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evaluation of unrwa's engaging youth project in syria

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**About UNRWA**

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

*Cover Photo: A student in the playground of an UNRWA school in Homs, Syria. © 2017 UNRWA Photo by Carlotta Tincati*
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1 executive summary

i. The Phase II of UNRWA’s Engaging Youth (EY) project was a Euro 7.3 million intervention targeting Palestine refugee youth in Syria and funded by the European Commission (EC). Through a set of complementary activities including ‘Career Guidance and Continuing Education’ (Component 1), Vocational Education (Component 2), ‘Business Development’ (Component 3) and ‘Youth Development’ (Component 4), the project aimed at boosting the employability of youth and reducing unemployment, while improving their standard of living and access to opportunities. The project was designed in late 2011 and unfolded through the Syrian crisis and a number of ensuing no-cost extensions, until its closure in October 2017.

ii. This report is the outcome of the evaluation of the Phase II of the Engaging Youth project, which UNRWA was contractually obliged to carry out in accordance with EC procedures. The exercise was conducted over the period October 2017-January 2018 and had a dual purpose of accountability and learning. Through a qualitative approach comprising extensive focus group discussions and interviews with project participants, staff and relevant stakeholders in Damascus, Homs and Latakia, as well as analyses and desk reviews of key documentation, the evaluation addressed the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the intervention.

iii. The EY project was generally aligned with the challenges faced by Palestine refugee youth in Syria, with its multi-pronged approach furthermore mirroring international best practice on youth employment programs. Different project components held varying levels of importance in the eyes of youth and degrees of competitiveness in the broader landscape of youth interventions in Syria, with vocational education viewed as the most significant. Equal access to the project’s activities was upheld at the expense of effective targeting of participants – who had been envisioned as marginalized youth, such as school drop outs with no formal education certificate or below-average performers from secondary education. Over the years, the vocational education component grew unsystematically, reaching a wide offer of short-term courses, and, together with the broadened targeting approach adopted, may have caused some trained EY youth to be in a disadvantaged labor market position comparatively to other peers. Overall, despite a general alignment with what Palestine refugee youth reportedly desired, less systematic attention seemed to have been given to what youth and the market actually needed for the future competitiveness on the job market of EY ‘graduates.’

iv. A stronger design of the project from the outset, with a reduced set of output-level indicators as proxies of achievements, could have refrained project management from what appeared to be a ‘rush’ for achieving high numbers as a way to increase the perceived effectiveness of the project.

v. Operational challenges caused delays in recruitment and procurement of inputs, posing high pressure to spend towards the end of the project. Loss of project staff, constraints in filling in the lost capacity - including the international project manager post which was left vacant since January 2015 - together with areas of the country becoming increasingly inaccessible due to the conflict posed a serious, lasting burden on the project’s efficient implementation.

vi. The project demonstrated remarkable endurance amidst the Syrian crisis, adapting to a rapidly changing environment, while also discontinuing several of its planned activities. It proved a critical means to keep youth productively engaged in the midst of the conflict, while its specific results on youth employment were limited. Given the level of disruption of the local Syrian economy as the project unfolded, assessing the effects on employment of an intervention as EY which, furthermore, only focused on the supply side of the labor market can be questioned.

vii. The geographical outreach of the project’s vocational education component, attained by outsourcing courses to a number of private institutes across the country, was
achieved at the expense of a standardized and consistent offer of courses. The extent of this tradeoff is something for future interventions to ponder.

viii. The business development component enhanced youth’s capacity for self-help rather than fostering entrepreneurship as an alternative to wage employment. By offering business development training to graduates of its short-term vocational courses, the project seemed to assume that entrepreneurship is an easily acquirable skill from virtually any individual with a limited vocational skillset and educational background. Future interventions in this field would require a stronger targeting of participants or, alternatively, more realistic goal-setting in the first place.

ix. The set of youth activities that were carried out under the youth development component remained significantly constrained in their scope and outreach. Sustained commitment for resources, including professional expertise from the design phase of the activities, and continued investment over time, seem critical in order to yield discernable effects.

x. Overall, the project seemed to adequately cater, to the extent possible, to the needs of both young men and women. It seemed less sensitive, however, to youth with special needs.

xi. While in many ways different from how it was initially envisioned, the EY project offered Palestine refugee youth in Syria a tremendous opportunity to invest in themselves, despite the crisis and seeing many of their peers flee the country in search for better lives. With literature suggesting that youth interventions are a long-term investment, and given UNRWA’s Medium Term Strategy (MTS) aiming at strengthening capabilities for increased livelihood opportunities (Strategic Outcome 4, MTS 2016-2021), there is a strong case for UNRWA to continue offering this opportunity in the future, not without implementing some adjustments.

xii. In line with the strong learning component envisioned for the evaluation, a set of recommendations were developed and geared towards enhancing the design, implementation and management of similar projects that UNRWA may execute in the near future. These included the following:

1. Identify a group or segment of the population (e.g. school drop outs) which the intervention will cater to and target activities accordingly by respecting pre-defined enrollment criteria.

2. Define the array and types of specializations of training courses to offer on the basis of the actual needs of the labor market, rather than aiming at increasing participation rates.

3. Coordinate and link with other organizations that have commissioned comprehensive and independent assessments of the labor market in Syria to identify and anticipate existing gaps, needs and the demand from employers.

4. Narrow down the array of specializations of training courses to offer by reflecting on the future level of competitiveness on the job market of training participants given their educational backgrounds; more specifically: (a) Reflect on the adequacy of providing short-term courses in specializations that are also offered by formal institutions (private and governmental) granting diplomas or university degrees in the country; (b) Reflect on the adequacy of offering short-term courses in fields that are in parallel offered in long-term form by UNRWA under its TVET programme.

5. Invest in a sound design of the intervention, including monitoring and evaluation from the onset of the project, with outcome-level indicators which may constitute a baseline for future assessments of the project.

6. If exceptional circumstances arise, revise the log frame of the project, with the understanding that any future assessment / evaluation will necessarily and inevitably build on this document.

7. Make a strategic decision on the extent of the trade-off between geographical coverage and standardization / consistency in the quality of vocational courses offered; decisions with respect to the number and types of partnerships with training institutes and the selection of instructors should naturally descend from this.
8. Rethink the strategy and approach behind the business development component and make it coherent with the results that are expected from it (e.g. actual employment as an alternative to wage employment or self-help for participants).

9. Invest in professionally-trained staff who can scale up the youth development component; explore further opportunities for synergies with other projects and programs, such as the UNICEF-funded Adolescent program implemented by UNRWA.

10. Build the capacity of a project management unit and maintain it across the whole life of the project, with a full-time project manager as well as financial / project management software to help monitor progress over time and support informed feedback loops in programming as the project unfolds.

11. Tie activities and components together to a greater extent by establishing a ‘road-map’ of required courses and initiatives as a condition for certification.

12. Rethink the profiles of EY project staff: while looking for synergies across components is critical, combining components such as business and youth does not seem to match the abovementioned need for an increased focus for each of them.

13. Mainstream disability, incorporating the requirements of youth with special needs in the design of the intervention and targeting this group in the participation of all initiatives.
2 background

1. Since 2010, with financial support from the European Commission (EC), UNRWA has been striving to improve the lives of Palestine refugee youth in Syria by increasing their opportunities to access the job market. Through a set of complementary interventions aimed at equipping youth with the necessary skills to become independent adults, the first phase¹ of the ‘Engaging Youth’ (EY) project was carried out between February 2010 and January 2012.

2. The second phase of the project was originally planned to be implemented over a 36 months’ timeframe (2012-2015) yet, due to the crisis in Syria and the challenges of an extremely volatile operational context, the project requested and was granted a series of no-cost extension agreements until project closure in 31 October 2017.²

3. This report is the outcome of the evaluation of the second phase of the Engaging Youth project which UNRWA was contractually obliged to carry out in accordance with EC procedures.

¹Engaging Youth: Addressing Palestinian Refugee Youth Exclusion to prevent radicalization and conflict (Phase 1 – Feb 2010-2012). Phase 1 of the Engaging Youth had, in turn, succeeded another project called Employment and Vocational Education Project.’

² Phase II had been previously extended until July 2016 and 30 April 2017.
3 evaluation purpose, objectives and scope

4. The evaluation had a dual purpose of accountability and learning: it aimed, on the one hand, to support accountability towards the project’s target population and the EC for the Euro 7.3 million invested; it was expected, on the other, to assist UNRWA in developing lessons on how to improve the planning, implementation and management of similar projects that the agency may execute in the near future.

5. The objective of the evaluation was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of UNRWA’s Engaging Youth project (Phase II). The evaluation did not address the impact of the intervention for several reasons including the nature of the project which not did lend itself to producing long-term effects that can be clearly and uniquely attributed to the intervention itself and the lack of a baseline to measure impact against. The sustainability of the project, or the extent to which its effects were durable following termination of donor funding, was not addressed either. Please refer to Annex 3 for the terms of reference of the evaluation.

6. While the evaluation report references the socio-economic devastation of seven years of conflict, wherever relevant, a thorough conflict analysis of the Syrian crises was beyond the scope of this document.
4 methodology and limitations

7. The evaluation’s methodology was shaped by issues of access to Syria, security and logistical restrictions in the country and timing constraints. The exercise adopted a qualitative approach in answering the research questions outlined in the terms of reference (see Evaluation Matrix in Annex 4).

8. Data and information collection methods included the following: (1) structured document review and content analysis of key documents (e.g. annual progress reports); (2) secondary analyses of project data (e.g. available indicators); (3) focus group discussions (FGDs) with project participants and relevant stakeholders in Damascus, Homs and Latakia; (4) key informant interviews with UNRWA staff and external partners / actors in Damascus, Homs and Latakia; and (5) desk review of relevant literature.

9. Primary data collection in Syria was conducted over a two weeks’ period (October 7th-20th 2017). Gender and human rights considerations were incorporated in the evaluation by ensuring relevant data collection, analysis and a disaggregated presentation of findings, were possible. For a full list of focus groups and interviews conducted please refer to Annex 2.

10. Additional time and resources could have allowed for a more thorough assessment with a greater level of triangulation of data and information. Issues which the evaluation’s approach was unable to provide comprehensive answers to were flagged and presented as food for thought for UNRWA’s management to explore in the near future, if and when needed. Key limitations of the study included the following:

a. Focus group discussions were conducted in EY training centers with relatively recent project participants, at a point in time when the circumstances they faced were evidently different from the peak of the crisis or the design phase of the project. ‘Older’ project participants (who had therefore stopped attending and visiting the training centers) had either migrated to escape the crisis or were hard to reach for data collection purposes due to the logistical constraints of travelling to their communities.

b. Field work was conducted towards the very end of the project. Interviewees showed a certain level of preoccupation with respect to the imminent closure of the project hence opinions and feedback shared with the evaluator were most likely biased towards the positive side.

c. Field visits and primary data collection were conducted in three of the six governorates where the project was implemented; no visits were made to Dera’a, Aleppo and Hama. Given the levels of insecurity of these locations, youth and their opinions about the project may have been systematically different from those interviewed and that have informed this report.

d. While the evaluation used all available monitoring data which was generated by the project, this mainly comprised output-level indicators. Key means of verification outlined in the project document, such as the survey of beneficiaries and pre-post testing of beneficiaries, were not implemented and hence the evaluation could not build on them. Project management also pointed out cases of inconsistent approaches and methodologies used to inform indicators over time, hampering the soundness of a trends analysis across reporting periods (e.g. ‘registered job seekers’).

e. Interviews with employers and companies operating in Syria at the time of the evaluation were not conducted due to logistical and time constraints. Direct insights from the labor market have thus not informed this report.

f. Due to limited data available, findings related to the efficiency of the project - including whether it used the least costly resources possible in order to achieve its results - were partially informative.

3 Randomly selected by EY staff. No interviewee attended more than one focus group, and most had either recently ‘graduated’ from the EY courses or were currently enrolled in one of them.

4 OCHA estimated that 5.5 million people fled Syria between March 2012 and December 2017 (See 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, November 2017).

5 Project management expressed, for instance, a desire to explore the costliness of vocational courses across specializations and
5 evaluation findings

11. In presenting the key results of the evaluation, the following section covers the issues of relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the Phase II of the Engaging Youth project and answers the questions that guided the exercise, as presented in the terms of reference.

12. As seen below, the evaluation maintained the project’s log frame (with its activities and expected outcomes) as the benchmark against which the achievements and results of the project were to be assessed. This approach does not intend to dismiss the severity and magnitude of the changes that affected Syria over the life of the project, nor the operational challenges and complexity that project management faced in those circumstances.

5.1 relevance

5.1.1 a relevant intervention and approach for addressing the challenges faced by Palestine refugee youth in Syria

13. An intervention aimed at addressing key obstacles to youth employment to improve the employability of youth was highly needed when the second phase of the project was designed in late 2011 and remained so, through the unfolding of the project and the Syrian crisis, until the time of report writing.

14. Available figures related to unemployment in Syria over the past seven
years are not always consistent across sources and should be read keeping in mind the challenges and limitations of producing estimates in a very fluid and unstable environment.

15. The International Labour Organization (ILO) suggests that unemployment rates among Syrian youth aged 15-24 spiked between 2010 and 2011, rapidly ranking Syrian youth from the least to the most unemployed among peers of similar age-groups in the region (see figure 1). As illustrated in the figure below, these estimates experienced minor changes since. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs’ (OCHA), the unemployment rate in Syria stood at 53 percent in 2017, with peaks of 78 percent amongst youth (15-24).

16. The urgency of youth-specific employment interventions becomes even clearer when considering the loss of human capital produced by the crisis, with youth losing the opportunity to continue schooling and education or, at best, having limited chances of regular, uninterrupted school attendance. OCHA also estimated that, as of September 2016, one in three children in Syria was out of school and 1.4 million at risk of dropping out.9

17. Perhaps even more remarkably than unemployment and drop out figures alone, focus groups conducted with youth for the purpose of this evaluation revealed youth’s eagerness to be employed, with clear views as to the reasons why many of them were not (figure 2).

“Unemployment is the biggest issue we face as Palestine refugees; if we solve this problem we can solve everything” (EY participant)

18. Focus groups generally confirmed the validity of the assumptions underlying the EY intervention, namely, that inadequate skillsets, both technical and ‘soft’, would be hampering employment opportunities for youth. Interviewed youth consistently referred to a general mismatch between their profiles and the needs of the labor market which reportedly asked for skills combined with years of practical experience, as well as formal schooling certification when applying for jobs in companies.

19. Interviewed youth interestingly also shed light on the limited applicability of the concept of ‘having a job’ as a stable source of income that would allow for making a living in the Syrian context: salaries were reportedly so low that being employed was often viewed as uneconomical and the boundaries between what in other contexts would be considered a ‘job’ and voluntary work seemed rather blurred. Indeed, when asked about their employment status, some interviewees included voluntary work as a form of employment. The conditions faced were such that UNRWA embodied one of the most appealing employers in the eyes of relatively more educated youth. A number of youth interviewed also noted the possibility of becoming EY trainers for short-term courses among their most desirable options.

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9Youth unemployment refers to the share of the labor force ages 15-24 without work but available for and seeking employment (International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database).

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9Ibid.
20. Job opportunities evidently plunged at large due to the deep economic recession which had been hitting the country for several years. Syria’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2016 was estimated at 55 per cent of what it was prior to the conflict,\(^{10}\) with the protraction of hostilities and drivers of conflict further damaging long-term economic prospects. The job market, however, seemed particularly constrained for young men in age of military service, with employers being reportedly less keen on hiring them given the limited continuity they could guarantee on the job.

21. Displacement of refugees from their original homes compounded the problem. OCHA estimated 6.1 million Syrians were internally displaced by violence as of December 2017 and, among these, 1.8 million were newly displaced in 2017 alone.\(^{11}\) As much as city centers were generally seen as offering greater opportunities than other areas, incentives to travel were limited due to high transportation costs, as well as the risk of undergoing controls at checkpoints.

22. Youth additionally mentioned the saturation of the job market with respect to some types of jobs (such as hairdressers’ and barbers) and the formalization of recruitment processes generally limited to larger companies only, with personal relations counting more elsewhere.

\[\text{Figure 2 – Most commonly reported reasons for unemployment}\]

- military service
- expensive uni degrees
- displacement
- tough economy
- low salaries
- no capital to start business
- mismatch btw education and labor mkt
- high transportation costs
- long working hours
- lack of experience
- informal recruitment processes
- saturation of job market

\textbf{Source:} focus group discussions with youth and EY staff

23. In this context, targeting marginalized youth such as school drop outs with no formal education certificate,\(^{12}\) youth who graduated from secondary education with below-average grades,\(^{13}\) or youth who failed to acquire vocational skills after leaving school, seemed highly pertinent. The project’s comprehensive approach for boosting employability furthermore mirrored international best practice for youth employment programs, whereby a multi-pronged strategy involving a set of complementary interventions would work better than isolated interventions, when attempting to remove key constraints to youth employment.\(^{14}\)

24. Figure 3 provides a visual representation of the phase 2 of the Engaging Youth project, with the logical and sequential connections between the project’s activities, expected results and objectives, as per project design.

5.1.2 different project components held varying levels of importance in the eyes of youth and degrees of competitiveness in the broader landscape of youth interventions in Syria

25. Despite the comprehensive nature of the intervention, youth seemed to mostly associate the EY project with its vocational education component (component 2), with the conversation in many focus groups often being brought back to the training opportunities offered, regardless of the intended focus of the group. The perceived relevance of each of the project’s components ultimately reflected the extent to which it was seen as addressing the reasons for youth’s unemployment (see figure 2).

26. The evaluation gathered a high level of interest and appreciation for the short-term courses offered, each catering to specific preferences and needs. Both EY staff and youth confirmed high participation rates, with only minor drop outs in exceptional cases of participants fleeing the country due to the crisis or being unable to keep up with the schedule of the courses due to personal circumstances.

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\(^{12}\) Who would thus not qualify for UNRWA’s TVET programme, which requires completion of 912 years of formal education and being 19-22 years old.

\(^{13}\) Who would thus not qualify for governmental institutes.

evaluation of unrwa’s ‘engaging youth’ project in syria

Figure 3 - Visual representation of the ‘Engaging Youth’ logical framework

Source: own elaboration
27. Despite the presence of organizations offering similar courses in their respective areas, youth emphasized the practical nature of those offered by EY as a real competitive advantage of the project. The non-theoretical approach of the short-term vocational courses was viewed as highly aligned with the need for experience that the labor market was reportedly looking for in employees, as if it were providing them with an opportunity to make some headway on the longer path of practice required.

28. The symbolic participation fees of EY courses were an additional factor of praise across target youth. These were indeed offered for free to individuals living in collective shelters and/or under UNRWA’s Social Safety Net Programme (SSNP) and at a fee of only 150 Syrian pounds to the rest. This was reportedly in stark contrast with private institutes which would charge 60-85,000 Syrian pounds for a similar 100-hour long course. The project’s competitiveness was also mentioned in relation to ‘continuing education’ courses (language / IT) (component 1) which were offered at the price of 500 Syrian pounds, against 20-30,000 in private institutes.

“No other training center offers what we offer at such price, in war circumstances” (EY trainer)

“UNRWA is the mother of all the others – people working in other organizations come from UNRWA” (UNRWA staff)

29. Even external actors in this field, consulted for the purpose of this evaluation, recognized UNRWA’s leading position in the field of vocational training over organizations that had entered the market far more recently.

30. Trainees and trained youth had also strong opinions as to how these courses could cater to their needs even further. Common themes raised, regardless of the training’s focus, included the need for longer courses, sequentially structured (basic / intermediate / advanced levels), with a greater offer of specializations and an improved outreach in underserved areas.

“It’s so cheap with UNRWA - private organizations offering similar courses cost 25,000 pounds [50USD] per month; to attend government institutes we need the right grades from secondary education; and they are long term…” (EY participant)

31. Business development training (component 3) was also well-received by youth who viewed the possibility of opening a business as an attractive alternative to wage employment, given the contraction of the labor market in Syria and the employment challenges mentioned above. Yet, as phrased by one interviewee, “money needs money and we do not have money.” The lack of capital – be it in the form of a grant or a loan for youth – was often mentioned by youth and EY staff alike as missing in the project’s approach to business development.

“Special projects need money – I did a few short courses here on electrical regulators and mobile circuits. I opened my own business for fixing electronic devices; I moved out of the camp (Mukhayem) but the rent was so expensive I had to move back. I’ve rented a smaller shop now, it is cheaper here but I would be earning better outside…” (EY participant)

32. The provision of entrepreneurship skills was, ultimately, more of an appendix to vocational training, comprising a 30-hours-long course offered to youth who had previously attended one of the short-term vocational courses. To a large extent, business development trainees comprised ‘graduates’ from hairdressing / beauty care, barber and mobile maintenance courses. Towards the end of the project, the distribution of toolkits to business development trainees seems to have

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15 Most commonly mentioned organizations (and respective training programs) included: Hovs Enname, Syria Trust (barber), Red Crescent (chef assistant, hairdressing, beauty care), Jaffra (hairdressing, English, KCDL), Noor, DRC and Syrian Red Cross.

16 These are categorized by UNRWA as the ‘abject poor’ or those who are unable to meet their basic food needs.
further influenced the ancillary nature of business development vis-à-vis those vocational courses which were more ‘prone’ to having a relevant toolkit to start with.

33. This approach appeared to be in stark contrast with best practices reportedly followed by other organizations operating entrepreneurship programs in Syria. One representative from a UN organization consulted for the purpose of this evaluation, for instance, explained how expecting youth to develop a business idea around a vocational education course was at odds with the idea of entrepreneurship. Another UN organization representative confirmed how the target group of the seed funding they offered to groups of youth in Syria comprised relatively higher educated youth with no linkage to the set of vocational courses attended.

34. Comparatively with other perceived obstacles to employment, youth expressed less conclusive views on the weight played by limited knowledge and awareness of the job market. The career guidance component (component 1) was consequently viewed by some (in Dahiet Qudseya and Khan Danoun, for instance) as less relevant to the needs of youth in search of employment. These were of the opinion that such initiative would mainly serve recent graduates who were still navigating the job market or those holding a secondary education certificate. Yet others (in Husseinieh, Qabt Esilit, Jaramana, Latakia, for instance) argued for the importance of being ushered to and guided in the job market following vocational training received. The evaluation was unable to identify consistent patterns that could contribute to the explanation of such views (understanding, for instance, how much of a determining factor was played by the level of exposure to this component in either opinion).

35. Assessing the relevance of the youth development component (component 4) was challenging since it comprised a diverse set of activities which turned out to differ greatly from the set of initiatives initially envisioned in the project’s design (see effectiveness section below).

5.1.3 equal access was upheld at the expense of effective targeting of participants

36. Strong views were consistently expressed across groups of youth about the fairness of the project, with the same opportunities reportedly being offered to all with no discrimination of sorts.

37. Youth explained the selection in EY’s vocational education initiatives as a rather linear process, which started with filling in an application with one’s basic information and a short interview thereafter. According to EY staff this was an opportunity to ensure that future participants reflected the age target for the project (17-35), while testing the motivation of candidates and their future plans.

38. The widespread access granted seems to have compromised the project’s targeting criterion which, as mentioned above, was supposed to comprise marginalized segments of Palestine refugees in Syria. Indeed, project data on the educational background of trainees suggested that approximately 30 percent of EY trainees held a university / institute degree or were enrolled in university / an institute, 40 percent held secondary education certificates and one third of trainees had reached elementary or preparatory schooling (see figure 4).

39. While focus groups were not intended to reflect statistical representativeness of the target population, they corroborated these figures by revealing a wide range of educational profiles and backgrounds of participants, which included university graduates or students at the time of the data collection.

“I wish there were a plan to not only offer courses but follow-up as well. The most important thing is that our projects get funded or that coordination with the local market be increased” (EY participant)

19 Youth learned about training opportunities or initiatives through the EY Facebook page for their area, or, where this was unavailable (e.g. in Homs), by paying personal visits to the EY center and through word of mouth.

20 Over the life of the project, the age limit increased to 40.
5.1.4 The vocational training component grew unsystematically, reaching a wide offer of courses, exposing some trainees to the risk of uncompetitive positioning on the job market.

40. The project featured an exponential growth in the number of specializations of short-term vocational courses offered and the number of youth enrolled in them over the years. As shown in figure 5, the types of courses were 15 in the first year of the project and reached almost 60 in 2015-2016. These included hand work courses, arts and trade courses, across its five EY areas of operation. Figure 6 equally illustrates a significant, albeit less linear, growth in the number of short-term trainees over the years.

41. Such growth was the result of both management decisions and youth desires. Through ‘market surveys’, conducted on a yearly or biennial basis, EY staff would reportedly gauge the demand among potential employers for specific specializations and skills and, in turn, inform the offer of courses, while better adapting their curricula. Project staff would reportedly also welcome regular feedback about the course from trainees, including suggestions for courses to be held in the future.

42. While the efforts in scoping the labor landscape in times of crises and offering concrete opportunities to youth to influence the design of the intervention cannot go unnoticed, these mechanisms to ensure the relevance of the project’s activities seemed somewhat unsystematic and with limited consideration of the future competitive position of EY short-term training ‘graduates’ in the labor market.

43. The combination of the targeting approach that the project eventually adopted, on the one hand, and the expansion in vocational courses offered, on the other, pose questions about the competitiveness of EY graduates on three different levels: i) relatively to other EY participants with stronger educational backgrounds; ii) relatively to non-

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21 These surveys would also help EY staff better guide and counsel youth through the job market. The evaluation was unable to review the outputs of these exercises.
EY youth trained by external providers; and iii) relatively to (long-term) TVET trainees and graduates.

I. positioning vis-à-vis other EY participants with stronger educational backgrounds

44. Information gathered from EY instructors and participants alike suggested a certain degree of segmentation of course participants, with emerging patterns between profiles / educational backgrounds of trainees, vocational courses attended under the EY project and expectations for the future (figure 7).

Figure 7 – Key variables underlying vocational trainee profiling

Educational achievements/background

Reasons for enrolling in EY short-term course

Type of EY short-term course enrolled in

Source: own elaboration

45. Youth on the lowest end of the educational spectrum seemed more inclined to enroll in ‘hand work’ courses such as barber training, hairdressing and beauty care, attracted by the possibility of learning new skills and, in turn, opening their own shop / ‘business’. Youth with the highest levels of educational attainments would either enroll in courses unrelated to their field of study to hedge the risk of not finding a job after years of higher education or, alternatively, in courses that would provide practical insights to their reportedly excessively theoretical studies.

46. The third group of EY participants comprised youth ‘in between’ the abovementioned two categories: youth holding secondary education certificates yet insufficient grades or inadequate specializations to be eligible for governmental institutes or UNRWA’s TVET programme, as well as youth who could not afford the fees of private institutes to get a diploma. This segment appeared to be attracted, among others, to ‘trade courses’ - such as marketing, accounting and business studies. In these cases, expectations included finding a job as an employee in a company.

47. With anecdotal evidence suggesting that trade courses comprised a varied group of participants in terms of educational background (i.e. university students / graduates and youth with secondary education certificates), whether this third category of youth could end up being in a disadvantaged position on the job market vis-à-vis EY training peers with higher educational attainments in the same field remains an open matter which future research should look into.

“Of course those with a university degree have more chances than those without; there is a government law whereby if you do not have a degree you cannot practice in childhood care - inside camps it is different; there is less control, it’s less rigid” (EY trainer)

23 The issue can be brought back to the more general theoretical discussion described in literature on the relationship between formal education and vocational training: are they complements or substitutes? Under a hypothesis of complementarity, better educated individuals benefit to a larger extent, so the labor market position of a vulnerable person might be deteriorated. Conversely, under a hypothesis of substitution, differences in labor market performance between educated and non-educated could improve. See ‘On the Complementarity between Education and Training in Europe’. Brunello, G. 2004.
II. positioning vis-à-vis non-EY youth trained by external providers

48. The hectic growth in the array of short-term vocational courses may have by-passed considerations about the soundness of indistinctively offering training opportunities in specializations which were also offered by other actors in the country at a diploma or university level. Once again, the final labor market position of EY graduates enrolling in these short-term courses is unclear.

49. The case of a young female participant who was interviewed in Latakia for this evaluation might exemplify the issue further. Unable to enroll in a governmental institute for a diploma in pharmacy due to her high school specialization in arts, she enrolled in and successfully attended a short-term EY course in ‘Medical Sales’ to become a pharmacy assistant. The young lady reportedly encountered challenges in securing an employment thereafter and emphasized how the EY course was insufficient to find a job.

"Offering marketing courses to marginalized people does not make sense...you have to link it to something else; construction, electricity..." (Interviewee)

"Accounting courses, business administration courses, childcare in Montessori methods – yes there are also (official) diplomas offered by government or private institutes out there in the same subjects..." (EY Staff)

III. positioning vis-à-vis (long-term) TVET trainees and graduates

50. Finally, the expansion in the vocational training component may also have lacked assessments on the appropriateness of offering courses in specializations which UNRWA, in parallel, was also offering in long-term form through its TVET programme. In Homs, for instance, ‘Air conditioning’ and ‘HR Assistant’ short-term courses were offered over the period 2015-2016, while long term courses were provided (under TVET) in the same location in ‘Maintenance of Air Conditioning Systems’ and ‘Human Resources Management’\(^\text{24}\). The evaluation did not verify the curricula of these; yet, the strategic soundness of offering similar courses under different programs and projects is something for UNRWA to assess.

51. Finally, the logic behind offering a small selection of long-term courses under the EY framework, alongside the range of short-term opportunities, is unclear given the presence of the TVET program which UNRWA has been running in Syria since the 1950s.

5.3.5 the project could have benefitted from a stronger design at the activity, outcome and indicator levels

52. A review of the project’s log frame suggests that activities were excessively fragmented and at times redundant, with the same or very similar activities included under different results\(^\text{25}\) and / or the same result.\(^\text{26}\) Outcomes were at times phrased as activities (e.g. Results 2 – ‘relevant and quality vocational education is provided’) and hard to measure due to the vagueness of the terms used (e.g. Results 4 - ‘youth’s capacity to play an active role’).

53. At the outcome level, the logical connection between the career guidance and continuing education component (component 1) and its expected result seemed weak, with ‘increased employment opportunities’ seeming more realistically the result of all project components rather than the first one alone.

54. The outcome for component 1 was also duplicative of the project’s objectives which, as per original project document, comprised ‘improved access to opportunities’ and ‘improved employability’ of target youth. Finally, indicators of achievement were mainly phrased at the output-level (i.e. ‘number of...’) thus limiting their informative power vis-à-vis the outcome they were supposed to measure progress against.

\(^{24}\) See EY Progress Report IV (page 17) and information provided by EY team.

\(^{25}\) For example: modernization of DTC (2.4) included short-term vocational courses which were also included under 2.2; peer to peer network fell under career counselling (1.1) and 1.3 (volunteers network); provision of extra-curricular activities for youth (including health awareness) was included under 4.1.a and 4.1.b (life skills trainings in all project locations, which includes health awareness). This issue also affected progress reports, where, at times, the same information was reported under different sections.
5.2 efficiency

5.2.1 contextual challenges caused delays and gaps in recruitment and procurement of inputs, posing high pressure to spend towards the end of the project

55. Earlier sections of the report highlighted the series of no-cost extensions agreements that the project was granted. Anecdotal evidence of money being spent at the end of the project provides further indication of the challenges that hampered the timely delivery of the project’s activities. At the time data collection was conducted for the purpose of this evaluation (October 2017), the EY centers in Homs and Latakia had just been established (September 2017), a classroom had been newly refurbished in the Damascus Training Center, (DTC) and the distribution of toolkits to business development trainees was still ongoing.

56. The ‘pressure to spend’ towards project closure seemed to be caused by delays affecting recruitment and procurement at large and the eagerness to make up for them. Loss of project staff, constraints in filling the lost capacity, together with areas of the country becoming increasingly inaccessible had posed a serious, lasting burden on project implementation.

57. The post of international project manager left vacant since January 2015 is worth highlighting in this respect. It created a management and oversight vacuum which was filled over the years, on an ad hoc basis, by either UNRWA’s Deputy Director of Programmes, TVET’s Chief and, more recently, the former Head of the vocational training and career guidance component, with support from UNRWA’s Programme Support Office in Syria. The reasons for such prolonged vacancy seemed to be a mix of visa approval challenges, the need for frequent evacuations as well as considerable uncertainty with regards to the future of the project itself, which evidently further reduced the incentives to address the gap.

58. These shifts and the related fragmentation in the management of the project exposed it to a series of adjustments as circumstances developed and necessities arose, in some cases attempting to increase efficiency,27 in others with less consideration of the implications of those decisions, as mentioned in earlier sections of the report.28

59. Progress reports have also consistently emphasized the high turn-over of project staff and the subsequent increasing ratio of positions left vacant due to the ‘brain drain’ of professionals caused by the conflict. While a number of the posts established in the project’s initial design had most likely lost relevance following the abolishment of project activities (see effectiveness section), it is startling that out of the total of 59 positions established in 2012, the proportion of unfilled positions increased from 44 percent (26/59) in 2014-2015, to 58 percent (34/59) in 2015-2016, to 76 percent (45/59) in 2016-2017.

60. The volatile operational context which had caused some activities to be reprogrammed or discontinued (see effectiveness section) further explains what project management recognized as a financial mismatch between the level of project funds available and the actual needs of the project.

“For the last two years they have been telling us that the project will close so it has been hard to work this way…” (EY Staff)

27 For instance: towards the end of the project, management decided to revise the tasks of EY staff by training them in all aspects and component-specific duties, moving away from a compartmentalization of roles.

28 See the issue of targeting presented in the relevance section of the report.
5.3 **effectiveness**

5.3.1 **the project exceeded most of the targets it had established**

61. The project generated and informed a number of output-based indicators which progress reports systematically presented over time. When merely comparing indicators with planned targets, the project appears to have accomplished more than what was envisioned.\(^\text{29}\) As shown in the following figure (figure 8), the only exceptions occurred with respect to the number of registered job seekers and the number of long-term trainees.\(^\text{31}\)

5.3.2 **the project demonstrated remarkable endurance amidst the crisis, adapting to a rapidly changing environment, while also discontinuing several of its planned activities**

62. The numbers of young men and women that the project managed to systematically engage in its different activities over time (see figure 9) is quite remarkable and, while not an indication of effectiveness, is a clear manifestation of the project’s endurance.

63. The intense conflict in Yarmouk camp, which started in July 2012, triggered a major shift in the project and ultimately tested its capacity to withstand. Not only had the largest youth center prior to 2012 become inaccessible, the massive outflow of refugees from Yarmouk at the end of that year posed an additional layer of challenges for UNRWA at large and the project, more specifically, to deal with.

64. Activities were consequently re-programmed so as to ‘follow’ the new gatherings of displaced refugees (e.g. Dahiet Quseya and Dummar), and after an initial provision of vocational training in shelters, the project soon started renting spaces in these new locations or, alternatively, entered into increasing number of agreements with private institutes for outsourcing the implementation of the training program. The project thus started featuring three distinct implementation approaches, with some courses held ‘in-house’ (e.g. at the DTC), others outsourced to the numerous institutes it partnered with throughout the country, and in other cases implemented in rented space such as schools or empty apartments.

65. The DTC was expanded to accommodate the increasing needs of the displaced population, which at the time of report writing was still standing at over 700 individuals.

66. Notwithstanding this flexibility, in other cases activities initially planned were discontinued. Examples of superseded activities included, among others, the construction of EY centers in Aleppo and Dera’a (activity 2.1), tours in the UK for Career Guidance Officers (activity 1.1), the implementation of a two-year course in professional community work (activity 4.2), the Youth Intervention Fund and youth-led participatory research (activity 4.1).

67. The cancellation of these activities ultimately seems to have triggered a shift in the configuration of the project and the weight of its different components, making the intervention highly skewed towards vocational education, with the other initiatives ending up being subsidiary components. Furthermore, while changes at the level of the objectives and expected accomplishments of the project were never formalized, the set of expected results and objectives outlined in the project document appeared to have taken a back seat over the broader, emerging need of keeping youth generally engaged.

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\(^\text{29}\) Figure 3 illustrates the four expected results of the project as per project design. The following sections (5.3.3-5.3.6) address the extent to which these outcomes were achieved.

\(^\text{30}\) Alongside the limitations of measuring effectiveness through output-level indicators, the evaluation calls for caution when reading these figures for several reasons. The ways in which the targets were set in the first place is unclear. Double-counting seems to affect these figures since any given participant might have partaken in more than one activity (and most likely did, given the level of porosity across project components). Finally, as pointed out in the limitations section of the report, the methodology used to inform these indicators has not been consistent across time, therefore hampering the soundness of consolidated figures.

\(^\text{31}\) As mentioned in para.5.1, the logic behind funding long-term courses through the EY project is unclear.
Figure 8 - Achieved Vs Targeted numbers across project components

- # enrolled/registered job seekers: 6,798
- # attended English and computer classes: 668
- # accessed 1-2 yrs semi-prof. courses: 1757
- # enrolled in short-term courses: 13,108
- # provided with long-term courses: 15,211
- # received awareness raising sessions: 1620
- # trained in self-employment: 2,347
- # engaged in youth clubs in 11 camps: 2,926
- # received psycho-social training: 0
- # received first aid and personal safety: 0

Source: EY progress reports

Figure 9 – Selected output indicators per project component across reporting periods [2012-2017]

Source: EY progress reports
5.3.3 EY proved a critical means to keep youth productively engaged in the midst of conflict; its specific effects on youth employment were limited

68. When asked in what ways the project had changed them or their lives, interviewed youth reported a range of effects (figure 10). Securing a job was rarely pointed to as a result, with most mentioning increased exposure to the work environment, the chance to gain practical experience and skills, greater confidence and trust in themselves and the opportunity to be better equipped to enter the job market.

70. Given the level of disruption of the local Syrian economy as the project unfolded, measuring the effects on employment of an intervention as EY which, furthermore, only focused on the supply side of the labor market might be misplaced.32

71. Moreover, the fact that a percentage of trainees across focus groups would always be engaged in some form of paid work33 yet, through the EY training received were looking for opportunities for additional income-generation, further speaks to the ‘relative concept’ of being employed in Syria; and, in turn, to the limited value of measuring effectiveness in these terms.

5.3.4 outsourcing vocational training hindered a standardized offer of consistent quality; regular feedback loops helped reduce the discrepancies

72. A consequence of UNRWA’s ability to guarantee a widespread and constant provision of short-term courses and services throughout the Syrian crisis (section 5.3.2) was the lack of consistency in its offer. The decision to

32 In other words, one could argue that, given the limited employment opportunities available in Syria at large, assessing whether EY training actually translated into concrete job opportunities for its participants is unfair.

33 A considerable proportion of interviewed youth in Homs and Latakia reported being involved in some form of paid retribution. Examples of jobs included the following: employee in tourism industry; water and sanitation officer in Qabr Essit camp; graphic designer; receptionist; teacher for private lessons from home; and teacher in school.
outsourcing vocational training courses to contracted private institutes to ensure its outreach across the country created significant variation in the offer, to a point that trainees’ opinions about the effectiveness of short-term courses were strictly dependent on the location where the courses were held (and, in turn, on the capacities of the partnered institutes with respect to the equipment carried). There was, in other words, no ‘same’ short-term course in any given subject under the EY project, nor an equal array of training courses offered in any given location.

“Between the facilities in Dahiet Qudseyah and DTC there’s as much difference as between a Nokia and an android phone!” (EY participant)

73. Training facilities and trainers were two variables which interviewed youth had opinions about. The DTC seemed to set a high bar in terms of training space and services against which other training locations could only barely compete. The evaluation gathered that trainees from Dahiet Qudseyah, Khan Dannoun, Jaramana, Qabr Essit and Husseinieh, for instance, were generally unsatisfied with the training facilities which were reportedly too small. Regular quality assurance and openness to feedback loops seem, however, to have been able to address cases of limited satisfaction by youth. In Dummar, for instance, an institute that UNRWA had partnered with for its marketing and business correspondence course was replaced with a different one following complaints about its lack of air conditioning and space. The construction in September 2017 of EY centers in Homs and Latakia were assessed as major improvements in this regard.

74. Trainers were employed on the project on three months-long contracts at a time and were generally free to design the details of the training, select any training material to use and plan the schedule of the course. Interviewed youth expressed general appreciation for them, with only minor exceptions. While only renewed upon satisfactory performance, the flexibility that trainers had over the design of the curriculum seemed to further affect the level of standardization of vocational training practices and results.

75. An additional side-effect of outsourcing the implementation of short-term courses to private institutes was the perception of differential treatment between UNRWA trainees under the EY project and trainees who would attend the course independently of the project, as regular ‘clients’ of the training center. In one case in Khan Dannoun, which the evaluation could not independently verify, youth were under the impression that trainees who had autonomously paid for the course were relatively better off in terms of materials and classroom than EY participants.

5.3.5 The business development component enhanced youth’s capacity for self-help rather than fostering entrepreneurship as an alternative to wage employment.

76. Conversion rates from business development training to business launching have always been low among youth participating in EY’s business development component.

77. Project management implemented a number of changes in this respect as an attempt to foster a greater effectiveness of these activities. These included the adoption of a less stringent approach in selecting business development trainees (through the active inclusion of EY vocational education graduates and not only those showing highest potential). It also led to the piloting of toolkits for business development graduates in Homs, Hama, Latakia, Aleppo and DTC. These comprised a set of basic tools and utensils (for hairdressers’/barbers, beauty care, mobile phone and computer maintenance workers and graphic designers) to facilitate youth in kick-starting their own business.

78. Yet such strategies have not always proved effective, with trained youth appearing to only timidly approach business plans and start-up businesses. With the understanding that business plans and start-up businesses may be outcomes of groups of trained youth rather than individuals (hence any expectation of mirroring trends would be incorrect), figure

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34 This coincided with the duration of a short-term vocational course.
13 provides some sense of the ‘slowness’ of this component.

Figure 13 - Selected Business Development indicators

![Graph showing business development indicators over time]

- No. of trained beneficiaries in self-employment
- No. of completed business plans
- No. of start-up businesses

Source: EY progress reports III, IV and V

79. Interestingly, interviewed business development graduates and trainees showed great enthusiasm over the possibility of ‘being their own boss’, and while relatively high proportions of them (approximately half in focus groups conducted) reported having opened a business thanks to the training and the toolkits received, in most cases these comprised in-house activities offered to family and neighbors, with unclear profitability and future prospects. Both business development trainees and project staff alike had strong opinions about how constrained this component was, by design, given the lack of seed funding provided to graduates.

“We learned how to build a project, to build it from scratch, to study, select the location, communicate with customers and identify their needs; we gained the confidence that we can do something from nothing” (EY participant)

80. The evaluation gathered that discussions had occurred, prior to the crisis, between management of the earlier phase of the project and UNRWA’s Microfinance (MF)

Department with respect to the possibility of including loans in this component. The evaluation further explored this possibility with the MF Department which clarified that its mandate obstructed the possibility of providing grants to youth. Conversely, ‘start-up loans’ were indeed offered to youth between 18 and 30 years of age at a two percent monthly interest rate and provided that a minimum 10 percent of capital was available upon request of the loan. This evidently would constitute a very high bar for the EY’s target population, with the MF Department also noting that over the past two years the majority of requests for the youth start-up loan had come from individuals over 30 years of age.

“Toolkits for mobile and computer maintenance are beneficial because you can start your job in your house” (EY participant)

5.3.6 the youth development component turned out to be a sparse set of diverse activities, with a limited discernable effect on youth’s actual role in social and civic life

81. Youth development was the component whose implementation differed the most from what was initially envisioned. Conflict can explain many of the programmatic changes affecting this set of activities, with the crisis shifting the focus towards community support rather than youth involvement per se. The provision of psycho social, first aid and person safety training (see figure 8) should be read in this light.

82. The crisis also led project management to drop the Youth Intervention Fund, whereby selected youth would have had the possibility of applying for small amounts of money to initiate a given project, as well as youth-led participatory research and the certified course on community / youth development. The intrinsic risks of offering funds to youth who could have fled the country were reportedly too high for the project to engage in this type of activity, leading management to refrain from implementing it.

83. The two-year-long certification course was cancelled after having gauged lack of

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35 See EY progress report II.
interest from target youth for longer-term courses in times of crises. The reasons underlying the cancellation of youth-led participatory research are less clear yet most likely explained by the challenges of heightened insecurity in the country.

84. Notwithstanding the related challenges, the evaluation notes that some UN organizations were able to offer similar activities. UNICEF Syria, for instance, conducted participatory research on the hopes and aspirations of young people in the country with the support of young researchers from Homs. The report was successfully issued in 2016. At the time of report writing, UNICEF was also offering up to 2,500 USD in seed funding to selected groups of youth.

85. The changes to the youth development component resulted in a wide range of sparse, small-scale and community-driven activities, such as English clubs, Music clubs (e.g. in Husseineh), life skills training (e.g. in Jaramana), decoration of the streets of a camp or drawing with kids in an UNRWA clinic during an anti-measles vaccination campaign (e.g. in Homs) and spreading awareness for healthy teeth among children (e.g. Latakia).

86. The lack of a systematic implementation across this component led to varied perceptions from youth about its effectiveness. The evaluation gathered a general sense of satisfaction of participants with respect to the sense of security of the premises where initiatives were held, the atmosphere, the possibility of making new friends and learning from their peers. The opportunity to enjoy activities which were seen as not strictly vocational was also generally valued. One interviewee, for instance, praised the ‘English club’ he was enrolled in, which reportedly yielded greater benefits than the English language course he had attended, thanks to the time spent on developing conversation skills.

87. Yet other participants seemed somewhat disillusioned with the weight that these initiatives could have. These activities were reportedly largely driven by voluntary efforts of vocational trainees and members of their community and reliant on their capacities and pre-existing resources, with only minor contributions from the project itself. In stressing what he believed was the project’s exclusive focus on vocational training, at the expense of more educational activities, a young participant mentioned the lack of musical instruments at the ‘music club’ which had been established in his community.

5.4 gender and human rights considerations

88. The report highlighted the specific obstacles that young men in Syria faced when looking for employment, with checkpoints and controlled movement within cities and across the country adding a further layer of complications and disincentives to their potential search for a job. These challenges were reflected in disaggregated monitoring data on EY activities, which suggested, for instance, relatively lower graduation and employment rates of young men from short-term vocational courses (see figures 14 and 15).

89. Youth were far less vocal about the challenges to employment faced by young women. A few cases were nonetheless mentioned and seemed to refer to cultural norms rather than the specificity of the crises per se, such as the restricted freedom of movement imposed by families and at times specific expectations on the employee and employer’s side, as anecdotally illustrated in the box below.

“In Sbeineh and Jaramana you can find women who are well-educated but when they finish studying they stay at home and wait for someone to marry them; this is a very big problem in the future because they then marry guys who are not educated and after ten years they are forced to work as cleaners” (EY Staff)

“Even appearance counts...some companies want to employ girls without a hijab” (EY participant)
90. Overall, the project seemed to adequately cater, to the extent possible, to the needs of both young men and women. Gender-disaggregated data was systematically collected by the project and supported this.

91. The project, however, seemed less sensitive to youth with special needs. The evaluation was unable to retrieve project-generated figures on the numbers or proportion of EY participants affected by physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment. Figures on persons with disabilities are, in fact, scarce in general and in the context of Syria particularly limited. More mapping seems to have occurred - and consequent statistics were more available at the time of report writing - relatively to the population who fled Syria due to the crisis, rather than those who stayed.

92. Global UNRWA estimates shed light on the breadth of the issue, suggesting that at least 15% of total registered Palestine refugees are affected by some form of disability. Furthermore, in UNRWA schools in Syria, approximately 5 percent of students (2,435/45,344) were reported to have a disability in 2014/2015.

93. While across the range of courses and initiatives offered under the umbrella of the EY project some were, by design, more prone to engaging youth affected by specific conditions, disabled youth at large did not constitute a target group of the project, nor was it sufficiently factored in its design or its implementation.

“A transportation is a problem (for youth with special needs); if they have the desire to attend courses they need money…ramps are not in all our centers…some would need psycho-social support so they are encouraged to go outside…also, the number of disabled people increased during the crisis…we are not excluding them but it is hard for them” (EY Staff)

36 A number of focus groups comprised individuals with some form of disability, yet the evaluation was unable to collect in-depth information with an exclusive focus on this group.

37 A 2013 study from Handicap International and Help Age International looked at the number and needs of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, and estimated that one in five refugees was affected by physical, sensory or intellectual impairment. See ‘Hidden Victims of the Syrian crisis: disabled, injured and older refugees’ (2013).

38 https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/disability_programme_fact_sheet.pdf
6 conclusions

94. The implementation of the second phase of UNRWA’s EY project coincided with years of human and economic destruction in Syria which significantly affected the unfolding of its planned activities and its results. While in many ways different from how it was initially envisioned, the project offered Palestine refugee youth in Syria a tremendous - if not the only - opportunity to invest in themselves and continue to nurture plans for their future, despite the crisis and seeing many of their peers flee the country in search for better lives.

“Violence comes from loss of hope in life. If you help youth find employment...they become afraid of losing something. The road to ending violence passes through giving an opportunity to people.” (EY staff)

95. With literature suggesting that youth interventions are a long-term investment, and given UNRWA’s Medium Term Strategy (MTS) aiming at strengthening capabilities for increased livelihood opportunities (Strategic Outcome 4, MTS 2016-2021), there is a strong case for UNRWA to continue offering this opportunity in the future, not without implementing some adjustments in order to increase the project’s relevance, effectiveness and efficiency.  

96. Overall, a stronger design of the project from the outset, with a reduced set of output-level indicators as proxies of achievements,  

99 ILO (2016).  
46 Reducing the unemployment rate, especially for young people, is one of the essential components of Sustainable Development Goal 8 (‘Sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth’).
could have refrained project management from what appeared to be a ‘rush’ for achieving high numbers (of vocational trainees, for instance) as a way to increase the perceived effectiveness of the project, while compensating for the inability to implement some of the planned activities due to the crisis.

97. With respect to the project’s specific components, additional considerations are outlined below.

98. *Vocational education and career guidance:* Evidence collected on the project’s vocational education component, which eventually constituted the bulk of the intervention in spite of its more comprehensive plans, suggested a general alignment with what Palestine refugee youth reportedly desired. Less systematic attention seemed yet to have been given to what youth and the market actually needed for the future competitiveness on the job market of EY ‘graduates.’

99. The risks of broadening the target of training participants, while offering a wide range of specializations, cannot be discounted given the potential consequences of leaving some groups of youth in a deteriorated or less competitive labor market position over their peers.41

100. The broadened targeting approach could represent a deliberate strategic choice in a context of heightened emergency and restricted opportunities for youth. It could also be explained in light of the demographic shifts that the Syrian refugee crisis caused among those remaining in Syria – if, for instance, youth enrolled in universities were less prone to flee the country than those holding a degree or with no plan to pursue higher education. For vocational trainees, one could also argue that enrolling in a course during the peak of a crisis is a valuable end in itself, regardless of considerations of competitiveness and likelihood of securing a job thereafter.

101. While the limited effects that the project yielded on youth employment had evidently broader context-specific causes, the appropriateness of this management decision in the long run is worth considering. More effective targeting and greater participant profiling could limit the risks of exposing certain segments of trained youth to disadvantaged positions on the labor market, while also reflecting international best practice in this field.42

102. On the side of the labor market needs in Syria, comprehensive knowledge is scarce, with studies so far having focused on the effects of the Syrian refugee crisis in neighbouring countries43 and far less on the consequences in-country.44 Anecdotal evidence collected through the evaluation suggested the presence of a fluid environment, with factors pulling in different directions: fewer job opportunities given the damaged business environment, on the one hand; yet the existence of supply gaps and discrepancies between required and available skills, on the other.45

103. The job fair organized under the framework of EY in Damascus in October 2017 constituted an incredible opportunity to increase knowledge of both demand and supply sides of the Syrian labor market. Conducting in-depth labor market assessments seems, none the less, an urgent priority in this context and should constitute a non-negotiable, preliminary condition of any future intervention in this field. Anticipating the potential needs for reconstruction in the country and incorporating them in future programming is also of utmost importance.

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41 Amongst: i) the pool of EY participants; ii) other young individuals with a related diploma or university degree and iii) UNRWA-TVET graduates.

42 According to an ILO study (2016), participant profiling would represent a key success factor in youth employment interventions.


44 When conducted, these seem to pertain to specific governorates. For example: see ACTED/GAC’s labor market assessment in Syria: Idlib Governorate. Syria. Prepared by International Advisory, Products and Systems (i-APS). April 2017.

45 A UN agency representative pointed to a gap in the demand and supply of skills which short-term vocational training programmes do not seem to be filling.
104. The outreach of the project’s vocational education component, attained by outsourcing courses to a number of private institutes, was achieved at the expense of a standardized and consistent offer of courses. The extent of this tradeoff is something for future interventions to ponder, alongside the level of participation fees requested, given that the symbolic fees paid by EY trainees were far from contributing to any running cost.

105. Business development: The importance of offering a comprehensive approach to youth interventions has been stated several times in this report. Yet, by offering business development training to graduates of its short-term vocational courses, the project seemed to assume that entrepreneurship is an easily acquirable skill from virtually any individual with a limited vocational skillset and educational background.

106. Future interventions in this field would require a stronger targeting of participants or, alternatively, more realistic goal-setting in the first place – away from the expectation of increasing youth’s self-employment opportunities as an alternative to wage employment.

107. In addition, with respect to the widely advocated for loans and grants, there is widespread literature questioning the direction of causality in the correlation between funding and enterprise which UNRWA should consider.

108. Youth development: The set of youth activities that were carried out in this component, amongst those initially designed and never implemented, remained significantly constrained in their scope and outreach. Sustained commitment for resources, including professional expertise from the design phase of the activities, and continued investment over time, seem critical in order to yield discernable effects. Investing in know-how in this field in a context like Syria - where volunteerism and NGO culture were limited prior to the crisis - seems ever more important. In doing so, synergies with other similar interventions could be explored, such as the UNICEF-funded adolescent program for Palestine refugees in Syria. This targets a generally younger age group (11-24 years) yet has evidently some overlaps with EY’s target across the 18-24 age range.
7 recommendations for future programming

109. In line with the strong learning component envisioned for the evaluation, the following set of recommendations were developed and geared towards enhancing the design, implementation and management of similar projects that UNRWA may execute in the near future:

1. Identify a group or segment of the population (e.g. school drop outs) which the intervention will cater to and target activities accordingly by respecting pre-defined enrollment criteria.

2. Define the array and types of specializations of training courses to offer on the basis of the actual needs of the labor market, rather than aiming at increasing participation rates.

3. Coordinate and link with other organizations that have commissioned comprehensive and independent assessments of the labor market in Syria to identify and anticipate existing gaps, needs and the demand from employers.

4. Narrow down the array of specializations of training courses to offer by reflecting on the future level of competitiveness on the job market of training participants given their educational backgrounds; more specifically:
   a. Reflect on the adequacy of providing short-term courses in specializations that are also offered by formal institutions (private and governmental) granting diplomas or university degrees in the country;
   b. Reflect on the adequacy of offering short-term courses in fields that are in parallel offered in long-term form by UNRWA under its TVET programme.

5. Invest in a sound design of the intervention, including monitoring and evaluation from the onset of the project, with outcome-level indicators which may constitute a baseline for future assessments of the project.

6. If exceptional circumstances arise, revise the log frame of the project, with the understanding that any future assessment / evaluation will necessarily and inevitably build on this document.

7. Make a strategic decision on the extent of the trade-off between geographical coverage and standardization / consistency in the quality of vocational courses offered; decisions with respect to the number and types of partnerships with training institutes and the selection of instructors should naturally descend from this.

8. Rethink the strategy and approach behind the business development component and make it coherent with the results that are expected from it (e.g. actual employment as an alternative to wage employment or self-help for participants).

9. Invest in professionally-trained staff who can scale up the youth development component; explore further opportunities for synergies with other projects and programs such as the UNICEF-funded Adolescent program implemented by UNRWA.

10. Build the capacity of a project management unit and maintain it across the whole life of the project, with a full-time project manager as well as financial / project management software to help monitor progress over time and support informed feedback loops in programming as the project unfolds.

11. Tie activities and components together to a greater extent by establishing a ‘road-map’ of required courses and initiatives as a condition for certification.

12. Rethink the profiles of EY project staff: while looking for synergies across components is critical, combining components such as business and youth does not seem to match the abovementioned need for an increased focus for each of them.

13. Mainstream disability, incorporating the requirements of youth with special needs in the design of the intervention and targeting this group in the participation of all initiatives.
annex 1 - management response

genral response

date of management response: 17 June 2018

Office and person coordinating the management response / recommendation follow up:
Programme Support Office- Garikai Mabeza (Monitoring and Evaluation Officer).

General comments on the use/effects of the evaluation:
The management of UNRWA acknowledges the value of this evaluation in reflecting the achievement,
immediate and potential impact of the engaging youth project. In addition, the management recognises the
usefulness of the recommendations outlined below in helping UNRWA shape the successor programme as well
as in influencing the decision of the agency especially during this austerity period.

The evaluation informed UNRWA on the importance of regular market surveys to update the relevance of the
courses offered. UNRWA is committed to conduct a comprehensive market survey covering the specialisations to
be offered and the needs of the market to help shape future vocational and technical education.

Secondly, the evaluation highlighted the need to maintain up to date log frames and a strong project
management unit in place. This is a recommendation that UNRWA has already initiated in setting up and this
evaluation will definitely be utilised as a supporting document towards advocacy initiatives to management and
donors for resource allocation for this unit. In addition, the unit will be a platform for overall management of
projects to help track financial and programme implementation.

UNRWA also learned the importance of aligning the programme to the priorities of the target communities
taking into account the Syrian crisis and the post reconstruction period. UNRWA will utilise the market survey in
reshaping the programme and target group in order to allow for retraining for youth with skills that will be
obsolete in the reconstruction period while emphasising more on the skills that will be in demand during the
reconstruction period.

SFO agrees that there is a need to define better the scope of the business development component and UNRWA
will ensure all courses are standardised.

UNRWA will prioritise trainings that are most in line with the current job market in Syria. UNRWA will engage a
company to conduct market needs analysis as well as employ a Career Guidance Officer to work with graduates
and potential employees on a regular basis. The evaluation received wide acknowledgement for highlighting
areas for improvements and the project components that worked well. The evaluation also served as a learning
exercise and will contribute to the design of successor programmes as well as inform the running of the TVET
programme as a whole.

response to specific recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>recommendation</th>
<th>management response: (Agree/Partially agree/Disagree)</th>
<th>action planned/taken or reason for partially agreeing or disagreeing</th>
<th>planned date for implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>recommendation 1: Identify a group or segment of the population (e.g. school drop outs) which the intervention will cater to and</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>UNRWA will have a look at the current resources and match resources to the needs. The project will make sure that effective targeting mechanisms will be in place</td>
<td>September 2019 academic year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
target activities accordingly by respecting pre-defined enrollment criteria to ensure that those who participate in the training courses actually reflect those who are supposed to participate. The market survey will inform the UNRWA on the catchment in order to respond to the post conflict and reconstruction period.

UNRWA will target people who have professions that are falling obsolete due to the crisis for example routine work on machinery production lines in textile industries etc. This group of people although beyond the initial target age group will require training in new employable professions such as in reconstruction which will be marketable during and post conflict. In addition, the agency will proactively encourage SSNP cases to get training and start their own project in order to get out of this category. The market survey will provide a list of courses that are marketable and these will be implemented for this group of people. This recommendation will depend on future funding for short term courses as well as the outcome of the harmonization of the long term and short term courses for efficient use of resources.

| recommendation 2 | Agree | A market survey will be conducted between now and the start of the next academic year. The market survey will provide recommended courses and the TVET will reach out to relevant partners such as Telecommunications courses which we will partner with Syria Tel or MTN. | September 2019 |
| recommendation 3: Coordinate and link with | Agree | UNRWA will coordinate with UNDP and UNHCR in sharing | September 2019 |
other organizations that have commissioned comprehensive and independent assessments of the labor market in Syria to identify and anticipate existing gaps, needs and the demand from employers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation 4:</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>This will be included in the comprehensive market survey to be conducted by UNRWA prior to wholesale changes on the programme. In addition, UNRWA will restructure the TVET department in order to ensure effective deployment of staff resources. The output from the two activities will be matched to the specializations to be offered to students.</th>
<th>September 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrow down the array of specializations of training courses to offer by reflecting on the future level of competitiveness on the job market of training participants given their educational backgrounds; more specifically:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Reflect on the adequacy of providing short-term courses in specializations that are also offered by formal institutions (private and governmental) granting diplomas or university degrees in the country;</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>UNRWA will conduct a review of all the courses currently offered and compare with the needs coming from the market survey. UNRWA will also conduct a follow up study of graduates from TVET in order to compare their competitiveness in the market compared to graduates from other institutes.</td>
<td>September 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Reflect on the adequacy of offering short-term courses in fields that are in parallel offered in long-term form by UNRWA under its TVET programme</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>UNRWA will conduct a review of all the courses currently offered and compare with the needs coming from the market survey. UNRWA will then match courses to be offered to the market needs. This will be done in line with the harmonization process for</td>
<td>September 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Date</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation 5:</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>UNRWA will ensure all projects will have minimum guiding documents in place such as an M&amp;E Plan and Implementation Plan and budget. In addition, all projects will have indicator tracking tables as well as M&amp;E plans with strong outcome level indicators.</td>
<td>September 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation 6:</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>UNRWA will work on developing standard operating procedures to guide project management. The programme support office will provide clear communication guidelines on how revisions of projects will be done and communicated to all stakeholders. Whenever log frames are updated relevant implementation teams will be informed. The projects will be reviewed during project assessment committee meetings (PAC) that will be held on quarterly as well as quarterly review meetings. All projects that will be approved will have a project steering committee consisting of TVET and support departments such as the programme support office and finance.</td>
<td>September 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation 7:</td>
<td>Partially Agree</td>
<td>UNRWA will have master trainers to conduct supervision and monitoring activities across the centres in the country to ensure opportunities are also availed to young people located across the country. UNRWA will conduct thorough assessments of potential training institutes in order to ensure these meet the minimum standards.</td>
<td>September 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>Agreement</td>
<td>UNRWA's Action</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8:</strong> Rethink the strategy and approach behind the business development component and make it coherent with the results that are expected from it (e.g. actual employment as an alternative to wage employment or self-help for participants)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>UNRWA will conduct orientation workshops to assist young people to identify their niche in terms of whether they are potential entrepreneurs and work on giving them needed skills and help them prepare their business plan development and provide tool kits that would facilitate starting their own projects. UNRWA will produce guidelines to define the structure and content of the orientation workshops.</td>
<td>September 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9:</strong> Invest in professionally-trained staff who can scale up the youth development component; explore further opportunities for synergies with other projects and programs such as the UNICEF-funded Adolescent program implemented by UNRWA</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Management will explore options to increase the capacities of staff as well as attract experienced staff. UNRWA will facilitate regular workshops to all TVET staff on rolling out youth development activities. This will be mainstreamed for all staff who have to deal with the youth. UNRWA will integrate the adolescent programme onto the TVET component. This will include performance based contracts for staff as well as potential synergies with other agencies.</td>
<td>September 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10:</strong> Build the capacity of a project management unit and maintain it across the whole life of the project, with a full-time project manager as well as financial / project management software to help monitor progress over time and support informed feedback loops in programming as the project unfolds</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>UNRWA will utilize this evaluation as an advocacy document in resource mobilization for the Project Management unit. Management will aim to have project managers that are certified through standard courses or promote the use of online courses.</td>
<td>September 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>11:</strong> Tie activities and components together to a greater extent by establishing a ‘road-map’</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>UNRWA will use the results from the market survey to group similar activities and complimentary courses. This</td>
<td>September 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of required courses and initiatives as a condition for certification will be followed by an annual review of the courses to determine their uptake and interest from the market.

| recommendation 12: Rethink the profiles of EY project staff: while looking for synergies across components is critical, combining components such as business and youth does not seem to match the above mentioned need for an increased focus for each of them Agree | UNRWA will conduct the market survey first and will inform the specializations to be implemented. Once the array of specializations are clear, will look at the current staffing levels and capacities and determine areas for capacity building as well as match components as part of the TVET harmonization exercise to increase efficiency and effectiveness. |
| recommendation 13: Mainstream disability, incorporating the requirements of youth with special needs in the design of the intervention and targeting this group in the participation of all initiatives Agree | Management will institute guidelines on how to engage people with special needs. This will also require UNRWA to recruit staff with expertise on how to deal with people with disabilities as well as network with agencies with experience on this area. September 2019 |
### Annex 2 - List of Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type of FGD/KII</th>
<th>Origin of trainees/area of responsibility of staff</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Damascus</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus Training Center (DTC)</td>
<td>Youth – trainees from Long-term Vocational Education courses</td>
<td>DTC</td>
<td>8 (including 2 women)</td>
<td>October 9th 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus Training Center</td>
<td>Youth – trainees from Business Development trainees</td>
<td>DTC and Khan Dannoun</td>
<td>11 (including 9 women)</td>
<td>October 9th 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus Training Center</td>
<td>Youth – trainees from Short-term Vocational Education courses</td>
<td>DTC and Khan Dannoun</td>
<td>13 (including 8 women)</td>
<td>October 9th 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus Training Center</td>
<td>Project staff: Business and Youth Development Officers; Vocational training and Continuing Education Officers; Career Guidance and Soft Skills Officer</td>
<td>DTC, Jaramana, Husseineh, Qabr Essit, Dummar, Dahiet Qudseya, Artuz, Alliance, Rekneddin</td>
<td>9 (including 3 women)</td>
<td>October 10th 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus Training Center</td>
<td>Youth – trainees from Short-term Vocational Education courses and Career Guidance</td>
<td>Jaramana, Husseineh, Qabr Essit</td>
<td>8 (including 5 women)</td>
<td>October 11th 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus Training Center</td>
<td>Youth – trainees from Career Guidance and Continuing Education</td>
<td>DTC</td>
<td>11 (including 8 women)</td>
<td>October 11th 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus Training Center</td>
<td>Youth – trainees from Youth Development</td>
<td>Jaramana, Huseineh and Zainab/Qabr Essit</td>
<td>9 (including 4 women)</td>
<td>October 11th 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus Training Center</td>
<td>Youth – trainees from Business Development</td>
<td>Jaramana, Huseineh and Qabr Essit</td>
<td>11 (including 5 women)</td>
<td>October 11th 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus Training Center</td>
<td>Youth – trainees from Short-term Vocational Education and Continuing Education</td>
<td>Dahiet Qudseya</td>
<td>7 (including 6 women)</td>
<td>October 12th 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus Training Center</td>
<td>Instructors of Short-term Vocational Education</td>
<td>DTC, Husseineh, Qabr Essit, Khan Dannoun, Alliance and Dummar</td>
<td>8 (including 2 women)</td>
<td>October 12th 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus Training Center</td>
<td>Youth – trainees in Short-term Vocational Education, Business Development and Continuing Education</td>
<td>Dummar</td>
<td>8 (all women)</td>
<td>October 12th 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homs Training Center</td>
<td>Project Staff - Livelihood Coordinator, Business</td>
<td>Homs</td>
<td>4 (including 2 women)</td>
<td>October 16th 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homs Training Center</td>
<td>Development Officer; Vocational Continuing Education Officer; Soft Skills and Career Guidance Officer</td>
<td>Homs</td>
<td>34 (including 18 women)</td>
<td>October 16&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LATAKIA</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Latakia Training Center</td>
<td>Project Staff – Business and Youth Development Officer; Livelihood Coordinator</td>
<td>Latakia</td>
<td>2 (including 1 woman)</td>
<td>October 17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latakia Training Center</td>
<td>Youth trainees from Career Guidance and Continuing Education</td>
<td>Latakia</td>
<td>11 (including 7 women)</td>
<td>October 17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latakia Training Center</td>
<td>Youth trainees from Short-term Vocational Education and Business Development</td>
<td>Latakia</td>
<td>12 (including 7 women)</td>
<td>October 17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latakia Training Center</td>
<td>Instructors of short-term Vocational Education</td>
<td>Latakia</td>
<td>4 (including 2 women)</td>
<td>October 17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHER</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>TVET Chief</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>October 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>TVET Deputy Chief</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>October 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>Programme Support Office</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>October 10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homs</td>
<td>Area Officer Homs Hama Latakia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oct 17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>UNRWA Project Manager for Adolescent project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oct 16&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>UNICEF (Adolescent project)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oct 19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>UNDP Livelihoods team leader</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oct 19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>Microfinance Department UNRWA (phone)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oct 19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>Observation visits to Dahiet Qudseya and Dummar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oct 19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
annex 3 - evaluation terms of reference

1. 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, microfinance and emergency assistance. UNRWA is the largest UN operation in the Middle East with more than 30,000 staff. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions.

1. BACKGROUND

2. The Syrian crisis further compounded the existing vulnerability of Palestine refugees in Syria, the majority of whom were already living in poverty prior to the conflict. At least 62% of the total Palestine refugee population was internally displaced at some point in time, and the conflict has now encroached on most Palestine refugees’ places of residence, causing not only extreme hardship and widespread displacement, but also unraveling social structure and support networks, and putting continuous strain on the capacity of host families.

3. The Engaging Youth (EY) project was the result of a grant agreement between the European Commission (EC) and UNRWA. The first phase of the intervention was successfully implemented between February 2010 and January 2012, with funding from the EU’s Instrument for Stability. The second phase of the project officially began on 01 February 2012 and was planned to be implemented over a 36 months’ timeframe (2012-2015). Due to the crisis in Syria and the challenges of an extremely volatile operational context, the project requested and was granted three no-cost extension agreements until July 2016, 30 April 2017 and 31 October 2017, respectively. By offering services to strengthen the employability of refugee youth, the project fell under UNRWA’s Human Development Goal 3, “a decent standard of living” (Medium Term Strategy for 2010-2015).

4. The overall objective of the project (Phase II) was to provide support for an improved standard of living and access to opportunity for Palestine refugees, Iraqi and Syrian youth. The specific objective was to improve employability and reduce unemployment rates among Palestine refugees and Syrian citizens, with a focus on Palestinian refugee youth. The project comprised four components, namely: i) Career Guidance and Continuing Education; ii) Vocational Education; iii) Business Development and iv) Youth Development (please see project document for further details). Activities were planned in six governorates including Damascus, Dera’a, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, and Latakia.

5. The objectives and the set of expected results of the project (one for each component mentioned above) remained unvaried throughout phase II. A series of programmatic and operational adjustments were, nonetheless, implemented, given the events that occurred as the project unfolded (e.g. the crisis in Yarmouk camp; displacement of population etc.) and the constraints under which the project was forced to operate (e.g. the suspension of some EY centers; prolonged vacant positions; etc.).

2. EVALUATION PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

6. UNRWA has a contractual obligation to carry out an external final evaluation of the Engaging Youth project in accordance with European procedures (see page 15 of project document). The present document is a revised version of the evaluation terms of reference which were issued in February 2017.

46 The only (minor) exception to this is the target age group of component 1 (‘Employment opportunities for youth have increased particularly for Palestine refugees’) which consisted of 17-33 (as per project document) and was extended to 17-35 as the project unfolded.
7. The evaluation has a dual purpose of accountability and learning. It will support accountability towards UNRWA’s beneficiaries and the EU for the USD 7.3 million invested in the project. The exercise is also expected to assist UNRWA in developing lessons on how to improve the planning, implementation and management of similar projects that the agency may execute in the near future.

8. The objective of the evaluation is to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of UNRWA’s Engaging Youth project (Phase II). The evaluation will incorporate gender and human rights perspectives throughout all stages of the evaluation.47

3. EVALUATION SCOPE

9. The evaluation will cover UNRWA’s Engaging Youth project (Phase II) in Syria over the period 2012-2017. Primary data collection will take place in five governorates including Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama and Latakia. Dera’a was not deemed accessible at the time of the design of the evaluation. The specific domains and research questions that will drive the exercise are outlined in section 4 below.

10. The evaluation will not look into the impact of the intervention for several reasons. These include nature of the project which does not lend itself to producing long-term effects that can be clearly attributed to the intervention itself and the lack of relevant, independently-collected baseline indicators.48 The evaluation will, nonetheless, report any unintended consequence of the project (positive or negative).

11. With respect to sustainability, the evaluation will only gauge the extent to which the institutions that were set up through the project can continue to provide services once donor funding terminates. It will not, however, assess whether the effects of the intervention continue on beneficiaries after the end of the project.

4. EVALUATION CRITERIA AND QUESTIONS

12. The evaluation will attempt to answer the following set of questions, organized around the relevant DAC/UNEG evaluation criteria.

(i) Relevance: [the extent to which the project is in line with the needs of beneficiaries (and UNRWA’s mandate and strategy, host country requirements and donor policies)]

1) To what extent are the objectives of the project still valid?
2) Are the activities and outputs of the project consistent with:
   o the overall goal and the attainment of its objectives?
   o intended impacts and effects (expected results)?
3) How aligned with the needs of beneficiaries are the project’s components?
4) How aligned is the intervention with UNRWA’s and the donor’s strategic frameworks (e.g. MTS; Youth Strategy etc.)?

(ii) Efficiency: [how appropriately and adequately the available inputs (resources, personnel, time etc.) were managed and used to generate the outputs. It is an economic term which signifies that the aid uses the least costly resources possible in order to achieve the desired results]

5) Were activities cost-efficient?
6) Were objectives achieved on time?

48The lack of a baseline does not allow for a ‘pre-post’ comparison (i.e. before and after the intervention). Ultimately, this links to a broader, common problem that is deciding to evaluate ‘impact’ at the end of a project, as opposed to planning it early on. If the decision to evaluate impact is made at the inception/design stage of any given intervention, the intervention itself could be designed in a way to support evaluable (for instance, through a staggered rollout of project activities over time and across locations so as to create ‘natural’ control groups).
(iii) **Effectiveness** [the extent to which the project’s objectives were achieved]

7) To what extent were the objectives and expected results achieved?
8) What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives?
9) To what extent did the project manage to adapt to its changing environment?

(iv) **Sustainability:** [the extent to which the effects of the intervention are durable if funding is reduced or terminated]

10) To what extent will the institutional structures that were set up through the intervention be able to continue providing services after donor funding ends?

While answering the questions outlined above, the evaluation will develop a set of recommendations to inform the direction and execution of similar projects that UNRWA may design and implement in the near future.

5. **METHODOLOGY**

13. The evaluation’s methodology is shaped by issues of access, security and timing. The evaluation will adopt a purely qualitative approach in answering the research questions outlined above. Information collected will be triangulated to ensure soundness of analysis. A perception survey with project beneficiaries will not be feasible given the tight timeline for conducting the exercise.

14. Data and information collection methods will include, but are not limited to: (1) structured document review and content analysis of key documents (e.g. annual progress reports); (2) secondary analyses of data (e.g. available indicators); (3) focus group discussions with project beneficiaries and relevant stakeholders; and (iv) key informant interviews UNRWA staff and external partners/actors.

15. The evaluator will lead the exercise with the support of one interpreter and one locally hired researcher/data collector. The evaluator will conduct primary data collection in Damascus and manage data collection efforts remotely, through the researcher/data collector, in other locations where travel is restricted.

16. The analysis and the presentation of data and information will, to the extent possible, be gender-disaggregated and take into consideration the needs of vulnerable groups.

6. **EVALUATION DELIVERABLES AND TIMING**

17. The exercise is expected to produce the following two deliverables:

1) A comprehensive evaluation report (max. 20 pages) providing an analytical review of the data collected for each criteria and programme included in the project. The report should provide chapters for each component, as well as a more general chapter focusing on UNRWA’s overall management of the project; including (but not only):
   - Executive summary;
   - Background;
   - Evaluation objectives;
   - Methodology and limitations;
   - Findings - split according to the evaluation criteria;
   - Lessons learned (if needed);
   - Recommendations *(either a separate section or under each evaluation criteria, tbd)*; and

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Given the unique management arrangements in place for this evaluation, an inception report will not be developed. The evaluator will, however, share with the Syria team supporting documentation that will clarify the approaches and methods used. The evaluator will draft a ‘note to the file’ should significant changes be made to the evaluation terms of reference outlined herewith.
2) A presentation workshop / briefing providing UNRWA staff the opportunity to better understand and adopt the findings and recommendations of the evaluation team, in a participatory forum. This will be conducted after submission of the draft report and will enable management to provide feedback before finalization of the report.

18. The evaluator will travel to Syria for data collection purposes one week in September and one week in October 2017 (pending visa). The draft evaluation report will be tentatively submitted by the end of November 2017.

7. ARRANGEMENTS FOR MANAGING THE EVALUATION

19. Due to the constraints faced by UNRWA’s Syria Field Office in recruiting external evaluators, the evaluation will be conducted by UNRWA’s centralized evaluation function, in close coordination with UNRWA’s FPSO Office in Syria and Engaging Youth Project team.

20. Given the exercise will resort to ‘remote’ management of data collection in locations outside Damascus, fieldwork will be planned and sequenced in a way to optimize the evaluation’s resources, considering time and travel constraints. The evaluator’s first mission to Syria (tentatively scheduled for September) will prioritize focus group discussions in Damascus, on the job training of the researcher / data collector and selected interviews with UNRWA staff. The October mission will prioritize key informant interviews and any remaining focus group. The researcher / data collector will travel to Hama, Homs, Aleppo and Latakia for data collection purposes between the evaluator’s first and second mission to Syria. S/He will brief the evaluator on the data independently collected over the phone and in person (in October).

21. The M&E Officer in Syria will provide all documents and information required to the evaluator, facilitate access to staff and visits to UNRWA offices, organize meetings / interviews with relevant stakeholders, assist with the recruitment of data collectors / researchers and interpreters, provide backstopping and liaise regularly on the progress of the evaluation with internal UNRWA management.

22. The evaluator is expected to undertake the evaluation in consultation with UNRWA, in full accordance with the terms of references outlined herewith and in full compliance with the UNEG’s norms and standards for evaluation.
## Annex 4 - Evaluation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Criteria</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Sub-Questions</th>
<th>Measures and Data analysis method</th>
<th>Means of Verification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relevance</strong></td>
<td>1. To what extent are the objectives of the project still valid?</td>
<td>- The objectives are still valid if there is evidence suggesting that youth suffers from limited employability/unemployment (specific obj.) and poor standards of living/constrained access to opportunities (overall obj.) - Also, the rational of the project/underlying assumptions should also be 'stress-tested' i.e. that youth faces different constraints in access to wage or self-employment including: i) inadequate skills ii) unskilled wage labor no longer available in Syria and iii) inadequate information about jobs</td>
<td>- Background research on context/desk review on employment rates etc. • FGD with youth • FGD/KII with private sector/employers • KII with other relevant stakeholders</td>
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<td>2. Are the activities and outputs of the project consistent with: - the overall goal and the attainment of its objectives? - intended impacts and effects? ('internal consistency')</td>
<td>- Internal consistency of the logframe will be gauged by determining whether: i) activities and expected results are phrased as such; ii) they are logically and sequentially connected; and iii) indicators are valid (measure what they are supposed to measure) - Structured analysis of logframe</td>
<td>• Project logframe • KII with UNRWA project manager(s)</td>
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<td>3. How aligned with the needs of beneficiaries (gender-disaggregated) are the project's components?</td>
<td>- Were needs assessments conducted? - To what extent have youth refugees and other stakeholders been involved in the design of the project? - Are the different project components offered aligned with the needs and the</td>
<td>- Youth are the direct beneficiaries of the interventions yet they might not be fully aware of their needs when it comes to 'employability' hence the need to integrate their perceptions about the relevance of the interventions with information from other sources</td>
<td>• FGD with youth • FGD/KII with private sector/employers • FGD/KII with trainers (ST and LT) • FGD with EY staff • KII with UNRWA Microfinance Dep. • KII with M&amp;E/PSO Syria</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELEVANCE</td>
<td>4. How aligned is the intervention with UNRWA’s strategic frameworks and the donor’s strategic frameworks?</td>
<td>Constraints of youth (taking into account age groups/gender/education level/work experience/special needs etc.)?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Are the project components offered aligned with the demand in the local labor market?</td>
<td>- Analysis of documents and interviews</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Do the competencies taught in training actually reflect the needs of the industry or field?</td>
<td>- KSIs with any other relevant stakeholder (e.g. NGOs, UNICEF etc.)</td>
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<td>- What is the level of employer satisfaction with the performance of the graduates from the project?</td>
<td>- Desk review/secondary sources of info</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Do alternative projects exist/are similar projects offered by other actors in Syria?</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFFICIENCY</td>
<td>5. Were activities cost-efficient?</td>
<td>MTS, Youth Strategy etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Analysis of documents and interviews</td>
<td>KSIs with UNRWA EY Project team</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>KSIs with M&amp;E/PSO Syria</td>
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<td>KSIs with EU</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFFICIENCY</td>
<td>6. Were objectives achieved on time?</td>
<td>Financial data (budget and expenditures)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- What impact has the delay in implementation had?</td>
<td>KSIs with UNRWA EY staff</td>
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<td>KSIs with M&amp;E/PSO Syria</td>
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<td></td>
<td>KSIs with relevant stakeholders</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFFECTIVENESS</td>
<td>7. To what extent were the objectives and expected results achieved? (gender-disaggregated)</td>
<td>FGD with youth</td>
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<td>FGD/KSIs with private sector/employers</td>
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<td>KSIs with UNRWA EY staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Objectives (or longer term expected results)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Support for improved standard of living (o.o.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Support for improved access to</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expected results:</td>
<td>KII with M&amp;E/PSO Syria</td>
<td>Other available documentation</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Employement opportunities for youth have increased (17-33)</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Check if these indicators are available, including trends (secondary data collection) – as reported in prodoc:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- % of youth employed among registered graduated jobseekers (gender disaggregated)</td>
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<td>- # of vacancies provided to EY job seekers from the network [= ‘increased opportunity’]</td>
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<td>- % of youth participating in the job fairs securing an interview with a company [= ‘increased opportunity’]</td>
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<tr>
<td>- % of youth participating in the job fairs offered a job [= ‘increased opportunity’]</td>
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<td>- # of evening trainees who passed ICDL exam</td>
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<td>- Relevant and quality vocational education provided and programmes modernized [due to the way this expected outcome is phrased (not as an outcome) this turns out to be redundant with Q. 3 i.e. the relevance questions above….]</td>
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<td>*Check if these indicators are available, including trends (secondary data collection):</td>
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<tr>
<td>- % of graduated trainees (LT and ST) employed or continuing studies (gender disaggregated)</td>
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<td>- % of graduated working in a job related to their training or continuing to study in a relevant field (disaggregated by</td>
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<td>- FGD with youth</td>
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<td>- FGD/KII with private sector/employers</td>
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<td>- FGD with EY staff</td>
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<td>- KII with M&amp;E/PSO Syria</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Monitoring data*</td>
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</table>

- KII with M&E/PSO Syria
- Other available documentation

- FGD with youth
- FGD/KII with private sector/employers
- FGD with EY staff
- KII with M&E/PSO Syria
- Monitoring data*
| EFFECTIVENESS | 8. What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives? (internal and external)* | What are the key challenges/constraints the project and its specific components have faced? | Compilation of issues mentioned more often by interviewees | Desk Review of quarterly project documents | KILs with all relevant stakeholders listed above | FGD with youth |
| | | | | | | |
| EFFECTIVENESS | 9. To what extent did the project manage to adapt to its changing environment? | What were the key changes affecting the environment as the project unfolded? | How prepared and responsive was UNRWA in the management of factors affecting the achievement of objectives? | Desk Review of quarterly project documents | KILs with M&E/PSO Syria | KILs with UNRWA EY staff | Other |

- Career options include self-employment as an alternative to waged employment

*Check if these indicators are available, including trends (secondary data collection):
  - % of micro-loans received from partner MFIs
  - % of potential entrepreneurs trained starting their own businesses
  - % of start-ups still in business after 3 years

- Youth’s capacity to play active role in social and civic life is enhanced (13-25)

- FGD with youth
- FGD/KIL with EY staff
- KIL with local entrepreneurs
- KIL with UNRWA Microfinance Dep.
- KILs with M&E/PSO Syria
- Monitoring data*
unrwa headquarters amman
department of internal oversight services

evaluation of unrwa’s engaging youth project in syria

carlotta fncati with fabio bezerra and nadeen jbara

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