

Palestine
Refugees
Today

No. 97





1 Education: UNRWA's priority	Education takes the largest part of UNRWA's budget and despite financial problems which may yet lead to cuts in the programme, the system continues to provide basic general education to 340,000 young Palestine refugees and vocational and teacher training for some 5,000.	
4 New careers for women	Several UNRWA vocational training centres now accept young women in courses that used to be male preserves. This year, 17 young women are graduating from Wadi Seer training centre in Jordan in such courses.	
5 OPEC finances VTC expansion	The OPEC Fund contributed \$ 2.5 million to UNRWA to help with the expansion of the Agency's seven vocational training centres. So far the expansion has meant that 172 more young refugees have had the chance of learning a trade at an UNRWA centre.	
6 NGOs provide school funds	Most of UNRWA's funding is provided by governments but many non-governmental organizations, clubs, church groups and individuals support the education programme. Norway's Save the Children Fund, Redd Barna, is one of these, providing direct financial aid through UNRWA to two schools in Jordan.	
7 The brain factories	UNRWA's elementary and junior secondary schools are the cornerstone of a system of education that leads many young Palestine refugees on to university and professional careers. Two universities where many refugees continue their education are the University of Jordan and the American University of Beirut.	



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Cover Photo: UNRWA School, Baqa'a Camp, Jordan

United Nations Relief and Works Agency
for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Palestine Refugees Today



Education: UNRWA's key programme

"You can cut our rations if you find more money to educate our children!" was the cry from Palestine refugees in the early days of UNRWA.

This awareness of the importance of education for Palestine refugees has if anything increased since then, 30 years ago. The problem for UNRWA is not forcing education on people who don't

want it but of providing adequate education for those who do. When UNRWA began operations in 1950, the main emphasis of its programmes was on food, shelter and health care. In 1950, only \$ 398,000 was spent on education. There were 40,000 pupils in 74 schools with 700 teachers. And many of the schools were in tents.

UNESCO becomes involved

Following an appeal from the United Nations General Assembly in 1950, Unesco began to play a role in the education of Palestine refugees. An agreement was signed between UNRWA and UNESCO under which UNESCO is responsible for the professional aspects of the programme includ-

ing the secondment to UNRWA of the Director of Education and other specialist staff. UNRWA administers and finances the programme.

The aim of the UNRWA/UNESCO Department of Education is to provide, within the framework of the curricula prescribed by the host countries, general education, teacher and higher education and vocational and technical education in accordance with the needs of Palestine refugees and to continuously improve all levels of the education system.

Today the system includes general education for some 335,000 children at elementary and junior secondary levels in 638 schools with 9,674 teachers; vocational and teacher training for nearly 5,000 trainees in eight training centres; in-service teacher train-

ing through the Institute of Education; and the annual award of about 360 university scholarships. The Education Department also has a placement service to help find jobs for graduates of vocational and teacher training centres. The Department provides policy guidance, direction and professional support for the Field Education Officers, themselves Palestine refugees, in the five UNRWA field offices: Beirut, Lebanon; Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic; Amman, Jordan; Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza Town, Gaza Strip.

New developments

In the past year, UNRWA has strengthened the professional aspects of its education system by setting up Education Development Units in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. And an Education Development Centre was established in the West Bank joining Centres established in Amman and Gaza in 1974.

The objective of these centres and units is to improve the quality of instruction in Agency schools through closer co-ordination of teaching and supervisory staff, integration of supervision with in-service training, reinforcement of existing resources devoted to in-service teacher training and the development of learning and teaching aids and library services for teachers. The centres and units have advanced science teaching kits and four of the five have language laboratories.

In 1980, about \$ 100 million was spent on UNRWA's education programme, 54 per cent of the Agency's \$ 184 million expenditure. In 1981, about \$ 115 million has been allocated for education.

School education

UNRWA's education system is complex as it follows four different curricula, has four different sets of text books and operates in five areas.

There is a reason for this complication. By offering the same curriculum as the government school system, children from UNRWA

schools can continue their education in their host country. UNRWA now provides six years of elementary education in all fields and three years of junior secondary in all but Lebanon, where four years are provided. If there is no UNRWA school close to a refugee child's home or if nearby UNRWA schools are too crowded, the Agency provides assistance for them to go to government or private schools. And in some fields, the Agency assists students going on to government or private senior secondary schools since UNRWA has no senior school programme.

Overcrowding

Despite improvements to the system, it is still handicapped by overcrowding with as many as 50 students per classroom in some areas. The pupil/teacher ratio is about 40 to one in the elementary cycle, decreasing slightly in the junior secondary cycle. Double-shifting, with two schools sharing one building, continues to be unavoidable because of natural population growth and the Agency's lack of money to build schools on the scale required. There is double-shifting in 478 schools, 75 per cent of the total. But in Jordan the level reaches 95 per cent and 91 per cent in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Textbooks

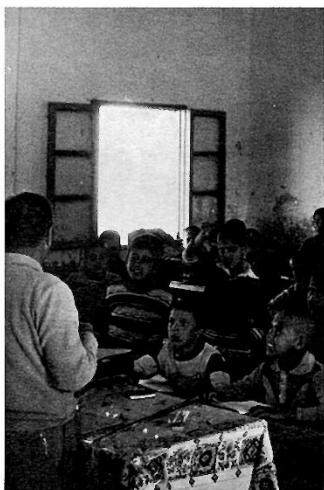
Since 1969, all texts newly prescribed or revised by host govern-

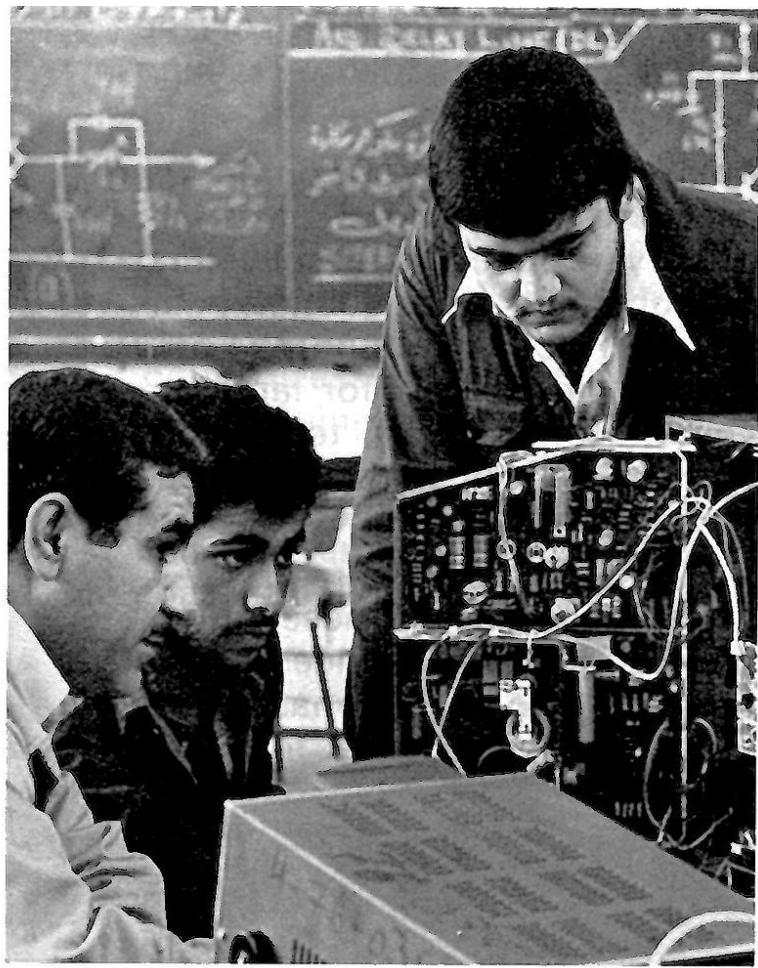
ments have been submitted to the Director-General of UNESCO for approval before the Agency buys them. In the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, where Jordanian and Egyptian text books are used, the books have to receive a special import permit from the occupying authorities.

At the end of May this year, of the books approved by UNESCO, 13 for the West Bank and 10 for Gaza had been refused import permits.

Teacher training

Pre-service training is provided at four teacher training centres in Jordan (1), Lebanon (1) and the West Bank (2). Enrolment in the





two-year course at the four centres in 1980–81 was 1,326 (671 men, 655 women). About 600 teachers graduate from the centres each year and usually find jobs in UNRWA schools or other schools in the Middle East and Gulf areas. In 1964, the Institute of Education was opened to provide training for teachers who had no professional training. As the number of unqualified teachers declined, the Institute has been able gradually to change its focus to include courses for head teachers and other key education personnel, provide refresher courses for qualified teachers and organize special courses for differing needs or to meet changes in curricula made by host governments.

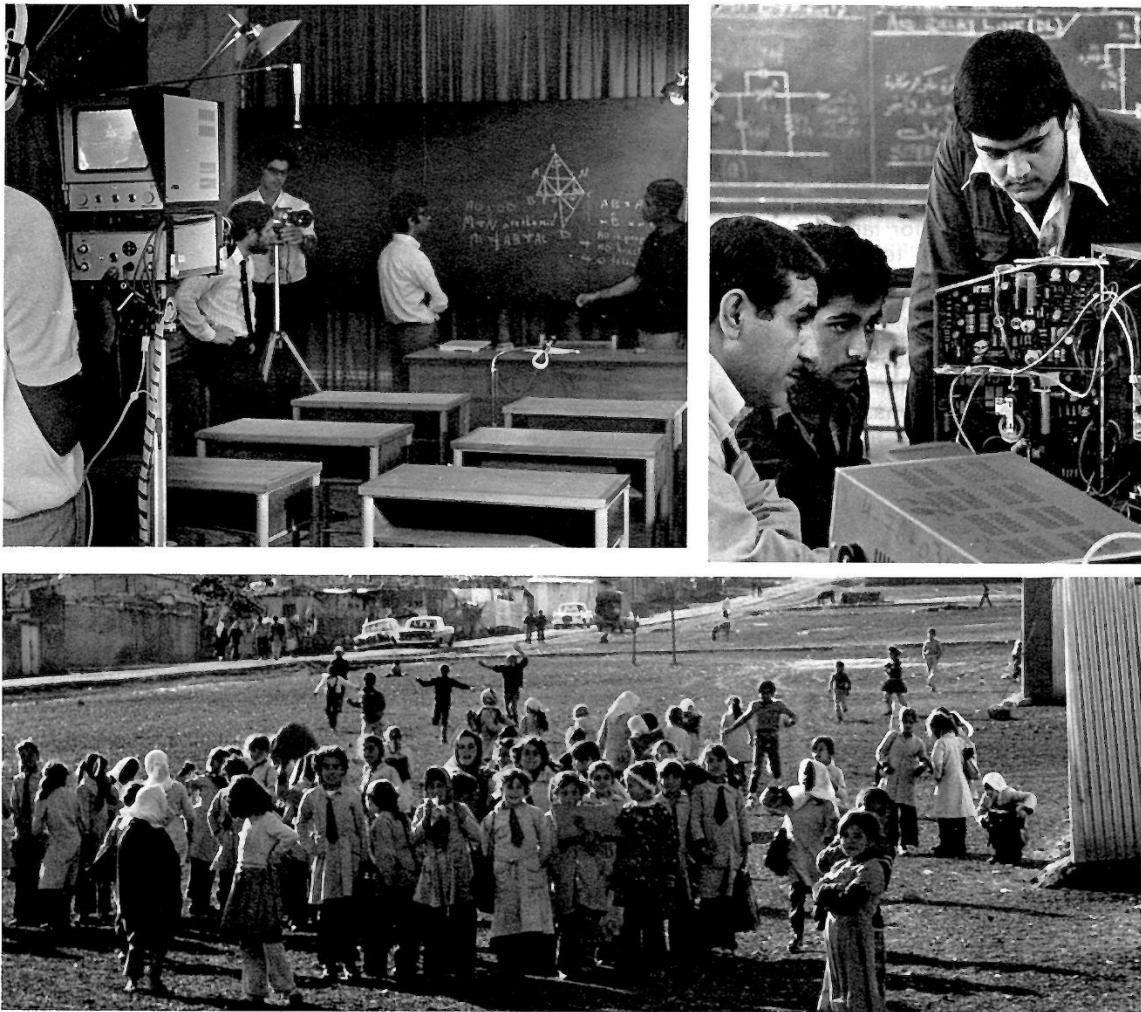
Vocational training

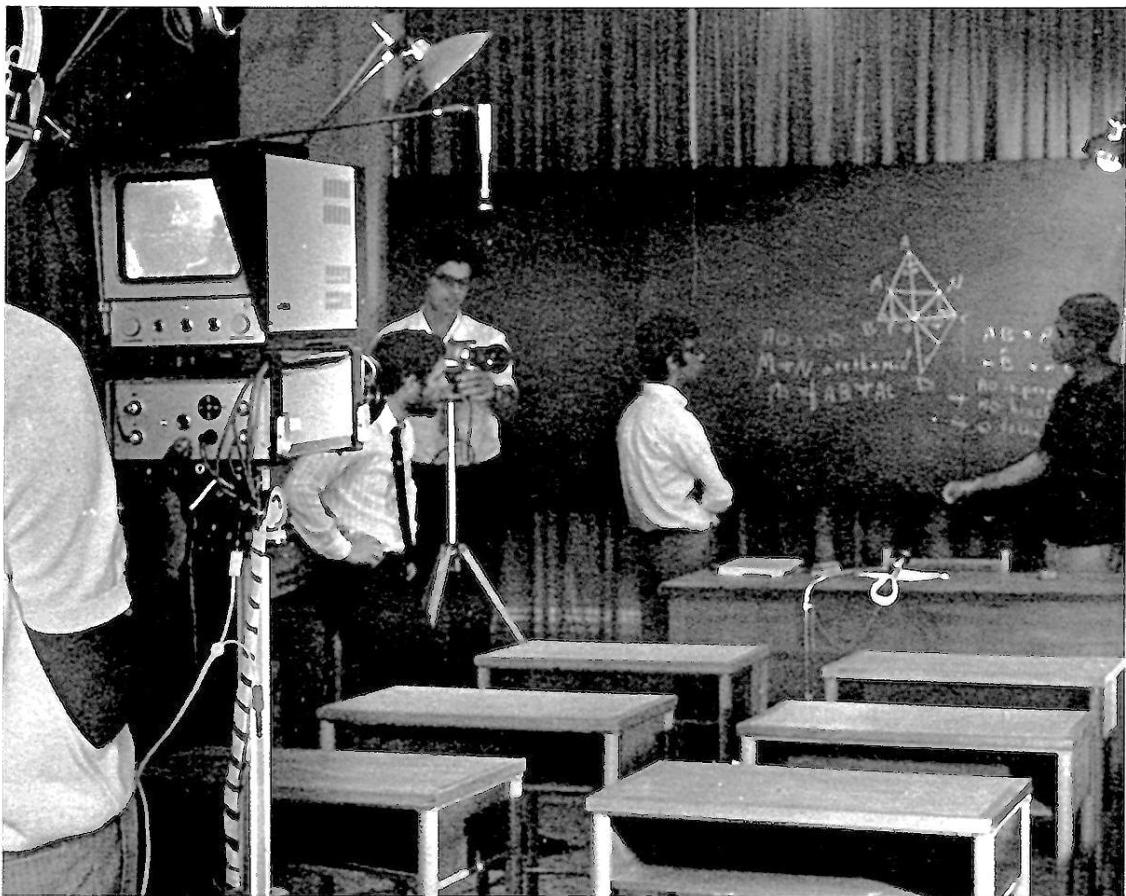
UNRWA's involvement in vocational training dates back to 1953–54 when the Kalandia (West Bank) and Gaza training centres began with a capacity of less than 400 trainees. By 1980–81 there were seven VTCs offering 36 different trade and technical courses. Enrolment was 3,548 (2,935 men and 613 women). Most courses are two years and all schools except the Gaza VTC are residential. Some 1,800 graduate from the centres annually and more than 24,000 have graduated since the programme began in 1953. Employment opportunities for graduates are good both in the area and in neighbouring Arab states or

the Gulf area. At the same time, applications to enter the centres greatly surpass their capacity so the Agency is continuously trying to expand their facilities. A contribution of \$ 2.5 million from the OPEC Fund was given recently to enlarge four centres and provide a wider range of courses (see page 5).

University scholarships

UNRWA's scholarship programme began in 1950. Now over 360 scholarships a year are granted for students studying at universities in the area. Parallel to this is a staff training scheme providing opportunities for further training to education staff.





New Careers for Young Women

For the first time since its establishment in 1960, UNRWA's Wadi Seer Training Centre outside Amman, Jordan has accepted a number of young women for two-year technical courses which were open in the past to male trainees only. The same is true for the UNRWA Vocational Training Centre in Damascus.

This year, 17 young women will graduate from Wadi Seer as laboratory technicians, architectural draughtsmen and quantity surveyors. Another group of 24 now enrolled in courses for land surveyor, construction technicians and assistant pharmacist are due to graduate from the Centre next year.

In the initial phase of these courses male and female trainees had to adapt to a co-educational system — a new experience for both. The young men showed some reluctance in the beginning at having to share the courses with girls, fearing that it would negatively affect the general standard of the course. But gradually, and with results starting to show, objections subsided to give way to a spirit of competition.

In the words of the instructors, the young women tend to show more perseverance, accuracy and perfection in technical training work. They do feel some added pressure that they have to work harder to prove themselves.

Nathmeh Ma'adi, from Wahdat camp, a trainee in architectural draughting, says: "I am very happy that I have chosen this field; I enjoy this kind of work." She worked for an engineer dur-





ing part of her summer holidays. He said: "She works like three draughtsmen."

For Nuha Abu Khalaf, a construction technician trainee, the career is a "challenge, so different from the careers traditionally open to female refugee students. It involves various skills, different activities, a lot of contact with people and a new kind of responsibility." Myriam Bahjat, another trainee, said: "I feel I will be taking an active role in society. Also, this course opens good job opportunities and is different from teaching for which I have little inclination." For some other young women who would have liked to go on to higher studies such as engineering, but could not afford it, this is one step on the way to that objective. Such is the case of Azizeh Al Jabali: "I would have liked to do engineering, but right now I need to work and wait until I have the opportunity and the means to achieve my aim."

As to employment, UNRWA training centre graduates enjoy a good reputation in the Arab world. Female trainees would not be surprised if job offers were directed to them too. "I, as well as other female colleagues, expect that employers when recruiting trainees will be looking, before anything else, for proficiency and skill," said Nuha Abu Khalaf.

Another important factor which will have a positive impact on the employment of female graduates is that the young men of the Centre, once having completed the course, will be called for military service in Jordan. Therefore, part of the local demand for technical skills could be filled by female trainees. Moreover, male technical graduates are inclined, when attracted by higher salaries, to travel and work in other Arab countries, leaving behind job opportunities which could become available to women graduates.

Intisar Abu Damess, whose father works as a draughtsman in Saudi Arabia, was encouraged to follow the same course. "I will be doing the same kind of work, but in Jordan and not away from home," she says.

OPEC Fund finances training expansion

During the past school year, the vocational training programme for Palestine refugees has undergone a sizeable expansion, financed by the OPEC Fund. Of the \$ 2.5 million donated by the Fund, \$ 2 million have already been spent. Although expansion work is still in progress, UNRWA's training centres have been able to open their doors to an additional 172 young refugees and nine new instructors have been hired.

Thanks to the donation, the capacity of the seven vocational training centres, now with 3,550 places, will have been increased by 400 places by the end of the 1982-83 school year in just four years. And expansion is needed, as about four out of five applicants for admission to the centres have to be turned down because of lack of space.

Training is also being improved and diversified. Eight of the nine new courses planned have begun, 17 classrooms, workshops and laboratories are under construction or are being refurbished and more than \$ 1 million has been used for buying new materials and equipment which are so important for vocational training.

The hundreds more young men and women who will be able to join each year the ranks of the some 24,000 graduates of UNRWA's training centres are contributing not only to the betterment of their own lives but also to the development of the Arab world. Many graduates easily find work in Arab countries, especially the Gulf states.

The rapid growth of the oil industry in the Middle East at the end of the 1940s came at the same time as the flight of the Palestinians. Since then, the ties between the oil-producing countries and the Palestine refugees have constantly developed. Qualified manpower is essential for a diversified and growing economy. From construction to welding, UNRWA vocational training centres offer 36 different kinds of course in trades that are sought after in the Middle East.



Direct help to schools

Although most of UNRWA's income is provided by governments and the European Community, non-governmental organisations also play an important role in financing the Agency. And the education programme is a beneficiary of this help.

Some of those involved include: Oxfam of the United Kingdom, Najda (American Women for the Middle East), the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, and Rädda Barnen (Swedish Save the Children Fund) which all sponsor trainees at UNRWA's vocational training centres, plus a number of individuals and church groups sponsoring children in elementary schools. Rädda Barnen also pays the operating costs of Jouffe Girls' School in Jordan.

Another important contributor is Redd Barna of Norway which provides funds for two schools in Jordan. The following is a story about these two schools:

Up the stairs we go, passing on the way a nine-year-old girl diligently sweeping the stairs, up another flight to the top floor. Now another few steps to a locked door.

The teacher opens the door and three lively girls dash in ahead. It is the school library, located in a tiny converted storeroom. To these three Palestine refugee girls — Hanan Amer, 14; Jaijar

Mustafa, 13; and Nazirah Qatami, 12 the library is the heart of their school. By any standards the library is not well stocked having only a couple of hundred well-thumbed volumes to serve more than 1,000 students.

The library is in Amman New Camp Girls' School No. 3, an UNRWA school whose elementary classes are sponsored by Redd Barna. Last year, Hanan, Jaijar and Nazirah won prizes in a city-wide contest because of their interest in their library.

They competed against thousands of boys and girls from both UNRWA and Jordanian schools in a reading contest. They had a list of 50 books to read, then they had to prepare book reports and finally they were quizzed on their knowledge of the books by a panel of teachers and administrators. Naturally, the prizes were books.

The school not only lacks books, it also lacks some stationery supplies. To help fill the gap, students and teachers took up a collection to buy enough materials.

But despite these drawbacks and many others including the poverty and difficult living conditions in their refugee camp neighbourhood, the school is clean, happy and friendly, with hallways lined by colourful creations of the art classes. The girls want to talk and ask questions of visitors, some stage an impromptu gymnastics display in the school yard.

Across the courtyard is the boys' school whose elementary cycle is also sponsored by Redd Barna. It is just as lively; a little more unruly and a little untidier, but the same friendliness and eagerness are

evident. There are few problems in getting Palestine refugee children to go to school.

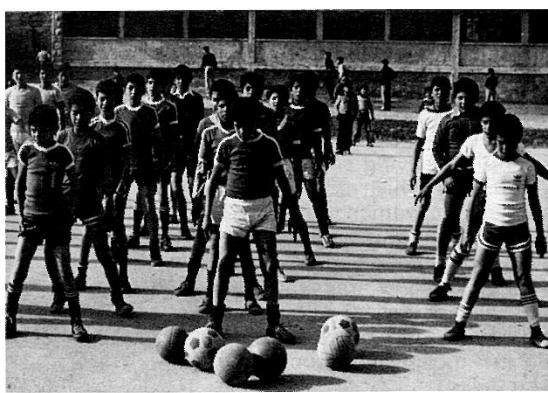
This school also has a voluntary fund to which students and teachers contribute. Elementary boys give 250 fils (75 cents) and the older boys give 500 fils (\$ 1.50) a year if they are able. The money is used to buy extra sports equipment, books, and materials for repairs around the school.

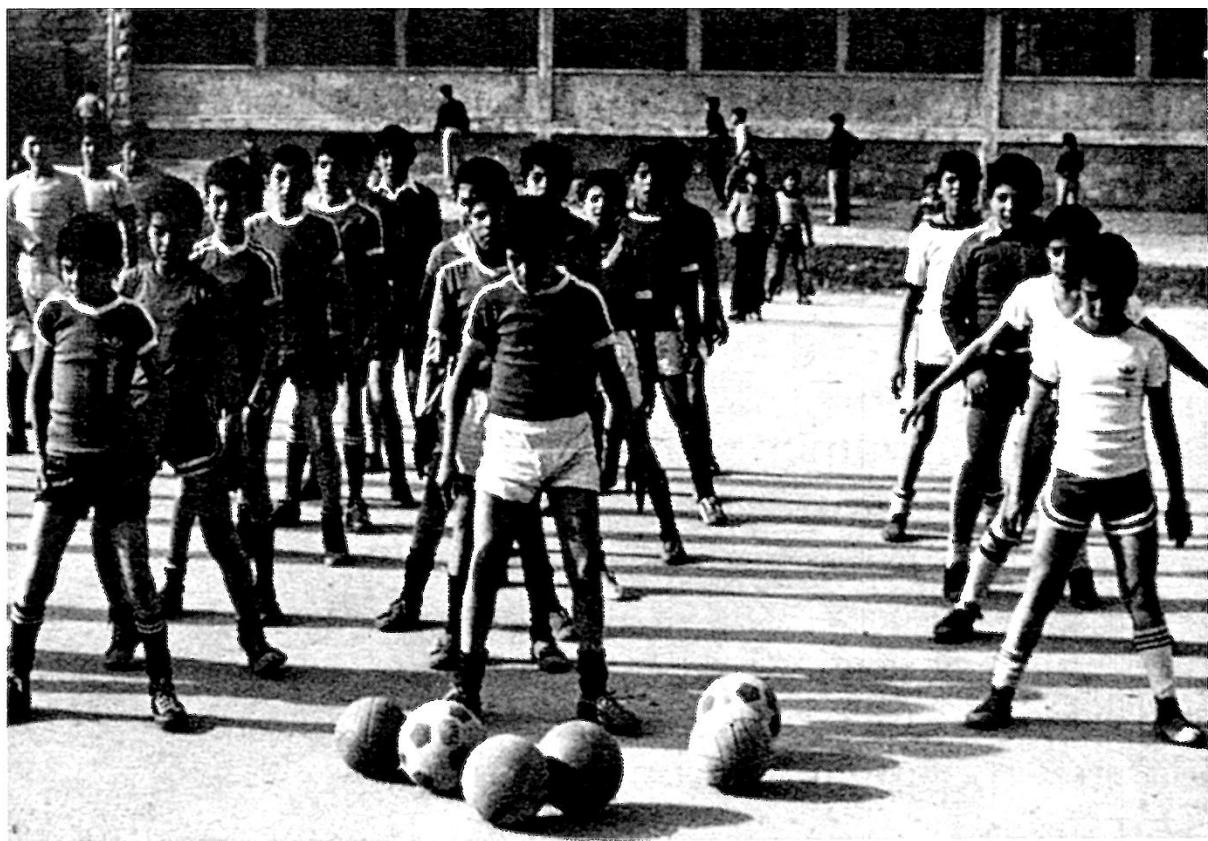
With money from the fund, the school bought a soldering machine to repair iron fixtures and material for paving the schoolyard. All the work was done by students who are organized into committees. Another source of money is the school canteen whose proprietor pays an annual fee to the school fund.

In another fund-raising effort last year, the school was able to buy clothing for 76 needy boys. Each was furnished with a shirt and a pair of pants.

In both of these schools, staff and students are eager to do more. They have the desire and the ability but they often lack the necessary equipment and materials for learning and for playing. And the things they have or have made themselves are used to their limit. In the 1980-81 school year, Redd Barna is spending more than \$ 100,000 to support the elementary programme in these two schools more than 2,500 km. away from Norway.

Other Norwegian contributions to UNRWA's programmes come from the Norwegian Refugee Council, \$ 260,000, and the Government, which gave almost \$ 4 million in 1980.



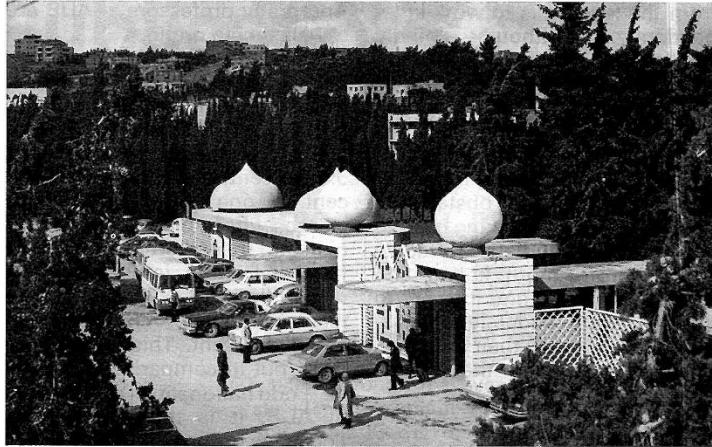


The brain factories

Out of necessity, Palestinians have become the best educated people in the Arab world. One of the "brain factories" where this is taking place is the University of Jordan in Amman, Jordan, the country where almost a third of the population is registered with UNRWA (about 720,000).

Universities such as the University of Jordan are the last link in the fragile chain which starts in the overcrowded schools of a refugee camp. Since its creation in 1962, the number of students at the University of Jordan has grown with the University's reputation. And there is almost numerical equality of men and women.

With only 136 students at the beginning, the university on its vast green campus in northwest Amman has grown to 10,800 students with 494 staff in 12 faculties. The University is Jordan's largest, the other being Yarmouk at Irbid with 6,000 students. Its evolution has been characterised by a regular expansion of the technical, medical and commercial faculties – now with 55 per cent of the students.



University of Jordan entrance.

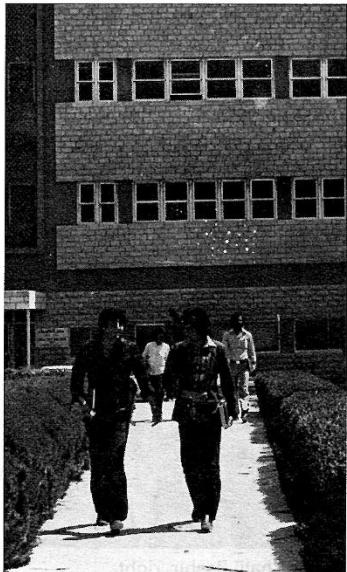
"The desire for such disciplines as medicine and engineering is explained by the fact that our students are primarily preoccupied with what they will do after graduation," says Dr. Mahmoud el-Samra, the University's vice president.

Self-reliance the key

According to 21-year-old Ahmed, a Palestine refugee in his third year of medicine, the preoccupation with employment oriented courses is explained partly by the large number of students of Palestinian origin, refugees or not. "We have learned to rely on our own abilities and our faith in the future to survive."

Ahmed was able to leave his family's two-room shelter crammed with 11 other family members to go to university only offered by UNRWA (365 in its five areas of operations in 1980–81). Before this he attended UNRWA elementary and junior secondary schools, winning first place in a national examination. This enabled him to enter a Jordanian secondary school.

Dr. el-Samra, also of Palestinian origin, states, "Many Palestinians lost everything in 1948 or in 1967. For them and their children, the best way of getting out is to excel in the pursuit of knowledge. To take their place in any Arab country they not only have to compete with local citizens, but also be better qualified."



This thirst for learning among Palestinians has spread throughout Jordan, explains Dr. Issa Shahin, also a Palestinian, Director of the University's Department of Physics. "Rare are the families in this country, whatever their background, who are not ready to sacrifice everything to be able to give their children a good education. The 15 professors in my department and I myself are all from modest backgrounds, and the pride of our department's driver is that he has two sons who are doctors."

"Assuring our own needs"

The main consequence of this situation is the strong spirit of competition in the growing ranks of the University of Jordan. This is a godsend for the professors and administration, who would like to make their university the best in the Middle East: "We lack high-level expertise in this part of the world, and that is what we are trying to remedy here."

Their words are echoed by the students. For example, refugee student Jamil, 21, who is studying engineering, finds that it is time to show that everything doesn't have to be imported from the west. "We are here to learn and to be able to fill our own development needs in the future."

One of the obstacles facing the students is tradition. "If there is something that we should learn

from the west, it is to work independently, without blindly swallowing whatever we are told," says another student. Dr. Issa Shahin explains that the patriarchal society in which they were brought up and in which the professor, as the father, is considered infallible, is an obstacle to the kind of critical thinking needed for advanced studies. "Students coming from more liberal and educated families find it easier to approach and understand problems and to realize their own mistakes and readjust their thinking."

The brain drain

There are signs of their dreams coming true, however. A growing number of graduates are in demand in the Gulf states because they are just as able as their fellow students trained in western universities. In the words of Dr. el-Samra, most graduates of Palestinian origin go to the highly competitive Gulf area. This "brain export", added to the export of skilled graduates of UNRWA's vocational training centres, has important effects on the Jordanian economy. In 1979, Jordanians working abroad sent more than 180 million Jordanian dinars (about \$ 590 million) back to Jordan.

But many students who are Palestine refugees prefer to contribute directly to the economic development of Jordan, their second home, and equally the country in which they can help their refugee brothers. Those who wish to go and work in the Gulf countries are generally motivated by the opportunity to make money but do not plan to establish themselves there permanently.

AUB: Palestine connection

Another of these brain factories is the American University of Beirut. It is sometimes said that AUB is a Palestinian university because of the many Palestinian engineers, doctors, scientists and businessmen who have emerged from it.

And many professors at AUB are of Palestinian origin.

But statistics deny that there is a Palestinian connection which controls the university. The student population is as follows: Palestinians, 3.5 per cent; Jordanians, 5.6 per cent; and Lebanese 72 per cent. If one includes Lebanese citizens whose origins are Palestinian and many Jordanians whose families lived in Jerusalem, Haifa or Jaffa before 1948, the Palestinian population could be as high as 10 per cent. This is not very large but in comparison with the 52 – odd nationalities represented at AUB, it is the largest non-Lebanese group.

There are a number of reasons for this. First, the Palestinian presence in Lebanon: there are more than 230,000 Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA alone. The second reason is the desire of Palestinians for education. And the third is that Beirut is one of the principal centres of Palestinian artists, writers and intellectuals. This point is backed up by the fact that there are many professors of Palestinian origin at AUB, probably the largest group of non-Lebanese teachers at the university. Some, such as Walid Khalidi, a leading figure in the Institute of Palestine Studies at Beirut and a Harvard professor, have international reputations.

One professor has four cousins teaching at AUB, and another eight cousins who are students. And there is Basam Abou-Hamad in the Faculty of Agriculture, who is the son of an UNRWA employee. A chemistry professor says, "We can't go unnoticed here. The city is full of engineers of Palestinian origin who graduated from AUB. Some came from refugee camps."

Solidarity

But for a Palestinian from an ordinary background, attending AUB means sacrifice. "I never could have studied here without an UNRWA scholarship and the backing of my family," says Sahar Khalil Bashir, 20, a third-year biology student who grew up in Burj el Barajneh refugee camp in Beirut's suburbs. She is one of the 25 refugee students in Lebanon

receiving a scholarship from UNRWA.

UNRWA pays about a third of her tuition fees which can run as high as LL 7,000 (\$ 1,500), a considerable sum when you are from a family of eight children with no father. Her older brothers and sisters who are already working pay the rest. "I was lucky to be the second youngest in the family," she says. "But it is very frustrating to think that my brothers and sisters could have gone to university like me."

Graduates remember

Some Palestinian graduates of AUB remember their own difficulties getting through university and often help out today's students. One of the more generous is Tala Abou Ghazaleh, managing director of the largest accounting firm in the Middle East. This 42-year-old business man, whose company has 23 branches throughout the world, has given \$ 4 million to AUB's School of Business which now bears his name.

He hasn't forgotten the difficult times when he was a student, says the school's Director, Frederick Bent. "He too was from a modest background and relied on a scholarship. And like many Palestinians he is very involved in the problems of education."

There is no doubt also that he is a good businessman who knows the value of public relations and is concerned about the training of his future employees and of others. Another way of keeping up the Palestinian connection . . .



Sahar Khalil Bashir, right.



Sahar Khalil Bashir, right.

UNRWA Publications

GENERAL

UNRWA: Basic Facts (PL 1006)
Printed Leaflet (English, French, German)

After 30 Years . . . UNRWA's 30th anniversary (PL 1008)
Printed Leaflet (English, French, German, Arabic)

Map of UNRWA's area of operations
with refugee location data (English, Arabic)

Survey (PB 1002)
Brochure of facts and figures (English, French, German and Arabic).

PROGRAMME LEAFLETS

Education (PL 2002—English, French, German)

Vocational Training (PL 2001—English, French, German)

Health (PL 3001—English, French, German)

Relief (PL 4001—English, French, German)

Palestine Refugees in Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. A series of five leaflets on each field of operation (English).

POSTERS

UNRWA and Children
A set of three posters on Palestine refugee children. Black and white. Titles in English, French, German.

UNRWA: Born in 1950 . . .
Marking UNRWA's 30th anniversary. Titles in English, French, German.

After 30 years . . .
Black and white poster to mark UNRWA's 30th anniversary. Titles in English, French, German or Arabic.

Family Album (Px 6)
Shows the lives of three young Palestine refugees from birth to today. Text in English, French or German.

Palestine Refugees in Camps (Px 7)
A full-colour poster showing refugee camp life with text in English, French or German.

Doubly Disabled (Px 8)

Full-colour poster to commemorate the International Year of Disabled Persons. Text in Arabic, English, French or German.

AUDIO-VISUAL PRODUCTIONS

Slide/Tape Shows

ST 1002: A seven-minute slide/tape production showing UNRWA's activities with Palestine refugees. Commentary in English, French, German or Arabic.

ST 1003: Through the Eyes of Ibrahim, a 10-minute slide-tape presentation in English, French, German and Arabic. Kit with map, posters and teaching notes included. Available on loan or purchase at \$ 45 per set.

Palestine Dresses: A set of 27 colour slides showing Palestine dresses from various regions. Included is a descriptive note in English, French, German or Arabic.

My Name is Fadwa

A 15-minute, 16 mm colour film on a deaf Palestine refugee child. Available for loan or purchase in English, French, German or Italian.

My Father's Land

A half-hour, 16 mm colour film on the Gaza blind school for Palestine refugee children. Available for purchase or loan in English, French or German.

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