



UNRWA's Salah el-Din shelter, Gaza, Gaza Strip. © 2026

Q1 Progress Report: Implementing the Colonna Report at UNRWA

January 2026 – March 2026

**Safeguarding Neutrality,
Strengthening Trust**



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Quarterly Implementation Progress Overview

This Quarterly Colonna Progress Report provides a summary of major milestones and developments during the first quarter of 2026 in the Agency's implementation of the 50 recommendations of the 'Colonna Report', formally known as the *Independent Review of Mechanisms and Procedures to Ensure Adherence by UNRWA to the Humanitarian Principle of Neutrality*. It also summarises progress across thematic categories, associated funding requirements, and the Agency's approach to sustainability of the reforms.

Less than two years since the release of the Colonna Report, UNRWA continues to make significant progress in implementing its recommendations and transforming them into concrete, long-term institutional practices. During the Q1 2026 reporting period, the Agency is closing an additional eleven recommendations, bringing the total number of closed recommendations to 40 out of 50, representing 80 per cent overall progress towards fulfilling the Colonna commitments (see *Chart I: Implementation Status Overview*). The Agency is also advancing the integration and institutionalisation of Colonna reforms within its policies and systems, to ensure lasting organizational change.

The eleven recently concluded recommendations during Q1 2026 span multiple thematic areas: Governance, Management and Internal Oversight, Neutrality of Staff, and Unions (see *Chart II: Completion Status per Category*). Key achievements include the exploration of additional governance arrangements with concrete asks for strategic direction to UNRWA's Advisory Commission (AdCom) (Recommendation 3); the streamlining of neutrality safeguards through a revised Neutrality Framework and the amplification of managerial accountability for staff neutrality (Recommendations 13 and 19); and the strengthening of disciplinary processes across the Agency with additional legal tools and provisions (Recommendation 27). The Agency has also launched its first-ever transparency portal with live data on UNRWA's projects (Recommendation 16); established processes for commercial staff vetting with a costed plan (Recommendation 24), which allows for vetting of staff union representatives (Recommendations 44 and 45); and submitted to the unions for consideration and adoption a revision of the 6 November 1990 Statute of the Union of Area Staff of UNRWA (Recommendation 42) with additional modalities for staff representation/elections (Recommendation 47). Collectively, these measures contribute to embedding neutrality, accountability, and inclusive governance more systematically across UNRWA's institutional and operational frameworks.

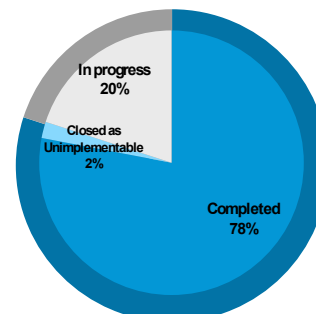
Related to Recommendation 46 (focusing on the outsourcing of pay-setting functions to an independent entity), the Agency has closed the recommendation as unimplementable. Since 2024, exhaustive outreach has been conducted to explore options, but no viable pathway was identified. Should any alternative approaches arise in the future, they will be explored beyond the scope of the Colonna High-Level Action Plan.

Against this backdrop, the Agency's implementation of the High-Level Action Plan, as indicated in *Chart III: Completion Status per Timeline*, is on track with 100 per cent implementation of planned activities envisaged for 2024 and 2025. The Agency has also successfully closed more than half of the recommendations scheduled for 2026 and has already closed the sole recommendation (27) scheduled for December 2027, reflecting a strong and sustained commitment to advancing neutrality reforms.

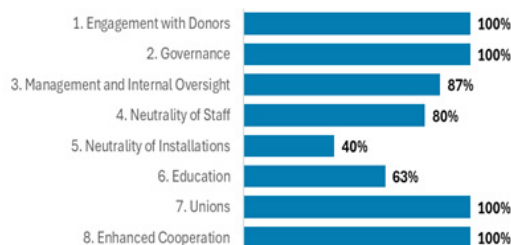
Each completed recommendation undergoes a formal review and endorsement process both internally through the Neutrality Task Force and externally through the AdCom Working Group on Neutrality and Integrity. All above eleven recommendations proposed for closure for Q1 2026 have been internally validated for closure at the Neutrality Task Force meeting on 26 March 2026. The AdCom Working Group on Neutrality and Integrity convened its third meeting on 31 March 2026 to review the evidence of the eight recommendations reported closed during Q4 2025 (Recommendations 9, 10, 15, 25, 26, 30, 34 and 43).

Importantly, upon closure of a recommendation, related activities continue as part of broader institutional arrangements within the Agency including regular monitoring, integration into policy and operational systems, and follow-up reviews. However, it should also be noted that the sustainability of certain reforms will be contingent on sufficient funding and availability of dedicated human resources.

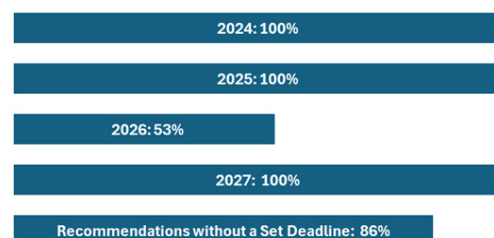
Implementation Status Overview- March 2026



Completion Status per Category- March 2026



Completion Status per Timeline- March 2026



Highlights by Category

Category 1: Engagement with Donors (Recommendation 1)

100%

Impact Headline: UNRWA continues to strengthen strategic partnerships and engagement with donors and Member States through structured, transparent and regular communication on integrity, neutrality and financial matters.

Showcasing Impact: UNRWA maintains regular, structured communication with donors and Member States through dedicated updates on neutrality measures and the Agency's financial situation. UNRWA provided targeted bilateral briefings to donors on the margins of the Sub-Committee of the AdCom in March 2026. The Commissioner-General also conducted a series of high-level engagements with host countries and key donors during Q1 2026. Looking ahead, the Deputy Commissioner-General (Operational Support) will deliver the fourth Integrity Briefing in New York on 21 May 2026.

Status: 1/1 recommendation completed (as of Q2 2025)

Category 2: Governance (Recommendations 2–3)

100%

Impact Headline: UNRWA has improved strategic oversight and donor engagement by embedding neutrality into the framework of its AdCom and has explored additional options for strengthened governance arrangements to provide strategic direction to the organization.

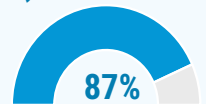
Showcasing Impact: Neutrality remains a standing item on the agenda of the AdCom's biannual meetings, which ensures sustained intergovernmental oversight of neutrality and integrity reforms within UNRWA. The AdCom Working Group on Neutrality and Integrity convened its third dedicated meeting on 31 March 2026 to review and verify evidence on the implementation of Q4 2025 Colonna recommendations as a basis to formally recommend acknowledgement of closure of eight recommendations to the AdCom. With regard to Recommendation 3, the Strategic Assessment of UNRWA commissioned by the Secretary-General has explored governance arrangements together with the Agency, particularly under Scenario 4 on "Institutionalizing Collective Responsibility". This scenario outlines options to strengthen strategic direction and external communication, proposing the establishment of an Executive Board to replace the AdCom. On 5 February 2026, UNRWA formally put forward the governance proposal reflected in the Strategic Assessment to the members of the AdCom for their consideration and further guidance on potential next steps. Since the final decision on the Agency's governance rests with the Member States, Recommendation 3 has been closed. The Agency will continue to engage Member States on future discussions related to governance models.

Status: 2/2 recommendations completed (as of Q1 2026)



Category 3: Management and Internal Oversight (Recommendations 4–18)

Impact Headline: UNRWA has continued to strengthen its internal oversight, ethics, and accountability mechanisms, raising awareness and reinforcing neutrality and integrity across management structures and operational processes.



Showcasing Impact: During Q1 2026, UNRWA closed two recommendations within this category. Under Recommendation 13, supervisor accountability for the neutrality of staff members was strengthened by establishing an accountability framework under the revised Neutrality Framework, which was published as a Commissioner-General Bulletin on 31 March 2026. Together with earlier actions, including the issuance of Personnel Directive No. PD/P/1/1 (June 2025) mandating completion of mandatory courses (including Humanitarian Principles & Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption), and the integration of neutrality-related learning components into tailored managerial training programmes (such as LEAP and Supervisory Skillset Trainings), this recommendation has been closed. Under Recommendation 16, as of the end of March 2026, UNRWA has developed its first-ever project transparency portal that will provide public access to both portfolio and project-level data on an Agency-wide basis. Following technical configurations, the portal has been published in April 2026. This dynamic tool builds on the successful rollout of the Project Procedures Manual (PPM) in 2025 and aims to strengthen transparency and traceability of projects across the Agency.

Implementation of the remaining two recommendations under this category is ongoing. Recommendation 7 is partially fulfilled with a review panel having submitted the draft report of the external peer review of the evaluation function to UNRWA for feedback, while the review of the investigation function is expected to extend into Q2 2026. Under Recommendation 12, the Agency continues to explore options to internationalise senior positions, although progress remains contingent on additional funding.

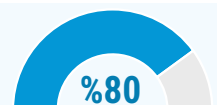
At the same time, UNRWA continues to ensure sustainability of earlier closed recommendations. In March 2026, an additional international staff member (P4) joined the Department of Internal Oversight Services (DIOS) as a Quality Assurance Officer to enhance the department's capacity in handling oversight functions and strengthen communication with field offices. Cooperation with the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) remains ongoing on serious and high-risk allegations, supported by the use of SharePoint-based case management systems to enhance workflow efficiency. In addition, the DIOS Neutrality Investigation Unit (Recommendation 8) continues to handle neutrality-related cases through a centralised approach. Staff awareness on the Code of Ethics continues to be reinforced by the mandatory Ethics and Integrity e-course with almost 23,000 completions by 2025, the rollout of a two-day training on ethical management, and a tailored version of the UN Leadership Dialogue on Outside and Political Activities.

Efforts are also underway to increase the number of female staff in senior managerial positions, including through Gender Parity Portfolios that provide a balanced overview of gender representation across the workforce. The volatile security situation during the reporting period has posed challenges to the delivery of in-person trainings and workshops, including those related to the Project Procedures Manual (PPM) and Code of Ethics awareness sessions. Implementing departments are adapting by expanding online modalities to cope with travel limitations.

Status: 13/15 recommendations completed; 2 in progress

Category 4: Neutrality of Staff (Recommendations 18–28)

Impact Headline: UNRWA has continued to develop its systems to ensure that staff uphold neutrality throughout recruitment, employment, and conduct.



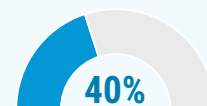
Showcasing Impact: During Q1 2026, UNRWA has closed three recommendations within this category, demonstrating commitment to strengthen safeguards related to staff conduct and accountability. Recommendation 19 was closed following the issuance of a revised Neutrality Framework in March 2026, which includes strengthened provisions addressing social media conduct and new technologies. Recommendation 24 is also closed following the finalisation of the commercial vetting pilot. Building on lessons learned from the pilot, a comprehensive evaluation and fully costed plan have been developed. The Agency is currently assessing options for the application of the tool, including linkages with screening tools. Disciplinary processes have further been significantly strengthened across the Agency resulting in the closure of Recommendation 27.

Under Recommendation 20, awareness raising of the revised Neutrality Framework will be enhanced in Q2 2026 through a regional Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop for field offices to accelerate knowledge sharing and neutrality-awareness at field level. UNRWA continues to ensure sustainability of closed recommendations. A social media monitoring tool has been developed to support the early detection of possible public social media breaches by staff. Whistleblower protection continues to be promoted through socialization campaigns, bystanders training and dialogue sessions with 70 middle managers being trained on protection against retaliation by Q1 2026. Progress on staff care and wellbeing is contingent on availability of predictable and sustainable funding. This remains a critical priority, particularly in light of the pressure on staff morale resulting from the regional context and cost-control measures.

Status: 8/10 recommendations completed; 2 in progress

Category 5: Neutrality of Installations (Recommendations 29–33)

Impact Headline: UNRWA has enhanced safeguards to protect the civilian nature of its installations through enhanced monitoring, staff training, and community engagement.



Showcasing Impact: While no additional recommendations were closed during this reporting period, the Agency continues to make steady progress across all ongoing and previously completed recommendations.

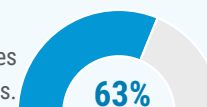
Under Recommendation 31, integrated assessments of UNRWA facilities are ongoing. By March 2026, UNRWA conducted integrated assessments of 85 per cent of its installations excluding Gaza, which follows a different approach given the security and access restrictions. The evolving military escalation in Lebanon and restrictions on UNRWA's operations in West Bank during the reporting period have adversely affected full-scale integrated assessments in Q1 2026. Further, insufficient funding for protection staff beyond March 2026 poses a significant challenge to sustaining quarterly assessments and related community awareness activities through the end of the year and beyond. UNRWA continues to bilaterally engage with Member States and host countries on the findings of the integrated assessments and issues protest letters in response to incidents of misuse.

Ongoing staff capacity building on the civilian nature of UNRWA installations has expanded, with over 10,000 staff having successfully completed the humanitarian principles e-course and over 2,000 installation managers having received in-person training as of March 2026. Community outreach activities took place across all field offices, including 29 awareness sessions and focus group discussions in Lebanon and Syria, reaching 683 community members; school-based activities in Jordan; and the production of 1,440 safety-awareness posters for Gaza. Implementation in Gaza and the West Bank remains constrained due to the prevailing political and security context.

Status: 2/5 recommendations completed; 3 in progress

Category 6: Education, Recommendations 34 – 41

Impact Headline: UNRWA has strengthened the adherence to neutrality of its education system in alignment with UN values and UNESCO standards through textbook reviews, enhanced teacher trainings, and expanded use of digital learning tools.



Showcasing Impact: While no additional recommendations were closed during this reporting period, progress continues across several key areas, and UNRWA also delivered a dedicated deep-dive session on education during the AdCom Working Group on Neutrality and Integrity meeting in March 2026. The Agency maintains a systematic textbook review process aligned with UN values/UNESCO standards and UNRWA's Critical-Thinking Approach, including ongoing capacity-building for staff on textbook reviews, engagement with host countries on findings, and monitoring newly introduced textbooks. This is complemented by internal measures to address inappropriate content, including strengthened policies, classroom inspections, a DIOS hotline for reporting concerns related to teaching content, and continuous teacher training on humanitarian principles and neutrality. In January 2026, a total of 150 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) instructors in the Syria field office received dedicated training.

The Tamkeen Community of Practice continues to support teachers through peer learning and practical guidance on the Critical Thinking Approach. In Q1 2026, moderators and focal points were trained to further strengthen thematic engagement and improve accessibility of tailored support across the platform. In parallel, the Education Department conducted post-validation discussions on textbook review findings to inform follow-up actions across fields and produced self-learning materials for Grade 1 students in Gaza.

UNRWA also continues its engagement with UNESCO to strengthen cooperation under the 2023 Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development. Efforts to strengthen gender representation continue, including through the introduction of the Gender Parity Portfolio in March 2026. As of March 2026, women comprise 53 per cent of leadership positions within UNRWA's education system, including school principals and deputies. Progress is also underway to expand digital learning. Enhancements to the Digital Learning Platform (DLP) are improving accessibility for teachers and students in Gaza, complemented by the provision of ICT equipment to support a more resilient and adaptive learning environment.

Status: 5/8 recommendations completed; 3 in progress

Implementation in Action: Gender Equality Award

In 2025, UNRWA launched the second edition of the Gender Equality Award, an initiative led by the Women's Advisory Forum (WAF) and supported through Colonna funding. The award promotes gender-responsive programming and encourages innovative approaches to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment across the Agency, in line with the cross-cutting priorities of the Colonna Report. Following a competitive selection process, a total of 103 submissions were received from across UNRWA operations. Five initiatives were shortlisted and recognised through three award categories.

The selected proposals focused on: (a) enhancing women's livelihood opportunities in Gaza through vocational training in embroidery, crochet, food production, and other income-generating skills; (b) developing a podcast series and digital storytelling platform to document and amplify the experiences of female UNRWA staff; and (c) promoting gender equality at the community level through dialogue-based activities, including family discussion sessions on gender roles and interactive puppet theatre addressing family communication and awareness of gender-based violence. Reflecting on her first-prize winning initiative "Maharat wa Sumoud", one recipient noted: "Moments of learning are transformed into sources of strength, as displaced women channel determination and hope into creating beautiful embroidery. Each stitch tells a story of resilience- carefully woven towards a brighter future".



Category 7: Neutrality of Unions (Recommendations 42 – 47)

Impact Headline: UNRWA is advancing reforms to strengthen the neutrality, inclusiveness, and accountability of staff unions, in line with UN standards on staff representation and governance.



Showcasing Impact: During Q1 2026, five recommendations under this category were closed, of which four were completed and one was closed as unimplementable, reflecting concrete progress in reforming staff union governance and vetting. The final draft of the revised Staff Union Statute was shared with the Chair of the Inter Staff Union Conference (ISUC), for consideration and review by all Union members. The revised Statute aligns with UN standards, UNRWA policies and regulations, and embraces key aspects of staff representation such as a gender quota, one-year term limits and reducing the size of Union membership. UNRWA's preparatory work has been extensive, so recommendations 42 and 47 were closed, acknowledging that the final adoption of the revised Staff Union Statute will be under the discretion of the Unions themselves. In parallel, progress on the vetting mechanisms for staff union members led to the closure of Recommendations 44 and 45. Building on the lessons learned developed under the commercial vetting pilot under Recommendation 24, UNRWA established a costed plan for periodic vetting of staff union representatives, including vetting upon election, contingent on sustainable and predictable funding in line with the fully costed plan.

Progress also continued on advancing women's participation in staff representation structures. The Women's Advisory Forum (WAF) implemented key elements of its multi-year workplan, including the finalization of the Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation. This analysis provides an evidence base on structural and cultural barriers to women's participation in decision-making, as well as enabling factors. WAF further strengthened its engagement with senior management, delivered three capacity-building and coaching workshops during the reporting period, and supported gender-responsive initiatives under the Gender Equality Award (see Implementation in Action).

Regarding Recommendation 46 on outsourcing pay-setting functions, UNRWA has concluded that no viable implementation pathway exists. Since 2024, the Agency has undertaken exhaustive outreach across the UN system, including the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), the UN Secretariat (OneHR, Bonn), and the International Labour Organization (ILO), all of which confirmed they are unable to assume such functions. In parallel, leading regional and international private sector consultancies were engaged, but none were able or willing to provide the required services. On this basis, and following the exhaustion of all credible options, the recommendation is closed as unimplementable.

Status: 6/6 recommendations closed (as of Q1 2026)

Category 8: Enhanced Cooperation (Recommendations 48–50)

Impact Headline: UNRWA has strengthened its engagement with the humanitarian coordination system, enhancing partnerships and redefining its role with inter-agency mechanisms.



Showcasing Impact: UNRWA has completed all recommendations within this category, reflecting strengthened integration into the humanitarian coordination architecture. The Agency actively participates in coordination mechanisms at country, regional, and global levels, including regular engagement in cluster system meetings and inter-agency platforms. Participation in key fora such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), UN Country Teams (UNCTs), regional emergency preparedness platforms, and sectoral clusters (including education, health, protection, shelter, and WASH) has been sustained and systematised. Internally, these efforts have been accompanied by a shift towards a more proactive engagement in joint planning, information-sharing, and collective response modalities, strengthening UNRWA's contribution to system-wide humanitarian action.

Status: 3/3 recommendations completed (as of Q2 2025)

Looking Ahead

UNRWA remains committed to the full implementation and institutionalisation of all 50 recommendations of the Colonna Report, despite the complex contextual and operational settings in which the Agency continues to operate. By Q1 2026, UNRWA has closed 40 recommendations and advanced implementation across all eight Colonna categories. Looking ahead, the Agency anticipates further progress during the next quarter and projects to close one additional recommendation in Q2 2026.

Progress achieved to date has been enabled through the financial support and sustained engagement of Member States and partners. UNRWA expresses its appreciation to its longstanding partners for their support to the implementation of the Colonna Report, including Germany, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Denmark, Finland, Canada, Japan, Norway, Switzerland, Luxembourg, and Austria. As 2026 marks the mid-point of Colonna implementation under the High-Level Action Plan, the Agency anticipates that certain remaining recommendations are significantly contingent on predictable and sustainable financial support from donors. These include establishing relevant international positions for the Staff Care Division (Recommendation 28), the internationalisation of senior area managerial posts (Recommendation 12), sustaining posts for regular integrated assessments (Recommendation 31), and the expansion of education digitalisation across UNRWA (Recommendation 40).

As Table I: *Funding secured to date* illustrates, UNRWA received roughly US \$17 million to support the implementation of Colonna recommendations since 2024. As of March 2026, five grants have been completed, with additional grants expected to close by late 2026 or early 2027.

Funding secured to date		
Member State	Project	Amount
Austria	Multiple categories	EUR 300,000
Canada	Multiple categories	CAD 1,000,000
Denmark	Multiple categories	US \$1,400,000
European Union	DIOS and Ethics	EUR 5,000,000
Finland	Multiple categories	EUR 500,000
Germany	Multiple categories	EUR 1,500,000
Germany	IST staff support	US \$240,000
Japan	LEAP/Multiple categories	US \$3,583,333
Luxembourg	IST staff support	In kind
Norway	HRD staff support	In kind
Switzerland	Multiple categories	CH 1,000,000
United Kingdom	Multiple categories	GBP 2,000,000

However, declining funding for reform efforts presents increasing challenges for sustaining implementation momentum and institutionalising completed measures. To sustain this, the Agency will begin developing a Post-Colonna Roadmap from Q2 2026 onwards to promote the long-term institutionalisation and sustainability of reforms beyond the current implementation horizon.

Implementation in 2026 is also taking place while Agency-wide cost-control measures were introduced in response to severe financial constraints, including restrictions on recruitment, travel, and in-person training, as well as a 20 per cent reduction in working hours and salaries for most locally recruited staff across all field offices, effective February 2026. While these measures were necessary to safeguard core services, they have had a direct impact on the pace of implementation of the Colonna Report. At the same time, they underscore the importance of advancing key reforms related to staff care, wellbeing, and ethics support. In this context, continued donor engagement will be critical to address emerging funding gaps from Q2 2026 onwards and to providing flexibility on the timelines of ongoing Colonna-related grants to mitigate the impact of cost-control measures on implementation schedules. The Agency remains committed to transparency, accountability, and sustained engagement with Member States on all neutrality-related matters, including through the AdCom Working Group on Neutrality and Integrity, the full AdCom, the biannual Integrity Briefings (next scheduled for 21 May 2026 in New York) and additional bilateral briefings as required.