



Teaching Twenty-First- Century Skills

Transforming Jerusalem's Youth, Equipping Them with Skills for the Future



By Peter Nasir

Youth in Palestine comprise about 30 percent of the population, and with the absence of a conducive political, social, and economic environment for youth and adolescents, they continue to face many challenges that hinder them from achieving their full potential or enjoying healthy living conditions. This leaves them in a state of self-identity conflict, lack of self-confidence, and little self-esteem.

One of the most pressing issues that face Palestinian youth is the increasing unemployment rate, especially among university graduates, holders of bachelor's degrees. It is estimated that the number of unemployed graduates over the past few years has reached about 400,000. Palestinian universities graduate approximately 45,000 students every year, but the absorption capacity of the Palestinian labor market is no more than 6,000, thus leaving about 38,000 university graduates with limited or no access to the labor market.

Youth themselves face a gap in acquiring the needed life and soft skills as well as twenty-first-century skills that match the labor market's demands and needs. Most of the young graduates lack some of the basic skills that would increase their opportunities to access their first job or self-employment. This gap can be clearly identified as soon as they start to consider their career path or think

about their career identity, engage in job search, develop their personal portfolio, or present themselves in job interviews. But it doesn't stop here. Young graduates who have successfully made it to their first career are also challenged with maintaining their positions because many of them lack the skills to cope with the new work environment, such as teamwork, communications, negotiations, work ethics, etc.

One cannot talk about Palestinian youth without addressing the unique yet complicated context of those living in East Jerusalem. On top of the challenging socio-economic conditions, they have experienced a protracted exposure to trauma and violence, in addition to the systematic approach of the Israeli government that is designed to move them out of Jerusalem. Many of them end up dropping out of school; an estimated figure of 36 percent of students drop out early from the school system or get involved in vandalism due to the



Challenging contexts
require unique
interventions.

stark imbalance in socio-economic indicators between the Israelis and the Palestinians who live in Jerusalem. Currently, Palestinian youth who live inside historical Palestine in general, and in East Jerusalem in particular, are considered youth at risk. They often engage in volatile actions to defend their dignity, identity, and faith, following the brutal actions of the state, putting themselves at risk of being abused, tortured, injured, detained, and unable to live a proper life.

Life skills session.





Digital literacy training session.

In such a challenging environment, new interventions and programming approaches have become a pressing need to empower youth by providing a complementary and comprehensive package of upskilling and reskilling training. Such measures help youth land their first job or access self-employment, while at the same time engaging them in self-development activities that contribute to overall improvement through healthy social and economic participation.

The Career Advancement Center (CAC) of the East Jerusalem YMCA (EJ-YMCA), established in 2020 with generous funds from UNDP, seeks to create a safe workspace for Jerusalemite youth, aiming to enhance their professional identity and develop their job skills to enable them to compete in the job market and to access better opportunities in their careers. The center also aims to foster resilience among youth in East Jerusalem by enhancing their coping mechanisms and empowering them to reach their full potential. This intervention of the CAC intersects

with the mission of the EJ-YMCA in developing and empowering youth and communities to reach their full potential in mind, body, and spirit based on Christian values.

The CAC also provides early career counseling and vocational assessment, utilizing international standardized tests such as the Holland Codes Assessment for career testing and the Valpar Test of Essential Skills for physical and mental assessment. These tests help youth to identify and explore their mental and physical capacities and personal inclinations and link this to potential future career paths or professions.

During the past two years, the CAC has worked with several partner organizations to implement projects aimed at youth-positive development. It has registered a number of life-changing stories, such as that of RS, a domestic violence survivor.

RS, an 18-year-old young woman, has been living in challenging conditions throughout her entire

life due to domestic violence. She expressed her concerns about the lack of support and care that had affected her ability to develop healthy relationships with others and that severely eroded her self-confidence and trust. RS participated in one of the soft and life-skills training courses offered by the CAC and also benefited from the career and vocational counseling assessment. This experience equipped her with the skills and confidence to set a career goal. She eventually succeeded in getting her first job

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Soft skills training session.

with a local merchant, leading to greater self-resilience and financial independence. She asserts, "The training helped me change a lot; it empowered me and encouraged me to go on despite the many challenges I was facing. I also found new tools, such as sports. I now know good ways to relieve all the negative energy inside of me, and it also helps to sustain my health."

Article photos are courtesy of The Career Advancement Center (CAC) of the East Jerusalem YMCA (EJ-YMCA).



Music therapy session.

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