

Action Fiche for Syria

1. IDENTIFICATION

Title/Number	Engaging Youth, phase II (ENPI/2011/276-801)		
Total cost	EU contribution: EUR 7,300,000		
Aid method / Method of implementation	Project approach – Joint management with an international organisation (UNRWA)		
DAC-code	11330, 16020	Sector	Aid to refugees

2. RATIONALE

2.1. Sector context

In spite of the ongoing unrest in Syria and the resulting actions from the Syrian authorities, the EU is keen to continue its co-operation benefiting directly the vulnerable part of the population, in particular Palestine refugees, given the specific issues faced by this group. Achieving a decent standard of living for Palestine refugees is an ongoing challenge. Refugees are faced with the issues of limited access to vocational training and high unemployment, poverty, lack of access to credit and financial services and poor living conditions. Besides, it is estimated that 50,000 Palestine refugees, over 10% of the Palestinian population residing in Syria, have been directly affected by a conflict which has been ongoing for over six months and continues to deteriorate.

According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's (UNRWA) Relief and Registration statistics, approximately 34% of the Palestine refugee population are under 18. In Syria, over 36% of the population was under the age of 15 in 2005. In 2010, 22% of the population were youth aged between 15-24 years. The percentage of the Palestine refugee population between the ages of 15-24 is also approximately 22% of the population or 100,399 persons. These statistics reflect the trend in the region of a 'youth bulge'.

The outcomes of the Fafo Institute for Applied Social Science (Norway) 2007 survey (the most recent period for which accurate socio-economic statistics are available) showed that the majority of poor Palestine refugees are located in peri-urban and regional areas of Syria, and that compared to their urban counterparts they have less access to education, health services and employment opportunities¹. It also found that those with access to education had better employment prospects. Fafo compared the income levels of Palestine refugees in the Middle East with other host countries and found that Syria had by far the lowest gross national income per capita, at USD 970 in 1999². Income disparities among Palestine refugees in Syria were also found by

¹ Age A. Tiltnes (Fafo). Keeping Up: A Brief on The Living Conditions of Palestinian Refugees in Syria. p. 53.

² Fafo., *Ibid.* p. 53.

Fafo with the cost of living relative to income being highest in the poorest regions and with the poorest groups who are predominantly in rural areas.

Unemployment rates, school dropout rates and lack of adequate skills to access the labour market are some of the major challenges that will need to be addressed. According to the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2012-2016), high unemployment rates, especially among the young are a major concern with 22.4% of 15-24 year olds and 15.5% of 24-29 year olds unemployed in Syria. Using the statistics for Syrians, if approximately 23% of these people are unemployed between the ages of 15-24 years, there are approximately 25,000 unemployed Palestine youth. Some could be hidden unemployed (at home/early marriage) and in the unofficial workforce.

Recent unrest and resulting action from the Syrian security forces have compounded these issues. It is estimated that 50,000 Palestine refugees, over 10% of the local Palestinian population, have been affected by the conflict. Highly publicised incidents, such as the military action which took place in Latakia camp back in August 2011, have produced localised emergencies and pockets of humanitarian need. However, for a majority of people, the most harmful effect of the conflict has been rapid economic contraction and loss of livelihoods. Curfews, electricity cuts, interrupted water supplies, broken supply chains and a highly volatile financial sector have significantly weakened local economies and the unskilled employment opportunities vulnerable households depend on. With 27% earning less than USD 2 per day even before the unrest, the need for greater employability among refugee youth has never been greater.

Ongoing vulnerability assessments undertaken by UNRWA among Palestinian population in conflict-affected areas have found that:

- Many youth that had previously been able to meet their basic needs were no longer able to do so because unskilled wage labour, their primary source of income, was no longer available.
- Restrictions on movement have prevented wage labourers from reaching job sites, even when employment possibilities still existed. This has led to significant losses in livelihood opportunities, whereby a large number of refugees are now unable to support themselves financially.
- There has been a significant spike in the cost of basic commodities including bread, meat and vegetables. For families who have lost their main source of income, the ability to meet basic needs has been significantly eroded. Empirical data is not available; however, UNRWA Social Service staff indicates that typical food-basket prices in Dera'a, for example, have increased by a factor of 10 since the violence began.
- Refugees working in the affected areas are primarily self-employed or unskilled daily labourers. As such, there has been a high vulnerability to the rising prices, falling demand and restricted access of recent months, causing a rapid fall in the ability to meet basic needs.

Recognising that many of the new challenges facing the Palestine refugee population are also being experienced by the Syrian population at large, *Engaging Youth II* seeks to expand its target population to include Syrian nationals in selected cases, particularly:

- Access to Engaging Youth centres for Syrian youth, improving their employability within skilled professions;
- Employment generation programme for both Palestine refugees and Syrian nationals.

In the coming phase, UNRWA seeks to consolidate career counselling and youth-owned business support services that were launched during the first phase. The agency will continue to expand the availability of vocational and employability skills for refugee youth in all areas of UNRWA's operation in Syria, build a new Training Center either in Homs or Aleppo and undertake the comprehensive modernisation of the UNRWA Damascus Training Centre (DTC), in order to maintain its position as the leading provider of technical vocational training in Syria. In terms of UNRWA's organisational development, the project will support additional resources for UNRWA to address youth employment and development. The DTC also provides training to Syrian youth, through access to paid course. It is envisaged that by strengthening UNRWA's expertise in these areas, the Agency will be able to play a pro-active role in supporting the development of civil society in Syria.

2.2. Lessons learnt

The first phase of *Engaging Youth* has been implemented since February 2010 with funding from the Instrument for Stability, expiring in November 2011. To date, *Engaging Youth* has successfully established a set of innovative services that enable Palestine refugee youth to acquire market-relevant skills and access employment opportunities in the private sector. Results achieved so far have been encouraging and there have been high numbers of refugee youth accessing the services, clearly pointing to the relevance of UNRWA's approach.

Although recent unrest in Syria has presented new challenges to the operation of Engaging Youth, UNRWA has a strong team in place and the capacity to adjust quickly to the changing situation. As one of the Agency's flagship programmes, UNRWA is keen to strengthen the capacity of the *Engaging Youth* team to continue its vital work in this new environment.

2.3. Complementary actions

In order to address in a coherent manner the issues faced by the Palestinian refugees and the Syrian citizens, this action is built complementing another project on "*Protecting Vulnerable Palestine Refugees*". The second project will provide an integrated package of assistance, supporting both immediate service delivery and broader early recovery among vulnerable conflict-affected communities.

This is part of a strategic transition within the UNRWA Syria field office to a comprehensive model of assistance to Palestine refugees, covering both human development and emergency relief, which are deeply inter related in the current circumstances Syria is facing. The funding to be delivered in both projects will for

the most part rely on existing programmes and service delivery structures. Both projects will also integrate Syrian citizens as final beneficiaries.

2.4. Donor coordination

The Commission has been since 2006 an observer of the UNRWA Advisory Commission, the main body where donors and host countries co-ordination takes place. This structure was expanded and reinvigorated and plays a vital role in enhancing the dialogue between the various stakeholders, providing advice and assistance to the Agency, for the final benefit of the refugees. For the past three years, the Commission has chaired the sub-committee of the Advisory Commission which prepares the operational work of the semi-annual meetings of the Advisory Commission. This follow-up mechanism is working well. The synergies amongst donors and common understanding between them and the Host Countries on UNRWA tasks, missions, challenges and achievements have been improved during the last years.

3. DESCRIPTION

3.1. Objectives

The overall objective of the programme is to improve the standard of living and the access to employment opportunities for Palestine refugee youth and young Syrians.

The specific objective of the programme is to improve the employability of Palestine refugees and Syrian citizens, with a focus on the Palestine refugee youth.

3.2. Expected results and main activities

The second phase of the Engaging Youth programme will continue to enhance the economic and social prospects of Palestine refugee youth and will also include young Syrians as beneficiaries, through the realisation of the following results and activities:

1. Improved employment opportunities for Palestine refugee youth between the ages of 17 and 33

Activities under this result will focus on recent school leavers, as well as refugee youth who have failed to acquire vocational skills after leaving school. Main activities may include:

- Short term training courses for Palestine refugee youth;
- Provision of career guidance in 12 project locations;
- English language and Information Technology training for refugee youth and other community members;
- Technical training for career counselling;
- Running of the Engaging Youth centres;

- International travel (career counselling placements, attendance at conferences, student camps).

2. Relevant and quality technical/vocational education and training structures and programmes in place

Activities under this result will enable an increased number of Palestine refugee youth to acquire marketable vocational skills. Main activities may include:

- Establishment of a new vocational training centre (in Homs or Aleppo) to be administered by UNRWA's DTC. The centre will give Palestine refugees, who have completed nine or twelve years of schooling, access to one to two year semi-professional and trade courses in professions that are particularly relevant for local industries in the target area.
- Modernisation of UNRWA's DTC.
- Running of the Qastal community learning compound in Yarmouk camp. The compound is being constructed as part of the first phase of the project and will serve as a central hub for implementing vocational training, youth activities and career counselling services for youth in the camp, where a third of the Palestine refugee population in Syria is concentrated.

3. Entrepreneurship awareness raising and employment opportunities for Palestine refugee youth are created

Phase two of the project will also continue the awareness raising on entrepreneurship and intensive training for future entrepreneurs that was launched during the first phase of the project. Aspiring entrepreneurs from among the Palestine refugee community will be followed-up, supported and referred to local Syrian and UNRWA micro-finance institutions by the project's business development facilitators based at the *Engaging Youth* centres.

4. Palestine refugee youth (between 13 and 25) are enabled to play an active role in the social and civic life of their community

With activities under this result, the project seeks to change preconceived ideas about youth in the community, and promote the role of youth as participants in local development. The main activities may include the following:

- Running of youth clubs in 11 camps and gatherings across Syria, already established during the first phase of the programme;
- Life-skills training sessions in 11 camps and gatherings across Syria;
- Continuation of the 'Youth initiative fund' implemented during the first phase, and proven as a successful tool in promoting youth volunteerism;
- Youth-led participatory action research to gather reliable data on issues affecting youth, particularly with regards to access to employment;

- Certified training course in community development, with the aim of creating a pool of qualified personnel that will be able to support the future development of civil society organisations in Syria.

3.3. Risks and assumptions

Given the current uncertainties pertaining to the political and precarious security situation in Syria, the project will need to maintain a degree of flexibility in adapting its activities and management to the evolving context. In the case of low to medium levels of localised unrest, it is envisaged that all Engaging Youth centres will be able to remain operational. Meanwhile, should economic circumstances worsen, the continuation of project activities, including career counselling, is considered particularly vital in these circumstances so as to continue to direct the energies and focus of refugee youth in a constructive manner. In case of intensifying violent conflict and the need for a humanitarian response, the support infrastructure provided by the project could be utilised to support early recovery and youth programmes.

3.4. Crosscutting Issues

Good governance is integrated through the ongoing reforms of UNRWA administration and management. UNRWA is prioritising human development, including protection of refugees in its reform. UNRWA is highly committed to mainstreaming concerns on gender and people with special needs in all of its activities.

3.5. Stakeholders

The end beneficiaries of the project are the Palestine refugee youth as well as Syrian citizens, who will also benefit from several activities. In particular, 50% of the employment generation programme will be reserved to Syrian citizens.

It is expected that up to 20,000 Palestine refugee youth will improve their vocational skills during the project period and around 10,000 will benefit from the youth development activities. Many more Palestine refugees will benefit from the improvement in vocational training infrastructure and UNRWA's improved capacity to address youth issues in the future.

4. IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

4.1. Method of implementation

The programme will be implemented under joint management with an international organisation through the signature of a standard contribution agreement with UNRWA and within the framework of the European Commission – UN Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement (FAFA), and in accordance with Article 53(d) of the Financial Regulation. UNRWA complies with the criteria provided for in the Financial Regulation.

The current unrest in Syria and the suspension of the EU bilateral co-operation under MEDA and ENPI instruments have importantly limited the number of partners with whom the Commission can work to implement its co-operation activities. Despite

some constraints, UNRWA is one of the few that can still reasonably operate and support social inclusion of vulnerable population living in Syria. Besides, for the past years UNRWA has been an important partner of the EU in co-operation activities, successfully managing and provided solid outcomes through the implementation of EU projects.

The change of management mode constitutes a substantial change except where the Commission "re-centralises" or reduces the level of tasks previously delegated to the beneficiary country, international organisation or delegatee body under, respectively, decentralised, joint or indirect centralised management.

4.2. Procurement and grant award procedures

All contracts implementing the action must be awarded and implemented in accordance with the procedures and standard documents laid down and published by UNRWA.

4.3. Indicative budget and calendar

The total EU financial contribution to the action amounts to a maximum of **EUR 7.3 million**, following the indicative breakdown below:

Description	budget (EUR)
Contribution Agreement with UNRWA	7,300,000
Total	7,300,000

The indicative duration of the programme is of **36 months** as from signature of the Contribution Agreement.

4.4. Performance monitoring

The performance of the project will be closely monitored by UNRWA and will be included in the Joint Review to be performed annually with UNRWA.

Following the outcomes and results of the 2011 Joint Review with UNRWA, a decision will be taken regarding future annual performance reviews of UNRWA's core programmes. More specifically, this would entail either a modification of agreed indicators, or, the adoption of UNRWA's programme strategic framework as it has been elaborated within its Medium Term Strategy (2010-2015) and reflected in UNRWA's Harmonised Donor Monitoring and Reporting Framework. This new UNRWA indicator framework, which is proposed to be used for reporting to donors for the 2010-2015 Medium Term Strategy, is composed of around 25 indicators. About half of the indicators are the same as those used in the EU external reviews. Several other indicators are in line with, or a consequence of, recommendations

External Results Oriented Monitoring missions may also be carried out by the Commission.

4.5. Evaluation and audit

An external final evaluation, covering all the activities of the action, will be carried out in accordance with European Commission procedures. Financial transactions and financial statements shall be subject to internal and external auditing procedures and checks, including on the spot, following the provisions of the European Commission – UN Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement (FAFA).

The Advisory Commission follow-up mechanism will also be used for the evaluation of the action.

4.6. Communication and visibility

All visibility activities will be implemented in accordance with the “EU visibility guidelines for external actions”. Depending on the evolution of the situation in the ground, visibility activities might need to be scaled down in order to allow a successful implementation of the project activities.