

## Education and vocational and technical training in the West Bank from a gender perspective

### Introduction

When the PA began operating in the Palestinian territories, it worked with the vocational and technical centers, schools and colleges that already existed. In 1996, it adopted the “National Strategy for Education and Vocational and Technical Training” which coincided with the educational, vocational and technical approaches in place, then developed them in 2000 and reviewed and further developed them in 2010.

The strategy focuses on improving and developing an educational and vocational and technical training system. It also takes into consideration the need to provide equal opportunities to males and females and for Palestinian women to have access to this type of education. However, the strategy does not discuss the importance of integrating gender issues into its objectives or adopting criteria and measures to bridge the gender gap in this sector.<sup>1</sup> Later, in February, 2005 the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Labor launched the Higher Council for Education and Vocational Training in Palestine. In turn, the Council established the Center for Vocational and Technical Development to serve as the technical arm of the system. It also established an executive council to develop plans and coordinate with educational, vocational and technical institutions.<sup>2</sup> In May, 2014 the Council of Ministers decided to establish the National Commission for Education and Vocational and Technical Training and considered it the body responsible for implementing the national strategy. This decision was suspended in the same month. Then again, in 2018, the Executive Council, with a mandate from the legal committee, recommended the preparation of an education and vocational and technical training law. A zero-draft law was drawn up on education and vocational and technical training.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, a committee was appointed to review and update the national strategy from a gender perspective in which the Palestinian Ministry of Women’s Affairs participated. In June 2019, the Council of Ministers established another committee to review the curriculum. A technical committee was formed from the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education and Research, the Ministry of National Economy and the Ministry of Information Technology to review the “National Strategy for Education and Vocational and Technical Training” in Palestine and to offer recommendations and visions to the Palestinian Council of Ministers to reform and

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ijoe.org/v6/IJJOE\\_03\\_01\\_06\\_2017.pdf](http://ijoe.org/v6/IJJOE_03_01_06_2017.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://library.palestineconomy.ps/public/files/server/20151412134557-2.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Interview with the Director of the Development Center, Mr. Edward Hmeidat on June 12, 2019

develop this sector.<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the structural makeup of vocational and technical training and education in Palestine is weak, which is why this sector continues to suffer from administrative and organizational difficulties.<sup>5</sup>

The success of vocational and technical training and education in Palestine depends on building strong cooperation between all governmental, nongovernmental, private and international bodies and institutions in order to develop this sector. What's more, [male and female] directors and CEOs of companies and institutions must play a crucial and effective role in planning and formulating the policies of this sector and in creating vocational and technical programs. It is important to focus on practical vocational skills and training within centers, institutions, schools and colleges in addition to training in work places in addition to ongoing follow-up and evaluation. Furthermore, curricula must be tailored to the needs of the Palestinian labor market.

### **Obstacles and challenges**

The system of education and vocational and technical training in the West Bank is up against tangible obstacles given the current situation. These obstacles can be divided into; structural challenges and obstacles and infrastructural challenges and obstacles of the education and vocational and technical training sector in addition to other obstacles at the level of female and male trainers and teachers, the theoretical curriculum and practical implementation. We will also discuss the obstacles and challenges facing students in general, with a focus on Palestinian girls in vocational and technical training and education in the West Bank.

### **Structural obstacles and challenges**

- There is a multitude of bodies that oversee the education, vocational and technical training in occupied Palestine, including government, private, international and civil society parties. There is no official body that represents all schools, technical or community colleges and vocational and technical centers. An example of this is how in order for researchers to obtain information or statistics on this sector, they must go to all the ministries overseeing the education and vocational and technical training to request each piece of information or statistic separately.
- At present, there is no active role for the center for the development of education and vocational and technical training, for the higher education council for education and vocational and technical training or for the executive council, which offers technical support, consultation and a review of the policies for following up and developing education and vocational and technical training in occupied Palestine.
- Non equitable geographic distribution of technical centers, schools and colleges and community colleges in West Bank districts, cities, villages and camps.

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Mr. Ziad Jweiles (expert and rapporteur for the technical committee) on June 11, 2019

<sup>5</sup> <https://library.palestineeconomy.ps/public/files/server/20151412134557-2.pdf>

- Hindrance to student access to centers, schools and colleges because of Israeli military checkpoints, especially in the northern and southern West Bank.
- The lack of awareness about education and vocational and technical training in the West Bank in spite of brochures and booklets in schools, institutes and centers in addition to social media pages on the topic.

### **Infrastructure obstacles:**

- The lack of periodic maintenance to buildings and workshops where students study and train; some buildings are in need of maintenance while others need expansion.
- There is no clear-cut budget for education and vocational and technical training; every ministry allocates a part of its budget to the programs it offers and oversees. As for the centers, schools and private and international colleges, they are self-funded or by donations from various parties, which makes them expensive.
- The lack of substitute teaching staff in case of leaves (maternity, emergency ) or retirement.
- There is a lack of a comprehensive review plan for the theoretical and practical curriculum, which is taught every three years. Conducting annual evaluations for all fields of specialization is also lacking.
- There is a weak presence of training that corresponds with the technological developments in the various disciplines taught in institutions.
- A shortage of professional competencies with specialized degrees in vocational centers and industrial schools.

### **Obstacles and challenges facing females**

- A shortage of educational, vocational and technical institutions close to where girls live
- The limited disciplines available to females in the West Bank, most of which reinforce the stereotypical role of women and girls.
- A shortage of job opportunities for female graduates in vocational training centers; even when available, their daily wages are very low.
- Israeli military checkpoints either delay or hinder girls from reaching institutions, prompting them to go back home, which decreases the opportunities for them to get out of the house.
- The lack of acceptance by family and society for girls to study certain disciplines which require studying in coed classes and which are perceived as male-only. This is due to the fact that disciplines are subject to the division of labor by gender in Palestinian society.
- There is a problem in the Palestinian Society's perception about vocational education; First, vocational and technical education and training is categorized as education for

males; second, it is considered education for those who have low scholastic achievement and third, it is for the poorer and more marginalized sectors.

- There is no policy for encouraging vocational and industrial students (male or female) to enroll in technical or community colleges and to follow-up with them.

### **Recommendations:**

- Conducting a statistical survey to determine the participation of women and girls in vocational and technical centers and the disciplines they enroll in.
- Evaluating the quality of education and training students receive, especially females, in all institutions that offer vocational and technical education and then linking this to the needs in the Palestinian local market and the ability of male and female graduates to work with the skills they acquired.
- Developing a cross-sectoral plan to guide vocational and technical education disciplines to keep abreast of the labor market's technological developments and needs and to increase the participation of Palestinian women; also to develop projects that contribute to Palestinian economic growth and provide job opportunities to absorb graduates, especially female graduates.
- Setting in place mechanisms for supervision and monitoring over vocational and technical training centers, which will create safe spaces for girls' and women's participation.
- Creating an attractive environment for female students in institutions that offer vocational and technical training through a variety of disciplines; motivating and encouraging trainees; raising the awareness of Palestinian society to the importance of vocational and technical training and education, which necessitates proposing its curriculum to elementary school students in order to introduce them and their families on the importance of the role of vocational education in developing and advancing Palestinian society.
- Developing clear policies and measures to employ graduates of this sector and to work towards developing an automated system to connect graduates with employers and institutions.
- Developing a database of all vocational and technical training graduates from the different centers, schools and colleges and making it available to employers and Palestinian institutions that offer small-grant programs for women's economic empowerment. This database will provide an opportunity for the various institutions to have access to every graduate's file and to communicate with them.
- Studying the geographic distribution of community and technical colleges, schools, centers and government, international, religious and charitable institutions and how easy it is to reach them; also reviewing their enrollment policies, in particular the institutions

that offer free vocational and technical education and therefore contribute to economic empowerment, especially for females living in difficult economic circumstances.

- The PA must allocate a special budget for vocational and technical education and training, which would require administrative and organizational restructuring.
- Putting into action the Higher Educational and Vocational Training Council and the Development Center; reviewing the zero-draft resolution law and passing a law on vocational and technical education and training in occupied Palestine.
- Raising awareness in Palestinian society on the importance of vocational and technical education and training, which would require proposing its curriculum to elementary school students to introduce them and their families to the importance of the role of vocational training in developing and advancing the Palestinian economy.
- The adoption of a comprehensive review plan for the theoretical and practical curriculum, which is taught every three years; conducting an annual evaluation for all fields of specialization.