

EC Partner

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)

Facts and Figures

- EC contribution: €2.5 million
- Duration: 2006-2010



EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Employment

Improving the employability of Palestinian refugees in Syria

Vocational training for Palestinian refugees

"I feel empowered and encouraged by my new profession, but most importantly, I now feel respected."

Ahmad Al-Saghir, student



Context

Without a solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict, Palestinian refugees are facing socio-economical difficulties, especially when it comes to finding employment. Their status as refugees sometimes makes it harder for them to obtain the qualifications needed to find jobs.

Objectives

- Contribute to poverty alleviation and improve the economic well-being of Palestinian refugees in Syria
- Enhance the employability of young and unemployed Palestinian refugees
- Develop efficient and accessible employment guidance services in refugee camps.

Impact

- Two new courses in graphic design and mechatronics were introduced at the Damascus Training Centre (DTC) to meet specific labour market needs.
- The DTC made short-term vocational courses available to people with low levels of education and/or limited access to further training.
- Pilot employment guidance offices were established in five camps across Syria.
- A dormitory for female students was constructed at the Damascus Training Centre.
- Pilot Business and Employment Advice Centres have been established in Aleppo.

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A path towards a job

"A businessman once shared his employment strategy with me: he hires not the best technician, but the one most in need of work in order to ensure high quality" explains Fawzi Madfaa, Principal of UNRWA Damascus Training Centre. *"This is the situation of our trainees: an urgent need of work and a dedication to their trade."* On 9 August 2009, 42 Palestinian trainees in a pilot course in Homs received certificates in arc welding, equipping them with the skills to enter the workforce in a specialised trade. The concept for the three-month vocational course was the result of a unique and mutually-beneficial partnership between the Homs Employment Office, which connects course graduates with employers, and Homs Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Basel al-Husan, mechanical engineer and metal-works contractor in Homs, expressed to Fida Awad, Employment Guidance Officer at the Employment Office, the need for skilled welders, highlighting an employment opportunity for Palestinian jobseekers. Al-Husan went on to provide not only support to the course in partnership with UNRWA, but also additional funding, course materials and, most importantly, mentorship for trainees. He has since hosted several trainees in his company and hired others. Al-Husan's involvement is but one of various means to ensure that the quality of training meets the expectations and needs of potential industrial employers.

Trainees entering the work force earn salaries of around 30 000 Syrian Pounds per month (about \$650). The financial autonomy gained has a very real impact on their lives. *"We used to rely on our families," recalls Muhammad Hussein Mahmoud. "Now, they come to us for help."* Fellow trainee Ahmad al-Saghir adds, *"I used to feel great anxiety in my heart, not knowing about my future. Now I know I have one."* Most admirable, however, is the trainees' appreciation of the personal development they have gained through such training. As Al-Saghir states with pride, *"I feel empowered and encouraged by my new profession. But most importantly, I now feel respected."*



Students of vocational training course

