

# KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

## PALESTINE\*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This country report outlines developments in Palestine<sup>1</sup> over the past year, particularly emphasising the effects of the Gaza conflict on education, training, and employability. This document is complemented by the [data on the impact of the Gaza crisis on human capital](#), which the ETF regularly collects based on key indicators and available information.

Human capital development and initiatives in Palestine in the last 12 months have been severely affected by the Gaza conflict, not only in terms of direct impact on education, training and employment dynamics but also in terms of potential long-term impact on human capital development overall. The war on Gaza, now extending also to the West Bank and other countries in the region, has had an unprecedented impact on the Palestinian economy, with a contraction of the country's GDP by 35% in 2024, more than 625 000 students in Gaza with no access to education, and mass unemployment currently measured at 49.9%.

In the last few years, Vocational Education and Training (VET) has been moved up the political agenda, and enrolment rates for VET students have been increasing, especially for initial VET programmes. Thanks to this policy prioritisation, Palestine's VET system has been performing relatively well in imparting basic skills and competences to young people and adults, aligning with the transition towards green and digital societies. Still, a significant challenge persisted in bridging the gap between the VET system and the labour market: the current setup lacks a systemic approach to integrating work-based learning, and the employability of VET graduates is below the international average. Measures have been put in place to improve the relevance of the system, including the creation of the working group to reach the approval of a National Qualification Framework, the launch of new programmes with stronger involvement from the private sector to make the training offer more flexible and adapted to employers' needs, the establishment of the National TVET Commission, an institution leading the VET strategy in the country and acting as a single contact point for donors in the TVET field. Similarly, several governmental initiatives and donor projects aim to improve the problems of the Palestinian labour market, notably low rates of activity and employment as well as the structural dependence on the Israeli economy.

The reconstruction of the VET and employment systems in Gaza and the West Bank, will sooner or later become a priority for Palestinians as well as for the international donor community, and will have to take into account not only economic development and labour market needs, but also the well-being of the Palestinian society in the long term and reconciliation within the region. It will be crucial to ensure intersectionality and synergy across sectors, addressing the needs of various groups, including women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised populations, to build back a better, more independent, inclusive and efficient human capital development system.

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<sup>1</sup> This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual position of the Member States on this issue.

# 1. KEY POLITICAL, DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

## 1.1 Political developments

Even prior to the ongoing conflict in Gaza, which began in October 2023 and continues with an unprecedented number of deaths and destruction (see key data and indicators in the [ETF infographics](#)), the Palestinian socio-economic environment was not conducive to reforms in education, training and the labour market system. Palestine is geographically segmented into East Jerusalem, Gaza, and the West Bank, with the latter further divided and intersected by Israeli settlements. This ‘archipelago economy’, along with a tense relationship with Israel, has obstructed various forms of communication, commerce, and the execution of educational policies and programmes. The persistent conflict has adversely impacted educational outcomes, which have worsened due to the current circumstances. In addition, Palestine is suffering from the lack of a unified political system, which is dominated in the West Bank by the Fatah party and in Gaza by Hamas.

## 1.2 Demographics

According to the latest data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), there are approximately 14.5 million Palestinians globally, with 5.5 million residing in Palestine: 3.2 million in the West Bank and 2.3 million in the Gaza Strip (PCBS, 2024). The youth population, defined as those aged 15 to 24, constitutes about 22% of the total population in Palestine, highlighting a significant demographic presence.

The Gaza crisis is significantly affecting national demographics. The annual population growth rate, which was relatively high in 2021 (2.5% overall and 2.7% in Gaza) is projected to decline in Gaza to approximately 1% in 2024 (PCBS, 2024). This decrease is foreseen as a result of a marked reduction in birth rates, due to many couples opting not to have children given the prevailing conditions and concerns for maternal and child health. Further, the war has resulted in significant loss of life, with estimates indicating that around 5% of the Gazan population has been killed, severely injured, or reported missing since the conflict started. The destruction of infrastructure and ongoing violence have exacerbated existing vulnerabilities, further complicating demographic trends. As conditions deteriorate, the combination of reduced fertility rates and increased mortality could lead to a demographic shift impeding future recovery efforts.

## 1.3 Key economic developments

Recent economic developments in Palestine reflect the severe impact of the ongoing conflict, particularly in Gaza, leading to significant economic contraction, rising unemployment and worsening humanitarian conditions, along several dimensions:

**GDP Decline** — In 2023, Palestine experienced a 6.2% contraction in GDP, with projections indicating further decline in 2024, estimated between 4.6% and 5%. The fourth quarter of 2023 saw a staggering 33% drop in GDP, with the economy contracting by 80% in Gaza and by 22% in the West Bank (World Bank, 2024).

**Surging Unemployment** — By the end of 2023, unemployment in Palestine surged to 46%, reaching 74% in Gaza and 29% in the West Bank. The conflict has resulted in the loss of approximately 500 000 jobs, including significant losses among cross-border commuters from the West Bank to Israel (World Bank, 2024).

**Food Insecurity** — The humanitarian situation is dire, with about 59% of Gazans facing emergency or famine conditions, projected to rise in the coming months. The agricultural sector suffered a dramatic 93% decline in value-added during Q4 2023 (World Bank, 2024).

**Inflation and Cost of Living** — Basic commodity prices skyrocketed by nearly 250% from August 2023 to August 2024 due to supply chain disruptions and increased transportation costs. This inflation exacerbates poverty levels, which stood at around 32.8% overall in mid-2023, with Gaza's rate close to 64% (PCBS, 2024).

**Palestinian Authority's Financing Gap** — The Palestinian Authority (PA) faces a projected financing gap of about USD 1.86 billion for 2024, more than double that of 2023. This gap is primarily filled through borrowing from domestic banks and by accumulating arrears to public employees (World Bank, 2024).

The situation in Gaza is particularly worrying. A report on the economic costs of the war prepared by UNCTAD calculates that it would take 350 years to return to its pre-conflict levels. Economic activities across Gaza are close to zero, apart from minimum humanitarian health and food services provided under conditions of severe water, fuel and electricity shortages and significant access constraints. Between 2022 and 2023, construction output was down by 96%, agriculture output by 93%, manufacturing by 92% and services sector output by 76% (UNCTAD, 2024).

## 1.4 Key social issues

The main issues in Palestine are deeply intertwined with the ongoing conflict, economic challenges, and systemic inequalities:

The **humanitarian situation** in Palestine, particularly in Gaza, has reached catastrophic levels. Approximately 75% of Gaza's population has been displaced due to ongoing military operations and blockades, leading to widespread food insecurity and a lack of access to essential services such as healthcare and clean water. The United Nations estimates that 96% of the population in Gaza requires basic support for survival.

The prolonged conflict and its associated traumas have led to significant **mental health challenges** among Palestinians. Reports indicate that many children are in need of mental health support due to exposure to violence and displacement. The situation is compounded by a lack of adequate mental health services; for instance, before the recent escalations, at least half a million children required psychosocial support.

**Women and girls** face heightened risks of violence in the context of ongoing conflict and societal norms that perpetuate gender inequality. According to UNFPA, about 59% of married women experience violence from their partners, with numbers expected to rise due to the current conflict conditions<sup>2</sup>. The lack of legal protections and support services further exacerbates this issue.

Arbitrary restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities significantly impact Palestinians' **freedom of movement**. Checkpoints, roadblocks, and military presence hinder access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. As documented by OCHA, there are over 645 checkpoints in the West Bank alone. These restrictions contribute to a sense of collective punishment and exacerbate socio-economic disparities.

The **healthcare system** in Palestine is under severe strain due to ongoing violence and blockades that restrict access to medical supplies and personnel. Hospitals have been attacked, leading to dire shortages of essential medicines and medical equipment. The blockade has also limited the ability of patients to seek necessary treatments outside Gaza.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://palestine.unfpa.org/en/unfpa-palestine>

## 2. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

### 2.1 Trends and challenges

#### Education strategy and legal framework for education

The **National Policy Agenda 2017-2022** (State of Palestine, 2016) and the **National Development Plan** (State of Palestine, 2020) recognise the importance of education for economic growth and sustainable development and identify quality education for all as a national priority. The **Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2022** comprises three strategic goals: 1) ensuring safe, inclusive and equitable access to quality education at all levels of the system; 2) developing a student-centred teaching and learning pedagogy and environment; and 3) enhancing accountability and results-based leadership, governance and management. The national government and the numerous international donors and organisations present in the country are making considerable efforts to achieve strategic goals and improve the education system<sup>3</sup>.

The current **European Joint Strategy 2021-2024**, titled 'Towards a democratic, accountable and sustainable Palestinian State' (European Commission, 2020), contains a pillar that covers three sectors: education, health and social protection. European development partners are working together with the Palestinian Ministry of Education to offer safe, gender-responsive, inclusive and equitable access to high-quality education for youth in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip. It would include support from early childhood education until higher education, comprising vocational education and training. Still, international financial support for the VET sector is declining; the main donors remain the EU, Germany (through GIZ) and Belgium (through Enabel). The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) has also allocated a budget to GIZ to implement the DO TVET Programme<sup>4</sup>.

#### Access, participation and early school leaving

Palestine has consistently demonstrated a high literacy rate of 97.5% for individuals aged 15 and above (PCBS, 2020). According to the latest data from 2024, the educational attainment landscape reveals that 54.4% of the population aged 15 and over have a low level of education (ISCED levels 0-2), while 22.1% possess a medium level (ISCED levels 3-4), and 23.5% achieve tertiary education. This marks a significant increase in tertiary education attainment, rising from 15.1% in 2010 to 23.5% in 2022 (PCBS). Despite the higher unemployment rates associated with higher levels of education, young Palestinians continue to prioritise tertiary education; this being particularly evident among females, with an enrolment rate of 53.5% compared to 32.5% for males in 2022 (UNESCO, 2024a). Although enrolment rates in vocational education and training are still low, there is a positive trend in students enrolling in vocational programmes. In 2015, only 2% of upper secondary students (ISCED level 3) enrolled in vocational programmes. By 2021, the enrolment rate had increased to 3.8% (ISCED level 3) (UNESCO, 2023a). In recent years, the Ministry of Education has made efforts to increase enrolment in VET and to close the gap between VET and general education by introducing vocational units and a technology track in general education (ETF, 2021a).

The percentage of early school leavers among young people aged 18 to 24 continues to drop (from 35.4% in 2010 to 31.2% in 2022). The drop is attributable to female students, who have substantially reduced their early school leaving rate, resulting in around one out of five young women (20.4%) leaving school early in 2022 (PCBS, 2022). The early school leaving rate for men is almost double that for women.

<sup>3</sup> The European Union is the biggest donor of external assistance to the Palestinians. A list of the main EU interventions can be found at [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/palestine/eu-projects-palestine\\_en?s=206](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/palestine/eu-projects-palestine_en?s=206)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/giz-2023-en-DoTVET.pdf>

## PISA results

In their first participation in the PISA assessment in 2022, with 50 participating secondary schools (30 from the West Bank and 20 from Gaza) Palestinian students achieved a commendable score despite the challenging conditions they face. Palestinian students obtained 366 points in mathematics, 349 in reading comprehension and 369 in science: even if the result is far from the OECD average (472, 476 and 485 respectively), the Palestinian territories are 5 points above Jordan in mathematics, 3 ahead in reading, and 6 behind in science. They also lead Morocco by 1 point in mathematics, 10 in reading comprehension and 4 in science. UNRWA schools in particular have consistently delivered good results, significantly outperforming the public and private school systems. Female students have also played a pivotal role in the Palestinian education system, consistently outperforming their male counterparts not only in reading but also in mathematics (OECD, 2023).

## 2.2 Initial VET and adult learning

### Strategic and legal framework for initial VET and adult learning

The Palestinian VET system has been shaped by the country's political history. After the Nakba in 1948, the Israeli occupation authority took over the state-administered education system, including vocational education, and continued to oversee its operations. At the same time, UNRWA was established and began providing education and vocational services. In the late 1970s, the Israeli occupation authority established several technical training centres to train Palestinian youth, especially to join the Israeli labour market. Palestinians also developed technical education as part of the tertiary education sector by establishing a few colleges. In 1994, when the PA began governing civil institutions in parts of the occupied Palestinian territory, the Israeli occupation authority transferred the administration of the education system, including the VET parts, to the newly established Authority.

The Palestinian VET system under the PA jurisdiction has three components:

1. Vocational Training (VT), consisting of government VT centres, non-governmental VT institutions, UNRWA-VT centres and private VT establishments. The government runs its own VT centres and issues licences to other VT centres and institutions.
2. Vocational Education (VE), consisting of secondary schools, mostly government-funded, as well as non-government schools and UNRWA schools.
3. Technical Education (TE), consisting of vocational colleges, technical colleges and technical university colleges. Some of these colleges are government colleges, while others are run as public associations and non-governmental organisations.

### VET governance and financing arrangements

In its **National Development Policies** (NDP) document for 2021-2023 (Government of Palestine, 2021), the government attaches special priority to TVET<sup>5</sup> and the handicraft industry, which needs to be aligned with labour-market needs. The following policy interventions are mentioned:

- Develop the educational evaluation system and principles, streamline secondary education to better integrate both sexes and to be more flexible, more enabling of the TVET enrolment, and more aligned to current and future labour-market needs.
- Align TVET and higher education outputs with development and labour-market needs and ensure access to equal opportunities for all.
- Upgrade and expand the TVET system.

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<sup>5</sup> In Palestine, the term 'technical and vocational education and training' (TVET) is used, while the ETF prefers to use 'vocational education and training' (VET). Throughout this paper, the term 'VET' will be used unless referring to a specific unit, document or quote from Palestine that refers to TVET.

- Develop and expand the foundations of TVET in accordance with the government's cluster development approach.

Even though the current strategy has sound objectives and a detailed action plan that addresses legislation, financing, the relevance of skills to labour-market needs, stakeholder engagement and qualifications frameworks, it has never been fully implemented. One of the reasons given is the lack of a single governing entity for VET. Other main challenges in achieving a more efficient and better-quality VET system are the following (MoEHE, 2017): low participation by the private sector and civil society in the management of the sector; low quality of TVET programmes, lack of harmony with market needs and the high unemployment rate among graduates; fragmentation of funders' policies; low turnout for vocational and technical education and training; low societal value for vocational and technical education; limited professional and technical specialisations related to the needs of the labour market; and weakness of the existing infrastructure (curricula, staff, equipment, systems, buildings, etc.).

According to the ETF Torino Process results, the Palestinian VET system is faced with several major challenges. Firstly, a rigid structure makes it difficult to understand the market needs and adapt the training offer accordingly. Secondly, due to extremely high informality rates, it is almost impossible to track youth transitions from education to employment. Furthermore, the overall legislation (Labour Law, Law of General Education, Higher Education Law) does not provide sufficient tools for the development of VET. All these factors lead to a low quality of VET, especially continuing vocational education and training (CVET). However, it is worth noting that VET graduates have more chance of finding a job than university graduates (ETF, 2024). A recent report by UNESCO's 'VET for Future' project<sup>6</sup> notes: 'it is essential to formulate a new national TVET strategy that replaces the one put in place in 2010. This strategy should have the characteristics of a grand strategy, which means being developed based on a multi-sectoral approach. (...) Thus the TVET grand strategy should be able to bring together the needs of different government entities that are reflected in their strategic plans on the one hand and the national economic agenda and the national employment strategy on the other' (Jabber, 2023).

VET policymaking is in the hands of three main players: the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and the Ministry of Labour. Since 2021, policy development and planning for these programmes have been overseen by the **National TVET Commission (NTC)**, which is the National Umbrella for the TVET system. The NTC's primary role is to lead policymaking of the TVET sector by overseeing and monitoring all institutions operating within this domain, in close cooperation with the various ministries responsible for different VET school categories. Additionally, the NTC coordinates donors' activities to ensure consistency across the sector.

To further enhance collaboration between stakeholders, the Palestinian government has established a **Sector Working Group (SWG)** for the TVET sector, which serves as a platform for the NTC to engage with donors, development agencies, private-sector representatives and private training institutions. In addition, the NTC includes in its strategic plan provisions to establish National Sector Skills Councils, the NSSCs, entities that should connect the labour market and the education and training systems, to foster demand orientation, and facilitate better use and development of people's skills. A pilot council, the **Renewable Energy Sector Skills Council (RESSC)** has been set up.

In 2021, under the umbrella of Enabel's 'Skilled Young Palestine' project, a blueprint was drafted to establish a **Skills Development Fund**, and a pilot of the new funding mechanism took place in 2021/2022 using Enabel funds. Building on this experience and on the Time Fund by KFW<sup>7</sup>, the National TVET Commission will work on establishing the National TVET Fund, and this should become a primary financial tool able to create an environment where training providers supply the skills that industry needs, avoiding funding duplication and stimulating a demand-led approach to TVET provision by supporting private-sector leadership in the delivery of projects.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/theory-practice-training-tvet-trainers-palestine-0>

<sup>7</sup> [https://tvetcommission.gov.ps/home/German%20Development%20Bank%20\(KFW\)%20Projects?culture=en-US](https://tvetcommission.gov.ps/home/German%20Development%20Bank%20(KFW)%20Projects?culture=en-US)

## Qualifications, validation and recognition

To bring about improvements such as qualifications standardisation and alignment of qualifications with employers' needs, in 2022 the Council of Ministers mandated by decree the establishment of Inter-Ministerial Committee, to undertake development of the **National Qualifications Framework (NQF)**. It comprises representatives from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the Ministry of Labour, plus the new National TVET Commission (NTC). GIZ and the ETF are actively supporting this Committee's work by providing connections with international NQF developments. The NQF Inter-Ministerial Committee and the Taskforce group, based on a committee comprising all stakeholders, drafted a White Paper on the NQF incorporating inputs from GIZ and ETF. Following a webinar in October 2024 to discuss NQF international experiences, with contributions from Türkiye and Jordan, the NQF Technical Committee plans to finalise the White Paper and proceed to Cabinet approval.

## Quality and quality assurance

In line with the TVET strategy of 2010, the **quality assurance system** includes various measures, such as the competency centre standards that are benchmarked against ISO quality standards for teachers. However, a VET national quality assurance authority does not exist, the current quality assurance approach mainly referring to the inspection of inputs with little autonomy for VET providers (ETF, 2020). While the implementation of VET is currently evaluated by each ministry that is accountable for its part of the system, in the future the NTC will oversee the monitoring of the entire VET system, ideally supported by an integrated TVET management information system and a full set of indicators. Regarding **accreditation**, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission licenses higher education institutions and accredits their programmes. For VET institutions, the Ministries of Education and Labour oversee the accrediting and licensing of VET institutions and the adoption of their programmes.

## Work-based learning arrangements

A **national WBL strategy** was developed in 2018, which outlines the different definitions and models that are in place for the education system, and which has guided the country efforts in these years. Regarding secondary-level VET, practical learning at the workplace is taking place, mainly through informal arrangements between schools, teachers, students, parents and local businesses. Until recently, it has been rather straightforward to collaborate with the private sector and find workplaces for students because of the low number of VET students. Different models of WBL are being implemented, depending on the different tracks provided by the secondary vocational schools: 1) the ordinary track; 2) the certificate of professional competence track or project-based learning track; and 3) the apprenticeship track. More efforts are needed to further streamline and implement WBL across the whole VET system to differentiate VET graduates from academic ones. VET students should learn the technical skills and competences that are required in the labour market to give them a better chance of finding a job (Samara, 2021). In recent years, GIZ, Enabel and the World Bank have been supporting the country in integrating WBL at different levels of education through several initiatives (see Annex 3). Also, the US International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) is supporting, through the **Forsah TVET** programme, non-governmental TVET institutions to enhance their relevance through partnerships with private sector actors, to implement a well-structured WBL approach within these schools.

## Digital education and skills

The **2021 National Development Plan** identifies digital transformation as a national development priority, connecting it with the aim of improving the quality of education and aligning VET with labour market requirements. The **Palestinian ICT Strategy 2021-2023** (Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology, 2021) identifies the lack of qualified workers in the ICT sector as a challenge, but does not provide a roadmap for developing digital skills and the needs of the labour market, in a situation where the unemployment rate among computer science graduates is higher than that for graduates of business, law, natural sciences and health (World Bank, 2021).

The **Ministry of Telecommunication and Digital Economy** is working on a comprehensive digital transformation plan, including data protection, e-governance, and digital services. The ‘Hukumati’<sup>8</sup> platform aims to streamline government services, allowing citizens and residents to access services and pay fees electronically, fostering transparency, and enhancing government-citizen interactions. It promotes efficient workflows across government entities, secure digital payments, and reduced public expenditures by minimising paper use and transport costs. This initiative supports the modernisation of public services and improved governance.

Building on the work done after the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 by the ‘Distance Learning Taskforce’, led by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education, innovative distance learning solutions to ensure inclusive and equitable high-quality education have been tested in the country. This has resulted in a free online platform with resources and lessons, called the **Palestinian eSchool Portal**<sup>9</sup>, which is considered a unified portal to communicate between the Ministry, schools, teachers and students. There are several donor initiatives that support the creation of digital learning platforms to make learning content available online. For example, the **UNRWA Digital Learning Platform**<sup>10</sup>, launched in 2021, provides remote learning resources to more than 550 000 Palestinian refugee students. **Equip Palestine with E-Learning (E-Pal)**<sup>11</sup> is a new initiative by the Palestine Polytechnic University and funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, to strengthen digital teaching approaches in the Palestinian higher education sector. Also, **Al-Quds Open University** works through 19 centres distributed all over the country and provides technical education through its Continuous Education Centre.

Digital education and skills development in Palestine have gained momentum through initiatives led by **ACTED, UNESCO, Enabel** and **UNICEF**. These projects aim to enhance digital literacy, promote entrepreneurship, and bridge the digital divide, empowering youth with essential skills for the digital economy. According to the 2019 Palestinian Digital Economy Assessment, development partners have established more than 40 computer labs with a total of 2 220 computers and laptops provided to vocational training centres in schools, and to local communities (UNESCO, 2023b). Local projects, such as **Empowering Palestinian girls through digital learning innovations in STEM fields**<sup>12</sup> by Birzeit University, aim to support students – especially girls – to code, collaborate and innovate.

## Education and training statistics

The PCBS is collecting **data on education and training** and has been successfully calculating skills mismatch indicators using the Labour Force Survey, demonstrating improvement in evidence and dataset availability. Tracer studies are mainly carried out by the donor community, but this is not yet integrated as a systematic monitoring tool. In 2018, the ETF, GIZ and Enabel carried out a joint tracer study to better understand the transition of TVET graduates from school to work (ETF, 2019).

For many years, **VET enrolment figures**, which include only the number of students enrolled in the 11th grade of formal secondary vocational education (industrial, agricultural, hotel management, household economics), have represented between 2% and 3% of the student population. According to the latest UNESCO data, 4.1% of students are enrolled in formal initial VET (secondary cycle, grade 11), with a sharp gender divide of 6.9% for boys and merely 1.5% for girls (UNESCO IOS, 2024). Existing approaches to gender inclusion in VET focus on addressing the under-representation of either gender in specific professions, as indicated by the needs of the Palestinian labour market. This does not necessarily mean integrating both genders into the same classrooms or training spaces, rather it emphasises creating educational and training opportunities tailored to equip both males and females with the skills required for professions where their representation is currently lacking.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.palestine.ps/Account/Description>

<sup>9</sup> [eschool.edu.ps](https://eschool.edu.ps)

<sup>10</sup> <https://keeplearning.unrwa.org/en/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://e-pal.ppu.edu/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://idrc-crdi.ca/en/project/empowering-palestinian-girls-through-digital-learning-innovations-stem-fields>

## 3. LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT

### 3.1 Trends and challenges

#### Labour market characteristics

The Palestinian labour market is highly segmented, not only by age and gender, but also geographically and administratively. The geographic and administrative separation between the West Bank and Gaza Strip creates a major obstacle to growth, since each area operates with its own labour-market characteristics and wage levels. The challenging labour market in Palestine had led many Palestinians to seek employment in Israel and the settlements, primarily in the construction sector. Driven by the lack of job opportunities and higher wages across the border, Palestinians increasingly have taken up this option despite challenges; some work informally or illegally. It remains to be seen whether and when these workers will be able to return to their jobs, due to the current conflict. This reliance on external employment reflects the difficulties in the local labour market, where informal employment remains high.

#### Labour market and employment statistics

In 2022, the overall unemployment rate in Palestine was 23.8%, with significant regional and demographic disparities, reaching 47% in Gaza, compared to 13% in the West Bank. Women faced higher unemployment (38.5%) than men (20%). Youth unemployment (aged 18-29) is particularly high, standing at 35.3%, with particularly worrying rates in Gaza (65%) compared to the West Bank (24%). Among the youth population, the highest rates of unemployment were recorded among graduates, with 53% unemployed. This figure includes 39% of male graduates and 66% of female graduates without work (World Bank, 2023). In 2022, informal employment accounted for three-quarters of the increase in Palestinian employment, with 65% of private-sector employees hired without a written contract. Additionally, only 26% of employees contributed to a pension fund, and just half of female salaried employees received paid maternity leave, reflecting gaps in labour protections and benefits (World Bank, 2023). Before the conflict, the PCBS released data on labour-force participation, which indicated **that inactivity was still a significant issue**, with only 44.0% of the population aged 15 years or above actively participating in the labour force (PCBS, 2022). Some of the barriers preventing VET graduates from entering the labour market are the lack of internships, limited access to apprenticeships, or misalignment between training and job skills.

A striking **gender gap** persists in labour force participation, with 71.1% of men, compared to 18.9% of women, being active in the labour market (PCBS, 2024). This disparity is one of the widest in the MENA region, reflecting the pervasive cultural and social barriers that women face in entering the formal labour market. Several structural impediments hinder women's economic empowerment. These include a lack of policies promoting female employment; a weak manufacturing sector that offers limited opportunities for women in the formal economy; high unemployment rates for men, which can discourage families from sending women to work; negative social norms that discourage women from seeking employment outside the home; and a lack of affordable childcare options. Due to men's role as sole breadwinners for their family — while nearly 70% of the deaths of the current conflict are estimated to be women and children (OCHCR, Nov 2024) — the share of widowed female-led households without any income or labour experience is likely to have increased since October 2023.

Palestine is suffering from a **skills mismatch in the labour market**. An ETF study, based on 2019 data, shows that one in three employees with a higher education degree worked in a job not corresponding to their field of study (horizontal mismatch), while almost 20% of employees with upper secondary education worked in jobs below their level of education. Similarly, around 22% of employees with tertiary education were employed in jobs below their level of education (vertical mismatch), while young employees are more exposed to a mismatch in employment (ETF, 2022).

A recent ETF study on platform work concluded that Palestinians have embraced **new forms of digital employment** and managed to acquire the skills needed to work as online freelancers. Men are over-represented compared to women on online platforms in Palestine, although the share of women on online platforms (40%) is the highest among all SEMED countries. Most online platform workers are young, with almost 80% being under 30 years old. Most online workers in Palestine work informally, which leads to a lack of work benefits and social protections (ETF, 2023).

## 3.2 Employment policy and institutional settings

### Strategy and legal framework in the employment policy field

Before the conflict, Palestine had put in place the following strategies to tackle the above challenges:

**Labour Sector Strategy 2021-2023** ‘The road to decent work and employment opportunities improvement’ (Ministry of Labour 2020). The strategy specifies four goals that are highly relevant for the skills and employment development of Palestinians: promoting self-employment; skilling and upskilling people in line with the needs of the labour market; improving the tripartite relationships regarding decent work and social protection of workers; and supporting networking amongst organisations.

**National Employment Strategy 2021-2025** (Ministry of Labour, 2021) to achieve full, productive and freely chosen employment for jobseekers, particularly women and young people. The strategy places employment at the heart of socio-economic development, viewing employment and decent work as a key focus to achieve stability, address the adverse consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Palestinian labour market, and respond to threats posed by the ongoing Israeli occupation.

**The second Palestinian Decent Work Programme 2018-2022** (ILO, 2018) provides a framework for collaboration between the Palestinian government and social partners on various aspects related to the three pillars of the Decent Work Agenda and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, with technical and financial assistance from the ILO.

### Initiatives to boost employment

Since 2003, the **Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection**<sup>13</sup> (PFESP) works as the national umbrella institution for all employment, job creation and entrepreneurship development programmes implemented in Palestine. However, most employment-support programmes are dependent on donor support. At the local level, various institutions provide employment support services to Palestinian citizens, including employment offices, chambers of trade and industry, universities, non-governmental organisations (such as the Welfare Association, the Sharek Youth Forum, the Centre for Youth Economic Empowerment), and private institutions.

A positive development in recent years has been the inclusion of **career guidance** within active labour market measures. However, a comprehensive and cohesive employment service system is still lacking in Palestine. The existing employment services face many challenges, including insufficient funding and limited human resources.

Entrepreneurship is seen as a possible solution to high youth unemployment, and several organisations support start-ups, including Palestine’s ICT Incubator (PICTI)<sup>14</sup>, Gaza Sky Geeks<sup>15</sup>, Flow Accelerator<sup>16</sup>, the Intersect Innovation Hub<sup>17</sup>, Jerusalem’s Station J<sup>18</sup> and Fikra Innovation Hub<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://pef.ps/en>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.picti.ps/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://gazaskygeeks.com/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://flow.ps/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.intersecthub.org/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://stationj.ps/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.fikrahub.com/>

All these organisations run hackathons and provide co-working space, incubators, and investment funds. However, developing entrepreneurial capacities requires an enabling environment and adequate investment, particularly in priority sectors such as agriculture, industry and tourism (ETF, 2020). In 2021, self-employment decreased to 27.8% of total employment, compared to 30.6% in 2016 (PCBS data): this seems to suggest a need for further investment in business development services and the promotion of youth entrepreneurship. The 2023 Enterprise Survey by the World Bank states that for 33.6% of firms the biggest obstacle is the political instability, followed by difficult access to finance, high tax rates and corruption.

The current Labour Sector Strategy highlights that employment services face significant challenges due to insufficient planning and administrative capacities, which impact the efficient execution of the active labour market programmes. Evaluating the overall impact of all the initiatives led by the government, the donor community and non-governmental organisations remains challenging, as each programme has its own objectives, outcomes and performance indicators. Furthermore, coordination among these initiatives at local and regional levels is a challenge. This and other challenges related to the labour market are addressed by different, mainly donor-driven programmes. The **European Joint Strategy in support of Palestine 2021-2024**, 'Towards a democratic, accountable and sustainable Palestinian state', supports policies aiming to create decent jobs, especially for young people and women, including improving the quality of employment services. An indirect objective of the new **'Youth Economic Empowerment in Palestine (YEP)'** scheme is to enhance the capacity of public employment services. One of the expected results is setting up and implementing a 'First Employment Facility', which will involve a partnership between the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection (PFESP) and key private-sector umbrella organisations.

## 4. The role of VET and skills development in recovery and reconstruction

### Impact of the Gaza crisis on education

The ongoing war on Gaza and the increased restrictions in the West Bank have hampered development processes in all sectors, severely disrupting an already fragile education and training system. All 625 000 school-aged children of Gaza have been out of school since October 2023, 122 schools and universities were destroyed, and 334 schools and universities were partially destroyed (Ministry of Education and Higher Education, September 2024). In addition, access to education became unavailable to both kindergarten and high school students in Gaza for almost an entire school year. The conflict has also severely disrupted education services in the West Bank, with public schools reducing in-person schooling due to mobility and security concerns.

A recent UNDP report was able to comprehensively quantify the war's impact on education, detailing the effect of the situation on young people and teachers. The most optimistic scenario — assuming an immediate ceasefire and a swift international effort to rebuild the education system in Gaza — suggests that students may lose two years of learning. If hostilities persist until 2026, this loss could extend to five years. These estimates do not consider the additional impacts of trauma, hunger, and forced displacement, all of which are exacerbating Gaza's educational crisis. Despite this pressing need, the study indicates that education has been deprioritised in international aid efforts, with funding directed toward other areas instead: the analysis shows that just 3.5% of aid for Gaza is being invested in education. The worsening economic conditions have significantly impacted Palestinian households, leading to a reduction in education expenditure (29% of Palestinian households reported cutting back on educational spending) and increased child labour (7% have begun sending their children to work instead of school). This situation has also severely affected Palestinian teachers, who have gone without 6 months of salary since October 2023 (ESCWA-UNDP, 2024). Furthermore, studies on youth in fragile contexts highlight that lack of meaningful work and economic insecurity are significant factors driving youth involvement in hostilities (Mercy Corps, 2015; Chacaltana and Dasgupta, 2021).

Since the beginning of the conflict, several initiatives have been launched to help maintain some sort of education continuity in Gaza:

- In February 2024, the An-Najah National University and the Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED) have launched the [Technical Education Support for Higher Education Students Initiative – TESI](#) aiming at empowering Gaza students to complete their university education remotely as visiting students for a limited period, with no financial burden on the students or their respective universities.
- In April 2024, the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergency (INEE) organised the webinar [Psychosocial Support for Students in Gaza](#).
- In May 2024 - ILO issued its [Emergency Response Plan for the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#).
- In May 2024, UNRWA organised an international meeting titled 'Restoration of Right to Education in Gaza', aiming to discuss a roadmap with key milestones for restoring education in Gaza. Participants included UN Agencies, the oPt Education Cluster co-leads, NGOs, Donors, Education Funds and the INEE Accelerated Education Working Group.
- The Education Cluster has been working with its partners to establish temporary learning spaces (TLS) to provide multi-channel learning opportunities for students. In May 2024, partners launched the first batch of TLSs in addition to other community-led initiatives; however, since then, military operations have been affecting several TLSs.
- In June 2024, ILO launched its [Palestinian labour market recovery programme](#).

- The Education Cluster has developed a Monitoring Framework that includes the priorities of the general education sector in Gaza, including human capital development (HCD), and the [5Ws Plus Dashboard](#).
- UNESCO is leading the efforts to monitor the status of Tertiary Education Institutions and Vocational Training Centres. Until now, this has been carried out through the analysis of satellite images, but an on-the-ground assessment will be initiated once the environment is conducive. The assessment framework includes identifying physical and infrastructure damage, and human losses (UNESCO, 2024b).
- The debate is kept alive through different initiatives and webinars. One of them took place in June 2024, organised by the American Friends Service Committee on [Rebuilding Education in Gaza: What Can We Do?](#), with Palestinian scholars Nour Hamad, Ahmed Maher Alghazali, and Majd Almishharawi.

Some universities from Gaza, whose buildings have been destroyed, such as Al-Aqsa University and the Islamic University, have resumed their activities by providing education online, through university-specific platforms where students can attend lectures, submit assignments, and take exams.

## The importance of VET for recovery and reconstruction

During armed conflicts, educational institutions are often targeted due to the important role that education plays in society (Magee and Pherali, 2019). VET is particularly vulnerable to disruptions during conflicts as it relies on specialised teachers and trainers who are difficult to replace. VET facilities often host specialised equipment and tools that can be damaged, making resource maintenance and updates challenging during prolonged conflicts (Barakat, 2009). Finally, VET students seem to be more likely to drop out of education, especially in regions where VET is perceived as a secondary option to academic paths, and where economic collapse caused by conflict undermines the prospects for gainful employment.

As mentioned above, in Gaza, formal education and training systems have been almost entirely disrupted by widespread infrastructure destruction. Since October 2023, **enrolments as well as access to educational institutions have been severely hindered**, with 12 out of 17 TVET units, spread across 14 public schools, that have been severely damaged.

In the West Bank, before the war, around 148 000 skilled and semi-skilled Palestinians used to be employed in the Israeli labour market. Due to rescinded or suspended work permits as a consequence of the current situation between Palestine and Israel, it remains uncertain whether and when they will be able to return to their jobs, and if regional markets will open their doors to Palestinian workers, or if the local labour market will be the only option for VET graduates. These factors must be considered when planning an efficient and effective VET supply system that meets labour market demands, provides decent employment opportunities for youth, and contributes to socio-economic development. By enhancing and strengthening TVET's role in post-conflict environments, there is potential to offer a meaningful pathway to personal and national rehabilitation, making it a critical component of the broader effort to achieve long-term peace and stability.

Recent attention to education in conflict and post-conflict settings has underscored the importance of VET. Its role in rebuilding post-conflict societies is gaining more recognition both from an economic reconstruction perspective and from a social cohesion perspective. This renewed emphasis has brought forward valuable insights and best practices, highlighting VET's specific opportunities for immediate economic recovery and long-term socio-economic reconstruction, emphasising the need to understand VET's distinct characteristics and its potential for contributing to societal recovery and development. Although VET systems serve a smaller segment of the population, they equip individuals with the practical skills necessary for self-reliance, decent employment and safe livelihoods, directly contributing to economic recovery and to the well-being of individuals.

The anticipated substantial support for the Gaza Strip from international partners and key stakeholders presents a unique opportunity to develop a modern, well-structured VET system. This new system can

be designed to be in agreement with the socio-economic realities and political objectives of the region, ensuring it meets current and future needs. By aligning the VET system with both the local socio-economic context and the broader political goals, there is potential to create a responsive, forward-looking educational framework that fosters sustainable development and positive change. The geopolitical situation following the war will have direct and indirect implications on the socio-economic landscape in the West Bank, including Jerusalem as well as the Gaza Strip. These implications and future local and regional arrangements will affect the nature and structure of the educational and training system in Palestine. The economic sectors and growth are critical factors that will determine the qualitative and quantitative demand for the outputs of the VET system.

Concerning the VET system recovery, there are two main dimensions that should be taken into consideration. First, understanding the extent of the damage and destruction to the educational system, and to VET in particular. To achieve this aim, a thorough assessment should be conducted prior to developing intervention plans. This assessment must also account for the second dimension, which is the assessment of the needs of society and of the labour market, ensuring that the VET system is effectively integrated into recovery and reconstruction efforts, also through deeper collaboration with healthcare, ICT, and renewable energy sectors to develop specialised VET programmes that meet the evolving needs of the economy. The restructuring of the VET and education system should align with Gaza's humanitarian, reconstruction, and development plans. It is crucial to ensure intersectionality and synergy across sectors, addressing the needs of various groups, including women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised populations.

## Labour Market Disruption and Recovery Pathways

The war has caused unprecedented devastation to the Palestinian labour market and the wider economy. The **unemployment rate** surged to 50.8%, with particularly alarming figures in the Gaza Strip, where it stands at 79.1% (MAS, 2024). However, these figures do not consider those who have completely exited the labour force after finding job opportunities unattainable, where labour force participation rates are projected to decline for both men and women (ILO, 2024). According to the World Bank, 144 000 jobs were lost in the West Bank due to Israeli attacks and their repercussions (World Bank, 2024). It is also noteworthy that the rate of Palestinian employment in the Israeli economy ranged between 20%-30% of the total Palestinian workforce.

In total, estimates of labour income losses in the Palestinian economy amount to USD 21.7 million per day. When considering also the loss in income for public employees due to partial salary payments by the Palestinian Authority and the decline in income earned by the broader private sector, the **estimated daily loss in labour income** against the baseline increases to USD 25.5 million (World Bank, 2024).

In the West Bank, the war has had multiple consequences on the economy, which will persist throughout the coming years (World Bank, 2024). The deteriorating security situation and increased movement restrictions across cities will continue to affect economic stability in the West Bank. These restrictions, along with the escalation of settlers' attacks on multiple Palestinian communities in the West Bank, and the denied access of 148 000 Palestinian workers from the West Bank to the Israeli labour market, have adversely impacted the labour market and the Palestinian economy (World Bank, 2024). According to MAS (2024), the total value of remittances from Palestinian workers from the West Bank in the Israeli labour market was estimated at approximately 17% of Palestinian GDP. Furthermore, the Palestinian Authority is struggling with a spiralling fiscal crisis resulting from Israel's policy of withholding taxes and customs owed to the Palestinian Treasury, which exacerbates the economic challenges. All of these factors will lead to economic shocks, while the economy is projected to contract between 6.5% and 9.4% during 2024 (World Bank, 2024).

According to a survey conducted by the ILO and the Federation of Palestinian Chambers of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture (FPCCIA), 98.8% of local businesses in the West Bank have been affected by the ongoing war, encountering challenges that disrupt operations and affect production capacity, ultimately impacting sales and profits. Among the surveyed enterprises, 65.3% reported a reduction in their workforce, while 73.3% reduced the working hours of some of their

employees. According to the workers' survey of the ILO and Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), among those still employed, 51.0% faced reduced hours of work, and 62.8% experienced a reduction in wages. For those who have lost their jobs, only 31.4% reported having received end-of-service entitlements from their employers. Furthermore, the war has also affected households, with 87.2% reporting income decline. Many families have resorted to coping strategies, including reducing entertainment expenses, reducing spending on essentials, and even sending children to work (ILO, 2024).

These figures highlight the destructive and profound impacts of the war on the Palestinian economy and labour market, which was already rooted in a highly complex socio-economic context.

Occupation conditions have transformed the Palestinian economy into a dependent economy that provides the Palestinian labour force without being granted the protection and legal rights usually afforded in formal employment. As a result, the local economy's capacity to generate sustainable job opportunities has eroded. In this context, the future of Palestinian employment and its reliance on the Israeli labour market will remain shaped by structural imbalances and ingrained distortions, which have persisted for over half a century. The Oslo Accords and their economic annex, the Paris Economic Protocol, aimed at rehabilitating Palestinian economic conditions and at building institutions during a five-year transition period. However, the failure to implement the terms of these agreements has limited the ability of Palestinians for self-governance in addressing these distortions (MAS, 2024).

The future of Palestinian economic development will be affected by the degree of its reliance on the Israeli labour market and by geopolitical arrangements. A study by MAS emphasises that addressing the issue of Palestinian labour in line with national economic development priorities requires a fundamental transformation of the economic structure, ending its dependence on Israeli economic policies. Such a transformation would leverage key sectors like industry, agriculture and construction, while developing laws and systems to protect local products. These are essential steps for creating sustainable job opportunities within the local economy. In addition, the study calls for international support to guarantee legal protection for Palestinian workers and transfer them their full entitlements, as stipulated in the Paris Economic Protocol (MAS, 2024).

At the same time, it would be important to expand international partnerships focused on capacity-building, technology transfer, and funding since collaboration with countries and organisations with similar VET challenges could help Palestine adopt best practices and achieve greater self-sufficiency in the long term. Finally, structured collaborations with international organisations with expertise in post-conflict reconstruction, such as UNESCO and the ILO, would be beneficial.

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# Statistical Annex

The Annex includes annual data from 2015, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 or the last available year.

	Indicator	2015	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
1	Total population (in thousands) <sup>(1)</sup>	4 270.1	4 685.3	4 803.3	4 922.7	5 043.6	5 165.8	
2	Relative size of youth population (age group 15-24 and denominator age 15-64, %) <sup>(1) C</sup>	37.7	35.2	34.7	34.4	34.1	33.9	
3	GDP growth rate (%)	3.7	1.4	-11.3	7.0	4.1	-5.5	
4	Gross value added by sector (%)	Agriculture	7.4	7.1	7.1	6.3	5.7	M.D.
		Industry	16.4	18.4	17.0	17.7	17.4	M.D.
		Services	61.7	61.1	60.6	60.1	58.3	M.D.
5	Public expenditure on education (as% of GDP)	4.7	M.D.	M.D.	5.4	M.D.	M.D.	
6	Public expenditure on education (as% of total public expenditure)	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	
7	Adult literacy (%)	96.5	97.4	97.5	M.D.	97.8	M.D.	
8	Educational attainment of total population (aged 15+) (%)	Low <sup>(2)</sup>	60.5	56.5	55.3	55.1	54.4	53.9
		Medium <sup>(3)</sup>	21.0	21.5	21.7	21.6	22.1	22.7
		High <sup>(4)</sup>	18.5	22.0	23.0	23.3	23.5	23.4
9	Early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) (%)	Total	31.4	30.3	30.3	29.5	31.2	30.6
		Male	39.6	40.2	39.4	38.2	38.9	40.1
		Female	20.8	17.8	18.4	17.9	20.4	16.7
10	Total NET enrolment rate (%)	Lower secondary	91.0	95.4	95.2	95.6	95.0	M.D.
		Upper secondary	69.7	73.4	74.3	76.2	75.9	M.D.
11	Share of VET students in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	2.0	3.0	3.9	3.8	3.9	M.D.	
12	Low achievement in reading, mathematics and science – PISA (%)	Reading	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	77.1	N.A.
		Mathematics	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	79.9	N.A.
		Science	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	72.4	N.A.
13	Total	44.0	44.3	40.9	43.4	45.0	M.D.	

	Indicator		2015	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	Activity rate (aged 15+) (%) <sup>(5)</sup>	Male	69.6	69.9	65.1	68.9	70.7	M.D.
		Female	17.7	18.1	16.1	17.2	18.6	M.D.
14	Inactivity rate (aged 15+) (%) <sup>(5)</sup>	Total	56.0	55.7	59.1	56.6	55.0	M.D.
		Male	30.4	30.1	34.9	31.1	29.3	M.D.
		Female	82.3	81.9	83.9	82.8	81.4	M.D.
15	Employment rate (aged 15+) (%) <sup>(5)</sup>	Total	33.9	33.1	30.3	31.9	33.4	M.D.
		Male	55.5	55.0	50.5	53.5	55.3	M.D.
		Female	11.6	10.6	9.7	9.8	11.2	M.D.
16	Employment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%) <sup>(5)</sup>	Low <sup>(2)</sup>	38.6	38.4	35.0	38.2	32.5	M.D.
		Medium <sup>(3)</sup>	30.6	29.9	27.6	28.2	26.9	M.D.
		High <sup>(4)</sup>	54.5	49.7	46.5	47.2	49.5	M.D.
17	Employment by sector (%) <sup>(5)</sup>	Agriculture	8.7	6.1	6.4	6.7	8.0	M.D.
		Industry	28.1	29.7	29.9	31.2	30.9	M.D.
		Services	63.2	64.2	63.8	62.1	61.0	M.D.
18	Incidence of self-employment (%) <sup>(5)</sup>		31.4	28.6	27.7	27.8	24.4	M.D.
19	Incidence of vulnerable employment (%) <sup>(5)</sup>		25.1	22.1	21.9	21.7	19.2	M.D.
20	Unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%) <sup>(5)</sup>	Total	17.1	17.4	18.0	18.9	20.2	M.D.
		Male	61.0	58.5	56.3	57.3	57.0	M.D.
		Female	21.9	24.1	25.7	23.8	22.8	M.D.
21	Unemployment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%) <sup>(5)</sup>	Low <sup>(2)</sup>	21.4	22.5	24.2	23.0	21.1	M.D.
		Medium <sup>(3)</sup>	17.4	20.3	20.1	22.0	19.1	M.D.
		High <sup>(4)</sup>	28.4	31.5	30.5	32.6	29.7	M.D.
22	Unemployment rate (aged 15-24) (%) <sup>(5)</sup>	Total	37.4	40.1	42.1	41.7	35.3	M.D.
		Male	33.7	34.7	36.6	37.2	31.7	M.D.
		Female	56.6	67.1	70.0	64.5	57.5	M.D.

Last update: 28/08/2023

Sources:

Indicators 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: World Bank, World Development Indicators database

Indicators 7, 10, 11: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics

Indicators 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)

**Indicator 12:** OECD PISA 2018 Results (Volume I) Annex B1

**Indicator 25:** UNDP

**Notes:**

(1) Estimation.

(2) Low – ISCED 0-2.

(3) Medium – ISCED 3-4.

(4) High – ISCED 5-8.

(5) Applies to 2018.

(6) Applies to 2012.

(7) Breaks in series due to the adaptation to the new definition of employment (adaptation to the 19<sup>th</sup> resolution of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians).

(8) Data from 2010 revised according to the results from population, housing and establishments census 2017.

**Legend:**

C = ETF calculations

N.A. = Not applicable

M.D. = Missing data

## Annex: Definition of indicators

	Description	Definition
1	Total population (in thousands)	The total population is estimated as the number of people having their usual residence in a country on 1 January of the respective year. When information on the usually resident population is unavailable, countries may report legal or registered residents.
2	Relative size of youth population (age group 15-24) (%)	This is the ratio of the youth population (aged 15-24) to the working-age population, usually aged 15-64 (or 15-74 or 15+).
3	GDP growth rate (%)	Annual percentage growth rate of GDP at market prices based on constant local currency. Aggregates are based on constant 2010 US dollars. GDP is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy, plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or for depletion and degradation of natural resources.
4	Gross value added by sector (%)	The share of value added from agriculture, industry and services. Agriculture corresponds to ISIC divisions 1-5 and includes forestry, hunting, fishing, crop cultivation and livestock production. Value added is the net output of a sector after adding up all outputs and subtracting intermediate inputs. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or depletion and degradation of natural resources. The origin of value added is determined by the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC), revision 3 or 4. Industry corresponds to the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) tabulation categories C-F (revision 3) or tabulation categories B-F (revision 4), and includes mining and quarrying (including oil production), manufacturing, construction, and public utilities (electricity, gas, and water). Services correspond to ISIC divisions 50-99 and include value added in wholesale and retail trade (including hotels and restaurants), transport, government, and financial, professional and personal services such as education, healthcare and real-estate services. Also included are imputed bank service charges, import duties, any statistical discrepancies noted by national compilers, and discrepancies arising from rescaling.
5	Public expenditure on education (as% of GDP)	Public expenditure on education expressed as a percentage of GDP. Generally, the public sector funds education either by directly bearing the current and capital expenses of educational institutions, or by supporting students and their families with scholarships and public loans, as well as by transferring public subsidies for educational activities to private firms or non-profit organisations (transfer to private households and enterprises). Both types of transactions together are reported as total public expenditure on education.
6	Public expenditure on education (as% of total public expenditure)	Public expenditure on education expressed as a percentage of total public expenditure. Generally, the public sector funds education either by directly bearing the current and capital expenses of educational institutions, or by supporting students and their families with scholarships and public loans, as well as by transferring public subsidies for educational activities to private firms or non-profit organisations (transfer to private households and enterprises). Both types of transactions together are reported as total public expenditure on education.
7	Adult literacy (%)	Adult literacy is the percentage of the population aged 15 years and over who can both read and write a short simple statement on their everyday life, and can understand it. Generally, 'literacy' also encompasses 'numeracy' – the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations.
8	Educational attainment of total population (aged 15+) (%)	Educational attainment refers to the highest educational level achieved by individuals, expressed as a percentage of all persons in that age group.

	Description	Definition
		This is usually measured in terms of the highest educational programme successfully completed, which is typically certified by a recognised qualification. Recognised intermediate qualifications are classified at a lower level than the programme itself.
9	Early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) (%)	Early leavers from education and training are defined as the percentage of the population aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education who were not in further education or training during the 4 weeks preceding the survey. Lower secondary education refers to ISCED 1997 levels 0-2 and 3C short (i.e. programmes lasting under 2 years) for data up to 2013, and to ISCED 2011 levels 0-2 for data from 2014 onwards.
10	NET enrolment rates in secondary education (ISCED level 2-3) (%)	This indicator covers enrolment in a given level of education of children/youths belonging to the official age group corresponding to the given level of education.
11	Share of VET students in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	Total number of students enrolled in vocational programmes at a given level of education (in this case, upper secondary), expressed as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled in all programmes (vocational and general) at that level.
12	Low achievement in reading, maths and science – PISA (%)	Low achievers are 15-year-olds who fail to reach level 2 on the PISA scale for reading, mathematics and science.
13	Activity rate (aged 15+) (%)	The activity rate is calculated by dividing the active population by the population of the same age group. The active population (also called 'labour force') is defined as the sum of employed and unemployed people. The inactive population consists of all people who are classified as neither employed nor unemployed.
14	Inactivity rate (aged 15+) (%)	The inactivity/out-of-the-labour-force rate is calculated by dividing the inactive population by the population of the same age group. The inactive population consists of all people who are classified as neither employed nor unemployed.
15	Employment rate (aged 15+) (%)	The employment rate is calculated by dividing the number of employed people by the population of the same age group. Employed people are all people who worked at least 1 hour for pay or profit during the reference period or were temporarily absent from such work. If a different age group is used, this should be indicated.
16	Employment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%)	The employment rate is calculated by dividing the number of employed persons by the population of the same age group. Employed persons are all persons who worked at least 1 hour for pay or profit during the reference period or were temporarily absent from such work. If a different age group is used, this should be indicated. Educational levels refer to the highest educational level successfully completed. Three levels are considered: Low (ISCED level 0-2), Medium (ISCED level 3-4) and High (ISCED 1997 level 5-6, and ISCED 2011 level 5-8).
17	Employment by sector (%)	This indicator provides information on the relative importance of different economic activities with regard to employment. Data is presented by broad branch of economic activity (i.e. agriculture/industry/services) based on the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC). In Europe, the NACE classification is consistent with ISIC.
18	Incidence of self-employment (%)	The incidence of self-employment is expressed by the number of self-employed people (i.e. employers + own-account workers + contributing family workers) as a proportion of the total employed population.
19	Incidence of vulnerable employment (%)	The incidence of vulnerable employment is expressed by the number of own-account workers and contributing family workers as a proportion of the total employed population.

	Description	Definition
20	Unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%)	The unemployment rate represents unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people who are employed or unemployed. Unemployed people comprise those aged 15-64 or 15+ who were without work during the reference week; are currently available for work (were available for paid employment or self-employment before the end of the 2 weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work, i.e. had taken specific steps in the 4-week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment; or had found a job to start later (within 3 months).
21	Unemployment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%)	The unemployment rate represents unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people who are employed or unemployed. Unemployed people comprise those aged 15-64 or 15+ who were without work during the reference week; are currently available for work (were available for paid employment or self-employment before the end of the 2 weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work (had taken specific steps in the 4-week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment; or had found a job to start later (within 3 months). Educational levels refer to the highest educational level successfully completed. Three levels are considered: Low (ISCED level 0-2), Medium (ISCED level 3-4) and High (ISCED 1997 level 5-6, and ISCED 2011 level 5-8).
22	Unemployment rate (aged 15-24) (%)	The unemployment rate represents unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people who are employed or unemployed. Unemployed people comprise those aged 15-24 who were without work during the reference week; are currently available for work (were available for paid employment or self-employment before the end of the 2 weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work, i.e. had taken specific steps in the 4-week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment; or had found a job to start later (within 3 months).
23	Proportion of people aged 15-24 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (%)	The indicator provides information on young people aged 15-24 who meet the following two conditions: first, they are not employed (i.e. unemployed or inactive according to the ILO definition); and second, they have not received any education or training in the 4 weeks preceding the survey. Data is expressed as a percentage of the total population of the same age group and gender, excluding respondents who have not answered the question on participation in education and training.
24	Participation in training / lifelong learning (% aged 25-64)	Participants in lifelong learning refers to persons aged 25-64 who stated that they received education or training in the 4 weeks preceding the survey (numerator). The denominator is the total population of the same age group, excluding those who did not answer the question on participation in education and training. The information collected relates to all education or training, whether or not it is relevant to the respondent's current or possible future job. If a different reference period is used, this should be indicated.
25	Human Development Index	The index is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living.

# KEY DONOR PROJECTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

A major player in the country is **UNRWA**<sup>20</sup>, the UN agency that supports Palestinian refugees. The agency offers its support through vocational training to young Palestinian refugees, managing eight training centres with semi-professional, trade and short-term courses in various specialisations that aim to prepare students for local employment. The specialisations include construction, nursing, hairdressing and fashion. The programme has achieved significant success, reaching over 123 000 graduates as of 2020. Furthermore, programme graduates enjoy high success rates in finding employment or self-employment. UNRWA also supports young women through its training programme. Of the 7 930 trainees who graduated from the programme in 2021, more than 3 500 were female. 156 UNRWA school buildings have been destroyed or damaged since October 2023, representing 83.4% of all school buildings in Gaza (Occupied Palestinian Territories Education Cluster, 2024). In October 2024, the Israeli government banned UNRWA from conducting any activity or providing any service inside Israel, and in the areas of occupied East Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank, and closed any direct interaction between the UN agency and the Israeli state. These resolutions are expected to heavily affect the services provided to the Palestinian refugees, including in the education and TVET area.

Other international players are very active in the country. The **Forsah Technical and Vocational Education and Training**<sup>21</sup> programme is a 5-year project to enable non-governmental TVET institutions in the West Bank and Gaza to meet labour-market demands and provide Palestinians with meaningful, well-paying employment and income-generating opportunities. Funded by USAID, Forsah TVET supports the development of new technical and vocational training and improves the quality and relevance of existing technical programmes, focusing on improving youth access and creating partnerships with the private sector. The **Lutheran World Federation**<sup>22</sup> in Jerusalem runs another initiative called the Vocational Training Programme (VTP). This initiative has served as one path for Palestinians to receive vocational training since 1949, including through programmes specifically designed for blind students. The VTP works actively to strengthen gender equity in the region by providing culturally accepted training to young women. One such example is training in electronics and telecommunications. With two training centres in Ramallah and Beit Hanina, the VTP is able to train about 210 students every year in fields such as carpentry, car mechanics and telecommunications. The **Technical Vocational Education and Training League (TVET League)**<sup>23</sup> started operations in Palestine in the early 2000s, and now has 16 members throughout Palestine, offering learning opportunities to students from various backgrounds. With vocational education and training in Palestine, students have a chance to work towards a better future for themselves and their families. Finally, **UNESCO** is collaborating with the Ministry of Education to enhance educational initiatives, focusing on improving learning environments and supporting the development of digital literacy and 21st-century skills for youth. This partnership aims to strengthen educational systems, build resilience among students, and create pathways for better job opportunities in Palestine. The collaboration also supports key projects that provide training and skills development for both educators and students.

This is a non-exhaustive overview of the main interventions in the field of education, training and employment.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.unrwa.org/what-we-do/vocational-training>.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.irex.org/files/rapid-sector-analysis-report-2023>.

<sup>22</sup> <https://jerusalem.lutheranworld.org/content/vocational-training-program-91>.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.tvet.ps/en>.

Project	Donor	Implemented by	Summary / areas of work
<a href="#">Youth Economic Empowerment in Palestine (YEP)</a>	Belgium & EU	Enabel	Address the lack of economic prospects for Palestinian youths, including vulnerable youths and young women, by empowering them to access decent employment opportunities.
<a href="#">Inclusive access to quality education and learning</a>	Belgium	Enabel	Young people in Palestine develop into active and critical citizens, ready for local and global challenges through improved education, training, guidance and access to employment.
<a href="#">Pathways to Employment in Palestine</a>	Belgium	Enabel	Young people in Palestine develop into active and critical citizens, ready for local and global challenges through improved education, training, guidance and access to employment.
<a href="#">EPISODE – Enhancing Palestinian Social and Digital Entrepreneurship</a>	EU	UNIMED	Enhance digital social entrepreneurship by defining future skills, upskilling teachers and mentors, co-creating a blended course, piloting it with youth, and providing an online microlearning unit.
<a href="#">Programme for Access to the Labour Market (PALM II)</a>	BMZ	GIZ	Improve labour-market policy to meet the needs of jobseekers and companies.
<a href="#">UFM Hub for Jobs, Trade and Investment</a>	BMZ	UFM	Foster regional cooperation in employment, trade and investment within the framework of the UFM.
<a href="#">More job opportunities for Palestinian youth II</a>	BMZ	GIZ	Improve the quality of and access to labour-market-oriented university education.
<a href="#">Demand-Oriented TVET (DO TVET)</a>	BMZ & Norway	National TVET Commission and GIZ	Align VET with the needs of the private sector and foster employability among young people.
<a href="#">More job opportunities for Palestinian youth</a>	BMZ	GIZ, DVV international	Increase employment opportunities for Palestinian young people thanks to training that meets the needs of the labour market.
<a href="#">Palestine Youth Digital Innovators Program</a>	MENA Catalyst	Various	The programme combines mentorship with hands-on, project-based learning to help students solve real-life local challenges. It emphasises mobile app development, digital problem-solving, and entrepreneurship, encouraging youth to innovate and engage in the digital economy.
<a href="#">Forsah TVET</a>	USAID	Implementing agency (IREX)	Support TVET institutions to better prepare Palestinian graduates for the labour market and to productively engage in local and regional economies.
<a href="#">GRIT</a>	Global Affairs Canada	Canadian Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran World Federation	The GRIT project (2019-2025) helps women and people with disabilities achieve their learning and employment goals.
<a href="#">Preserving endangered traditional crafts and enhancing employability in the creative sector in Palestine.</a>	EU, UNESCO	UNESCO	The project aims to contribute to enhancing the employability of young professionals and students in Cultural and Creative Industries, particularly in crafts, as well as to safeguard endangered crafts through documentation and inventorying of related traditional know-how.
<a href="#">Finance for Jobs (F4J)</a>	World Bank	Implementing agency	Support skills development and job creation for youths.

## Abbreviations

ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease of 2019
CVET	Continuing vocational education and training
Enabel	Belgian Development Agency
E-Pal	Equip Palestine with E-Learning
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
F4J	Finance for jobs
FPCCIA	Federation of Palestinian Chambers of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
HCD	Human capital development
ICT	Information and communication technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergency
IREX	US International Research and Exchanges Board
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ISIC	International Standard Industrial Classification
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LMIS	Labour market information system
MAS	Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute

MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MOHESR	Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
MOL	Ministry of Labour
NDP	National Development Policies
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NTC	National TVET Commission
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OCHCR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PA	Palestinian Authority
PALM	Programme for access to the labour market
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PFESP	Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection for Workers
PGFTU	Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions
PICTI	Palestine's ICT Incubator
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RESSG	Renewable Energy Sector Skills Council
SEMED	Southern and eastern Mediterranean
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
SWG	Sector Working Group
TE	Technical Education

TLS	Temporary learning spaces
TVET	Technical vocational education and training
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
UNIMED	Mediterranean Universities Union
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
VE	Vocational Education
VET	Vocational education and training
VT	Vocational Training
WBL	Work-based learning
YEP	Youth Economic Empowerment in Palestine

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