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## Social and Economic Situation of Palestinian Women and Girls

July 2014 – June 2016

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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

# **Social and economic situation of Palestinian women and girls**

*(July 2014 – June 2016)*



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## Executive summary

This report, one of a regular series, provides an overview of the situation regarding the political, social, economic and human rights of Palestinian women and girls. It draws on statistics collected by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) and findings of international and national organizations, and United Nations agencies, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

This report reviews the period from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2016, a period marked by major events affecting the security and political situation in the State of Palestine, in particular the 50-day Israeli offensive against Gaza in the summer of 2014 and, since October 2015, the upsurge of violence in the West Bank in reaction to ongoing occupation, widespread human rights violations, disputes around the holy sites in East Jerusalem, and increased settler violence against Palestinians and their property. The first chapter sets out the political situation in Palestine during the reporting period and the impact of the occupation on the rights of women and girls. It highlights that the complex political setting and the geographic fragmentation between and within the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza have created unique challenges. Gender-based discrimination leaves women and girls particularly susceptible to poverty and suffering brought about by periodic outbreaks of violence, and by the occupation and its related policies. The latter include the sea, air and land blockade of Gaza since 2007, restrictions on movement, land confiscation, house demolitions, settlement expansion and the construction of the separation wall in the West Bank. There has been no progress towards achieving a peaceful solution towards ending the occupation, allowing the Palestinians to exercise their full rights on their land, and guaranteeing security for Israel. This chapter also describes political developments in the State of Palestine, including the status of national reconciliation processes, and analyses their implications for women and girls.

The socioeconomic indicators set forth in the second chapter provide a mixed picture of women's rights: education indicators reveal gender gaps in favour of girls, but employment indicators illustrate stark gender disparities, including low female participation rates in the labour market, high unemployment, especially among female graduates, and low wages. In Gaza, the blockade and repeated military assaults have decimated the economy, leading to high levels of poverty and food insecurity. The ongoing power crisis in Gaza has added pressure to the already fragile public health, water and sanitation, and education sectors, hampering access by women and girls to services and increasing their care burden. In the West Bank, due to the myriad impediments imposed by Israel, many Palestinian women and girls, especially in Area C, in the seam zones and in East Jerusalem, continue to face significant obstacles in accessing basic services, health care, justice institutions, water and sanitation, and economic opportunities. Violence against women remains a serious concern, despite institutional and policy measures implemented by the authorities, with the participation of civil society, to better protect women and girls.

The third chapter examines the political representation of women and notes that progress in terms of the number of females holding political office and in decision-making positions remains slow. Despite legislative advances on domestic violence, more must be done to bring the law into line with international human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Progress on gender-equitable legislative reform has been stymied by the suspension of the Palestinian Legislative Council since 2007 and the political division between the West Bank and Gaza. The report concludes with recommendations including a broad range of gender-sensitive legal and institutional reforms, and socioeconomic policy provisions for women and girls.

This report acknowledges that the occupation negatively impacts the lives of all women and men, girls and boys in the State of Palestine. However, this report seeks to highlight the specific gendered impact of the occupation, in addition to the social, economic, political and legal policies of the State of Palestine on the lives of Palestinian women and girls.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICHR	Independent Commission for Human Rights
NPA	National Planning Agenda
NCD	non-communicable diseases
NCG	National Consensus Government
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PA	Palestinian Authority
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PHC	primary health care
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSCO	United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VAW	violence against women
WCLAC	Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling
WHO	World Health Organization

## I. THE POLITICAL SITUATION OF THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORY UNDER THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION

In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2003/42 on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) issues periodic reports on the status of women and girls in the State of Palestine.<sup>1</sup> The information contained in this report is based on data collected by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) and reports published by United Nations entities, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (UNSCO). Data and analysis have also been informed by information provided by the Palestinian Ministry of Women Affairs, civil society organizations and international development agencies. The report covers the period from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2016, which was marked by major developments in the security and political situation in the State of Palestine.

### A. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

#### 1. Contextual background

Pursuant to the Oslo Accords of 1993 between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Government of Israel, the Palestinian Authority was established in 1994 as the recognized governing authority of the West Bank and Gaza. The Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement (Oslo II Accord) divided the West Bank into three administrative zones: Area A, under the full civil jurisdiction and security control of the Authority, Area B, under Palestinian civil and Israeli security control, and Area C, under Israeli jurisdiction (figure 1). In the more than 20 years since the agreement was signed, little political progress has been made on the transfer of control over Area C to the Authority. Indeed, Israeli control over Area C has become even more entrenched. Political restrictions have made it extremely difficult for the Authority to extend vital services to Area C, severely curtailing the access of women and girls to education, welfare, health, police, the courts and other services.

On 29 November 2012, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 67/19,<sup>2</sup> Palestine was granted non-Member Observer State status at the United Nations. However, the political and security situation remained highly volatile. The ongoing Israeli occupation and violations of international humanitarian and human rights law have resulted in a protracted humanitarian crisis, slowing progress on women's civil, political, social and economic rights. During the reporting period, efforts by the international community to encourage a resumption of negotiations between the Government of Israel and the Authority on a final status



Source: B'Tselem, 2014, p. 1.

<sup>1</sup> This report is preceded by six others. See <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/publications-list>.

<sup>2</sup> A/RES/67/19.

agreement did not materialize. Public support in Israel and the State of Palestine for a two-state solution is waning.<sup>3</sup> With the political impasse, tensions and hostilities have increased markedly in the West Bank and Gaza.

## *2. Overall security situation*

The situation in the State of Palestine is characterized by violations of international human rights and humanitarian law by the Government of Israel, punctuated by violent escalations that have devastating consequences for women's rights to life, security and protection.

The 2014 summer offensive against Gaza, launched by the Israeli army on 8 July, caused widespread destruction in a region already reeling from the 2008-2009 and 2012 assaults and the blockade that has been in force since 2007. Operation Protective Edge was the deadliest military operation since Israel occupied Gaza in 1967: 2,251 Palestinians, including 551 children, died and more than 11,000 were injured, of whom 10 per cent suffered permanent disability.<sup>4</sup> The offensive, which included intensive bombardment from the air, land and sea, and a ground invasion, led to the destruction of residential and commercial buildings, schools, health facilities, infrastructure and farm land. At the height of the conflict, more than 485,000 Palestinians were internally displaced in UNRWA-operated emergency shelters, government schools and informal shelters, and with host families.<sup>5</sup>

The conflict in Gaza, one of the most densely populated areas in the world, has further contributed to women and girls' insecurity by exacerbating "pre-existing vulnerabilities stemming from the longstanding Israeli blockade and the discrimination against women within Palestinian society" (box 1).<sup>6</sup>

### **Box 1. Impact of the 2014 hostilities on women and girls in Gaza**

Women and girls in Gaza encountered gender-specific insecurity stemming from the 2014 hostilities. Of particular concern was the situation of widows, internally displaced females, women and girls with disabilities, adolescent girls and female farmers. Over the course of the military assault:

- 299 women (of whom at least 16 were pregnant) and 197 girls were killed;
- More than 2,000 women and hundreds of girls were injured;
- At least 790 women were widowed;
- During the second half of 2014, the number of registered cases of maternal and neonatal mortality doubled compared with the first half of the year;
- Some 24,300 girls and 22,900 women, whose homes were destroyed or severely damaged in the fighting, were still displaced and living in precarious conditions as of the last quarter of 2015.

*Source:* OCHA, 2015b, p. 1.

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<sup>3</sup> Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 2015, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> A/HRC/29/52, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2015a, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> OCHA, 2015b, p. 1.



As primary caregivers – often in large households with many children and generations – women face significant challenges coping with the long-term impact of damaged housing and public infrastructure, and curtailed basic services.<sup>7</sup> Limited access to electricity and water adds to the burden of responsibility women have for caring for the elderly and people with disabilities.<sup>8</sup> Displaced women and girls face over-crowding, a lack of privacy and, reportedly, sexual harassment. A study carried out immediately after the ceasefire of August 2014 found that: “Girls and women were subjected to many types and varying degrees of violence practiced against them, whether in the emergency shelters or host families’ homes. Women often responded to these types of violence with silence or by practicing violence on their children, especially on girls”.<sup>9</sup>

The August 2014 ceasefire has been followed by a period of relative calm, punctuated by sporadic Israeli airstrikes and shootings near access restricted areas. In 2015, these aggressions led to the death of 25 people, including a girl and a woman, and the injury of more than 1,400.<sup>10</sup> Although export restrictions have been eased somewhat, Israel has maintained its relentless blockade of Gaza. Almost two years after the establishment of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (a temporary agreement brokered by the United Nations in September 2014 to allow the entry of building materials for repairs), Israeli restrictions and the slow disbursement of donor funds have delayed reconstruction. The humanitarian situation remains dire. Tens of thousands of Palestinians who lost their homes during the conflict remain displaced, living in precarious conditions and taking refuge in shelters, rented accommodation, or with host families. About 13,000 families (over 70,000 individuals) remained displaced according to a report issued in May 2016.<sup>11</sup>

After the carnage of 2014 in Gaza, 2015 saw a rise in casualties and the detention of Palestinians in the West Bank. Widespread clashes between Palestinians and Israeli forces took place from October of that year, with a sharp rise in alleged stabbings, shootings and vehicle attacks by Palestinians against Israelis. The latest outbreak of violence came in response to widespread human rights violations by Israeli occupation forces, escalating tensions at holy sites in East Jerusalem and settler violence against Palestinian civilians and their property.<sup>12</sup> One deadly arson attack by settlers on a Palestinian family in Duma in the summer of 2015 led to the death of an 18-month old baby and his parents. In January 2016, the United Nations Secretary-General noted “the growing frustration felt by Palestinians, linked to Israeli actions that were chipping away the viability of a Palestinian State and the ability of the Palestinian people to live in dignity.” In a briefing to the Security Council on 22 October 2015, his deputy referred to “the stifling and humiliating occupation” that had lasted almost half a century.<sup>13</sup> Out of the 219 alleged stabbings and other attacks on Israelis by lone Palestinians since October 2015, 11 per cent were committed by young girls or women.<sup>14</sup> Amid clashes and a spate of attacks in the West Bank, Israeli soldiers and police have “responded with lethal force including, at times, in circumstances when individuals posed no imminent threat to life”.<sup>15</sup> In 2015, 145 Palestinian fatalities, including seven women and four girls – many in circumstances that have raised concern about the excessive use of force and arbitrary deprivation of life – were recorded alongside 25 Israeli fatalities.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2014, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> OCHA, 2016a, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> CFTA and UNFPA, 2014, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> OCHA, 2016b, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Shelter Cluster in Palestine, 2016, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> In general, see General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> A/71/86.

<sup>14</sup> Institute for Palestinian Studies, 2016, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Amnesty International, 2016, p. 51.

<sup>16</sup> OCHA, 2016b, p. 5.

Settler violence remained a threat to Palestinian women and girls, especially in the Israeli-controlled part of Hebron City (referred to as H2),<sup>17</sup> Area C and East Jerusalem. Attacks on Palestinians and their property continued throughout the reporting period, with no improvement in efforts to bring to justice those responsible.<sup>18</sup> Between 2005 and 2015, the Israeli District Police opened 1,104 investigations, leading to the serving of indictments in a mere 75 cases (7.3 per cent of all concluded investigations). Most of the cases were closed without prosecution.<sup>19</sup> Settler violence directly and indirectly affects the lives of women and girls: mothers fear for themselves and their children; the threat of violence can make it difficult for girls and young women to study or work outside the home; and settler violence can contribute to tensions among family members and even increase the risk of domestic violence.<sup>20</sup>

During the reporting period, Israeli military night raids and day-time incursions and mass arrests in the West Bank became more frequent. The number of Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli jails and detention centres soared to 7,000 (of whom 70 were female, including children) in May 2016,<sup>21</sup> compared with 5,271 (17 females) in May 2014.<sup>22</sup> Of the 13 girls arrested in 2015, some were injured at the time of their arrest.<sup>23</sup> Among the women arrested and detained during the reporting period was Khalida Jarrar, a Palestinian Legislative Council member and senior political leader. In February 2016, Dima al-Wawi, aged 12, became the youngest Palestinian girl to be jailed in an Israeli prison; she was released two and a half months later. Female prisoners report ill-treatment, including denial of food and water, sleep deprivation, punitive strip searches, unsanitary confinement conditions and sexual harassment, all of which has a long-term impact on their physical and mental well-being.<sup>24</sup>

The arrest of family members in night raids provokes terror. Palestinian women have reported threats by Israeli soldiers to shoot them or family members during the raids.<sup>25</sup> The detention of men exacts a heavy toll on their wives. A study on the families of political prisoners highlights that “the absence of the husband can further curtail women’s autonomy, with wives usually placed under the authority of their in-laws, with increasing restrictions on their movement, dress and freedoms by family and community”.<sup>26</sup> In the absence of the primary breadwinner, women may face increased economic pressure and even impoverishment.

### *3. National political and policy developments*

The political divide between the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas, which has de facto control of Gaza, persisted throughout the reporting period in spite of the agreement to form a National Consensus Government in June 2014. The articles of the agreement have not been fully implemented and the Palestinian Legislative Council has been paralyzed since 2007, hampering the amendment of laws.

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<sup>17</sup> The PLO and Israel signed the Hebron Protocol in 1997, dividing the city into areas H1 (fully controlled by the Palestinian Authority) and H2 (under Israeli military control). OCHA, 2005, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Yesh Din, 2015, pp. 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2013, p. 5. For more on this issue, see Memmi, 2015; Clark and others, 2010; Al-Krenawi and others, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, 2016a, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Addameer, 2016b, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Addameer, 2016c, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Addameer, 2016c, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC), 2015a, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Balsam and others, 2014, p. 2. For more on the impact of male imprisonment on female family members, see Peteet (1994).

A political stalemate has hampered the building of institutions and worsened the already poor living conditions in Gaza. The Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) argues that the National Consensus Government “has failed to ensure operational budgets for vital sectors such as education and health. Furthermore, it has not taken concrete steps to resolve this problem or to pay the salaries of public sector servants who were appointed during the political divide”.<sup>27</sup> At the time of writing of this report, 40 per cent of Ministry of Health employees, including doctors and nurses, had not received regular salary payments since May 2014.<sup>28</sup> Women account for a significant number of health sector employees, among other service sectors.<sup>29</sup>

As the National Development Plan of 2014-2016 comes to a close, the Government is preparing a National Planning Agenda (NPA) for 2017-2022. Unlike in earlier development plans, policy priorities will be limited in number and tightly linked to a fiscal framework.<sup>30</sup>

In April 2014, the State of Palestine presented letters of accession to 15 international conventions and treaties, including CEDAW.<sup>31</sup> In January 2015, it acceded to the Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court (ICC), and accepted the Court’s jurisdiction with respect to alleged crimes committed “in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, since June 13, 2014”.<sup>32</sup>

## B. RAMIFICATIONS OF ISRAELI POLICIES AND IMPEDIMENTS

### 1. *Movement restrictions*

The Government of Israel imposes wide-ranging and systematic restrictions on the freedom of movement of people and goods in occupied Palestinian territory, through a complex system of administrative procedures and physical obstacles. Those restrictions exacerbate the geographical fragmentation of the State of Palestine and infringe on the economic, social and cultural rights of women and girls.

Freedom of movement for Palestinians between cities and villages in the West Bank, between the West Bank and Gaza, and between Gaza and the outside world, are restricted. Access for Palestinians in Gaza to the West Bank and the outside world is severely restricted. The blockade on Gaza has halved its gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>33</sup> Gaza’s export sector has virtually disappeared and the private sector has shrunk. The World Bank estimates that, without the blockade and conflicts, the GDP of Gaza would have been US\$3.9 billion higher than it was.<sup>34</sup> The resulting economic ruin has led to high unemployment, poor food security and heightened dependency on aid. The blockade flouts the right of people in Gaza to an adequate standard of living.

Israel eased restrictions slightly during the reporting period. The number of permits issued to Palestinians wishing to exit Gaza, mainly for health or business reasons, rose. The United Nations reported “that the daily average of crossings by permit holders out of Gaza via the Israeli-controlled Erez crossing in the first five months of 2015 stood at 449, more than double the same period of 2014, but less than 2 per cent

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<sup>27</sup> ICHR, 2015, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Piper, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> PCBS, 2016g.

<sup>30</sup> Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO), 2016, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> For a list, see Hatuqa, 2014.

<sup>32</sup> International Criminal Court, 2015, p. 11.

<sup>33</sup> World Bank, 2015a, p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> World Bank, 2015a, p. 24.

of the 26,000 daily crossings prior to September 2000”.<sup>35</sup> Controls imposed by Egypt on the Rafah crossing in the second half of 2013 were tightened further in October 2014. In 2015, the crossing opened for 32 days, on only 26 of which exit from Gaza to Egypt was allowed.<sup>36</sup> Since 2015, Jordan has also tightened transit, placing more restrictions on Palestinians from Gaza wishing to transit through Jordan to travel abroad.<sup>37</sup>

Movement and access restrictions continue to be among the main drivers of humanitarian vulnerability of Palestinian women in the West Bank. The permit regime, combined with physical obstacles such as the separation wall (also known as the barrier or separation barrier) and checkpoints, restricts the movement of Palestinians within the West Bank, including into East Jerusalem. Access and movement have been especially restricted in the ‘seam zones’ (areas between the wall and the Green Line, where access is dependent on a permit and gate regime), in the Jordan Valley, in villages in the vicinity of Israeli settlements and within H2. Restrictions have been eased somewhat over the past few years, with a drop in the number of checkpoints and an increase in permits issued to West Bank Palestinians wishing to work in Israel but, in response to the escalation of violence since October 2015, new road blocks and checkpoints have been set up, especially in the district of Hebron.

Nearly 12 years after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion stating that the sections of the wall running inside the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, violated international law,<sup>38</sup> the wall continues to obstruct the movement of Palestinians and undermine their rights. Some 85 per cent of the wall’s route does not follow the Green Line, lying instead within the West Bank. If completed as planned, 9.4 per cent of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, will be isolated.<sup>39</sup> The Government of Israel has ignored recommendations contained in the advisory opinion to cease construction of the wall, dismantle the sections already completed and “repeal or render ineffective forthwith all legislative and regulatory acts relating thereto”.<sup>40</sup>

The wall and its associated gate and permit regime continues to have an adverse impact on women’s rights to health, education, decent work and an adequate standard of living. It has divided West Bank villages from their lands and water resources, thereby cutting job opportunities in agriculture, which especially affects women in seasonal farm work.<sup>41</sup> Unlike their male counterparts, who seek work in urban centres due to the dearth of local job opportunities, young women in “walled out” communities face social and family pressure not to travel beyond their communities. Women in villages have less freedom to join the labour market than to pursue their education.<sup>42</sup>

The impact of the wall has been particularly dramatic around East Jerusalem. Suburbs that were once closely connected to the city, such as Kafr Aqab, Semiramis, Ras Khamis, Ras Shehada, Dahiyat al-Salam, and the Shuafat, are now fenced off. For Palestinian residents of Jerusalem on the “wrong” side of the wall, access to health, education, and social services, to which they are entitled as “permanent residents of Israel” under Israeli law, has become severely restricted. For example, an estimated 20 per cent of teachers and students around East Jerusalem have to cross the wall every day to get to schools.<sup>43</sup> Women interviewed in Kafr Aqab “described heightened anxiety and stress during times of pregnancy and childbirth for issues related

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<sup>35</sup> OCHA, 2015c, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Gisha – Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, 2016, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Watch, 2016, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> International Court of Justice, 2004, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> OCHA, 2013a, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> OCHA, 2014f.

<sup>41</sup> Y Care International, 2014, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Y Care International, 2014, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), 2015a, p. 24.

to unplanned birthing... given the separation wall and the physical obstacles couples may face in reaching Jerusalem inside the wall... women often articulated fears of giving birth at a checkpoint, fearing the denial of their child's birth certificate".<sup>44</sup> Given declining living standards in these communities, families are either being forced to leave to areas with better access to services and business and employment opportunities or to raise money on their own to take care of basic issues such as paving roads, filling potholes and setting up kindergartens.<sup>45</sup>

Movement restrictions continue to undermine women's right to family life and protection of the family unit, enshrined in various international human rights instruments. Almost a third of Palestinians in Gaza, for example, are estimated to have relatives in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, or Israel.<sup>46</sup> Travel out of Gaza, however, is mainly limited to medical patients, businessmen and exceptional humanitarian cases. Obtaining permits for family-related visits to the West Bank remains extremely difficult (box 2).

## Box 2. Distant relatives

Family ties are inexorable, and, as the years of separation between Gaza and the West Bank have shown, the longing to see relatives endures... Yusra is 60 years old. Her eldest daughter, Samah, left Gaza to live with her husband in the West Bank in 2007... Samah, working with an international NGO, managed to get a permit to attend a conference in Ramallah where she met and fell in love with Raed... Yusra has seen her only twice since then. She and her husband, Abed, 62, did not attend their daughter's wedding... Samah's parents were eager to meet their daughter's fiancé before the wedding, but were denied a permit to enter the West Bank, and Raed was denied a permit to enter Gaza to meet his future in-laws. Since they couldn't meet with him, they asked Samah's uncle, who had a merchant permit, to meet Raed in Ramallah so they might get a sense of her husband-to-be. They couldn't visit Samah when she gave birth to her two children, their grandchildren, and Samah didn't get a permit to attend her brother's wedding in the Gaza Strip.

*Source:* Gisha – Legal Center for Freedom of Movement (2015).

## 2. Access restrictions, home demolitions and displacement

Myriad physical and administrative obstacles limit the access of Palestinians to land and resources, especially in Area C, which accounts for more than 60 per cent of the West Bank. Israel retains almost exclusive control, including over security, planning and law enforcement, of Area C, where the number of Israeli settlers has reached 341,000.<sup>47</sup> As a consequence of Israeli policies, land expropriation, the demolition of houses and farm infrastructure, forced displacement, settler violence, and restrictions on movement and access to resources continue to be a daily reality for many of the 300,000 Palestinians in Area C.<sup>48</sup> While the Government of Israel facilitates the establishment of settlements in Area C in contravention of international law, its discriminatory zoning and planning regime makes it virtually impossible for Palestinians to obtain building permits. Only 1.5 per cent of Palestinian applications for building permits in Area C submitted between 2010 and 2014 were approved.<sup>49</sup> In East Jerusalem, the Government of Israel also implements a discriminatory urban planning policy, which has left only 13 per cent of the municipal area, most of which is already built up, zoned for Palestinian construction.<sup>50</sup> Most Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem thus suffer from deteriorating housing stock, high density and declining public infrastructure.

<sup>44</sup> Hammoudeh, D., and others, 2016, p. 42.

<sup>45</sup> Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), 2015a, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Gisha, 2013, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> OCHA, 2014a, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> OCHA, 2015d, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> OCHA, 2014b, p. 1.



Many households are forced to build without a permit, despite the high risk of eviction or demolition. As of January 2015, over 11,000 outstanding demolition orders affected more than 13,000 residential and non-residential structures.<sup>51</sup> Those orders heighten the vulnerability of thousands of Palestinian households to forced displacement. During the reporting period, the pace of house demolition accelerated rapidly. In the first five months of 2016 alone, 632 structures, including residential buildings, were demolished in Area C and East Jerusalem, mainly in small herding communities. That affected nearly 2,600 people, leading to the displacement of nearly 950,<sup>52</sup> and represents a noteworthy increase from the first half of 2015, when 245 Palestinian structures were demolished, dismantled or confiscated.<sup>53</sup> It also represents a substantial increase over the previous reporting period: the number of homes demolished between January and May 2016 alone was only slightly below the number demolished in 2013 (663 structures).<sup>54</sup>

The properties targeted include items provided by donor agencies as humanitarian assistance, including to Bedouin communities at risk of forcible transfer.<sup>55</sup> Palestinians residing in parts of Area C that have been designated by the Government of Israel as “firing zones” for military training, are particularly at risk of displacement. Coercive policies, including forcible transfer and relocation plans, have made it increasingly difficult for Bedouin women to move freely within their community and fulfil their traditional role in livestock management, thereby reducing their economic contribution to and status in the family and community.<sup>56</sup>

For many households, demolition means the loss of their main economic asset, dispossession and forced displacement. The lengthy process leading up to house demolition and eviction can also be impoverishing, as households often must pay hefty legal fees and penalties, to which women have attested (box 3). Research has shown that the emotional and psychological toll of demolition often hits women harder than men, given the prevailing gender division of labour and space. The private sphere of the home is the centre of many women’s lives, where they experience autonomy, engage in social life and develop small-scale economic activities. Testimonies from women suggest that “the mere threat of home demolition has an almost paralyzing effect on the residents, causing them to live in constant fear and insecurity”.<sup>57</sup> At the prospect of losing their homes, “women described anxiety, depression, pain and difficulties in their relationships with their husbands and with their children”.<sup>58</sup> Living with extended families in overcrowded conditions often results in psychosocial distress, loss of privacy and autonomy and the risk of sexual violence, which can lead to child marriage for girls.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Shelter Cluster, 2016, p. 2. No annual breakdown of demolition orders was found, rendering it difficult to assess whether demolition orders were on the rise compared to the previous reporting period.

<sup>52</sup> Shelter Cluster in Palestine, 2016, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> OCHA, 2015d, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> OCHA, 2014c, p. 26.

<sup>55</sup> OCHA, 2016c, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), 2015, p. 43.

<sup>57</sup> WCLAC, 2015b, pp. 22-23.

<sup>58</sup> WCLAC, 2010, p. 18.

<sup>59</sup> Protection Cluster, 2014, p. 8.

### Box 3. Personal account: Women in East Jerusalem

“On 15 November 2011, the Municipality of Jerusalem attached a demolition order to our front door. We hired a lawyer and two weeks later the authorities fined us NIS 48,000, which we pay off in monthly instalments of NIS 500. During this time our lawyer kept pursuing the case in court. On 13 December 2014, our lawyer called us and said that the court had ruled that the latest additions to our house had to be demolished within 25 days. We could either do it ourselves or the authorities would do it and charge us for their labour”.

- W.H., 27 December 2014.

“Although it is almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain building permits from the Israeli authorities in East Jerusalem we did try. After a lot of expense, we failed to get a permit. In January 2015, the Municipality sent us another notice to demolish the house within 2 weeks. If we did not demolish the house ourselves, they would send a bulldozer and charge us NIS 90,000”.

- F.M., 13 January 2015.

*Source:* Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counselling (2015b).

Home demolition and displacement occurs in parallel with settlement expansion. According to official Israeli data obtained by the United Nations, the number of new “building starts” in Area C settlements (i.e. excluding settlements in East Jerusalem) increased by 26 per cent in 2015, compared with 2014.<sup>60</sup> Peace now announced in December 2015 that it had obtained information that the Israeli Ministry of Housing was planning 55,548 new residential units in settlements, representing a massive expansion of settlements across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.<sup>61</sup> If implemented, those plans would deepen the geographical fragmentation of the West Bank.

## II. DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC TRENDS

Demographic and socioeconomic trends in the State of Palestine over the reporting period reveal that gender inequalities persist. The Israeli occupation, coupled with entrenched gender-based discrimination, has an adverse effect on the well-being of Palestinian women and girls.

### A. POPULATION

#### 1. *Size and distribution of population*

By the end of 2015, the total population of the State of Palestine was estimated at 4.75 million, with 2.9 million in the West Bank, and 1.85 million in Gaza (table 1).<sup>62</sup> Males (2.41 million) slightly outnumber females (2.34 million).<sup>63</sup> The West Bank is home to nearly 775,000 refugees<sup>64</sup> and Gaza to 1.26 million refugees registered with UNRWA.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> OCHA, 2016b, p. 18.

<sup>61</sup> Peace Now, 2015, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> PCBS, 2016a, p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> UNRWA considers all those whose habitual place of residence was in Palestine between 1 June 1946 and 15 May 1948 and who lost their homes and means of livelihoods in 1948, and their descendants, as refugees. UNRWA, 2016a, p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> UNRWA, 2016b, p. 1.

**Table 1. Demographic indicators**

Demographic indicator	Palestine	West Bank	Gaza	Year
Population	4.75 million	2.90 million	1.85 million	End of 2015
Registered refugees	2.03 million	774,000	1.26 million	2014-2015
Ratio of men to women	103.3	---	---	2015
Population growth rate	2.9 per cent	2.6 per cent	3.4 per cent	Mid-2015
Population density (capita/km <sup>2</sup> )	789	513	5,070	End of 2015
Children under the age of 15	39.4 per cent	37 per cent	42.8 per cent	Mid-2015
Elderly (above 60 years of age)	4.5 per cent	4.9 per cent	3.8 per cent	Mid-2015

Sources: PCBS, UNRWA.

The rate of population growth remained relatively stable at 2.9 per cent during the reporting period, with Gaza registering a particularly rapid growth rate of 3.4 per cent in mid-2015.<sup>66</sup> This is strikingly higher than the global population growth rate of 1.2 per cent<sup>67</sup> and is largely due to still-high fertility rates combined with decreasing mortality. The fertility rate dropped from 6 children per woman in 1997 to 4.1 in 2011-2013,<sup>68</sup> but it remains high even by regional standards.<sup>69</sup> Fast population growth has considerable ramifications for socioeconomic development prospects and gender equality. Continued high population growth in Gaza, in a context of insufficient and damaged infrastructure, has stretched basic services, including water and health, to the limit. Gaza already has one of the highest population density rates in the world, estimated in 2015 at 5,070 persons per square kilometre (capita/km<sup>2</sup>), compared with 513 in the West Bank.<sup>70</sup> By 2028, it is expected to increase to 7,562 capita/km<sup>2</sup> – raising concerns about the impact of overcrowding on social tension, insecurity and the vulnerability of women and girls to domestic violence.<sup>71</sup>

Palestinian society is young. Children under the age of 15 constitute 39.4 per cent of the overall population.<sup>72</sup> The percentage of persons above 60 years of age is low at 4.5 per cent.<sup>73</sup> As women have longer life expectancy than men (75 compared with 72 years in mid-2015), there are fewer elderly men than women (83.6 males to 100 females).<sup>74</sup> Elderly men are more likely to be married than their female counterparts: almost half of elderly women are widowed, compared with 8.4 per cent of elderly men.<sup>75</sup> This may be explained not

<sup>66</sup> PCBS, 2016a, p. 13.

<sup>67</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, 2015a, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> PCBS, 2016b, p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> The average fertility rate in Western Asia was 2.9 between 2010 and 2015. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Population Division, 2015b, p. 22.

<sup>70</sup> PCBS, 2016a, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> United Nations Country Team, 2012, p. 9.

<sup>72</sup> PCBS, 2016a, p. 13.

<sup>73</sup> PCBS, 2015c, p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> PCBS, 2015c, p. 2.

only by gender differences in life expectancy, but also by sociocultural norms. There is greater social acceptance of remarriage of men after the death of their spouse than is the case for women.<sup>76</sup>

Despite their low share of the population, the over-60-years age group accounted for 23.3 per cent of medical referrals in 2015, reflecting the prevalence of non-communicable diseases among the elderly and their health vulnerability.<sup>77</sup> Chronic complaints such as hypertension, diabetes and cardiac diseases are more prevalent among elderly females than their male counterparts. As women live longer, they will need services beyond medical care that are not provided in the country, including home care, meal delivery and other social services.<sup>78</sup>

## 2. *Child marriage*

Child marriage is a grave violation of children's human rights, as underlined in international instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and CEDAW. While Child Law No. 7 of 2004 and its amendments specify a minimum marriage age of 18 years in Palestine, Personal Status Law No. 61 of 1976 in Jordan (applicable in the West Bank) allows for the marriage of a female from the age of 15. Likewise, the 1954 Egyptian Law of Family Rights (applicable in Gaza) sets the minimum marriage age at 17.<sup>79</sup> While these allowances are made under certain conditions, they not only contradict the spirit of the Child Law but are in violation of international human rights law.<sup>80</sup>

Child marriage is widespread, although the median age at first marriage is gradually rising. According to 2015 statistics, 28.6 per cent of women in the 20-49 year age group in Gaza, and 21.4 per cent in the West Bank, was married before the age of 18.<sup>81</sup> There are indications that child marriage is more common in economically disadvantaged areas. For example, a survey of 500 married women in Yatta, in the Hebron district in the West Bank, indicated that 41.4 per cent of respondents, especially among poor and less educated girls, had married before the age of 18.<sup>82</sup> Studies suggest that impoverishment (resulting from the blockade and consecutive military assaults) is pushing households to marry off their daughters at an early age to reduce their economic burden.<sup>83</sup> In impoverished fishing communities in access restricted areas in Gaza, community representatives have reported that, faced with financial hardship, "organizing early marriages for their daughters was increasingly their only option" due to limited education and employment options for females.<sup>84</sup> In Gaza, "the insecure reality of the life of internally displaced persons, the loss of livelihood sources, the overcrowded housing and loss of familiar social networks create an increased sense of urgency to marry adolescent girls as early as the age of 15 years".<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Juzoor for Health and Social Development, 2010, p. 49.

<sup>77</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), 2016a, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> UN Women, 2013, p. 16.

<sup>79</sup> Based on a 1996 directive issued by a sharia judge, laws in force in Gaza allow for the marriage of a female at 14 years and seven months if judicial consent has been obtained. Article 185 of the Jordanian Personal Status Law of 1976 defines 'year' as the lunar Islamic year, meaning that in Gregorian years the minimum age of marriage for a female is 14 years and six months in the West Bank. United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 2011, p. 23.

<sup>80</sup> Child marriage persists for very specific reasons in Palestine: "...the most recent surveys suggest that the very difficult living conditions Palestinians face due to the occupation - mobility restrictions, increasing unemployment, and high poverty levels - are leading to communities establishing coping strategies to deal with the reality, and this includes marry [sic] daughters young to manage household poverty," Medecins du Monde, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> PCBS, 2015d, p. 1. The aggregate number of child marriages during the reporting period was not established.

<sup>82</sup> Ghrayeb and others, 2015, p. 293.

<sup>83</sup> UNFPA, 2015, p. 3.

<sup>84</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), 2014, p. 41.

<sup>85</sup> UN Women and OCHA, 2015, p. 3.

Testimonials of girls and women gathered by development organizations suggest that adolescent girls are ill-prepared for marriage and have little or no access to reproductive and sexual health information.<sup>86</sup> The risks associated with child marriage with regards to adolescent reproductive health, including pregnancy-related complications, have been extensively documented. Child marriage is considered a risk factor for domestic violence by the local and international community. A 2015 study in Gaza highlighted that, where the age gap between men and women is large, women are more vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse by their spouses. Interviewed women underlined the need to stop child marriage as a way to counter physical and sexual abuse of women by their spouses.<sup>87</sup> Child marriage also increases vulnerability to poverty and insecurity as girls lose the opportunity to continue with education or create a professional life (box 4).

#### **Box 4. Voices from the field: The impact of child marriage on education and economic opportunities**

Depriving girls of education can be harsh to handle. Child brides have hopes and dreams to be educated and have a job, and be decision-makers. However, when they are deprived of this opportunity, they give up all that. I deal with cases... they always blame their family “for getting me married early and when I even don’t know what it actually means, and depriving me of school”.

- Nehad Egilan, psychological counsellor, Gaza.

Maysoun was forced into marriage when she was just 15 years old. As soon as she was under her new husband’s roof, he made her quit school. For two years, Maysoun suffered his abuse and that of his extended family. She had to wake up at dawn and spent her days standing in the kitchen washing, cleaning and cooking. The duties of a wife according to traditions overwhelmed the young girl and put her under tremendous psychological pressure. She started hallucinating and talking to herself. Then, when she was just 17, her husband divorced her, leaving her isolated in the community and filled with shame.

*Sources:* Women’s Affairs Center (2015); United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery (2014).

### **B. POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY**

Against the backdrop of political turmoil and internal division, the Palestinian economy has stagnated. Economic growth in Palestine dropped from 8 per cent to 3 per cent between 2007 and 2015.<sup>88</sup> The blockade of and the military assaults on Gaza, Israeli restrictions in the West Bank and the stifling of the private sector have all contributed to economic decline. The steep drop in donor funding (from 32 per cent of GDP in 2008 to 6 per cent in 2015) has compounded fiscal difficulties.<sup>89</sup> The frequent withholding of Palestinian clearance revenue by Israel only makes matters worse. Israel suspended clearance revenue transfers for four months following the application by the State of Palestine for membership to the ICC, leading to delays in salary payments of Palestinian Authority public servants and in necessary maintenance and infrastructure investments. Economic downturn has translated into high unemployment and low household incomes, and made it more difficult for women and girls, especially in Gaza, Area C and East Jerusalem, to achieve an adequate standard of living.

Food insecurity remains high, with 27 per cent of the population, or 1.6 million people, severely or marginally food insecure.<sup>90</sup> The figure is 47 per cent in Gaza and 16 per cent in the West Bank. Female-headed households are more likely to experience food insecurity than male-headed households (32 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively), which may reflect the hurdles women face in finding decent work. In the West Bank, 25 per cent of female-headed households are food insecure, compared with 15 per cent of male-headed

<sup>86</sup> Women’s Affairs Center, 2015, pp. 38-39, 49.

<sup>87</sup> Müller and Barhoum, 2015, p. 60.

<sup>88</sup> World Bank, 2016, p. 1.

<sup>89</sup> World Bank, 2016, p. 1.

<sup>90</sup> PCBS and Food Security Sector, 2015, p. 1.



households. By contrast, in Gaza, both groups suffer to a similar degree.<sup>91</sup> That geographical difference may be due to aid distribution: in Gaza, female-headed households tend to receive more assistance than male-headed households.<sup>92</sup>

Per capita GDP in Gaza in 2015 was a staggering 72 per cent below the level recorded in 1994.<sup>93</sup> Despite the National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan, launched by the National Consensus Government in October 2014, the slow pace of reconstruction is exacerbating frustrations, and livelihoods remain fragile. Tens of thousands of households have lost property, sources of income and productive assets, pushing them further into dependence on humanitarian assistance. Even prior to the 2014 assault, most of the population of Gaza lived in a precarious state, with 80 per cent dependent on some form of aid, mostly food distribution.<sup>94</sup> The high prices of fresh food and meat and the lack of diversity in large-scale food assistance programmes are adversely affecting dietary diversity. There is concern that this is leading to a deterioration of the nutritional status of lactating and pregnant women and children.<sup>95</sup> The situation is also particularly alarming for adolescent girls in Gaza, the majority of whom suffer from micronutrient deficiencies, including Vitamin A deficiencies, resulting from inadequate food intake.<sup>96</sup>

There are also pockets of poverty and food insecurity in the West Bank, especially among herder and Bedouin communities in Area C. Those communities live in areas that contain most of the agricultural and grazing land and the main water aquifers of the West Bank. However, their food security and livelihoods are undermined by Israeli restrictions on access to land and water resources, and to markets, denial of access to basic infrastructure, severe difficulties in obtaining building permits, and the risk of demolition of housing and other structures. Poverty is acute in East Jerusalem, where more than 400,000 Palestinians reside.<sup>97</sup> The economic vulnerability of Palestinians has been exacerbated by widespread social, economic and institutional marginalization. Construction of the wall has isolated the city from the rest of the West Bank. In 2015, three quarters of Palestinians in East Jerusalem lived below the poverty line – up from 64 per cent in 2006.<sup>98</sup>

Data shows that Palestinian women earn significantly less than men. The estimated per capita gross national income of the former was US\$1,580 in 2014, compared with US\$7,726 for men.<sup>99</sup> The economic marginalization of women is exacerbated by sociocultural norms and discriminatory legislation on property and inheritance. Under the prevailing Islamic family law utilized in both the West Bank and Gaza, a daughter is entitled to inherit one half the share of a son, and a widow one eighth. However, in practice, women often receive less than their limited legal entitlements due to social pressure to give up their inheritance rights in favour of male family members.<sup>100</sup> Legal challenges, involving lengthy court procedures and high fees, often prevent women from claiming their inheritance. According to a 2014 report on women and inheritance in Palestine, “including claims filed to the court, it took five years to settle inheritance claims in almost 50 per cent of the cases... portraying the uneasy access to inheritance and lengthy procedures of litigation at national courts”.<sup>101</sup> Consequently, women have little access to land ownership. In fact, while women play an important

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> OCHA, 2013b, p. 16.

<sup>93</sup> OCHA, 2015e, p. 5.

<sup>94</sup> UNRWA, 2016b, p. 1.

<sup>95</sup> OCHA, 2014d, p. 16.

<sup>96</sup> OCHA, 2015e, p. 19.

<sup>97</sup> PCBS, 2015f, p. 111.

<sup>98</sup> ACRI, 2015b, pp. 3-4.

<sup>99</sup> UNDP, 2015, p. 221.

<sup>100</sup> WCLAC, n.d., p. 1.

<sup>101</sup> WCLAC, 2014, p. 76.

role in agriculture they own only 6.7 per cent of farm holdings in the State of Palestine.<sup>102</sup> Labour Law Number 7 of 2000 largely ignores sectors in which women tend to be concentrated, including unpaid agricultural labour, family and informal home-based work. More broadly, while labour legislation prohibits gender-based discrimination, it does not specify penalties for employers who violate this article of the law.

### C. EDUCATION

In the State of Palestine, basic education is almost universal and gender parity in many educational indicators has been achieved. In the academic year 2015/2016, slightly more girls than boys were enrolled in basic and secondary schools (603,722 and 596,144 respectively).<sup>103</sup> The educational attendance rate of girls is consistently higher than that of boys across all age groups. That is particularly so in the 15-17 age group: 91 per cent of girls and only 78.2 per cent of boys in that group attended school in 2013.<sup>104</sup> On average, boys are less likely than girls to attend and complete school. In the 2013/2014 academic year, the dropout rate for girls in basic and secondary school was respectively at 0.6 per cent and 3.3 per cent, compared with 1.3 and 4.2 per cent for boys.<sup>105</sup> Reasons for dropping out include early engagement or marriage for girls, and an inability to balance study with work or poor performance in school in the case of boys.<sup>106</sup> Other reasons for girls especially include the distance between place of residence and schools, which may induce emotional distress and insecurity. UNICEF reports that “Bedouin children and youth often suffer from psychological hardships that lead to school dropout. Families in these communities are also reluctant to send their children, especially older girls, to school, as schools are often located far away, either forcing children to walk long distances or imposing high transport costs on families”.<sup>107</sup> Disability may also be linked to higher dropout rates. The Palestine Ministry of Education and Higher Education adopted an inclusive education program in 1997, but many children with disabilities, especially girls, still face difficulties in accessing good quality education because transport and school infrastructure are inadequate and due to the lack of qualified and specialized staff, particularly in Gaza.<sup>108</sup>

Female students tend to achieve better results than their male counterparts in international, national and unified exams. For example, in 2011, female eighth-graders achieved a rate of 415 in mathematics, compared with 392 for their male counterparts, according to the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).<sup>109</sup> The Ministry of Education and Higher Education reports that girls score higher in life skills, including on critical thinking and communication: in 2012, the life skills rating for female students in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grades was 76.2, compared with 69 for male students.<sup>110</sup>

International comparative assessments show that Palestinian students tend to perform poorly in mathematics and science, even in comparison with their counterparts in other countries in the Arab region.<sup>111</sup> The quality of education is low, and in some communities even in decline, due to political violence and movement and access restrictions. In particular, the development of school infrastructure has been slowed by various impediments, including the blockade of Gaza. School infrastructure in East Jerusalem is also poor.

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<sup>102</sup> PCBS, 2012, p. 47.

<sup>103</sup> PCBS, 2016a, p. 26.

<sup>104</sup> PCBS, 2016a, p. 30.

<sup>105</sup> PCBS, n.d., p. 1.

<sup>106</sup> PCBS, 2015a, p. 32.

<sup>107</sup> UNICEF, 2016, p. 5.

<sup>108</sup> Handicap International, 2015, p. 22, 25.

<sup>109</sup> Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2014, p. 141.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., pp. 142-143.

<sup>111</sup> Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD) and CARE International, 2015, p. 20.

During the reporting period, the municipal education system lacked some 1,000 classrooms and 43 per cent of those available were deemed inadequate.<sup>112</sup>

Maintaining the quality of education in Gaza is problematic, in part due to the ongoing energy crisis. Power outages of up to 16 hours a day disrupt classes.<sup>113</sup> Even prior to the 2014 military assault, there was a shortage of almost 200 schools and the majority of schools were operating on a double shift, adversely affecting student performance and leading to a decrease or the cancellation of remedial classes and extra-curricular activities in many schools. The 2014 military operation left 258 kindergartens and schools destroyed or damaged, affecting hundreds of thousands of preschool, basic and secondary school students.<sup>114</sup> The lack of security even after the conflict continued to hamper access to good quality education. That is especially the case in access restricted areas, where Israeli incursions occur regularly and schools have repeatedly been affected.

The volatile political and security situation also disrupts schooling in the West Bank. Schools come under fire during military operations and settlers threaten Palestinian students with violence. The number of education-related attacks increased from 97 in 2012 to 273 in 2014.<sup>115</sup> Schools adjacent to the wall, near Israeli settlements, in “firing zones” in the Jordan Valley, and in Hebron are the most vulnerable to attack. Research suggests that girls are disproportionately affected, as they “are more likely to stop attending when faced with harassment, violence and intimidation at checkpoints or on their commute to school”.<sup>116</sup>

At the tertiary level, data reflect a strong gender gap in favour of young women: in the 2014/2015 academic year, 61 per cent of university students were female.<sup>117</sup> However, young women in the State of Palestine face significant hurdles when they attempt to move from school to work. The International Labour Organization (ILO) found in 2014 that young men had completed the “education to work transition” with greater ease than their female counterparts (38.9 per cent of young men and only 6.6 per cent of young women made the transition that year).<sup>118</sup> One reason may be that fields of study continue to be heavily influenced by gender roles. Young women tend to specialize more in the humanities, for example, leading to a mismatch between their qualifications and labour market needs.

#### D. EMPLOYMENT

The inclusion of women in the economy in the Arab region, including in the State of Palestine, is marked by a paradox. Despite unprecedented gains in female education, including at the tertiary level, and relatively sharp falls in fertility rates, Palestinian women continue to fare worse than their male counterparts in nearly every employment indicator. Investment in women’s education and health has not translated into significant employment gains. The labour force participation rate of women in the State of Palestine is even lower than the regional average (of 24 per cent),<sup>119</sup> which in turn is considerably lower than global average (50 per cent).<sup>120</sup> Access to work for women not only enhances their economic empowerment and participation in public life, it also helps to drive economic growth and poverty reduction. Promoting the economic participation of women

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<sup>112</sup> ACRI, 2015b, p. 1.

<sup>113</sup> OCHA, 2014d, p. 15.

<sup>114</sup> UNICEF, 2014, p. 1.

<sup>115</sup> MA’AN Development Center, 2015, p. 9.

<sup>116</sup> Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, 2013, p. 6.

<sup>117</sup> PCBS, 2016a, p. 27.

<sup>118</sup> Sadeq and Elder, 2014, p. 37.

<sup>119</sup> ILO, 2016a, p. 1.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

is crucial and has been included as one of the five strategic objectives of the Government's 2014-2016 Cross-Sectoral National Gender Strategy.

In 2015, the participation rate of men in the labour force in the State of Palestine, at 71.9 per cent, was nearly four times higher than that of women, at 19.1 per cent (table 2).<sup>121</sup> Moreover, 17.1 per cent of women categorized as “employed” were, in reality, unpaid family workers, especially among agricultural households in the West Bank.<sup>122</sup> Low female participation rates in the labour force in part reflect social and cultural constraints, the time women spend on raising families and care work, and the limited availability of childcare. The most common reason cited by women aged between 25 and 54 in surveys for being out of the labour force was “housekeeping”.<sup>123</sup> Women are disproportionately engaged in unpaid domestic work, including taking care of children and the elderly, leaving them limited time to engage in paid employment or enterprise development. Moreover, the distorted structure of the Palestinian economy and incapacity of the private sector to generate sufficient decent jobs further discourages women from attempting to enter the labour market.

**Table 2. Employment indicators**

Indicator	Female	Male	Year
Labour Force Participation Rate	19.1%	71.9%	2015
Unemployment Rate (Gaza)	62.6%	34.5%	First Quarter of 2016
Unemployment Rate (West Bank)	28.4%	15.5%	First Quarter of 2016
Unemployment Rate (Palestine)	42.8%	22.3%	First Quarter of 2016
Unemployment Rate (13+ years of schooling, Palestine)	48.0%	18.6%	2015
Unemployment Rate (1-6 years of schooling, Palestine)	9.7%	27.1%	2015
Share of services in total employment	62.9%	30.9%	2015
Share of agriculture in total employment	13.1%	7.8%	2015
Average Daily Wages (in NIS)	81.9	108.0	2015

Source: PCBS Labour Force Survey 2015.

The impact of the occupation and its policies have exacerbated gender inequality, further undermining the ability of women to enter the labour force or engage in business or trade. The economy of Gaza has been decimated and unemployment there stood at 41.2 per cent in the first quarter of 2016, compared with 18 per cent in the West Bank.<sup>124</sup> During the reporting period, female unemployment remained strikingly high, especially among young educated women in Gaza. In the first quarter of 2016, 42.8 per cent of women in the State of Palestine were unemployed, and 22.3 per cent of men.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>121</sup> PCBS, 2016c.

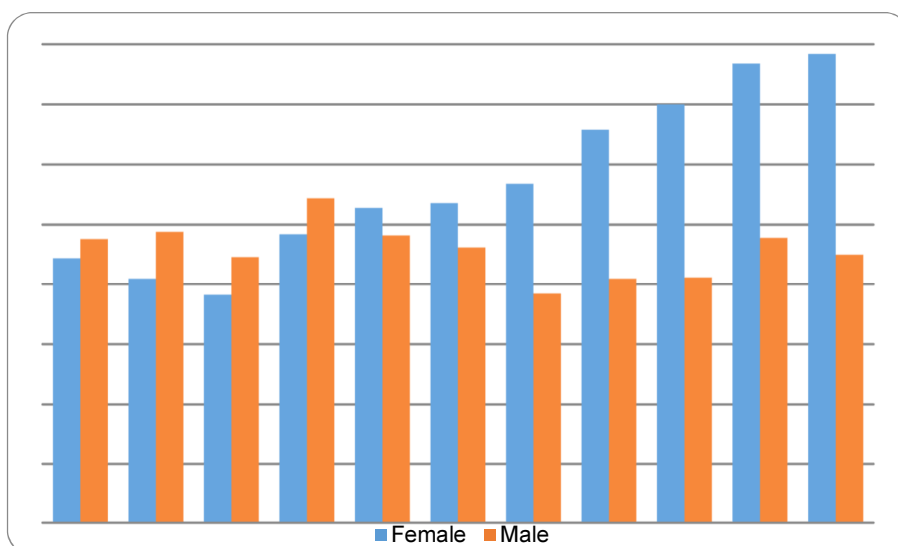
<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> PCBS, 2016d.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

**Figure 2. Unemployment rate by gender, 2005-2015**



Source: PCBS (2016c).

Challenges associated with the transition from education to employment reveal gender differences. The more men are educated, the lower their rate of unemployment, while women with more than 13 years of schooling face much higher unemployment rates than those with less education. In 2015, 48 per cent of more educated women in the State of Palestine were unemployed, compared with 9.7 per cent of those with between one and six years of schooling.<sup>126</sup>

The discrepancy in unemployment rates between women and men could be because, except in the public sector, employers tend to favour men over women for skilled positions.<sup>127</sup> Women, on the other hand, are more in demand for less skilled occupations.<sup>128</sup> A 2015 survey also suggests that young women and men view their employability differently. While 82.9 per cent of the young Palestinian men surveyed attribute their unemployment to a lack of jobs, only 59.6 per cent of their female counterparts do so.<sup>129</sup> More young women than men attribute their unemployment to the mismatch between their skills and available jobs.

Faced with the lack of paid employment in Gaza, 44.8 per cent of the surveyed young men have strived to establish their own businesses, compared with 15.9 per cent of their female counterparts.<sup>130</sup> Studies suggest that women own an exceptionally small proportion of enterprises in the State of Palestine. That is partly due to the difficulty women have in obtaining credit and accessing business development services, and partly to sociocultural norms, including “societal prejudices, male dominance, work and commitments at home, childcare...”<sup>131</sup> Limited access to property means that women have difficulty in putting up the collateral needed to obtain commercial loans.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>126</sup> PCBS, 2016c, p. 63.

<sup>127</sup> Al-Botmeh, 2015.

<sup>128</sup> AWRAD and CARE International, 2015, p. 20.

<sup>129</sup> PCBS, 2016e.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Abdullah, 2014, p. 2.

<sup>132</sup> UN Women, 2013, p. 58.



The service sector accounts for 62.9 per cent of working women (and 30.9 per cent of working men), followed by agriculture (13.1 per cent of women and 7.8 per cent of men).<sup>133</sup> Most women (86.4 per cent) working in the service sector have more than 13 years of education, while 97.8 per cent of women working in agriculture have 12 years of schooling or less.<sup>134</sup> According to the Ministry of Women Affairs, women working in agriculture score poorly in terms of empowerment on a number of indicators, including education, age at first marriage, decision-making and control over income.<sup>135</sup> Women suffer from horizontal and vertical segregation, being concentrated into a couple of sectors and occupying fewer senior and managerial posts than men.<sup>136</sup>

The ILO reports that most “of the extremely low proportion of women who enter the labour force... are often relegated to working in low-productivity, informal activities”, such as childcare, cleaning, small-scale home-based entrepreneurial activities, and unpaid work for family farms or informal businesses.<sup>137</sup> The informal sector may be an important source of employment for women, but “one cannot underestimate the exploitative nature of this work, or disregard the insecurity and lack of social protection that [it] entails”.<sup>138</sup> Wages also reflect gender inequality. More women than men (42.1 per cent and 30.7 per cent, respectively) in the private sector earn less than the minimum wage.<sup>139</sup> In 2015, the average daily wage for women was 75.8 per cent of that of men.<sup>140</sup>

The contribution of women, whether as unpaid labour, salaried workers or self-employed, to the household and national economy is not sufficiently recognized. According to a 2016 online survey of 365 women, respondents financially contributed to 44 per cent of households and 13 per cent of households rely fully on the contribution of women.<sup>141</sup> This small survey is indicative of women’s multi-faceted, yet rarely documented, support of the Palestinian household.

## E. HEALTH

The accessibility and quality of health services available to women continues to be adversely affected by political and security impediments, including restrictions on the movement of patients, health-care personnel, medical supplies and ambulances, combined with the limited capacity of the Government to deliver services in Area C, and the widespread destruction of public infrastructure and health facilities in Gaza.

### 1. *Availability and accessibility of health services*

Health services in Gaza were already struggling prior to the 2014 military assault, due to the rapidly increasing population, widespread malfunctioning of medical equipment, chronic power cuts and severe shortages of medical supplies. The problems have been exacerbated by the longstanding blockade. By January 2014, more than 300 medical machines at hospitals were out of order, including ultrasound, X-ray, laboratory machines, cardiac monitors and Gaza’s only MRI machine.<sup>142</sup> Reproductive health care also suffered prior to

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<sup>133</sup> PCBS, 2016c.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Palestinian Ministry of Women Affairs, 2014, p. 18.

<sup>136</sup> Al-Botmeh, 2015, p. 2.

<sup>137</sup> ILC.104/DG/APP, p. 11.

<sup>138</sup> UN Women, 2013, p. 58.

<sup>139</sup> ILC.104/DG/APP, p. 14.

<sup>140</sup> PCBS, 2016c, p. 105.

<sup>141</sup> AWRAD, 2016, p. 1.

<sup>142</sup> OCHA, 2014e, p. 1.

the assault, with too few and insufficiently qualified midwives, chronically poor post-natal care, overcrowding and long waiting hours at health facilities resulting from high demand.<sup>143</sup>

Amid the course of hostilities, Gaza's only rehabilitation hospital and three primary health care clinics were destroyed. Another 18 hospitals and 60 clinics were damaged.<sup>144</sup> During the assault, more than 40,000 pregnant women were deprived of access to basic reproductive health services; 5,500 deliveries took place in extremely poor conditions in hospitals, shelters and homes; and the number of pregnancy-related complications such as bleeding, premature delivery and miscarriages increased.<sup>145</sup> Most damaged facilities are being repaired but health services remain over-stretched. As of June 2016, in the Al-Shifa hospital alone, more than 3,800 patients were waiting for surgery, some scheduled for as far in advance as 2018.<sup>146</sup>

During the reporting period, Palestinians continued to face restrictions in accessing medical facilities outside their usual area of residence. Due to limited capacity in medical facilities run by the Ministry of Health, patients requiring specialized treatment or surgery are often referred for treatment, in East Jerusalem, Israel or abroad. Each year, tens of thousands of Palestinians seek approval from the Israeli authorities to travel for medical needs. The process of obtaining a permit is convoluted and governed by considerations that are not transparent to the applicants. It often results in delays in and denial of care (box 5). Access to healthcare in Egypt, traditionally an important alternative for Gaza patients, has been restricted. In 2015, the Rafah crossing was open for just 26 days, allowing only 178 of the 1,670 patients with Ministry of Health referrals to Egypt to cross. Prior to the partial closure of the border, which started in the second half of 2013, a monthly average of 4,000 patients crossed into Egypt via Rafah.<sup>147</sup>

#### **Box 5. Access to health care hangs on arbitrary decisions**

Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHR-Israel) "works to change decisions of Israeli authorities where a request for free movement for medical purposes is denied or where the answer is delayed to such an extent as to cause the patient to miss the medical appointment".

"One of the requests received by PHR-Israel concerned a six-year old girl from the Gaza Strip named Ritaj (pseudonym). Suffering from problems in the nervous system, Ritaj was invited for surgery at St. Joseph Hospital in East Jerusalem at the end of October. Ritaj's family put in an application to coordinate her transfer to Jerusalem, but was answered by the Israeli District Civil Liaison Office (DCL) that the application was "being processed", even after the date of the scheduled operation had already passed. Upon receiving the request in November 2014, a PHR-Israel representative filed a complaint with the Erez DCL concerning the delayed handling of the request; this had the effect of accelerating things, and the patient was given an exit permit. This is one routine incident among many serving to illustrate how the applications of patients who clearly pose no security threat to the State of Israel might also be delayed without cause... PHR-Israel's high rate of success in changing the decisions of the Israeli authorities raises the suspicion that the decisions had been arbitrary and irrelevant to begin with".

*Source:* Physicians for Human Rights Israel, 2015, pp. 9, 17.

In the West Bank, 132 vulnerable communities in Area C, in the seam zones and on the periphery of East Jerusalem continue to face restricted access to basic health care due to a range of impediments, including threats of settler violence, restrictions on the movement of patients, medical personnel and ambulances, and difficulties in obtaining permits to build health infrastructure.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Health Cluster, 2014, p. 20.

<sup>144</sup> OCHA, 2016d, p. 7.

<sup>145</sup> UNFPA, 2014, p. 4.

<sup>146</sup> OCHA, 2016d, p. 6.

<sup>147</sup> WHO, 2016, p. 1.

<sup>148</sup> OCHA, 2014g, p. 25.

## 2. *Health status of women*

Overall health care for Palestinian women and girls continues to improve, but the volatile political environment risks eroding gains made over the past decades. Maternal mortality has fallen from an estimated 55 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 1999 to 23 in 2010-2014.<sup>149</sup> However, the United Nations has warned that this ratio could increase owing to the deterioration of reproductive health care in Gaza.<sup>150</sup> Maternal mortality in Gaza rose sharply during and after the 2014 hostilities; at least 16 pregnant women were killed during the conflict.<sup>151</sup> Registered cases of maternal and neonatal mortality have doubled since mid-2014.<sup>152</sup>

Shortcomings in health care during pregnancy, and during and post-delivery, persist.<sup>153</sup> The rate of caesarian deliveries is rising and has reached 17.4 per cent in Gaza and 22.7 per cent in the West Bank.<sup>154</sup> When medically justified, a caesarean section can prevent maternal and infant mortality and morbidity. However, the World Health Organization (WHO) asserts that “at population level, caesarean section rates higher than 10 per cent are not associated with reductions in maternal and new-born mortality rates”.<sup>155</sup> The procedure can involve risks for women who do not require it, which can have an impact not only on the health of the mother and child, but also on any future pregnancies. Family planning gaps remain: 11 per cent of married women, who wish to space out or limit births, report an unmet need for contraception.<sup>156</sup> “Women in the poorest income quintiles are the least likely to use contraception, indicating a need to improve access for the most vulnerable”.<sup>157</sup>

As in many other Arab countries, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have become a key public health concern for women, with an increasing incidence of cardiovascular disease, cancer, hypertension and diabetes, among other conditions. Women suffer disproportionately from NCDs: various sociocultural and economic factors increase their vulnerability to risk factors. For example, 17 per cent of young women practiced sports on a daily basis in 2015, compared with 32 per cent of young men.<sup>158</sup> Sporting activities and clubs are dominated by men; for example, in Gaza, 13.8 per cent of young men are members of sports clubs, compared with 0.8 per cent of young women.<sup>159</sup> In many rural settings, it is not culturally appropriate for young women to undertake physical activity in public. Socioeconomic and cultural barriers may prevent women from making use of health services and thereby exacerbate the risks they run. It has been suggested, for instance, that the potential link between mortality rates for breast cancer in the southern districts of the West Bank and cultural norms that prevent women from accessing screening and treatment services should be investigated further.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> MIFTAH: The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy and ICHR, 2015, p. 33.

<sup>150</sup> UN Women and OCHA, 2015, p. 6.

<sup>151</sup> OCHA, 2015b, p.1.

<sup>152</sup> UN Women and OCHA, 2015, p. 2.

<sup>153</sup> UN Women, 2013, p. 14.

<sup>154</sup> PCBS, 2015b, p. 39.

<sup>155</sup> WHO, 2015, p. 4.

<sup>156</sup> PCBS, 2015e, p. 16.

<sup>157</sup> Hammoudeh, W., 2014, p. 1.

<sup>158</sup> PCBS, 2016e.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Abu-Rmeileh and others, 2016, p. 8.

There is concern that health services prioritize maternal health over other health-care needs of women of all ages.<sup>161</sup> Post-traumatic stress – and psychosocial health in general – is an emerging health priority for women as patients and as primary caregivers.

## F. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women and girls remains a serious issue, despite the implementation of commendable measures under the Palestinian National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women (2011-2019). In Gaza, East Jerusalem, and Area C, the consequences of violence on the health of women and girls are exacerbated by restricted access to justice, health services, specialized institutions and support systems.

Women and girls face violence resulting from the Israeli occupation (such as home demolitions, displacement, settler violence, military raids and bombardments) and from within their own communities. The National Strategy underlines the role of norms and traditions in a patriarchal culture that deprive women of the power to decide their own fate and limit their participation in the public sphere.<sup>162</sup> A number of studies show a link between economic factors, such as male unemployment, and increased domestic tension and violence.<sup>163</sup> Violence perpetrated by the Israeli military occupation also “promotes and strengthens patriarchal power within the Palestinian domestic sphere. Israeli violence perpetrated against Palestinian men thus often turns into acts of violence committed against women by those same men”.<sup>164</sup>

Women and girls are exposed to different types of violence in their own communities<sup>165</sup>. Comprehensive data is unavailable but evidence collected by development agencies suggests that violence, especially in Gaza, is on the rise, aggravated by an upsurge in political violence. A survey of internally displaced persons (IDPs) indicates that more than 70 per cent of respondent households perceive a rise in violence against women in Gaza.<sup>166</sup> A small, but more recent survey of Palestinian women indicates that 53 per cent of respondents have experienced or witnessed domestic violence.<sup>167</sup>

Murder is the most serious form of violence against women and girls. In 2015, 16 cases of “femicide” were documented in the West Bank and Gaza. Such violence may well be under-reported, especially in Gaza. Witnesses are afraid of being hurt themselves if they come forward.<sup>168</sup> Some murders result from family disputes or crime. In other cases, women may be victims of so-called “honour killing”, which male family members see as justified to remedy damaged family honour and violations of the customary moral code.<sup>169</sup>

Other forms of violence against women include incest, sexual abuse and rape.<sup>170</sup> Many cases of rape and sexual assault within the family, particularly of girls under the age of 15, go unreported because the victim is accompanied by an older family member or custodian when filing a complaint with the authorities. “In such

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<sup>161</sup> UN Women, 2013, p. 15.

<sup>162</sup> Palestinian Ministry of Women Affairs, 2011, p. 10.

<sup>163</sup> Clark and others, 2010; World Bank, 2010.

<sup>164</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, 2015, p. 4.

<sup>165</sup> The latest PCBS survey on violence against women was conducted in 2011, which is outside the scope of the study period. The latest survey show that 37 percent of ever married women in Palestine were exposed to one form of violence by their husbands; 29.9 per cent in the West Bank compared to 51.1 per cent in Gaza., PCBS 2011b, p. 17.

<sup>166</sup> OCHA, 2016a, p. 6.

<sup>167</sup> AWRAD, 2016, p. 1.

<sup>168</sup> WCLAC, 2016a, p. 30.

<sup>169</sup> Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2002.

<sup>170</sup> Human Rights Council, 2017, pp. 6, 8. For efforts to address this violence locally, see International Planned Parenthood Federation, n.d.; Defense for Children International – Palestine, 2017; SAWA, 2017.

situations, the relative who is supposed to accompany her is in fact the perpetrator”.<sup>171</sup> Palestinian women and girls are also subject to verbal, physical and sexual harassment in public spaces. According to a 2015 survey, 25.7 per cent of young women aged between 15 and 29 in Gaza had experienced some form of sexual harassment in the previous year, compared with 13.8 per cent in the West Bank. Most cases related to sexist statements.<sup>172</sup> Research suggests that women with disabilities are at higher risk of physical and verbal abuse, feel that women’s rights organizations do not meet their need for protection and report that shelters and other services are not always physically accessible.<sup>173</sup>

Despite positive developments, such as the suspension of a number of legal provisions allowing for the exemption from or mitigation of sentences for those found guilty of committing honour crimes, legislation does not provide for the effective prohibition of such offences or punishment of perpetrators. It has also been argued that the laws that do indirectly protect the rights of women are not implemented, largely due to religious and cultural considerations, such as the focus on the preservation of “honour”.<sup>174</sup> Women face an array of obstacles in accessing justice and obtaining redress. “These include fragmented legal and organizational frameworks, inadequate coordination among... and between institutions and civil society, the absence of specialized courts, the slow speed of judicial decision-making, poor judgment enforcement, capacity deficits, and entrenched legal and social discrimination against women”.<sup>175</sup>

Poor legal literacy and limited financial resources also limit women’s access to justice, as do the difficulties in gaining physical access to security, justice and social services institutions in Area C and East Jerusalem. In some areas, the public prosecution faces numerous obstacles in investigating crimes, attending crime scenes and arresting offenders. It is also worth noting that in 2014, only 3.8 per cent of Palestinian police personnel were women, marginally up from 3.4 per cent in 2011.<sup>176</sup>

Despite awareness-raising campaigns on violence against women, including by the Ministry of Women Affairs, a culture of silence on the subject persists. According to one study, “all women survivors/victims interviewed believe that, in most cases... it is safer for females of all ages to live a life of violence and to accept the fact that there is no justice... than it is to disclose the abuse inflicted against them”.<sup>177</sup> Fear of social stigma and of losing their family, combined with the lack of confidentiality measures in police departments, stops many women from filing complaints.<sup>178</sup>

Nonetheless, the Family Protection Unit of the Police, Ministry of Women Affairs, Ministry of Social Development and civil society organizations have implemented some commendable measures. They include awareness-raising campaigns, national hotlines, emergency shelters and the provision of legal aid, counselling and psychological support services. Launched in 2009, Takamol is a national legal-health-social service referral system for women victims of violence. It is now mandatory for all centres providing support for women victims of violence, as well as the police and health and social affairs institutions, to use the Takamol system.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> UN Women, 2014, p. 38.

<sup>172</sup> PCBS, 2016e, p. 111.

<sup>173</sup> Sayrafi, 2013, pp. 18, 25.

<sup>174</sup> UN Women, 2014, p. 17.

<sup>175</sup> UNSCO, 2016, p. 10.

<sup>176</sup> PCBS, 2015b, p. 56.

<sup>177</sup> UN Women, 2014, p. 23.

<sup>178</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, 2015, p. 3.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.



In February 2016, the Public Prosecution Office established the Family Protection Unit, which will focus on domestic violence.<sup>180</sup>

The Ministry of Women Affairs is planning to establish a national observatory on violence against women. Having more accurate statistics on the prevalence and types of violence committed against women and girls should make it possible to improve policy and protection mechanisms.

## G. ENVIRONMENT

Access to good quality water and sanitation remained a major concern throughout the reporting period, especially in Gaza. Due to a range of political impediments, including discriminatory water-sharing agreements between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, Palestinians have limited control over water resources and are prevented from developing adequate water and sanitation infrastructure. In Area C, the demolition policy of Israeli authorities has compounded the problem. In 2015, 39 water and sanitation structures, including latrines, water networks and cisterns, were demolished or confiscated. The pace of demolition of such structures, the majority of which are donor-funded, accelerated in early 2016.<sup>181</sup>

Households with no access to water infrastructure have to rely on water purchased from private vendors, for which they pay an exorbitant amount. Nearly 70 per cent of communities in Area C are not connected to the water network, and water consumption in some of them drops to as low as 20 litres per capita per day, one fifth of the level recommended by WHO.<sup>182</sup> In East Jerusalem, only 64 per cent of households are officially connected to the water network. In areas behind the separation wall, water supply per capita is at 55 per cent of the WHO recommended level for adequate health and hygiene.<sup>183</sup> In Gaza, most households are connected to the water network but 90-95 per cent of that water is undrinkable due to wastewater leakage, seawater intrusion or other contamination.<sup>184</sup> “Left with no choice but to severely reduce water consumption and to rely upon desalinated water purchased from private vendors, 95 per cent of Gaza’s population may now be at risk of waterborne diseases”.<sup>185</sup> Some 70 per cent of the population only has piped water for an average of six to eight hours every two to four days because of insufficient power supply.<sup>186</sup> Women are the primary managers of domestic water needs, and they are increasingly employing conservation measures, including “recycling water or using grey water for washing and irrigation, and using run-off from those activities for livestock. Women also tend to monitor water quality, sterilizing or disinfecting well water in an effort to mitigate potential health impacts for themselves and their families”.<sup>187</sup>

Another critical environmental issue, especially in Gaza, is the lack of adequate sanitation. Consecutive military assaults have caused massive damage to infrastructure. Import restrictions imposed by Israel limit operational and maintenance capacity, and the severe electricity shortage compounds the problem. Approximately 90 million litres per day of untreated or partially treated sewage is discharged into the sea, posing serious health and environmental risks. As women often bear the responsibility for managing household water needs and require greater access to water than men for sanitation purposes, reduced access has clear

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<sup>180</sup> WCLAC, 2016b, p. 1.

<sup>181</sup> Emergency Water and Sanitation Hygiene (EWASH), 2016a, p. 1.

<sup>182</sup> OCHA, 2014a, p. 1.

<sup>183</sup> ACRI, 2015b, p. 11.

<sup>184</sup> A69/44 Add.1, p. 3.

<sup>185</sup> EWASH, 2016b, p. 1.

<sup>186</sup> UNSCO, 2016, p. 16.

<sup>187</sup> United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), UN Women, United Nations Peace Building Support Office (PBSO), and UNDP, 2013, p. 22.

implications for their workload and well-being (box 6). Water and electricity shortages have made it more difficult for women to “engage in income-generating activities or allocate time to their own needs”.<sup>188</sup>

#### Box 6. A “game between men”

“The electricity crisis puts disproportionate stress on women. Most women are expected to have everything in the home prepared and ready for their husbands’ approval. When there is no electricity, women cannot complete their daily work inside the home. The children are stressed and scared and they have to comfort them. They have to find ways to juggle the household expenses to afford the fuel for the generator. All of these things increase internal problems within the home, putting women at risk of violence and disempowerment... The blockade is the root cause of the ongoing fuel crisis and it is also why women in Gaza struggle in daily life. Both these problems are now compounded by the political divide, which prevents the parties from working together to solve the electricity crisis or to approve legislation that can advance women’s status and rights. Women’s groups know how critical reconciliation is and we have been doing so much to try to put it on the table. We want to contribute, to be a part of the process, but thus far it has been a game between men”.

- Naila Ayesh, Director of the Women’s Affairs Center (WAC) in Gaza.

*Source:* Oxfam, n.d., p. 2.

During the reporting period, the National Consensus Government continued efforts to mainstream gender into water and environmental policies by implementing the 2013-2017 Gender Strategy in the Environment Sector, with emphasis on water and solid waste. Given women’s key environmental role at the household and community levels, the strategy was launched to address the lack of women’s participation in policy and decision-making. The participation rate of women in water utilities does not exceed 8 per cent, they do not occupy decision-making positions and they rarely work in technical and specialized jobs.<sup>189</sup> Their involvement in local-level institutions, such as water user associations and joint services councils, is also limited. After considerable delay in the implementation of the strategy and its associated action plan, a gender planning workshop was held in February 2015. Efforts are underway to conduct a gender audit of the Palestinian Water Authority and to create a gender unit in it.<sup>190</sup>

#### H. MEDIA

There is still progress to be made with regards to women’s representation in the media. One quarter of journalists in Palestine were women in 2014 – higher than the average female labour force participation rate.<sup>191</sup> However, senior editorial and decision-making positions continue to be held predominantly by men. Only 18.5 per cent of editors are women.<sup>192</sup> Moreover, the unemployment rate for females holding a diploma in media and communications is a staggering 76.9 per cent (compared with 29.8 for their male counterparts).<sup>193</sup>

According to a 2014 survey, there is a general perception that Palestinian media outlets do not sufficiently cover issues of relevance to women. For instance, only 18 per cent of surveyed members of the public and 6 per cent of surveyed journalists believed that the media give adequate coverage to the issue of child marriage.<sup>194</sup> The findings suggest that the media reinforce gender stereotypes and fail to highlight the

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<sup>188</sup> OCHA, 2015b, p. 1.

<sup>189</sup> Palestinian Water Authority and Global Water Partnership, 2015.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> PCBS, 2015b, p. 58.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> PCBS, 2016b, p. 128.

<sup>194</sup> AWRAD, 2014.

economic contribution of women.<sup>195</sup> Given the still limited number of media outlets managed by and focused on women, women journalists in the West Bank and Gaza are increasingly organizing their own platforms.

## I. GIRL CHILD

The State of Palestine has taken key steps to promote and protect the rights of the girl child, including accession to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict in 2014. During the reporting period, national institutions carried out various measures. In 2016, for instance, the Ministry of Justice included gender and juvenile justice considerations in its work plan for the first time.<sup>196</sup>

Demonstrable progress continues to be made in improving children's health. The under-five mortality rate declined from around 42 (in 1991) to 22 per 1,000 live births in 2014, and infant mortality from 32 in 1991 to the current rate of around 18 deaths per 1,000 live births.<sup>197</sup> In reviewing health data for children under five, a gender gap in favour of girls can be discerned, as demonstrated by a number of malnutrition indicators, including the proportion of children suffering from underweight, and moderate and severe stunting. Education indicators show a consistent gender gap in favour of girls. Progress in terms of reducing child marriage however has been lagging, with no notable legislative reforms implemented during the reporting period.

Despite the overall gains made in terms of their well-being, the political situation continues to affect the rights of Palestinian girls adversely in terms of safety, health, education, social protection and recreation. Girls from low-income households, those residing in East Jerusalem, those living in remote, marginalized communities in Area C, and girls with disabilities have been perhaps the most affected by a range of threats, including threats to life and those of home demolition and forced displacement. Those issues have an impact on the psychosocial health of children and adolescents. In Gaza, doctors have discouraged adolescent girls from accessing support networks and health services. Interviews reveal that the "older the girl, the less likely she is to accede to psychosocial and mental health services, because the stigma that comes with doing so could affect her reputation and her chances of marrying".<sup>198</sup>

## III. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

### A. POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The long history of Palestinian women's political activism is only slowly being translated into gains in the formal political realm. The Basic Law of Palestine enshrines the right of women to political participation. Article 4 of the Law on Public Legislative Elections of 2005 guarantees the representation of women in electoral lists, while Article 17 of the Law on Local Council Elections guarantees a quota system for women in local bodies. Notwithstanding high levels of educational achievement, strong participation in civil society and political activism, women remain under-represented in formal decision-making bodies. During the reporting period, women held three of the 17 ministerial level posts (17.6 per cent), fewer than the five of 22 (22.7 per cent) of posts they had held in 2011.<sup>199</sup> Regardless of the importance attributed to women's organizations by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000 on women, peace and security, women continued to be marginalized in national reconciliation processes between Fatah and Hamas, the two main political factions.

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> UNSCO, 2016, p. 10.

<sup>197</sup> PCBS, 2016f, p. 1.

<sup>198</sup> Jones and Abu-Hamed, 2015, p. 5.

<sup>199</sup> PCBS, 2011a, p. 2.

The presence of women in fields such as diplomacy remains low. In 2014, women accounted for only 5.8 per cent of ambassadors,<sup>200</sup> slightly up from 4.3 per cent in 2012.<sup>201</sup> Women account for 41.8 per cent of civil servants,<sup>202</sup> but in 2014 the percentage of women in general director and undersecretary positions was disproportionately low at 10.7 per cent.<sup>203</sup> That same year, only 14.5 per cent of prosecutors and 20.9 per cent of lawyers were women.<sup>204</sup> In the more conservative Gaza Strip, there was not a single women prosecutor in 2014. Women are also only marginally represented in commerce. A mere 3.4 per cent of the registered members of the Agricultural, Commerce and Industry Chamber in Palestine were female in 2014.<sup>205</sup> Again, in Gaza, not one member was a woman. The participation of young women in community activities remains limited. In 2015, 26 per cent of young men were involved in volunteer activities, mainly with charitable organizations, compared with 12.8 per cent of young women.<sup>206</sup>

Regardless of the Israeli occupation, the narrowing of political space and prevailing sociocultural norms regarding gender division of labour, women continue to mobilize in order to participate in civil society and the political arena (box 7). A 2016 study on the political participation of women in Gaza highlights factors that contribute to women's exercise of voice and leadership, including: "Access to higher education; supportive male family members; economic security that enabled women to participate in politics while also balancing family responsibilities; and exceptional personal courage in defying dominant gender norms".<sup>207</sup> More determined action is needed to increase women's political participation and representation at all levels of decision-making and to support women in elected and appointed posts. The decision, with the Ministry of Women Affairs in the lead, to develop a national strategy to promote the political participation of women is welcomed.

#### **Box 7. Women and political activism**

In addition to working at the community level on awareness-raising, capacity-building and mobilization initiatives, Palestinian women's rights organizations also lobby political parties to enhance women's participation and representation. The Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development (PWWSD) has helped to establish 48 women's shadow councils across the West Bank to lend support to elected women councillors and to ensure that women's interests are taken into consideration in municipal and public affairs. PWWSD trains the shadow councillors in negotiating and communication skills, teamwork, municipal legislation, leadership and assessing community needs. The Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC) has been working for nearly two decades to promote structural change in political parties and the review of their by-laws from a gender perspective. The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH), among its many other activities, works to promote gender-sensitive leadership and gender-responsive local governance. The Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) promotes legal reform in the interests of gender equality and protecting women from violence. It also works to improve the leadership skills of women in order to boost their participation in political life. The women they train go on to devote themselves to awareness-raising efforts in local communities through workshops and meetings on active citizenship, rights and duties, community and political participation, advocacy and networking.

*Source:* Adapted from Alpha International for Polling Research and Informatics, 2016.

<sup>200</sup> PCBS, 2016g, p. 2.

<sup>201</sup> PCBS, 2014, p. 2.

<sup>202</sup> PCBS, 2016g, p. 2.

<sup>203</sup> PCBS, 2015b.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> PCBS, 2016e, p. 129.

<sup>207</sup> Jones, Abu-Hamed and Plank, 2016, p. 27.

## B. ALIGNING NATIONAL LEGISLATION WITH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

The Palestinian legal system consists of multiple layers of laws and regulations inherited through history, including customary law, Ottoman, British Mandate, Jordanian (in the West Bank), Egyptian (in Gaza) and Israeli laws. Existing legislation discriminates against women, particularly in matters of divorce, child custody, inheritance and violence against women. There is a particular need to overhaul the Criminal Code and personal status laws.

Under the Basic Law, the provisions of international humanitarian and human rights treaties and conventions to which Palestine accedes become binding once they are published in the Official Gazette.<sup>208</sup> This is an important step towards ensuring their enforcement. The recent ratification of 15 human rights treaties, including CEDAW, signals a commitment on the part of the State of Palestine to meet international standards on women's rights. However, full implementation of the Convention is hindered by the Israeli occupation. The State of Palestine has limited jurisdiction in Area C and Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem come under Israeli jurisdiction. Moreover, the ongoing political divide between the West Bank and Gaza, and the suspension of the Palestinian Legislative Council since 2007, have impeded efforts to harmonize legal efforts. The State of Palestine is expected to submit its initial report on implementation of the CEDAW in late 2017.

Despite the difficulties, the Government, in cooperation with women's rights organizations and supported by United Nations and donor agencies, took serious steps during the reporting period towards enhancing gender equality and promoting the compliance of national legislation with international human rights standards, as provided for under the Convention.

After years of work by women's rights organizations, the NGO Forum on Violence against Women (Al Muntada) and the Ministry of Women Affairs, the Council of Ministers provisionally accepted the Family Protection from Violence Bill in 2013. At the time of writing, it was being prepared for ratification by the Council. If passed, the landmark legislation will be the first to address domestic violence against women, affording protection to victims and holding perpetrators accountable. It will encourage women to seek support from the police's Family Protection Unit and provide for the creation of family protection courts. Proposed amendments to the Criminal Code, submitted to the Presidential Office in 2011, have, however, yet to be approved.

In 2015, the Council of Ministers approved a strategic framework for a National Action Plan (NAP) on Security Council Resolution 1325. It includes three pillars: protection, accountability and participation. It focuses on developing protection mechanisms for women facing violations due to the Israeli occupation; strengthening accountability by focusing on monitoring and documentation violations, and advocacy; and increasing representation and participation of women in decision-making, peace processes and national reconciliation. The framework was the fruit of dialogue between government bodies, the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) and women's rights organizations. The Ministry of Women Affairs, supported by UN Women and ESCWA, and in partnership with women's rights organizations, officially launched the NAP for the period of 2017-2019.

## C. NATIONAL MACHINERIES FOR WOMEN

Established in 2003, the Ministry of Women Affairs sets and develops the Government's gender strategies and plans, based on the principles set forth under the Convention and the Sustainable Development Goals. It monitors the sectoral plans of other ministries, works to strengthen their gender mainstreaming initiatives, and aims to ensure that sufficient human, technical and financial resources are allocated to the

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<sup>208</sup> ICHR, 2015, p. 15.

design and adoption of gender-sensitive budgeting. It is not an executive ministry, and works with a wide network of government and civil society institutions to promote gender equitable policies and measures.

Under the Government's National Development Plan for 2014-2016, the Ministry of Women Affairs, supported by UN Women and in consultation with government bodies, civil society and United Nations agencies, developed the Cross-Sectoral National Gender Strategy: Promoting Gender Equity, Equality and the Empowerment of Women. It focused on five objectives: to increase the participation of women in the labour force; reduce all forms of violence against Palestinian women; boost the involvement of women in decision-making; ensure access to all basic services without discrimination; and universalize gender mainstreaming. The Ministry recently reviewed implementation of the strategy and is working with the line ministries on a renewed strategy for 2017-2022. The review looked at gender-equitable policies adopted in sectoral and cross-sectoral plans; progress in achieving key performance indicators and strategic goals; and budget allocation.

#### **IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Israeli military occupation continues to cause widespread suffering and poverty among Palestinian households, and impede the social, economic and political advancement of Palestinian women and girls. The military occupation needs to end if the rights of Palestinian women and girls are to be upheld. However, the National Consensus Government, in cooperation with civil society organizations, can also do more to advance the status of women and girls in line with international standards and conventions such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Security Council Resolution 1325 and CEDAW.

Recommendations for gender-sensitive legislative reforms, enhanced women's political participation and socioeconomic policy follow. They are in line with policy measures included in the Government's national planning documents and its commitments to human rights instruments. They comply with recommendations made by leading civil society and human rights organizations in the West Bank and Gaza.

##### **Legislative reforms**

1. In light of its ratification, without reservations, of CEDAW and other human rights treaties, the development of unified national laws in compliance with international standards on women's rights should be expedited.
2. In particular, amendments to the Criminal Code, prepared by the Ministry of Justice in close consultation with women's rights organizations, should be approved.
3. Personal status laws need to be brought into line with international standards. In the immediate term, the Government should ensure that the minimum age of marriage for girls is raised to 18 and complement legal reform with socioeconomic measures to deter child marriage.
4. The Family Protection from Violence Bill, finalized during the reporting period, should be passed into law and enforced.

##### **Political participation**

1. The development of a national strategy by the Ministry of Women Affairs to promote women's political participation, in consultation with civil society organizations, signals the Government's commitment to increasing women's political participation and representation at all levels of decision-making. Political commitment, and technical and financial support will be required to implement and monitor the strategy.
2. The introduction of quota systems in the State of Palestine in 2005 contributed to reducing gender bias in the 2012 local elections. Increasing the quota of female representation from 20 to 30 per cent in local

councils, as called for by the GUPW and women's rights organizations, and introducing such a quota system for unions, political committees and other bodies would significantly enhance women's participation in political decision-making.

3. Efforts to engage Palestinian women in national reconciliation processes and in negotiations with Israel need to be intensified in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1325. Women leaders, for example, should be included in delegations related to reconciliation, ending the occupation and conflict resolution.

### **Socioeconomic rights**

1. The National Cross-Sectoral Gender Strategy for 2017-2022 should be finalized in close consultation with line ministries, other government bodies and civil society organizations. The Government and donors should allocate sufficient financial and human resources to promote the social, educational, health and economic rights of women, especially those living in East Jerusalem, vulnerable communities in Area C, and Gaza.

2. Efforts to implement gender-responsive budgeting should be stepped up in the design and implementation of the 2017-2022 National Planning Agenda. Technical capacities, including of staff in the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning, in gender-sensitive indicator and target-setting, need to be upgraded.

3. More needs to be done to provide women with access to quality education and training that translates into decent jobs and does not reinforce traditional gender divisions of labour. Market-based vocational and business development programmes to promote female entrepreneurship should be supported.

4. To ensure the success of the national referral system for victims of violence against women and those at risk, there is a need to enhance community awareness, upgrade protection services and provide response and referral service providers with specialized training.



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