

For Immediate Release



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AUB builds sustainable capacities through Tech for Food

The first cohort of Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities in the Beqaa completed a digital skills training provided through a partnership between the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the World Food Programme (WFP). Teaching digital skills through vocational training programs over a period of two months, the Tech for Food project offered 70 students six weeks of intensive digital skills and two weeks of intensive English, to be followed by six weeks of advanced project-based learning and a virtual internship for returning students.

The Tech for Food project aims to maximize vulnerable communities' livelihood and build sustainable capacity opportunities through tailored programs that tap into a growing global demand for lower-skilled, labor-intensive data services.

The project is led by AUB through the Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service (CCECS) with academic curriculum and supervision provided by the Department of Computer Science at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and the University Preparatory Program. Daily information technology (IT) support was provided by AUB's IT Unit at the make-shift computer labs which were set up with 50 laptops that were paid for, as was the whole project, by WFP.

“WFP is proud to collaborate with AUB on this innovative pilot project,” said WFP Country Director Dominik Heinrich. “It is a win-win project for the students and the local economies, and one that drives forward our journey towards a Zero Hunger world not just in Lebanon but across the region.”

AUB and WFP piloted a digital skills training of 100 participants in 2016 at AUB's Beirut campus. In 2017, two more cohorts of 80 participants each were trained at AUB in Beirut. During May and June, the first cohort of 70 economically disadvantaged Syrian and Lebanese young adults, aged 15-30 years, were trained in AUB's AREC campus in Beqaa on basic digital literacy, internet literacy, MS Office programs, MS Excel, Photoshop, and English. Participants were recruited and coached by the Lebanese Organization of Studies and Training (LOST).

The initiative is in line with AUB's mission to serve and engage with communities. It also unlocks the potential for AREC as a facility to serve as a hub for strategic intervention for AUB's efforts to address the refugee crisis.

"I am glad to see AREC is used as a hub by AUB community and local NGOs for training young Syrian refugees and underserved Lebanese youth on digital skills to face future challenges away from war and terror," Dr. Mustapha Haidar, AREC director, told us. "I am sure this skill-building program will enable them to connect to online work opportunities and build up opportunities for them by ensuring they have access to livelihood and economic opportunities."

The Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service aims with its partners to have built the capacity of 1000 students through this program in the Beqaa and Beirut by the end of 2017.

"For the CCECS, this is a strategic project and partnership, which demonstrates AUB's commitment to serve marginalized communities by offering participants opportunities to learn transferrable digital skills," CCECS Director Rabih Shibli told us. "In this regards, we are leveraging the expertise of AUB academics and facilities and the progressive vision of the World Food Program to open new horizons for refugees and host communities in Lebanon, with this innovative approach which may eventually extend to other countries in the region."

The students received their certificates of achievement on June 29 at a ceremony in AREC and were elated to be armed with knowledge and put on the track towards independence and self-sufficiency.

"I am grateful for having this opportunity to learn so much in such a short period, and through my hard work, I shall continue what this program has started," said Alaa Daoud, a young Syrian refugee. "The world opens its doors to those who want to achieve their dreams. Thanks to this program, I am one step closer to achieving mine."

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 130 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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