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NOKUT 



Palestine

Refugees Country Briefing

ARENA aims to enable access to higher education for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation.



Palestine*

Official name: Palestine

Location: The West Bank is bordered by Israel and Jordan, and the Gaza Strip by Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea

Population: 4.818.255 (July 2020 est.)

Ethnic groups: Palestinian and Israeli

Languages: Arabic (official), Hebrew

This country briefing – especially developed to help with the evaluation of credentials of refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation – is intended to give orientation on the education system in Palestine in the light of recent political and economic developments in this country. It presents a systematised overview on its higher education system and links to the available information sources that are useful for the evaluation of qualifications of refugees coming from Palestine, even in cases where candidates present insufficient or lack of documentation.

** The designation of Palestine shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the EU Member States on this issue.*

Source: CIA World Factbook

Photo coverage:
Ramallah palestine landscape
cityscape night
Photo: Shutterstock

Current situation

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

After World War I, Palestine fell under British mandate. Subsequent to, or concurrent with, the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, Palestinians stayed in two areas: the West Bank (5.860 km²) and the Gaza Strip (380 km²), while the rest became refugees in other countries.

From 1948 until the Israeli Occupation in 1967, the Palestinian territories were administered (including education issues) by either Jordan - which administered the area of the West Bank, or Egypt - which administered the Gaza Strip area.

In 1967, as a result of the end of the Six Day War, Israel took control of both territories. This war also led to continued tension and armed conflict between Israel and its neighbours over the following decades. In 1987, the First Intifada broke out, to fight the ongoing Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. At the beginning of the 90's, a peace process known as the Oslo Peace Accords was promoted and obtained as its major result the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA). The Palestinian Authority assumed partial control of administration and services in many areas of Palestinian life, including education. The Oslo Accords failed in their ultimate goal of bringing Israel and the Palestinians to agree on a full-fledged peace plan. In September 2000, the Second Palestinian Intifada began and lasted for five years.

CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION

Palestinians are fighting for an official state that is formally recognised by all countries, the borders are not clearly defined, and persistent conflict continues to be the norm. The last attempt to bring a peaceful solution to this contended territory was in May 2017, when the leaders of the Palestinian Authorities presented a document that proposed the formation of a Palestinian state using the 1967 defined borders, with Jerusalem as its capital. However, they refused to recognise Israel as a state, and the Israeli government rejected the plan.

IMPACT ON THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

From 1948 to 1967 Palestinians' education fell under the responsibility of Jordan (West Bank area) and Egypt (Gaza strip area). After 1967, the educational system in these two areas continued to use the Egyptian and Jordanian curricula with some modifications that were introduced by the Israeli military 'Civil Administration' which controlled the education system. It is in this period (the 1970s) that universities, offering a four-year bachelor's degree, came into existence in the Palestine territories. Until that time there were only two-year colleges focused on teacher training, liberal arts and technical education. Universities were part of a collective Palestinian effort to preserve their identity as well as to provide young Palestinians with the opportunity to pursue HE, after it became increasingly difficult for them to go abroad for such studies. In the 1990s, as a result of the Oslo Accords, the responsibility for education was transferred from Israel to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and the sector saw significant advances. The Ministry of Education (MoE) was established, enrolment in all schools substantially increased, school and university construction and rehabilitation become a priority.

The recent history of these territories was signed by moments of particular instability, such as the First (1987-1993) and Second Intifada (2000-2005). There was significant impact on education during these phases. Many teachers were forced to retire, teachers' unions were prohibited, and students were expelled, arrested and prevented from travelling abroad. Palestinian schools were closed for extended periods and some universities shut down for more than four years. Students rarely completed their studies within the regular four-year period required for graduation. Since 2005 until now, the never-ending conflict and constant uncertainty that characterised this territory has had an overwhelming effect on students' lives and education in general. This situation hampers the possibility of individuals obtaining regular instruction and looking at the big picture, the true development of the education sector.

Education in Palestine

RESPONSIBLE GOVERNING BODIES

The competent body in charge of primary and secondary education in Palestine is the Ministry of Education and Higher Education وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي: <https://www.mohe.ps/>. Information is available in Arabic only.

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research - وزارة التعليم العالي و البحث العلمي: <http://www.mohe.pna.ps/>¹. Information is available in Arabic only.

In terms of governance of the Higher Education sectors, apart from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, that regulates institutions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency) operates as an education provider both at secondary and at higher education levels, providing courses free of charge for refugees. In addition to that, other charity associations and NGOs support the education sector in all Palestinian territories.

RECOGNISED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Nowadays the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research provides a list of more than fifty accredited higher education institutions, located both in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, including universities, university colleges and community colleges.

The full list of accredited higher education institutions is available at the following link: <http://www.mohe.pna.ps/Higher-Education/Institutions/Universities>

ACCREDITATION BODIES

The Palestinian quality assurance policy was upgraded in 2002 simultaneously with the establishment of the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC) as the only authorised agency responsible for the accreditation and quality assurance of higher education in

Palestine. The AQAC is a semi-autonomous governmental body under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE). Additional information on the accreditation process and accredited programmes can be found on the official website, available online in both Arabic and English: <http://www.aqac.mohe.gov.ps/en/>

TYPES OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Higher education institutions can be divided into four different types, according to the number of faculties and courses offered, as follows:

- Universities – الجامعات: higher education institutions that usually consist of at least three colleges or faculties and award undergraduate and postgraduate degrees
- University Colleges - الكليات الجامعية: higher education institutions that offer both academic and vocationally oriented programmes. They offer Diploma or Bachelor programmes
- Polytechnics – بوليتكنك: higher education institutions that confer diplomas or bachelor's degrees mainly in professional and technical fields
- Intermediate Colleges - الكليات المتوسطة: higher education institutions that offer highly specialised technical and professional programmes leading to a final diploma, usually aimed at the labour market

NATIONAL EDUCATION REFORMS

Legislation in the education sector is a quite recent phenomenon in Palestine, since the Education Law of 2017, decisions have been made by the Palestinian Authority to defer development of a general law until the final status negotiations for the territory are completed. Nevertheless, significant efforts have been conducted to guarantee free and accessible education for children, at the level of compulsory education, which consists of ten years of schooling.

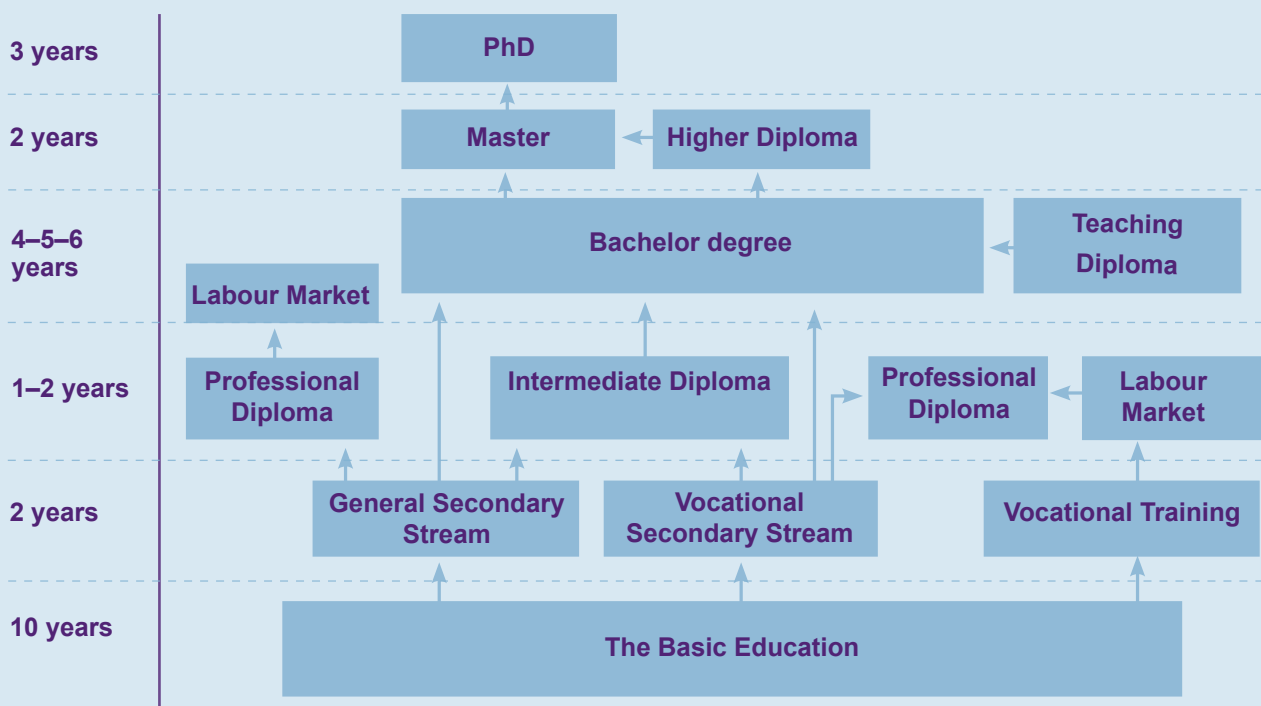
¹Sometimes the website of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education does not seem to work properly but information provided is complete and several attempts to find updated information is recommended.

Last information check on 11/1/2020, available now on web archive: http://web-old.archive.org/web/*/http://www.mohe.pna.ps/Higher-Education/Institutions/Universities

As far as higher education is concerned, the Law on Higher Education No. 11 of 1998 represents the pillar for the development of the sector, stipulating that every citizen has the right to higher education (Article 2), and provides the legal framework for the organisation and management of higher education institutions.

A useful tool of reference for additional updates on the topic is given by the Education Sector Strategic Plan (2017-2022), issued by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education that aims to pave the way for future actions and development in the education sectors.

Education chart



Source: *The Higher Education System in Palestine*: <http://www.mohe.pna.ps/Higher-Education-/Higher-Education-System>

Education system

The education system in Palestine resembles the one adopted in the majority of other Arab states, consisting of a binary system from the upper secondary level of education. After the completion of twelve years of schooling, students proceed with their studies within higher education, according to the stream they have previously chosen, and the final average obtained after the national exam. The academic sector is the natural study path for those who successfully pass the

General Secondary Certificate while colleges and polytechnics offer specialised two-year courses that offer vocational education addressed to the needs of the labour market. PhD courses are offered in some disciplines and effort on the development of graduate programmes is one of the main topics in the agenda of the Education Sector Strategic Plan (2017-2022) promoted by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

Pre-Higher Education

The structure of the education system in Palestine consists of a two-year cycle of pre-school education, ten years of compulsory basic education, two years of secondary academic or vocational education after which the students sit for a General Certificate of Secondary Education Exam - شهادة الدراسة الثانوية العامة, commonly known as Tawjihi.

In addition to post-secondary higher education, there are non-formal education and training schemes.

Primary Education

Compulsory education in Palestine begins at the age of six, when students enroll in the first step of the main stage, which lasts for ten years until the end of tenth grade. The language of instruction is Arabic and after the final examination, students can proceed to upper secondary education by choosing the General Secondary Stream or the Vocational one.

Secondary Education

After the completion of the basic level of compulsory education, secondary education is divided into several sections, namely:

- Academic secondary education: its duration is two years in both streams of Scientific and Human Sciences where the students must sit a general examination - Tawjihi, after which they can enter higher education
- Vocational secondary education: its duration is two years and divided into the following branches: Industrial, Commercial, Agricultural, Home Economics and Hotel Management. They prepare the students for Technical Tawjihi exams, after which students are able to enter the labour market in the sector studied or enrol in community colleges and universities in certain professions

The language of instruction is Arabic both in the academic and vocational streams. Concerning admission at undergraduate level, minimum requirements are set annually by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, that can be summed up as follows:

- Obtaining the General Secondary Education Certificate with pass results
- Tawjihi score should not be less than the mark mentioned in the Council of Higher Education's decision for that academic year

- Student placement in the faculties depends on the completed stream (Science or Arts) indicated in the certificate. For example, a Tawjihi in the science stream grants access to all undergraduate courses, a Tawjihi in the arts stream does not grant admission to scientific undergraduate courses and the Tawjihi in the vocational stream grants access to a limited range of degree courses

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education in Palestine adopts a binary system with education provided by community and technical colleges that leads to a diploma certificate issued after two years of studies; or education at university. Programmes offered at undergraduate level can vary from four to up to six years in length, according to the field of studies. Universities also offer post-bachelor programmes where they award a higher diploma after one year, master's programmes in a period of two years, and doctoral programmes in some disciplines in three years.

First Cycle (Bachelor level)

First cycle studies are offered at all types of higher education institutions in Palestine and can last four years (minimum 121 credit hours). Upon the completion of this level of studies, the student receives a bachelor's degree - (بكالوريوس).

A Bachelor study programme may include a final thesis that the student must defend at the end of his/her studies, but this depends on the specific curriculum.

The main branches of higher education studies in Palestine are education, technical and technology sciences; humanities and social sciences; natural sciences and mathematics. The language of instruction used in each university varies, and some may include an English proficiency examination as an entrance requirement.

Second Cycle (Master level)

The traditional second cycle programme in Palestine is the master's degree (الماجستير), an academic specialised study programme, offered at universities, faculties and colleges of academic studies. The length of the studies is commonly two years and students must have completed a Bachelor programme with an average of not less than C in order to be admitted to a Master level course. The

language of instruction varies, according to the institution and the requirements for obtaining a master's degrees are at least 33 credit hours and a thesis, alternatively a qualifying exam grants the master's degree in applied fields.

Upon successful completion of a bachelor's degree with a minimum overall assessment of "Good", students can decide to further their studies for one additional year at graduate level, obtaining a Higher Diploma (دبلوم العالي), this course acts as a bridge between the first and the second degree and grants students the right to continue at Master level.

Third Cycle (Doctorate level)

The third cycle qualification in Palestine is the PhD (دكتوراه), offered only by two universities and in

few fields of studies and lasts minimum three years with a final dissertation of a minimum of 24 credits.

In order to be admitted into a PhD course, applicants should have obtained a master's degree with "Very Good" as a final mark. Additional requirements are set by the Council of the University.

Teacher Education

Teacher education represents one of the main challenges for Palestine since a definition of Teacher Qualification Strategy is part of the agenda of the Education Sector Strategic Plan. Universities and colleges offer a Teaching Diploma (دبلوم التاهيل التربوي) aimed at training teachers after or during the bachelor's degree by granting a professional qualification without any academic rights.

The Toolkit projects

ARENA is the third cycle Refugees and Recognition - Toolkit project. The two previous are:

TOOLKIT

The first project took place between 2016–2018. The overall goal was to enhance the mobility, employability and access to further studies for refugees. The main outcome of the project was the Toolkit for Recognition of Refugees' Qualifications, representing a first-aid kit for staff working with the assessment of inadequately documented qualifications.

For further information, visit: <https://www.nokut.no/en/Refugees-and-Recognition/toolkit>

REACT

The follow-up project REACT took place between 2018–2020. Here the Toolkit methodology was successfully tested as a supplement to ordinary admission procedures in cooperation with several European higher education institutions. The main outcome was the REACT Q-Card for Admission Officers, providing recommendations for action at higher education institutions working towards enabling access to further studies for refugees.

For further information, visit: <https://www.nokut.no/en/react/refugees-and-recognition>



In addition to that, UNRWA is in charge of teacher training for professional development of educators at basic and secondary education level.

Medicine and Health Sciences

In order to be admitted to medical schools, a Tawjihi score of at least 85 per cent is usually required. The nominal length of the programme is six years and students must pass each year in order to progress to the next one. As part of the programme, practical training is required before successfully obtaining the qualification of Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (بكالوريوس الطب والجراحة). As for most professional degrees in Palestine, before registering in the professional association, students are required to complete supervised practical training for one year before they are allowed to practise on their own.

Other professional degrees in Health Sciences last five years, such as Dentistry, Pharmacy and Veterinary Medicine, upon which students are granted a Bachelor in the related field.

The language of instruction at medical colleges and in Health Sciences is English.

Engineering Education

Engineering programmes are five years in length and lead to a professional degree in the related field. For that reason, a higher mark in the Tawjihi is usually required, as for other professions. Upon successful completion of all the requirements, students obtain a Bachelor of Engineering (بكالوريوس في الهندسة) in the related field. This qualification is mainly aimed at practising the profession, and grants access to Master level courses in the related field.

Grading System

SECONDARY SCHOOL

Grading System – Secondary Education

Percentage	Description (Arabic)	Description (English)
90–100%	ممتاز	Excellent
80–89%	جيد جداً	Very Good
70–79%	جيد	Good
60–69%	متوسط	Satisfactory
50–59%	مقبول	Pass
00–49%	مقصر	Fail

HIGHER EDUCATION

Most of the higher education institutions adopt the same grading system as secondary school. Exceptions are represented by institutions, such as the Arab American University, that follow grade scales based on GPA. Additional information about grading systems are usually provided on the transcript of academic records of each qualification.

Grading System - Higher Education

Percentage	Description (Arabic)	Description (English)
90–100%	ممتاز	Excellent
80–89%	جيد جداً	Very Good
70–79%	جيد	Good
60–69%	متوسط	Satisfactory
50–59%	مقبول	Pass
00–49%	مقصر	Fail

Information Resources, Recommendations and Best Practices

DATABASES AND NATIONAL BODIES

ENIC-NARIC Network

Information regarding national authorities in charge of higher education issues in Palestine:
<https://www.enic-naric.net/arab-states.aspx?country=Palestine&c=208&srcval=palestine>

Existing Country Databases

- European Commission. (2017). Overview of the Higher Education System, Palestine.
- Ministry of Education and Higher Education. (2017). Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017 – 2022.
- Ministry of Education and Higher Education. (2013). Palestinian National Qualifications Framework.
- RecoNow. (2016). The Higher Education System in Palestine.
- UNESCO. (2011). World Data on Education, 7th edition.
- UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the near east).

National Education Bodies

- Ministry of Education and Higher Education - وزارة التعليم و التربية و العالي: <https://www.mohe.ps/>
- Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research - وزارة التعليم العالي و البحث العلمي: <http://www.mohe.pna.ps/>
- Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC): http://www.aqac.mohe.gov.ps/aqac/?page_id=651

EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Documentation

The Certificate of General Secondary Education Examination is a one-page document that can be issued in English or Arabic.

As far as documents issued by universities are concerned, format and language vary according to institutions. Usually students can provide documents in both English and Arabic officially issued by the University.

Fraudulent Documents and Diploma Mills

If you have any questions concerning the authenticity of a document or the accreditation of an institution, we recommend that you contact your national ENIC-NARIC centre.

Additional Information

It is possible to verify the results of Tawjihi of the current academic year at a link provided by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education: <http://injaz.mohe.ps/>

For recent years, online results of Tawjihi can be found on the net.

Some universities publish or provide an online database in which it is possible to authenticate the qualification received directly, such as An Najah National University (<https://zajel.najah.edu/>) and Birzeit University (<https://ritaj.birzeit.edu/verify-transcript>).

In other cases, it is suggested to contact the institution directly.

Sometimes the website of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education does not seem to work properly but information provided is complete and several attempts to find updated information is recommended.

EXISTING BEST PRACTICES**European Area of Recognition Manual**

http://www.eurorecognition.eu/manual/ear_manual_v_1.0.pdf

Recommendation on the Recognition of Refugees' Qualifications under the Lisbon Recognition Convention and Explanatory Memorandum

<https://rm.coe.int/recommendation-on-recognition-of-qualifications-held-by-refugees-displ/16807688a8>

European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR)

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/recognition-of-refugees-qualifications>

Toolkit for Recognition of Refugees' Qualifications

https://www.nokut.no/globalassets/nokut/artikkelbibliotek/utenlandsk_utdanning/veiledere/toolkit_for_recognition_of_refugees_qualifications.pdf

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UNESCO. (2011). World Data on Education, 7th edition: http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Palestine.pdf

UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the near east): <https://www.unrwa.org/>

What is ARENA?

ARENA (Refugees and Recognition – Toolkit 3) is an Erasmus+ supported project, which aims to contribute towards more transparent and professional procedures for the recognition of refugees' qualifications in Europe. The project builds on the completed Refugees and Recognition – Toolkit project, where a common methodological approach to the recognition of refugees' qualifications was developed with the Toolkit for Recognition of Refugees' Qualifications.

Goal

The overall goal of the ARENA project is to enhance the mobility, employability and access to further studies for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation, including those without official documentation of their educational background.

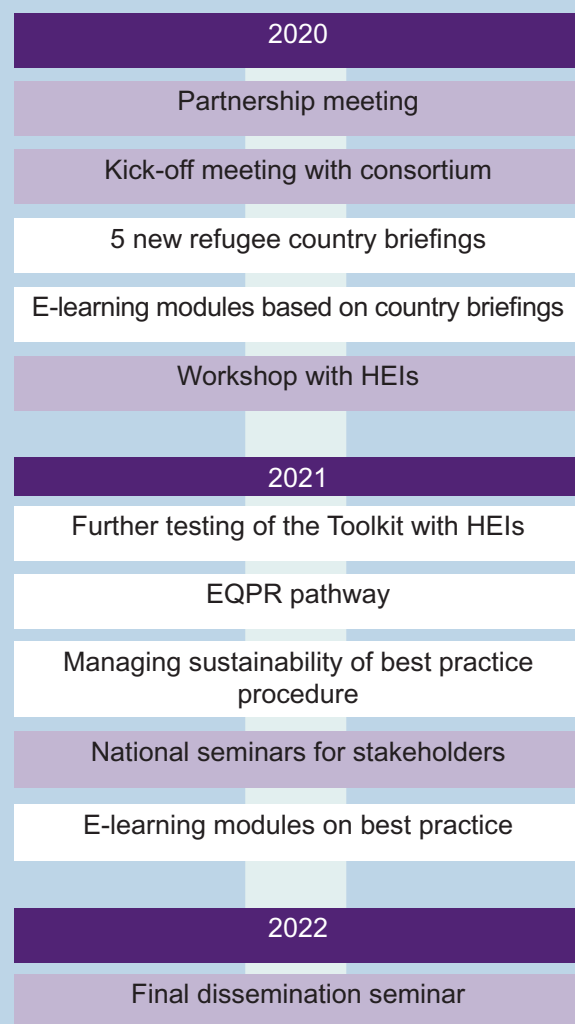
Activities

The activities are structured around three main focus areas concerning the further testing of the Toolkit in major refugee receiving countries, managing sustainability of identified best practice procedures and assessment schemes, and addressing the need for updated and relevant information resources.

MAIN PROJECT ACTIVITIES

- Further testing of the Toolkit in cooperation with NARICs and HEIs from Greece and Malta
- Mapping of how HEIs in Italy view the EQPR as a supplementary document for admission to further studies
- Managing sustainability of best practice procedure identified in the REACT project
- Development of five new refugee country briefings on the educational systems of Yemen, Burundi, Rwanda, Sudan and Palestine
- Development of e-learning modules

TIMELINE



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

To enable the accessibility and transparency of the project's work, the results will be made available on the project's website on a continuous basis.

Websites:

<https://www.nokut.no/en/arena-toolkit-3>

Email:

project-arena@nokut.no

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