying the positive aspects and the progress they made in achieving better quality standards.

9. Environmental sustainability

Using the environment as “third teacher”, the use, dissemination and consequent increased awareness of environmental waste and the importance of recycling are broadly implemented. The use of these raw materials has seen the involvement of both children, teachers, principals and parents. These aspects of environmental sustainability introduced through the Project were then further strengthened through the PACE Project with the inauguration of the BCERC.

10. Opening of public preschool classes and inclusion of vulnerable groups

Through the opening of public pre-school classes in synergy with the MEAE-UNESCO EFA Program, the Project has promoted the extension of public pre-school services in disadvantaged areas, at risk of conflict and characterized by low schooling, redesigning the educational environment through a child-centred approach and disseminating innovative educational approaches. The social impact of this activity was important and demonstrated by the SROI analysis conducted during the evaluation. In this way, the project has fostered the inclusion of children from disadvantaged areas in preschool education.

11. Support for the development of an early childhood education center in Bethlehem

The AEPIC Project has launched an intense collaboration with the Public Kindergarten in Bethlehem, where a very good adoption of the Reggio Emilia approach was found through the evaluation. In addition, during the study visit to Italy, the MEAE and the Education Directorate of Bethlehem demonstrated a strong interest in the Reggio experience of the REMIDA Creative Recycling Center. This interest later allowed the creation of the BECRC - annexed to the Bethlehem Public School - through the PACE Project. In addition, one of the training centers for in-service teachers is also active at the school premises, the Bethlehem Training Center (TCB), currently being supported through funding from the Emilia-Romagna Region. The AEPIC Project thus launched the process of creating an educational center of national importance that works on the basis of a close synergy between the three actors that make it up: the School, the BECRC and the Training Center. The educational center now serves as an experimentation site for the Reggio Emilia Approach, where various pedagogical exchanges take place with other schools and materials (documentation and publications) are available for use by other Palestinian actors.

3.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation has made it possible to identify the recommendations described below, which may be useful for optimising the results achieved and increasing their sustainability. These recommendations could be part of the strategy of future interventions that the donor, the promoter or the partners wish to implement in the same field.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Develop a Project Theory of Change in relation to the Country Program of the implementing Body, capable of clarifying the underlying logic of the individual projects and the contribution made to the general objectives**

Responsible Body: Implementing body / Donor

We recommend developing a Theory of Change for the implementation of the Country Programme, which can explain the underlying logic of individual projects, or how projects contribute to long-term objectives in the field of intervention and in the country. In this way, the individual projects can be more easily linked to the ToC and the Country Programme and possibly include more standardised indicators according to the fields of intervention, which may also facilitate the periodic collection and monitoring of data and which may be complementary to those of the institution concerned, in this case the MOEHE. In the context of this project, it has been difficult to monitor the indicators of the objectives due to unavailability of reliable data or the difficult access to verification sources. This situation could be improved by having standardised and recurrent indicators, setting up their systematic data collection.

2. **Develop the Logical Framework more accurately, with specific reference to clarifying the outcomes and to the indicators, which must be relevant and measurable.**

Responsible Body: Implementing body / Donor

Greater attention to the definition of the Specific Objective is recommended. This has to be an outcome achievable by the end of the Project and not an action strategy or activity. As regards the horizontal logic of the Logical Framework, greater accuracy in defining indicators is necessary. The results and objectives should be accompanied by effectiveness and impact indicators, that is indicators that can prove the changes occurred and the benefits produced by the initiative. Various indicators of the Logical Framework were rather efficiency indicators, i.e. indicators reflecting the achievement of an activity or an output. Moreover, several indicators were not consistent with the outcome they intended to measure or they were not however the best options to choose from compared to the SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound). Finally, the indicators lacked a baseline and in several cases the final target value expected, which does not allow for measurement.

For the future, it is suggested that indicators be more focused on:

- indicators consistent with the result/objective they are linked to, therefore the indicator must clearly and directly demonstrate the achievement of the result;
- SMART indicators: *Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound*;
- correct formulation in terms of: variable of the change (what changes), its quantification (how much changes); target group of reference (who is involved in the change); time (how long or when do we expect we can detect the indicator?); tracking (where can I find the change?).

In the design phase, it is also recommended not to extend too much the range of action because there is a risk of leaving some aspects on the side-lines or carrying them out in a generic way. Sometimes it would be better to have fewer side activities to focus efforts and energies on a number of aspects: this allows for the building of a greater impact and a more solid ownership. Several of the aspects of AEPIC were then developed by the subsequent PACE project. If this second project had not taken place, some aspects might have run the risk of remaining incomplete.

3. Strengthen synergies with other international players active in education and preschool education in the country, both at the design and implementing stage.

Responsible Body: Implementing Body /Local counterpart

For the future, greater synergy with other international players active in the field of pre-school education and education is recommended. The Project has not established significant synergies, for a number of reasons referred to in the "Efficiency" Chapter, beyond the interaction with UNESCO within the EFA Program and which in any case has not resulted in an exchange of experience or pedagogical approaches. These synergies should take place both at the design stage -in order to have the opportunity to develop an initiative which capitalizes results obtained through other interventions and existing good practices- and at the implementation stage, to allow continuous improvement through comparison and maximum dissemination of the results obtained. Although participation to the PTWG has allowed a good dissemination of awareness of the Reggio Emilia Approach among other actors involved in the group, this interaction did not result in any effective methodological exchange, let alone joint actions. In this regard, it will be very important to strengthen the collaboration between RTM and the World Bank which is currently carrying out a Project concerning a training course for early childhood school teachers (in-service training) to regulate private sector teachers who are not currently graduates and therefore do not have the required qualification.

4. Overcome the ad-hoc project approach in favour of a programmatic Country approach especially in the case of initiatives with the aim of triggering cultural changes.

Responsible Body: Executing body / Donor

The limited duration of projects linked to donors' funding mechanisms is an obstacle for projects which aim not only at introducing a new pedagogical approach but in fact at starting a cultural change at several levels, which affects both institutions (Ministry, schools, kindergartens) and individuals (teachers, supervisors, principals, parents and, last but not least, the children). These are processes of change which need a long time and to which various initiatives can contribute. In this sense, the transition from the perspective of individual projects to a more programmatic vision would be ideal.

5. Develop ongoing monitoring and evaluation frameworks for development initiatives

Responsible Body: Implementing Body / Donor / Local counterpart

At the start of the project, no ad hoc monitoring and evaluation tool was developed as a matrix clearly linked to the output indicators and outcomes of the logical framework linked to a data collection system (there are also open source ones). This instrument could have provided a real-time overview of the values achieved at a given time and of the progress compared to the three-year values set. It would always be useful to have such an instrument, so to be able to report immediately the values reached for each output and outcome and verify the progress with respect to the objectives set. This should be a user-friendly tool for the use of staff and possibly partners, who can thus be kept informed about the progress of the project. The local partnership of the AEPIC project did not seem aware of the existence of monitoring tools under the initiative. Although this can be attributed to the time elapsed from the end of the Project to the evaluation, the interviews conducted suggest that the local partners were not involved in the monitoring exercise with respect to the Project indicators. In addition, although the Reggio Emilia Approach deviates from an assessment and measurement of acquired skills, it would be important to carry out an assessment and document the learning processes of teachers and supervisors, also through informal methods

such as focus groups, this would be useful for the staff itself and also in view of an ongoing evaluation of the results of the Project.

More generally, the MOEHE's competences in terms of monitoring and evaluating educational achievements and in relation to the ability to measure the performance of the new Palestinian preschool curriculum need to be further strengthened, as well as the ability to collect and manage data related to the indicators of the M&V system.

6. Enhance the inclusion of children with special needs and greater focus on gender in international cooperation projects

Responsible Body: Executing body / Donor

Given the government's commitment to the inclusion of children with functional difficulties, the plan is certainly ambitious and lacks the instruments, mainly financial, for its full implementation. A project such as the one evaluated, which aims to promote inclusion, should always integrate a dimension that takes into account children with special needs and encourages their inclusion in the school system, including preschool.

The gender component would also deserve more attention and integration in training and awareness-raising activities. Given the target audience of the project (principals, teachers, parents), the inclusion of issues such as gender relations, equality and empowerment of women could have had many relapse effects.

USEFUL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CONTINUATION OF THE INITIATIVE

7. Promote strategies for the dissemination of the Reggio Emilia Approach

Responsible Body: Implementing body / Local counterpart

Different recommendations have been identified with the aim of promoting the dissemination of the approach, this being, in itself, a recommendation. The dissemination aspect, which was underlined in the final evaluation of the Project, was taken up and strengthened through the PACE Project, where more work was done on the issue of the dissemination of the Reggio approach. Some suggestions were made to further encourage the dissemination of the method.

a. Support the process related to the dissemination and implementation of the Licensing criteria and materials related to the Reggio Emilia Approach

Make recommendations to the MOEHE to ensure a wide and correct dissemination of the *Licensing Instructions For Private Preschools 2020/2021* in schools and the incorporation of these within schools that have worked with AEPIC (and PACE). The workshops to present the guidelines organized by RTM and the role of supervisors will have to be supported in this sense, as well as a correct training on how to apply the contents of the Reggio Emilia Approach that are mentioned. Far from being a list of things the school should have, the criteria refer to the ability to use certain objects for educational purposes. In this context, it was also suggested that it would be appropriate to digitize the guidelines and materials attached to the Reggio Emilia Approach. As experienced during the evaluation, the E-school Platform seems to be a good channel of communication and dissemination.

b. Widen the access to training on the RE Approach through the existing structures

Several Departments and Directorates of the MOEHE have been aware of the added value of the Reggio Emilia Approach, so it will be important to integrate in a coherent way in the different existing channels in order to allow a wide dissemination of the method, which, moreover, appears to be completely complementary to the new Palestinian curriculum on preschool education. These channels are represented by: 1) the existing 6 training centres for in-service teachers; 2) the NIET of

the MOEHE which prepares the training modules adopted by the supervisors and also deals directly with the training of teachers at the various levels of education; 3) the Universities which have active degree courses for teaching in kindergartens and preschools. In this context, RTM will be able to further consolidate the collaboration with the Al Quds University, which in the PACE Project has consisted in the dissemination of material and experience of the BECRC but in the future could foresee the development of training modules within the graduation courses; 4) the World Bank Project mentioned above; 5) the BECRC, which is an institutional initiative that according to many stakeholders should be replicated in several Governorates, also for the promotion of environmental sustainability issues.

8. Think of sustainable modalities of carrying out continuous training and updates for supervisors and teachers trained in the two Projects

Responsible Body: Executing body / Local counterpart

Several respondents stressed the need for regular updates on the Reggio Emilia Approach. This is particularly true for some public schools. These may include sharing new developments in the RE Approach, so that teaching techniques can be continuously updated. Sharing may take place through regular meetings, exchange visits, scientific conferences, and workshops, both externally and internally, using the resources made available at local level, such as the trained supervisors and the training centre in Bethlehem.

9. Reconsider the role and functioning of the Forum of Early Childhood of Bethlehem

Responsible Body: Local partners

The Public Private Forum on Early Childhood launched by the AEPIC Project was significantly important for the educational exchanges between schools; however, it was not extended beyond the 7 pilot schools, the MOEHE does not actively participate and is currently showing little dynamism, partly because of the effects of the pandemic. In addition, the Forum is completely unknown outside the Bethlehem area. Its impact as a replicable service management model is therefore very limited. In this sense, it is to be expected that the Forum will be able to operate more based on concrete opportunities for collaboration (events, educational exchanges, activities linked to the BECRC) rather than on strategic programmes and action plans which could be hardly sustainable.

10. Study and plan the involvement of primary schools in the RE Approach

Responsible Body: Implementing body / Italian Partners and counterpart

Many stakeholders have pointed out the gap that can be created between the early childhood schools that apply the Reggio Emilia Approach and the teaching methodology of primary schools, which is more unidirectional, mnemonic and traditional. An option could be exposing to the Reggio Emilia approach also the primary school teachers and the concerned MOEHE officials. The experience, already present in some schools in Italy, is also strongly advocated by the Reggio Children itself. The supervisors and teachers that have already undergone training may play a central role also in this respect.

11. Reconsider the selection criteria concerning the classes to involve in future projects.

Responsible Body: Implementing body

In case of a new project, several stakeholders have recommended that this be addressed to some schools taken in their entirety, rather than only one class per school. Although this may represent the risk of creating "model kindergartens" without exposing others to the approach, it may mitigate

the problem of turnover, each class will have a trained teacher, and each teacher trained, in turn, will find an organized class and materials available in line with the training received. In doing so, the needs of each preschool should be taken into account and financial support should also be proportionate to the needs detected.

12. Continue the awareness raising initiatives addressed to families

Responsible Body: Local counterpart and local partners

Families usually expect early childhood schools to function as a sort of "preschool" where they can teach children the basics of reading, writing, and addition. Teachers and school management staff have been engaged in interactions with parents, making it clear that the teaching and learning processes in the early childhood schools are aimed at developing critical thinking through play, experimenting with materials, theatre, the surrounding environment and nature, and that this opens the way to a more effective learning than the "traditional" one. However, there is still much work to be done in this area, as reported by many of the teachers interviewed. Today, many parents, and society in general, reject the idea that you can learn through play or interaction with the environment. So there is still a need for awareness-raising in this regard, which can be continued by the teachers and the MOEHE itself.

13. Increase networking and coordination from the MOEHE with regards to the stakeholders in the educational sector, with specific reference to teachers' training.

Responsible Body: Local counterpart

For the teachers' training to be integrated, it is necessary to develop unified training for all the preschool education staff, including an action plan with qualification requirements and aspects of continuing vocational training. To this end, coordination by the MOEHE between all the stakeholders involved is necessary. It is strongly recommended to promote the partnership between the public and private sector, without which, in the absence of a strong involvement of the private sector and as advocated by the MOEHE itself, the right to pre-education is difficult to apply in the poorer areas of the West Bank. In this context, the opening of new training centres in other areas of the country was recommended. These could be accessed by teachers of public and private schools. The starting of specialized university programs for early childhood schools was also encouraged. It is important to continue to work in this area at the policy level. In particular, it has been pointed out that there are already discussions on the renewal of the system of skills assessment, including those of teachers, which should be based more on the description of skills, performance and qualitative results.

ANNEXES TO THE REPORT

- A. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE EVALUATION
- B. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY
- C. MATRIX OF EVALUATION
- D. LIST OF CONSULTED DOCUMENTS

- E. SROI CASE STUDY
- F. GUIDELINES FOR THE INTERVIEWS
- G. LIST OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED
- H. PARTICIPANTS TO THE FOCUS GROUPS
- I. PILOT SCHOOLS QUESTIONNAIRE
- J. E-SCHOOL PLATFORM QUESTIONNAIRE
- K. SROI QUESTIONNAIRE