



Deema Al-Sousi, a national UN Volunteer Education and Adolescent Officer with UNICEF, during a discussion with the adolescents about their future initiatives in Gaza, State of Palestine.

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## UN Volunteers go above and beyond to build the confidence and skills of their students

Education is recognized by the United Nations as a basic human right and yet only about 61 per cent of refugee children worldwide are enrolled in school. The enrollment of refugees in higher education is a mere one per cent. Through education programmes, UN Volunteers work to build the confidence and skill base of students and pupils despite their fragile contexts.

Since 1950, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees ([UNRWA](#)) has been working to ensure recognition of the rights of five million refugees in the Near East. Among them are over half a million children who continue to receive [quality education](#).

Rakel Jeaid is originally from Lebanon and volunteers as an After-School Academic and Cultural Support Facilitator for UNRWA. Her two master's degrees in translation have led to her giving language courses at the Lebanese University, the only public institution for further study in Lebanon, and in two francophone UNRWA schools; "le Rocher" in Saida and

"Ras El-Ain" in Beirut.

Transferring her experience in the service of refugee children to primary schools, Rakel is currently part of a project that aims to give students self-assurance and stability despite their uncertain situations. Funded by the French embassy in Beirut, the assignment supports and enhances the French education of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

The extra sessions Rakel leads promote the students' learning outside of their usual classroom time, giving them more exposure to the material and cementing their learning. There are around 130 students of differing ages, in grades one to nine.

*“ As a volunteer, I can challenge myself to do something different, achieve personal goals and discover my talents. --Rakel Jaaid, UN Volunteer After-School Academic and Cultural Support Facilitator with UNRWA, Lebanon*

Rakel also leads sessions for the parents of her students, coaching them in French language skills so they can communicate with their children. This at-home practice gives the students yet another context in which they can practice French, enriching their learning and building the confidence of their parents too.

Deema Al-Soussi graduated with a BA in Business Administration from Al-Azhar University in Gaza and pursued a career in project implementation and management with non-governmental organizations, with a focus on youth and education programmes.

Her first posting as a UN Volunteer was with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), where she served as an E-work and Communications Coordinator on the [Right to Education](#) programme that aims to rehabilitate educational facilities destroyed in the 2014 hostilities in Gaza.

Deema also led the implementation of a cultural exchange programme that enabled Gaza university students to have video conferences with students abroad. This gave the students a space to discuss scientific and social topics in a real-life context that enriched their studies and will ultimately give them increased prospects of employment.

*“ To change any community, you have to begin with its residents, and there is nothing more important than investing in children. --Deema Al-Soussi, UN Volunteer Education and Adolescent Officer with UNICEF, State of Palestine*

Deema is currently an Education and Adolescent Officer with UNICEF. She works closely with low-performance and first-grade students through catch-up classes designed to provide low performing students with the support they need and ensuring first-grade students have a good understanding of Maths and Arabic.

There is a strong focus on training teachers in active learning techniques to make sure students stay engaged in lessons. Enabling students to achieve their full potential comes from both sides and Deema's teacher training gives teachers the resources they need to do this.

Deema is also responsible for several programmes for adolescents. Between these, the core goal is to improve life skills; encouraging entrepreneurship and enhancing communication.

In these projects, the young adults are given a space that they have not had before – the space to speak up, to discover hidden talents and to plant seeds for future projects. Deema's work enabled them to be empowered through education, to discover their strengths and weaknesses and find the confidence to put forward their own ideas.

One student told Deema, "I have always dreamt of owning a smart phone. After engaging in this project and learning how to enhance my entrepreneurial skills, I decided to think out of the box and start my own business! My idea was to design and make crochet using simple materials and selling them, and I am now starting to gain income from my project! Then my dream came true... I purchased a smart phone and used it for promotional purposes through social media." "Just a little support for Gazan youth enables them to can go on to achieve their dreams," Deema shares.

“The youth of Gaza face huge political, social and economic obstacles,” Deema says. “However, what makes these projects unique is the change that occurs in the children and young people. Their acceptance of others and open-mindedness after the challenges they have faced is truly remarkable.”

Rakel also sees her students go on to achieve inspiring things through her projects. One grade nine student worked hard at Rakel's extra classes, determined to get good grades. She went on to pass her exams with high marks and even won a special scholarship.

These UN Volunteers are enabling young people to have a quality education despite the odds, giving future generations the space and confidence to have their say.

*This story was drafted with the kind support of [Online Volunteer](#) Erin O'Neill.*

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Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 4: Quality education](#) [SDG 5: Gender equality](#) [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)