

**EUROPEAN UNION CONTRIBUTES ADDITIONAL EUR 5 MILLION TO SUPPORT EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN GAZA**

[الاتحاد الأوروبي يساهم بمبلغ خمسة ملايين يورو إضافية لدعم فرص العمل في غزة](#)

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The European Union (EU) has announced a new EUR 5 million (US\$ 5.7 million) contribution to the UNRWA Job Creation Programme in the Gaza Strip. The EU has now contributed almost EUR 19.5 million to the Job Creation Programme in Gaza since 2011.

The UNRWA Job Creation Programme seeks to mitigate the devastating effects of the eight year Israeli blockade, which has caused the Gaza Strip to become one of the most unstable economies in the world. The second quarter of 2014 saw an unemployment rate of 45.5 per cent among Palestine refugees in Gaza – the highest since 2000 in UNRWA records, which are based on Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics data.

The new funding will provide short-term employment opportunities of between three and 12 months. The jobs provide vital income to Palestine refugee families, while supporting private and public sector recovery by covering labour costs. More than 16,000 unemployed Palestine refugees will benefit from the EU funding for the programme.

The EU contribution was celebrated at a signing event between UNRWA and the EU in Gaza today. The Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, Robert Turner, said: "I thank the EU for recognizing the importance of the UNRWA Job Creation Programme in offering employment opportunities to people in Gaza who are desperate to work, earn an income and provide for their families. We know that in Gaza, much like anywhere else in the world, lack of employment can lead to growing frustration and a sense of hopelessness. People cannot leave the Strip for work, due to severe restrictions on movement of people and inaccessible markets. Creating jobs is not only a way of relieving immediate economic hardship; it is also a way of creating hope."

EJ Representative John Catt-Rutter added: "During the latest war in Gaza, many businesses were affected in various ways. Therefore, we have decided to provide extra support to the Job Creation Programme through an additional EUR 5 million through Instrument for Stability (recently renamed Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace - ICSP) funds on the top of EUR 15 million in 2011. This will provide short-term job opportunities for an additional 4,800 vulnerable refugees in Gaza, with a particular focus on unskilled women. New opportunities will be created mainly in the struggling agriculture and fisheries sectors. Our efforts will help improve the lives of many of the most vulnerable people in Gaza. But, as I have said, alone it is not enough and this is not in any way a permanent solution to the problems we are facing. It is still vital that we continue to work with all partners to bring about fundamental change by ensuring that the severe restrictions on movement and access are lifted and there is real progress on reconciliation, leading to the return of a single Palestinian Authority to Gaza."

The new EU contribution will introduce Job Creation Programme support to the agriculture and fishery sectors in Gaza, which face a number of environmental threats including the destruction of agricultural land, salinization and pollution of groundwater, and lack of access to fishing grounds beyond a six nautical mile limit imposed by Israel. Job Creation Programme contractors will work to reclaim and rehabilitate land, rehabilitate and maintain irrigation systems, nurseries and greenhouses; and plant and harvest various types of fruits and vegetables; ultimately contributing to local food security.

Employment opportunities for upwards of 2,700 women in the agricultural sector will also be created, providing much-needed opportunities to enhance female participation in the economy.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and is mandated to provide assistance and protection to a population of some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip to achieve their full potential in human development, pending a just solution to their plight. UNRWA's services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, and microfinance.

Financial support to UNRWA has not kept pace with an increased demand for services caused by growing numbers of registered refugees, expanding need, and deepening poverty. As a result, the Agency's General Fund (GF), supporting UNRWA's core activities and 97 per cent reliant on voluntary contributions, has begun each year with a large projected deficit. Currently the deficit stands at US\$ 81 million.

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