



## **Shockingly high unemployment in Gaza**

June 2011

The UN have found that Gaza's unemployment rate in late 2010 was among the world's highest (at 45.2%), as Israel's blockade of the territory enters its fifth year.

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) said real wages fell by more than a third, and that private businesses have been hardest hit by the continuing ban on virtually all exports.

Israel tightened sanctions on Gaza in 2006 after militants captured Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit. The blockade was tightened again a year later when Hamas ousted rival Palestinian organisation Fatah from the territory.

Israel says the measures against Gaza are necessary to stop weapons smuggling and to put pressure on Hamas, but the UN insists the restrictions amount to collective punishment of Gaza's population.

UNRWA spokesman Chris Guinness said of the report: *"These are disturbing trends and the refugees, who make up two-thirds of Gaza's 1.5 million population, were the worst hit."*

Restrictions at Gaza's border with Egypt have been eased since the ousting of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak earlier this year – the southern border crossing at Rafah is now opened daily for civilian traffic, although still not for trade.

The BBC's Jon Donnison writes about his experience of visiting the region:

*"One of the things you notice in Gaza is the tremendous number of people just sitting around, apparently with time on their hands – smoking, chatting, shading themselves from the June sun."*

*"This week I met a young man, Rami, a graduate with a degree and two masters degrees but still with no job. By no means a supporter of Hamas, he told me had no reason for optimism."*

*"Israel imposed the blockade to weaken and put pressure on Hamas, which it calls a terror organisation. But as the blockade enters its fifth year, one of the key findings of the UN report is that the Hamas-run public sector is one of the only areas of the economy that is growing."*

*"Hamas employs tens of thousands of people here. Private businesses have largely been crippled by the ban on virtually all exports and the fact that Gazans just don't have the money to spend."*

The situation for many people in Gaza is certainly desperate – not only is there a high unemployment rate, up to 70% of the population live below the poverty line (nearly two thirds of residents live in refugee camps). But BibleLands and local partners in the region are striving to give the most marginalised and desperate people a real hope for the future, by providing education and healthcare, and facilitating community development.

Education and vocational training is hugely important in providing the tools and knowledge needed to generate an income, as well as boosting and developing self-esteem, giving individuals a meaningful vision for their future.

Education is the key to an independent future. Our **Education Programme** helps fund schools and vocational training centres that allow children and young people from disadvantaged families to gain a good education and become able to earn a living.

This is so important in places like Gaza and the West Bank, as well as in Lebanon and Egypt. **DSPR** (Middle East Council of Churches' Department of Service for Palestinian Refugees) in Gaza and **ETVTC** (Episcopal Technological and Vocational Training Centre), based in Ramallah (West Bank), provide training for children and young people in areas such as technology education, youth development and hospitality, for example, learning all aspects of running a hotel, as well as providing technology and arts camps.

At ETVTC BibleLands focus support on the Hotel Department, which helps Christians (75% – of whom half are from low-income families) and Muslims (25%). Nearly two thirds (60%) of beneficiaries are below average academically and 30% are slow learners, have unseen disabilities or are difficult social cases.

These are just a couple of examples of BibleLands' partners in the Middle East providing practical and accessible help to young people without much hope, giving them skills and experience to create a fulfilling future.

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