

# PALESTINE\*

## EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENTS 2021

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# KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

The current socioeconomic situation in Palestine is highly volatile and has been deteriorating, with persistently high rates of poverty and unemployment and falling gross domestic product (GDP) per capita over the last three years. Even before the economic shock due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the economy was expected to slip into recession in 2020 and 2021 (UNCTAD, 2020).

The government has been working on emergency plans. The Palestinian Authority is urgently calling upon additional financial support from the international donor community to work in partnership with the government to overcome the current crisis, which is seriously affecting the lives of the Palestinian people, in particular women.

In terms of education and training, the Covid-19 outbreak has pushed the relevant ministries, schools, teachers and students to move ahead with digital online learning. Especially in the context of Palestine, where there is limited mobility for individuals between the different areas, e-learning needs to be further developed. Between 2013 and 2018, the Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) curriculum was reformed to adopt a modular and competence-based approach. Further investments are needed to continue modernising the curriculum with a focus on 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, including digital and entrepreneurial skills.

Technical and vocational education and training has been moved up the political agenda, while the enrolment of vocational education and training (VET) students is slowly increasing. However, women are still significantly underrepresented. One of the objectives of the Labour Sector Strategy 2020-2022 is to increase the effectiveness of the TVET system and to make it more relevant to the needs of the labour market. The establishment of the new national TVET Commission was finally approved by the President in February 2021. This will hopefully bring an end to the weak governance structure which has been hindering the development of a comprehensive and effective VET system for many years. The new TVET Commission will need to generate evidence on skills in demand, track VET graduates and contribute to building up a comprehensive labour market and skills information system, together with all the key partners working in the employment and statistics areas.

Employment promotion, skills and entrepreneurship have been placed at the centre of the new national employment strategy 2021-2025, with a special focus on young people and women and emphasising the marginalised areas near the separation wall, Gaza and East Jerusalem. Efforts are being made to strengthen the capacity of public employment services and to make them more efficient and responsive to jobseekers and employers. The Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection is playing a more important role in supporting funding and training for micro and small enterprises, especially for those enterprises affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

An important achievement is that the government, trade unions and employers' organisations have reached an agreement to increase the national minimum wage by approximately USD 130 per month, starting from early 2022 (ILO, 2021).

The majority of future jobs for Palestinians will need to come from the private sector. However, different factors that are linked to the Israeli occupation (such as limitations on movement, lack of control over borders, volatile customs agreements and unpredictable tariffs) are discouraging factors for foreign investment in the Palestinian economy. There is a need to further invest in business

development services and to promote entrepreneurship among young people. This includes access to finance and investments, in particular in priority sectors, with the aim to restructure the Palestinian economy and rejuvenate the agriculture, industry and tourism sectors.

# 1. KEY DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

## ▪ Political developments

Palestine is characterised by its fragile political situation due to the long-lasting Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The regular escalations of violence and ongoing restrictions imposed by Israel on trade, movement of people and goods, and access to resources as well as tax revenues are making it difficult for Palestine to build a sustainable state. The constraints imposed under the Israeli occupation on the different regions (West Bank including East-Jerusalem and Gaza strip), including a decade-long blockade on the Gaza strip, have resulted in varying jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority within disconnected regions. In addition, Palestine is also suffering from the lack of a unified political system, which is dominated in the West Bank by Mahmoud Abbas with the Fatah party and in Gaza by Hamas. The Fatah-Hamas<sup>1</sup> conflict is still ongoing and negotiations between the two parties remain difficult.

This unique geopolitical context generates a segmented and structurally distorted economy with limited potential for economic growth. The situation further deteriorated following the military escalation between Israel and Hamas in May 2021. Trust between the two sides remains very low and prospects for an early return to meaningful negotiations are therefore limited.

Hopes are placed on improved relationships between the United States (US) and Palestine after the Trump administration left office. There are expectations for the Revival of the Quartet<sup>2</sup> discussions towards a renewed peace agreement between Israel and Palestine. The first steps to renew US-Palestine relations have been taken in 2021, including the announcement to reopen the US Consulate in East Jerusalem.

## ▪ Health situation

The state of emergency over the Covid-19 crisis is still in place and the World Health Organization (WHO) is working closely with the Ministry of Health to respond to the crisis. The monitoring system to collect data on the Covid-19 situation in Palestine is efficient. The necessary support actions are being coordinated in the West Bank and Gaza through the sub-national Health Cluster, for example for the delivery of equipment and medication, the training of health workers, vaccination awareness campaigns, etc.

During the Covid-19 crisis, the Palestinian people are experiencing the same shock and uncertainty as the rest of humanity; however, their government is unable to respond to the socioeconomic effects with the same agency as that of an independent, sovereign state (UN, 2020, p.15). The Palestinian Authority has to count on increased financial and development assistance to address its public health needs, provide essential services and respond to the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic.

As of 12 August 2021, 348 234 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 3 889 deaths have been reported. Active cases of COVID-19 are continuing to rise across Palestine, with Gaza reporting the most cases. In total, 626 279 people have been vaccinated: 512 416 in the West Bank, and 113 863 in Gaza.

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<sup>1</sup> [Fatah–Hamas conflict - Wikipedia](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Office of the Quartet - Wikipedia](#)

These figures represent around 22 % of the target Palestinian population (18 years and above) (source: World Health Organization, Situation Report 79, August 2021).

In addition to the Covid-19 crisis, the latest military escalation of May 2021 caused further population displacement and exacerbated a prolonged humanitarian crisis. Hostilities resulted in a loss of 278 Palestinian lives and over 9 000 injuries. Over 77 000 people were internally displaced and around 30 health facilities have been damaged. Because of the volatile health situation in Palestine, in May 2021 the WHO launched an appeal for USD 7 million to support its health operations focusing on trauma and emergency care, mental health and psychosocial services, advocacy, and maintaining essential health services, including for Covid-19 (World Health Organization, June 2021).

### ▪ **Demographics**

There were about 13.8 million Palestinians in the world in mid-2021, of whom about 5.23 million living in the Palestinian territories. The majority of Palestinians live abroad, mostly in other Arab states. The estimated population of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip stood at 3.12 million and 2.11 million respectively in mid-2021. More than one-third of the population is less than 15 years old. (UNFPA-PCBS, July 2021).

The annual population growth rate continues to be high, as has been the case for the last few decades. As of 2019, the population in Palestine was growing at 2.65 % annually. The average woman in Palestine gives birth to 4 children (source: World Population Review).

Young people (aged 15–24) were estimated to account for 34.1 % of the working-age population (aged 15–64) in 2020, which means that Palestine has one of the youngest populations not only in the region but also in the world (source: World Bank).

### ▪ **Economic development**

In 2015, the gross domestic product (GDP) was 3.7 %. Already in 2019, economic growth was low with a GDP of only 1.4 %, whereas it declined by 11.5 % in 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic worsened the already weak and fragile economic situation of Palestine due to its geopolitical context. During 2020, GDP fell by 11.5 % (the largest decline since 2002) due to the effects of the pandemic and due to Israeli occupation measures withholding tax clearance revenues. Those tax revenues that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority constitute 70 % of the total Palestinian revenues and are considered the main source of funds used to cover current expenditures (see press release from the Palestine Monetary Authority and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

A forecast simulation framework predicts that it will take at least two years for the Palestinian economy to recover from the pandemic, as GDP is projected to grow by 11 % and 6 % in 2021 and 2022 respectively, but only if Covid-19 is contained (UNCTAD, 2021, p. 29).

Services was the first sector to be hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular the tourism sector. Given that the service sector is the largest employer (61 % of gross value added), its disruption has serious consequences on the Palestinian economy.

If the current political and economic environment persists, the Palestinian economy will not be in a position to generate sufficient jobs to respond to the persistently high unemployment rates and will not be able to balance its public finances or reduce its trade deficit. Sustainable socio-economic recovery in Palestine requires lifting the blockade on Gaza, easing restrictions imposed by occupation in the West Bank, expanding the policy space and increasing donor support (see UNCTAD article, March 2021).

- **Informal economy**

The informal economy and informal employment play a significant role in the Palestinian labour market. Various sources (including the ILO and World Bank) indicate that more than half of workers in Palestine are hired informally. Informal employment primarily affects the most vulnerable. It is exceptionally high for young workers, while workers with a semi-skilled or low-skilled profile have a high chance of being employed informally.

- **Remittances**

Remittance inflows to Palestine are a necessary source of foreign currency. According to the latest figures from the World Bank, in 2020 Palestine received USD 2 650 million in remittances, which was slightly less than in 2019 with a remittance inflow of USD 2 860 million (source: World Bank).

- **International support**

The European Union and the European development partners are the largest contributors of assistance to Palestine, covering all areas (West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Area C, and the Gaza Strip). The nature and volume of European development cooperation in Palestine is strongly linked to the geopolitical context and the EU's objectives with regards to the Middle East Peace Process.

In 2021, the European Union provided EUR 34 million in humanitarian funding for Palestinians in need, including funds to address emerging needs due to the coronavirus pandemic and the recent violence in Gaza. Since 2000, the EU has provided more than EUR 827 million in humanitarian funding for Palestine (EU factsheet, 2021).

After some years of financial crisis for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the US has announced in April 2021 a new injection of USD 150 million for human development and humanitarian aid assistance to Palestine refugees across the Middle East (see UNWRA news, April 2021).

## 2. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

### 2.1 Trends and challenges

- **Education expenditure, access, participation and early leaving**

The UN's Education Cluster Strategy estimates that 416 000 people need humanitarian assistance in the field of education. The latest military escalations of May 2021 have damaged several schools in the Gaza Strip and worsened the already fragile education infrastructure. The acute humanitarian situation is exacerbated by the severe shortages in electricity, increased poverty and protection concerns. As a result, the financial requirement for the education sector of the Humanitarian Response Plan 2020 increased to USD 25.3 million needed for the year 2021 (United Nations, 2020). The financial requirement for the education sector expressed in the Humanitarian Response Plans for 2019 and 2020 was much lower, standing at USD 15 million and USD 15.3 million respectively (United Nations, 2018 and 2019).

Although 5.3 % of GDP was allocated to financing the education sector in 2017 (source: UNESCO), funding of education is heavily reliant on foreign aid. UNWRA is an important donor that is supporting the education sector for Palestinian refugees. As mentioned above, Palestine has faced a funding crisis as a result of cuts in foreign aid which had a negative effect on the education sector as a whole.

According to PCBS, in 2020, 47.9 % of the active population (aged 15+) have attained a low level of education, 15.3 % a medium level of education and 36.8 % a higher education degree (source: PCBS). Over the last five years, more people (from the active population aged 15 +) have attained a higher level education degree (31.5 % in 2015, compared to 36.8 % in 2020). Although higher educational attainments correspond to higher unemployment rates, young Palestinians do continue to prioritise higher education, especially women (79.5 % of which had a higher education degree in 2020). This phenomenon can be observed in many other Arabic countries. Evidence has shown that women who have higher levels of education than men have difficulties in finding a job, especially for those with high levels of educational attainment (ETF, 2021 b).

A drop of 5 % in early school leavers among young people aged 18–24 was observed over the past decade (from 35.4 % in 2010 to 30.3 % in 2020). The drop is due to female students, who have reduced their early dropout rate by almost 10 percentage points, resulting in fewer than one out of five young women (18.4 %) dropping out early (PCBS, 2020). The dropout rate for men is almost double of that of women.

Education in Palestine suffers from fragmented management. The Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHE)<sup>3</sup> are responsible for managing public schools, colleges and universities and have regulatory overview of those run by the private sector. Meanwhile, the VET arena (including non-formal vocational training) is home to an even more complex spectrum, with additional players such as centres affiliated to the Ministry of Labour (MoL), the Ministry of Social Development, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

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<sup>3</sup> At regular intervals, these two ministries have been merged and separated again. Since April 2019, they have operated as two separate entities.



Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), civil society organisations (CSOs), including those that are faith-based, and private for-profit training providers.

The share of students in initial VET in Palestine has long been considered marginal. 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 economy), have hovered around 2 % to 3 %. According to the Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report from the Ministry of Education (2018), the latest available figures for 2018 point to a share of 3.9 % of students in formal initial VET (secondary cycle, grade 11) and find a sharp gender divide (6.9 % for boys and merely 1.5 % for girls). This is an increase of 1 % compared to 2017 in the case of secondary vocational education (grade 11) (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Due to the fragmented VET system, it has always been a challenge to gain a complete picture of the system with administrative data such as enrolment figures. Based on calculations and data gathering carried out in 2019 in the framework of the national Torino Process assessment, a positive trend can be identified with a rise of roughly 15 % of student enrolment in the upper-secondary age cohort (aged 16–18) in all forms of formal and non-formal VET training programmes provided by different ministries. Overall, it can be concluded that enrolment figures are positive for all the VET tracks (ETF, 2021).

Keeping up this performance in terms of overall access to education will require even greater efforts, because the school-age population is expected to increase in the coming years as a result of demographic changes.

- **Young people not in employment nor education (NEETs)**

In 2020, 34.5 % of young Palestinians aged 15–24 were not in employment, education or training (NEETs); 30 % of NEETs are male and 39 % are female (PCBS, 2021). In the last five years, these figures have been stagnating despite all the support provided from the donor and civic society community. Continuous efforts are invested to reduce the high percentage of NEETs.

A new EU-funded programme entitled ‘Youth Economic Empowerment in Palestine (YEP)’ is being developed to enable young people not in employment or education to access decent employment opportunities and is intended to enhance their contribution to economic, social and public life. This new programme is planned to start in 2022.

- **Education during the COVID-19 pandemic**

The Ministry of Education (MoE) estimates that more than 1.43 million children, including primary and secondary students as well as preschool children, were locked down in their homes during the pandemic. The UN established a Covid-19 response plan for the education sector that focused on providing adequate information, providing access to free online platforms for home-based learning and implementing necessary hygiene measures in all schools to prevent the virus from spreading. A lot of attention was also given to the mental health and psychosocial well-being of students, parents and educators in the West bank and Gaza (Source: United Nations, 2020).

As in many countries of the world, the lack of equipment (computers, laptops, etc.), e-learning platforms and weak internet connection were the main obstacles hindering the continuation of the learning process. Weak digital skills among teachers and educators made it difficult to shift from face-to-face to online education. However, many good practices have emerged in online teaching and the donor community is continuing to offer digital skills training for teachers and educators.

## 2.2 VET policy and institutional setting

- **Strategic and legal framework for VET and adult learning**

From the National Policy Agenda for 2017–2022 (State of Palestine, 2016), it is clear that the Palestinian government is particularly aware of human capital development issues. One of the seven educational programmes in the plan focuses solely on TVET<sup>4</sup>, with the aim of preparing qualified graduates of vocational education programmes to enter university, working life and the labour market.

Sectoral strategies have been developed within the framework of this agenda and the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2020. The Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017–2022, developed by the former Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), is considered to be the current strategic working document.

The first TVET strategy dates from 1999 and was revised in 2008 and 2010. 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 cited reasons is the lack of a single governing entity for VET.

The National Strategy for Adult learning dates from 2013 and there is little information available that shows any new developments in this area at institutional level.

- **VET governance and financing arrangements**

As in many countries, VET governance is fragmented in Palestine. VET policymaking is in the hands of three main actors: the Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHE) and Ministry of Labour (MoL).

As mentioned above, the TVET strategy has never been fully implemented partially due to the lack of a single governance body. For decades, many attempts have been made to address the governance issue and different models were proposed and implemented (e.g. the Higher Council for TVET and Development Centre 2017). By the end of 2020, the draft law had received Cabinet approval and, in February 2021 the establishment of the TVET Commission was finally approved by the President (Presidential Law n°4). An executive director and a board of directors have been appointed. The commission is currently working on an action plan and will receive an operational budget in 2022 to start its activities. In principle, as of February 2022, all the TVET departments from the different ministries (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Transport) will be integrated under the umbrella of the TVET Commission. In addition, high-level representatives from the Chambers of Commerce, Trade Union association and the Nablus TVET University are key members of the new Commission.

According to the Monitoring and Evaluation Report of the Ministry of Education, the cost of a student in school education dropped to USD 933 in 2018 from USD 971 in 2017, whereas the education budget represented 20 % of the total budget of the Palestinian Authority in 2018. The education budget

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<sup>4</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 paper the term VET will be used unless referring to a specific unit, document or quote from Palestine that makes reference to TVET.

decreased slightly in relation to 2017, when stood at 21 % of the total budget (Ministry of Education, 2018). The target for 2022 would be to increase the education budget to represent 27 % of the total budget. The reasons for this small decline are not explained in the monitoring and evaluation report.

There is no recent data available on government expenditure for the TVET sector as a whole.

A National Training Fund was first designed in 2013 but did not become operational.

In 2021, under the umbrella of ENABEL's project 'Skilled Young Palestine', a blueprint to establish a new Skills Development Fund is being drafted and discussions are ongoing between all key stakeholders. The Skills Development Fund will become the primary financial pillar providing sustainable financing and technical support for skills development for the whole country. With the approval of the new TVET Commission earlier this year and the strong involvement of the private sector in the design phase of the Fund, expectations are high that the Skills Development Fund will become a reality in the near future.

- **Quality and quality assurance**

A National Qualification Framework (NQF) working group developed a draft NQF in 2010, based on the Arab Standard Occupational Classification (AOC) system, but the Cabinet did not approve it. No law on a Palestinian NQF has been adopted yet. Regarding the accreditation, it is the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee (AQAC) that licenses higher education institutions and colleges and accredits their programmes. For VET institutions, the Ministries of Education and Labour are in charge of accrediting and licensing VET institutions and the adoption of their programmes. However, qualification standards are not systematically applied, nor are assessment and certification standards in order to quality-assure qualifications and their assessment and award (ETF, 2021 c).

- **Work-based learning arrangements**

The ministries of education and labour are convinced of the importance and impact that work-based learning (WBL) has on the employability of young people. In recent years, GIZ, ENABEL and the World bank have been supporting the country to integrate WBL at different levels of education in Palestine.

A national WBL strategy was developed in 2018 which outlines WBL definitions and models that include: Traineeship - Internship - First job experience - Apprenticeship school-based - Apprenticeship company-based - Informal apprenticeship (not TVET).

Because of the fragmented VET system, different models of WBL have been implemented at different levels in VET. More efforts are needed to further streamline and implement WBL across the whole VET system.

WBL is expensive and it is clear that additional funding is needed to further implement and fine tune the WBL model. The national Skills Development Fund that is currently being developed could provide support in this respect. Based on a recent internal GIZ report on WBL, one of the main constraints is the limited number of medium-sized enterprises that are well placed to implement WBL. Many micro and small companies will need to come on board through the provision of incentives and extra support.

The WBL legal framework and bylaws need to be reviewed, based on the TVET law and new governance structure. In addition, it should be compatible with the higher education bylaws.

- **Digital education and skills**

Within the framework of the UN's Education Cluster, a 'Distance Learning Taskforce' was established with the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020. The taskforce is led by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education and lays the groundwork for the development of innovative distance learning solutions to ensure inclusive and equitable high-quality education. The taskforce started to develop a blended learning strategy for Palestine.

There is a strong need for a digital skills strategy, especially in the case of Palestine where student mobility is difficult in some regions due to the Israeli occupation and where face-to-face teaching is interrupted because of military escalation, as was the case in May 2021 in Gaza and East-Jerusalem.

- **Donor support to education and VET for young people and adults**

There are numerous donors supporting education and VET, such as UNESCO, UNICEF and UNWRA. The latter remains a key partner in supporting education for millions of Palestinian refugees worldwide. The main donors are the EU through the joint strategy; in particular ENABEL (Belgium) and GIZ (Germany) are among the main supporters of the VET sector. Finland, Ireland, France, Norway and Canada are also supporting the education and VET sector.

A new European Joint Strategy 2021-2024 entitled 'Towards a democratic, accountable and sustainable Palestinian State' is being developed. The third pillar of the strategy is about providing sustainable service delivery which includes three sectors: education, health and social protection. European development partners are working together with the Ministry of Education and UNRWA to offer safe, gender responsive, inclusive and equitable access to high-quality education for all boys and girls in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

Most of the support to VET is covered within wider economic empowerment projects that are linking VET with the labour market, such as Enabel's Skilled Young Palestine (SYP) project and the EU's upcoming project 'Youth Economic Empowerment' (YEP).

There are only a few ongoing projects that are aiming at VET specifically:

'Strengthening a demand-oriented Vocational Education and Training (DoTVET)' (2021-2024), financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). DoTVET focuses on capacity development for TVET personnel and in-company trainers, cooperation between schools and workplaces as learning spaces and raising the attractiveness of TVET programmes.

GRIT Project: Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Technical and Vocational Education and Training in the West Bank (2019-2024), financed by Global Affairs Canada and implemented by the Lutheran World Federation. The focus is on integrating more women and women with disabilities in VET.

## 3. LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT

### 3.1 Trends and challenges

- **Labour market and employment challenges in general**

As a result of Palestine's specific historical, political and economic situation, its 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, Gaza Strip and Israel is very pronounced and creates a major obstacle to growth. Each area operates with its own labour market characteristics, labour demand and wage levels. Compared to the West Bank, the Gaza Strip performs clearly worse for all measurable labour market indicators, with higher unemployment, lower activity and employment rates, lower wages and a smaller private sector. Moreover, the differences between the situations of Palestinians in the domestic labour market and those working in Israel are even more prominent.

This challenging macroeconomic context seriously affects labour market outcomes. Between 2000 and 2016 the working-age population in Palestine increased by 83 % to almost 2.93 million, or about 61 % of the total Palestinian population. However, the working-age population remains largely inactive, particularly in the case of women and young people (ILO, 2018).

The labour force survey (LFS) is clear: inactivity is predominant in Palestine, with only 40.9 % of the population aged 15 years or above actively participating (source: PCBS, 2020). There is, however, a huge discrepancy by gender. The labour force participation rate (population aged 15+) for men stands at 65.1 %, but it is only 16.1 % for women, which is low even by regional standards. Over a period of 10 years, the situation did not change drastically: in 2010 the activity rate (age 15+) for men was 67 % and 14,8 % for women. Major structural obstacles hinder women's entry into the formal labour force. These include a lack of policies that promote the hiring of women, a weak manufacturing sector, high unemployment rates for men, negative cultural attitudes and unfavourable societal views regarding women working outside the home, limited childcare opportunities and traditional gender divisions of labour (ETF, 2021 a).

Unemployment figures are high, especially among young people and women, with big discrepancies between Gaza and the West Bank.

When addressing the labour market situation in Palestine, one cannot neglect the growing number of Palestinians working in Israel and the settlements. According to the ILO, this concerns 127 000 Palestinians, two thirds of which in the country's booming construction sector (ILO, 2019). Some of them work illegally, informally or using illegally purchased work permits. The lack of jobs and potentially higher salaries are the main reasons for such a high outflow. Palestinians working in Israel or in the settlements are heavily affected by the political situation. In crisis periods, such as Covid-19 and military interventions, physical access to Israel is restricted and makes it impossible for Palestinians to work and to earn an income.

The majority of future jobs for the Palestinians will need to come from the private sector, but as long as the country is living under occupation, the private sector will not be able to fully flourish. Different factors (such as limitations on movement, lack of control over borders, volatile customs agreements and unpredictable tariffs) are discouraging factors for foreign investors. Foreign direct investment in

Palestine has hovered at a low rate of 1–2 % of GDP over the past decade, standing at 1.8 % in 2018 (source: IMF).

### ▪ **Employment**

Based on PCBS labour force survey data, the distribution of employment across economic sectors has changed significantly over the past decade. While 11.8 % of Palestinians workers were still employed in the agricultural sector in 2010, this share fell by almost a half to 6.4 % in 2020 (PCBS).

Most Palestinians workers were employed in the service sector (63.8 %), while 29.9 % were employed in the industry and construction sector in 2020 (PCBS).

While the share of value added from the agricultural sector declined from 9 % in 2010 to 7.1 % in 2019, the share of value added from the industry sector stagnated in the last decade and that of the services sector increased from 57.7 % in 2010 to 61.1 % in 2019 (World bank).

The Palestinian economy is dominated by small firms and has a high level of self-employment, namely 27.7 % in 2020 (PCBS). Entrepreneurship is seen as a possible solution for unemployment, but it would need an enabling business environment and investment to develop entrepreneurial capacities.

The tourism sector is the hardest hit sector and its recovery from the pandemic will be slower than that of other sectors. Before the pandemic, the sector directly accounted for 4 % of the employed workforce and, in recent years, its contribution to the economy had been rising fast. During the first half of 2019, the sector registered a 21 % and 40 % increase in hotel guests compared with the corresponding periods in 2018 and 2017, respectively (UNCTAD 2020, p. 11).

### ▪ **Unemployment**

As mentioned above, unemployment figures are high in Palestine and, compared to unemployment figures in 2015, the situation is deteriorating. In 2020, the overall unemployment rate for Palestine (for the population aged 15+) stood at 25.9 %, compared to 23 % in 2015.

The unemployment figures vary significantly when broken down further: there are large discrepancies by gender (22.5 % for men and 40.1 % for women), by region (15.7 % in the West Bank and 46.6 % in Gaza) and by age (73.8 % in the 15-24 age group compared to 45.1 % in the 25-49 age group) (PCBS Labour Force Survey 2020).

A big challenge for Palestine is the fight against high youth unemployment (42.1 % in 2020 among those aged 15–24), reaching the dramatic figure of 70 % among young women. The most recent available data shows that the situation in the Gaza Strip is particularly worrying, with a youth unemployment rate (aged 15–24 years) of 71.6 % (71.6 % for men and 92 % for women) in 2020. This means that, in Gaza, two-thirds of young people have no income and almost all young women are unemployed. In the West Bank, the youth unemployment rate (aged 15–24 years) is 28.1 %, namely 23.6 % for men and 54 % for women (PCBS Labour Force Survey 2020).

### ▪ **Statistical data collection and labour market information**

The Palestinian Labour Market Information System (LMIS) operates under the umbrella of the Ministry of Labour. The LMIS should, in principle, be kept updated by the MoL, but owing to a lack of resources and capacities this is not happening. It is mainly the PCBS that disseminates labour market and labour force information.

Labour market data is gathered from two main sources: labour force surveys carried out every six months by the PCBS, and information gathered through the one-stop shops. In addition, other organisations and research centres, such as ILO, Paltrade and the Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) carry out labour market studies to identify trends and analyse skill needs.

- **Poverty**

Three out of ten Palestinians live in deep poverty<sup>5</sup>. The poverty rate increased from 25.8 % in 2011 to 29.2 % in 2017. Gaza is mostly affected, where 53 % of the population lives below the poverty line. The rising unemployment levels, declining donor support and falling per-capita GDP indicate that the poverty crisis has only become worse since 2017 in both the West Bank and Gaza (UNCTAD, 2020, p. 7-8).

## 3.2 Employment policy and institutional setting

- **Strategy and legal framework in the employment policy field**

Palestine has the following strategies in place in the area of labour market and employment:

**Labour Sector Strategy of 2020-2022** 'The road to decent work and employment opportunities improvement'. The strategy specifies five goals that are very relevant for the skills and employment development of the Palestinians, such as: promoting self-employment, skilling and upskilling people in line with the needs of the labour market, improving the tri-partite relationships regarding decent work and social protection of workers and supporting networking amongst organisations.

**National Employment Strategy of 2021-2025** to achieve full, productive and freely chosen employment for jobseekers, particularly youth and women. The strategy places employment at the heart of socioeconomic 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.

**National Strategy for Entrepreneurship and Empowerment Sector of 2020-2022**, including all individual and collective initiatives that are based on commercial foundations and seek to achieve economic growth or societal development. The strategy aims to support development and establishment of SMEs and start-ups in priority sectors, focusing on agriculture, industry and tourism.

**The second Palestinian Decent Work Programme 2018-2022**, provides a framework of 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**

Initiatives to boost employment and active labour market policies (ALMP) are provided by a wide range of national stakeholders: Palestinian Public Employment Service; Palestinian Fund for

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<sup>5</sup> Poverty is defined by PCBS according to monthly consumption patterns. The poverty line is estimated on the basis of covering basic household needs (shelter, clothing and food) as well as health care, education, transportation, personal care, and housekeeping supplies. Deep poverty is defined as households 'unable to meet the minimum required basic needs for food, clothing and housing'. Poverty lines have been adjusted to reflect the varying consumption of families based on household size and number of children (PCBS 2020).

Employment and Social Protection for Workers (PFESP); Employment Offices; One-Stop Shops and Local Education and Training Councils. However, there is still a lack of an adequate and comprehensive employment service system in Palestine. The Labour Sector Strategy 2020-2022 aims to improve the employment services and to reinforce the role of the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection for Workers (PFESP) which is the national umbrella institution for all employment, job creation and entrepreneurship development programmes implemented in Palestine.

UNRWA and various Palestinian civil society organisations and associations (such as the Welfare Association, the Sharek Youth Forum, the Centre for Youth Economic Empowerment and the Education for Employment Fund) also provide ALMPs through programmes that focus on enhancing the employability of young people through training, coaching and mentoring. Those programmes, implemented by different organisations or funded by different donors, often have similar goals and are not always coordinated. As much of the donor aid flows through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), they still seem the most important players in providing social and employment services.

In the future, joint efforts between GIZ and ENABEL will be made towards developing a 'First Employment Facility' that would help VET and university graduates to find their way to employment by getting a first job experience through a matching platform and internships. This will be done in close cooperation with the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection for Workers (PFESP).

There is a need to further invest in business development services and to promote youth entrepreneurship. This includes access to finance and investments, in particular in priority sectors with the aim to restructure the Palestinian economy and rejuvenate the agriculture, industry and tourism sectors (ETF, 2020).

Entrepreneurship is seen as a possible solution for unemployment, but it would need an enabling environment and investment to develop entrepreneurial capacities. Self-employment accounted for 27.7 % of total employment in 2020, while it stood at 32.4 % in 2010 (PCBS).

- **Donor support to the employment policy field**

The following ongoing projects are aimed at improving the employability of Palestinians, in particular women and young people. The main stakeholder in those programmes is the Ministry of Labour.

The upcoming EU programme entitled '*Palestinian Youth Empowerment Programme*' (EUR 5 million financed under the European Neighbourhood Instrument) will be implemented and co-financed by Enabel. The objective of the programme is to better equip young women and men to access inclusive and decent employment opportunities.

The '*Programme for Access to the Labour Market (PALM)*', implemented and financed by GIZ, aims at providing job seekers with better quality employment services (e.g. job counselling, placement, short term qualification, self-employment orientation, entrepreneurship counselling) with the objective of finding employment within 6 months after having received the employment services. At the same time, the programme also helps companies to benefit from consulting services addressing recruitment, marketing and planning practices.

'*SYP - Skilled Young Palestine: Improving Resilience and Job opportunities for Youth*' is financed and implemented by ENABEL. It aims to support Palestinian youth (aged between 16 and 29 years) in gaining economic autonomy and building resilience through improving transition to employment and self-employment.



For further information, please contact Kristien Van den Eynde, European Training Foundation, email: [kristien.van-den-eynde@etf.europa.eu](mailto:kristien.van-den-eynde@etf.europa.eu)

# STATISTICAL ANNEX, REFERENCES, ACRONYMS- PALESTINE

The annex includes annual data from 2010, 2015, 2019 and 2020 or the last available year.

	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	
<b>1</b>	Total Population ('000) <sup>(1)</sup>	3 786.2	4 270.1	4 685.3	4 803.3	
<b>2</b>	Relative size of youth population (age group 15–24 and age in the denominator 15–64, %) <sup>(1)(2)</sup>	39.4	38.1	34.9	34.1	
<b>3</b>	GDP growth rate (%)	5.8	3.7	1.4	-11.5	
<b>4</b>	GDP by sector (%)	Agriculture added value	9.0	7.4	7.1	M.D.
		Industry added value	18.6	16.4	18.4	M.D.
		Services added value	57.7	61.7	61.1	M.D.
<b>5</b>	Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP)	6.7	5.1	5.3 (2017)	M.D.	
<b>6</b>	Public expenditure on education (as % of total public expenditure)	17.8	15.5	16.1 (2017)	M.D.	
<b>7</b>	Adult literacy (%)	94.7	96.5	97.4	M.D.	
<b>8</b>	Educational attainment of adult population (aged 25–64 or 15+) (%) <sup>(3)</sup>	Low	57.2	53.7	49.6	47.9
		Medium	14.5	14.8	15.2	15.6
		High	28.4	31.5	35.2	36.8
<b>9</b>	Early leavers from education and training (aged 18–24) (%)	Total	35.4	31.4	30.3	30.3
		Male	41.4	39.6	40.2	39.4
		Female	28.1	20.8	17.8	18.4
<b>10</b>	Gross enrolment rates in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	77.9	68.0	78.1	M.D.	
<b>11</b>	Share of VET students in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	6.1	2.0	3.0	M.D.	
<b>12</b>	Tertiary education attainment (aged 30–34) (%)	20.4	28.4	M.D.	M.D.	
<b>13</b>	Participation in training/lifelong learning (aged 25–64) (%)	Total	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
		Male	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
		Female	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
<b>14</b>	Reading	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	

	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	
	Low achievement in reading, mathematics and science – PISA (%)	Mathematics	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
		Science	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
<b>15</b>	Activity rate (aged 15+) (%) <sup>(4)</sup>	Total	41.2	44.0	44.3	40.9
		Male	67.1	69.6	69.9	65.1
		Female	14.8	17.7	18.1	16.1
<b>16</b>	Inactivity rate (aged 15+) (%) <sup>(4)</sup>	Total	58.8	56.0	55.7	59.1
		Male	32.9	30.4	30.1	34.9
		Female	85.2	82.3	81.9	83.9
<b>17</b>	Employment rate (aged 15+) (%) <sup>(4)</sup>	Total	31.4	33.9	33.1	30.3
		Male	51.6	55.5	55.0	50.5
		Female	10.8	11.6	10.6	9.7
<b>18</b>	Employment rate by educational attainment (% aged 15+) <sup>(4)(5)</sup>	Low	36.5	38.6	38.4	35.0
		Medium	27.1	30.6	29.9	27.6
		High	59.8	54.5	49.7	46.5
<b>19</b>	Employment by sector (%) <sup>(4)</sup>	Agriculture	11.8	8.7	6.1	6.4
		Industry	24.3	28.1	29.7	29.9
		Services	63.9	63.2	64.2	63.8
<b>20</b>	Incidence of self-employment (%) <sup>(4) (C)</sup>		32.4	31.4	28.6	27.7
<b>21</b>	Incidence of vulnerable employment (%) <sup>(4)</sup>		26.0	25.1	22.1	21.9
<b>22</b>	Unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%) <sup>(4)</sup>	Total	23.8	23.0	25.3	25.9
		Male	23.1	20.2	21.3	22.5
		Female	26.8	34.3	41.2	40.1
<b>23</b>	Unemployment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%) <sup>(4)</sup>	Low	24.6	21.4	22.5	24.2
		Medium	19.7	17.4	20.3	20.1
		High	24.1	28.4	31.5	30.5
<b>24</b>	Long-term unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%) <sup>(4)</sup>		12.5	9.5	M.D.	M.D.
<b>25</b>	Youth unemployment rate (aged 15–24) (%) <sup>(4)</sup>	Total	39.1	37.4	40.1	42.1
		Male	37.1	33.7	34.7	36.6
		Female	49.8	56.6	67.1	70.0
<b>26</b>	Total		29.3	32.2	33.4	34.5

Indicator		2010	2015	2019	2020
Proportion of people aged 15–24 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (%) <sup>(4)</sup>	Male	24.3	26.6	26.7	30.0
	Female	34.5	38.2	40.4	39.1

Last update: September 2021

Sources:

Indicators 8, 9, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS).

Indicators 5, 6, 7, 10, 11: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics.

Indicators 1, 2, 3, 4: The World Bank, World Development Indicators database.

Notes:

<sup>(1)</sup> The values shown are mid-year estimates.

<sup>(2)</sup> ETF calculations.

<sup>(3)</sup> Active population.

<sup>(4)</sup> Data from 2010 revised according to the results from the population, housing and establishments' census, 2017; there is a break in series in year 2015 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).

Legend:

c = calculated

N.A. = Not Applicable

M.D. = Missing Data

## ANNEX: DEFINITIONS OF INDICATORS

	Description	Definition
1	Total population ('000)	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 not available, 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 (74)/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 U.S. 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	GDP by sector (%)	The share of value added from Agriculture, Industry and Services. Agriculture corresponds to ISIC divisions 1–5 and includes forestry, hunting, and fishing, as well as cultivation of crops 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.
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 his/her everyday life, and understand it. Generally, 'literacy' also encompasses 'numeracy' – the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations.

	Description	Definition
8	Educational attainment of adult population (25–64 or aged 15+) (%)	Educational attainment refers to the highest educational level achieved by individuals expressed as a percentage of all persons in that age group.  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 (age group 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 four weeks preceding the survey. Lower secondary education refers to: ISCED 1997 levels 0–2 and 3C short (i.e. programmes lasting under two years) for data up to 2013; ISCED 2011 levels 0–2 for data from 2014 onwards.
10	Gross enrolment rates in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	Number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same 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	Tertiary education attainment (aged 30–34) (%)	Tertiary attainment is calculated as the percentage of the population aged 30–34 who have successfully completed tertiary studies (e.g. university, higher technical institution). Educational attainment refers to: ISCED 1997 level 5–6 up to 2013; ISCED 2011 level 5–8 from 2014 onwards.
13	Participation in training/lifelong learning (age group 25–64) (%)	Participants in lifelong learning refers to persons aged 25–64 who stated that they received education or training in the four 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.
14	Low achievement in reading, maths and science – PISA (%)	Low achievers are the 15-year-olds who are failing to reach level 2 on the PISA scale for reading, mathematics and science.
15	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.
16	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.
17	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 one 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.

	Description	Definition
18	Employment rate by educational attainment (% aged 15+)	<p>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 one 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.</p> <p>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).</p>
19	Employment by sector (%)	This indicator provides information on the relative importance of different economic activities with regard to employment. Data are presented by broad branches 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.
20	Incidence of self-employment (%)	The incidence of self-employment is expressed by the self-employed (i.e. employers + own-account workers + contributing family workers) as a proportion of the total employed.
21	Incidence of vulnerable employment (%)	The incidence of vulnerable employment is expressed by the own-account workers and contributing family workers as a proportion of the total employed.
22	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 two weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work, i.e. had taken specific steps in the four-week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment, or had found a job to start later (within a period of, at most, three months).
23	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 two weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work (had taken specific steps in the four-week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment, or had found a job to start later (within a period of, at most, three 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)
24	Long-term unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%)	The long-term unemployment rate is the share of people in the total active population who have been unemployed for 12 months or more, expressed as a percentage. The duration of unemployment is defined as the duration of a search for a job or as the period of time since the last job was held (if this period is shorter than the duration of the search for a job).

	Description	Definition
25	Youth unemployment rate (aged 15–24) (%)	The youth unemployment ratio is calculated by dividing the number of unemployed people aged 15–24 by the total population of the same age group.
26	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 four weeks preceding the survey. Data are expressed as a percentage of the total population of the same age group and gender, excluding the respondents who have not answered the question on participation in education and training.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ALMP	Active Labour Market Policies
CBO	community based organisations
CSO	civil society organisations
ENABEL	Belgium Development Agency
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	International Labour Organization
LFS	labour force survey
LMIS	Labour Market Information System
MAS	Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
MOL	Ministry of Labour
NEET	not in employment, education or training

NQF National Qualification Framework  
PALM Programme for Access to the Labour Market  
PCBS Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics  
PFESP Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection for Workers  
PEDCAR Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction  
SME Small and Medium Enterprises  
SYP Skilled Young Palestine  
TVET Technical Vocational Education and Training  
UNCTAD - United Nations Conference on Trade and Development  
UNWRA United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees  
UN United Nations  
US United States  
VET Vocational Education and Training  
WBL Work-Based Learning  
WHO World Health Organization  
YEP Youth Economic Empowerment in Palestine

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT  
OUR ACTIVITIES PLEASE CONTACT:  
COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT  
EUROPEAN TRAINING FOUNDATION  
VIALE SETTIMIO SEVERO 65  
I - 10133 TORINO  
E: [INFO@ETF.EUROPA.EU](mailto:INFO@ETF.EUROPA.EU)  
T: +39 011 6302222  
F: +39 011 6302200  
[WWW.ETF.EUROPA.EU](http://WWW.ETF.EUROPA.EU)