



European Union

# UNESCO National Webinar in the Tourism Sector in Palestine: Overview of Needs after COVID-19

Report from the national webinar, 2 June 2020



Ramallah, 2 June 2020 - UNESCO Ramallah Office, in cooperation with UNESCO Headquarters and the Regional Office in Beirut, organized a national webinar on Skills in the Tourism Sector in Palestine, providing an overview of the needs after the COVID-19 crisis. The objectives of the webinar were to initiate a dialogue at the policy level, explore the jobs and skills needed in tourism during and after COVID-19 and shed some light on future programs and partnerships to revive the sector, enhance the capacity of youth and increase their employability in this sector. Around sixty participants attended the webinar, including ministries, international agencies, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, private sector and youth organizations.

The tourism sector is one of the most severely hit by COVID-19 in Palestine, which resulted in a high unemployment rate. Since the beginning of the crisis, tourism has stopped in Palestine and tourism facilities were closed. This includes the closure of 210 hotels, tourism and travel offices, visitor centers, museums, tourist restaurants, and craft shops and workshops. Furthermore, the work of tourist guides, street vendors and service providers for hotels and restaurants was suspended. The vast majority of more than 30,000 workers in the private tourism sector have been hit by the recent crisis.

In her opening remarks, Ms. Noha Bawazir, Head of UNESCO Ramallah mentioned that *“TVET can play a crucial role in providing the tourism sector with skilled workers. However, more analysis is required to better assess the impact of COVID-19 and the consequential needs for the tourism sector and TVET education”*.

During the webinar, UNESCO introduced its Youth Employment in the Mediterranean (YEM) project, funded by the European Union. It has an overall objective to support national authorities, together with the private sector, TVET providers and the Youth organisations in the South Mediterranean region, in understanding and anticipating labour market changes. The project informs the design, implementation and evaluation of relevant TVET policies, strategies and programmes, aimed at increasing youth employment and entrepreneurship.

A number of the webinar’s panelists provided insightful interventions related to the overview of tourism sector and TVET as well as needed skills, and provided private sector and youth points of view about the sector. Majed Ishaq, General Director of Tourism Marketing at the Ministry of Tourism, described the significant developments in the Palestinian tourism sector over the last years, which had more than 3.1 million visitors and created 35.000 direct job opportunities. In the beginning of March, COVID-19 related restrictions resulted in shutting many tourism entities and handicraft factories. In addition, the international tourism arrivals in Palestine decreased by 70 percent and 25,000 people in the industry lost their income. To support the affected, the government introduced special subsidies as well as soft-loans by local banks. This is being complemented by exemptions from licensing fees to incentivize entrepreneurship in the sector. Furthermore, a task force with public and private sector representatives of main stakeholders was set up to implement an action plan to ensure a safe environment for international visitors (e.g. by adapting new safety and health standards for tourism in Palestine).

As another panelist from the public sector, Ms. Mai Obaid, Head of the Colleges at the Ministry of Higher Education & Scientific Research, explained that TVET programs have been divided into the theoretical part, which is being taught online, and the currently suspended practical part. In complementary, Mr. Haitham Daik highlighted that the changed environment provides an opportunity of intensified learning through many digital learning platforms available online. Youth can access and acquire new knowledge and skills, including related to languages. Furthermore, tour guides could open community courses such as MOOCs to offer continued lectures and learning.

In his turn, Mr. Sebastian Dominik from GIZ, mentioned that an employment questionnaire was launched with the private sector to analyze the situation of workers under the shutdown and their plans for the upcoming weeks and months to investigate if they are seeking new job opportunities or thinking about moving to other countries.

Mr. Giovanni Anbar from a private TVET school in Palestine confirmed that health and safety measures are being adopted for every program and that the staff is working on the curricula and on providing safe

online and offline teaching environments. In addition, he mentioned the need for all staff in the tourism sector to retrain in order to fully understand the new safety measures.

Mr. Hasan Omar from the Federation of Chamber of Commerce, underlined the necessity to incentivize entrepreneurship. One step in that direction can be the review of existing restrictions for licensing a business. Tourism and digital technologies should be taught in TVET schools as well as communication and language skills to meet the requirements of the tourism sector when leaving formal education. TVET should be more directed towards e-marketing and cloud services where augmented reality can also be explored for tourism purposes (e.g. for virtual visits). In order to make the job search easier for young graduates, Mr. Omar proposed a one-stop platform to search specifically for jobs in the tourism sector.

Ms. Margo Tarazi on behalf of Mr. Tony Khashram, President of the Holy Land Tour Operators Association, noted that the tourism sector will most likely revive slowly. Even though there are some airlines restarting in June, the frequency will not be the same as before and travel agencies need to find a way to facilitate tourism without carrying high liability and risks. Thus, the sector needs to be creative and responsible in reacting to the challenges.

Mr. Zaher Basyouni from Leaders Youth Organization, underlined the lack of digital skills and proposed mentorship platforms to link these skills with professional experience.

The last part of the webinar was a productive discussion on priorities and next steps of the sector:

- There is a need of a comprehensive assessment on tourism and TVET, building on existing assessments by UNESCO and other partners. Skills forecasting would be crucial to ensure that the labour market can absorb the skilled young people leaving formal education.
- Distance and practical learning solutions should provide a wide range of technical skills and transversal competencies (e.g., related to tourism, hospitality, hygiene, safety, crafts, agriculture, entrepreneurship, marketing, digitalization, languages, inter-cultural understanding)
- It is important to establish a national stakeholder platform, including public and private sector, international agencies, youth and data providers and partners from East Jerusalem.

The recording of the webinar is available here:

<https://web.microsoftstream.com/video/718f15a1-edd4-43d5-a0f3-9ca5c504b479>

*YEM builds on the achievements of the EU-funded NET-MED Youth project's Employment Component. It has helped build skills anticipation models and mobilized key national stakeholders, including national institutions, youth and private sector representatives, to understand and employ the results from this exercise in service of policymaking for technical and vocational education and training (TVET).*

*The YEM project is funded by the European Union and implemented over a three-year period (2018-2020). Its aim is to support youth employment and entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean region by improving skills anticipation and TVET systems.*

- [YEM project website](#)
- [YEM Knowledge Platform](#)
- [What UNESCO does in the field of Skills for Work and Life](#)