



Mona Ouda, UN Volunteer engineer, supervising the removal of rubble for the rebuilding of schools in the Gaza Strip, State of Palestine. (UNV, 2016)

## Building gender equality in the Gaza Strip

Unemployment in the Gaza Strip, State of Palestine, stands at 42 percent. Part of the problem can be attributed to enduring conflict, which despite international and domestic relief efforts prevents sustained economic activity. Another contributing factor is the lack of women's participation in the economy and ongoing relief efforts. The 2009 Inter-Agency Gender Needs Survey revealed that 93% of female heads of household had never participated in the relief process.

### Bringing opportunities to all

From education to employment, the opportunities offered to men and women in Gaza are not equal. With programs implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, this is slowly changing. Together, they promote gender equality in Gaza through volunteerism and women's

participation. There are currently 60 UN Volunteers in the State of Palestine, 26 are women.

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The efforts of UNPD and UNV target both men and women by increasing employment opportunities for young people and helping them develop their skills. These young people bring their own unique input when it comes to localizing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and improving their communities.

### Rebuilding education

Due to conflict in 2014, 226 schools were destroyed or damaged in Gaza, including 70 schools operated by the [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East](#) (UNRWA).

21 million USD was entrusted to the UNDP to respond to the need to rebuild classrooms in Gaza. The funds were allocated to rebuilding facilities while ensuring—in cooperation with UNICEF—that facilities would be inclusive and child-friendly learning environments.

The [Right to Education](#) programme is one of the initiatives used to complete this task. Developed to reconstruct and rehabilitate approximately 194 classrooms, the programme aims to give access to education to more than 600,000 students in Gaza.

Aliaa Abu Shawish is a female engineer mobilized by this programme. Despite graduating from the faculty of Civil Engineering of the Islamic University in Gaza in 2009, she remained unemployed for over a year. Becoming a part of the Right to Education programme, Aliaa was tasked with overseeing multiple construction sites, supervising the daily work of sub-contractors and workers. She also assures that all materials, especially those used in building processes, match agreed specifications.

For Aliaa, the experience had a great impact on both her technical and soft skills. She gained valuable work experience within her field of study, furthering her career, and improved her communications and interpersonal skills.

### Inspiring gender equality

Aliaa is currently 1 of 9 UN Volunteers involved in the Right to Education programme. She believes that the development of any society depends on giving fair opportunities to both males and females; that both of them have to work side by side and respect each other in

order to contribute to their community.

Unfortunately, for young women in Gaza—like Aliaa—working as an engineer doesn't always seem possible. "Being a civil engineer [was] such a challenge for me. I stood against my family and my community and fought with all my efforts in order to let my dreams come true."

Through programs which promote gender equality, more and more people like Aliaa are becoming catalysts for change, enabling empowerment and inspiring participation.

### Bringing communities together

Another area in which UNDP has mobilized volunteers is the rubble removal program. Mona Ouda is 1 of 15 engineers tasked with helping set the foundations for reconstruction in the region. "Working in the field is such a challenging task. Every day, we work among rubble and dust to improve the living conditions of families within our community and pave the road for the reconstruction of our homes," she says.

Yet, as a woman, the task for Mona isn't just about the work itself. "Women benefiting from the program used to come to me, to explain how their home was demolished, talk about their economic situation and their lives. I felt I was not only an engineer, but also a woman supporting other women in the field and I am proud of it," she recalls.

For Mona, her role helps bring her community together, and further links UN initiatives to local needs for sustainable solutions.

*This case study was drafted with the kind support of [UN Online Volunteer](#) Robert W. Bailey.*

### Arab States

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Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 4: Quality education](#) [SDG 5: Gender equality](#)