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Social and Economic Situation of Palestinian Women and Girls

(July 2016 – June 2018)

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**Social and Economic Situation of Palestinian
Women and Girls
(July 2016 – June 2018)**



United Nations
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Executive Summary

This report reviews the situation of Palestinian women and girls during the period July 2016-June 2018, focusing on political, social, economic and human rights developments. Building upon previously published research of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) on the status of Palestinian women and girls and drawing upon the most recent data available, this report highlights the complex situation of women and girls, revealing both progress and setbacks in the context of the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza.

The first chapter of the report presents a background of the volatile political setting and its impact on the well-being and rights of women and girls. It lays out the devastating effects of the 11-year Israeli blockade of Gaza on the nearly two million Palestinians who are denied free access to the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory and to the outside world. It also highlights the gendered impacts of occupation-related policies, such as increasing settlement activity, threats of forced eviction and house demolitions, particularly in East Jerusalem and Area C of the West Bank. The chapter also presents major developments in the security and political situation in the occupied Palestinian territory during the reporting period including the United States administration's recognition – in violation of international law – of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the Great March of Return along Israel's border fence by Palestinian refugees in Gaza demanding their right to return to their land and homes and a lifting of the Israeli blockade.

The second chapter presents the socioeconomic indicators that define the lives of women and girls in the State of Palestine. It provides information on the increasing gap in living standards between the communities within the West Bank, and between West Bank and Gaza where the blockade, combined with periodic escalation of violence and the long-standing political divide between the Government of Palestine and the de facto authorities, has led to further deterioration in the living conditions for women and girls in Gaza and has deepened their vulnerability. The chapter also illustrates the mixed picture of women's rights, where high educational attainment levels among women are in sharp contrast to their escalating levels of unemployment. Furthermore, during the reporting period, the health rights of women and girls continued to be undermined by the blockade of Gaza and by the discriminatory building permit policies in Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. And despite a number of commendable measures put in place by the Government of Palestine over the reporting period, violence against women and girls continued unabated, posing a significant challenge to the attainment of their economic, social, civil and political rights.

The third chapter assesses the extent to which the State of Palestine has made progress in aligning national legislation and policies with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda being implemented by in the West Bank. It notes that while there have been a number of positive steps, including the launch of the National Action Plan on the Implementation of the Security Council resolution 1325 for the State of Palestine for the period 2017-2019, legislative reforms need to be expedited to better protect and promote the rights of women and girls. The chapter also confirms the crucial role that civil society organizations in the State of Palestine continue to play in advocating for the advancement of the rights of women and girls. Finally, it examines women's political representation and notes that much more needs to be done to increase the number of females holding political office and assuming decision-making positions.

The report concludes with a set of recommendations that encompass a broad range of gender-sensitive legal and institutional reforms along with economic and social measures to enhance the rights and well-being of women and girls.

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Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
GBV	Gender-based violence
GUPW	General Union of Palestinian Women
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICHR	Independent Commission for Human Rights
NPA	National Policy Agenda
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PWWSD	Palestinian Working Women Society for Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TAM	Women Media and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
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 for the Middle East Peace Process
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WCLAC	Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling
WHO	World Health Organization
WILPF	Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

I. THE POLITICAL SETTING AND GENDERED ASPECTS OF THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORY UNDER OCCUPATION

In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2003/42 on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, and in line with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) resolution 330 (XXX) requesting the secretariat to “monitor, analyse and document the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation and Israeli violations of the rights of the Palestinian people and of international law,” ESCWA issues periodic reports on the status of women and girls in the State of Palestine.¹ The information contained in this report is based on data published 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 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Data and analysis have also been complemented by information provided by the Palestinian Ministry of Women’s Affairs, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education as well as civil society organizations and international development agencies.

The present report covers the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2018, a timeframe that was marred by major developments in the security and political situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.² The fiftieth anniversary of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza was reached in June 2017. It was also the tenth year of the sea, air and land blockade of Gaza and the ongoing and concerning deterioration of living standards for women and girls. The reporting period also marked more than a century since the Balfour Declaration was signed, the seventieth anniversary of the Nakba³ and the thirtieth anniversary of the first Intifada. With each of these anniversaries, there continues to be no end in sight for the protracted humanitarian crisis and repeated human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territory.

A. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The prolonged Israeli occupation, characterized by frequent incidences of violence and violations of international law, continued to adversely affect advances in Palestinian women’s political, civil, social and economic rights in the occupied Palestinian territory during the reporting period.

1. *Political context*

International human rights law and international humanitarian law are applicable in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza.⁴ Pursuant to the 1993 Oslo Accords 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 Oslo II Accord divided the West Bank into three administrative zones: Area A (under Palestinian civil jurisdiction and security control), Area B (under Palestinian civil and Israeli security control) and Area C (under full Israeli civil and security control).

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

² This report employs the following terminology: Government of Palestine is used to describe the legal entity governing the State of Palestine; State of Palestine is used to describe the Government’s engagement in the international sphere as a State recognized by the United Nations; occupied Palestinian territory is used to describe the geographical space and division of the territory under Israeli occupation.

³ The Nakba (Arabic for ‘catastrophe’) is the term used to describe the mass displacement of Palestinians from their homes and villages in 1948.

⁴ A/RES/72/85.

In the 25 years since the first agreement was signed, no political progress has been made on the transfer of control over Area C, which comprises more than 60 per cent of the West Bank, to the Government of Palestine. Indeed, Israeli control over Area C has become even more entrenched. The Palestinian Government's ability to enforce its laws in Area C and its capacity to extend much needed public services, including health, education and protection services to women and girls in vulnerable communities (which are not provided by the Government of Israel despite this requirement under international law), is thus stifled by the geopolitical situation. This lack of progress is expected to prolong negative development indicators, particularly for women and girls in the most marginalized areas.

East Jerusalem, occupied by Israel since 1967, was officially and unilaterally annexed by Israel in 1980 with the passing of the Basic Law: Jerusalem, Capital of Israel, in an act that violated international law. Internationally condemned, it was deemed null and void by the Security Council.⁵ Israel proceeded with applying its civil law in East Jerusalem even while it remains occupied territory under international law. During the reporting period, the Government of Israel continued to pursue a policy of physical, political and economic separation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank and de facto annexation of areas surrounding the city.⁶

In 2005, Israel dismantled settlements in Gaza and withdrew its forces as part of a unilateral plan to disengage from this part of the occupied territory. Despite its disengagement, Israel continues to control all border crossings by land, apart from the Rafah Crossing that is controlled by Egypt, as well as Gaza's sea and air space and remains the occupying Power in the Gaza Strip.⁷ Since 2007, Israel has imposed a restrictive blockade on Gaza, where nearly two million residents are essentially trapped in that they are denied free access to the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory and to the outside world. Gaza also suffered a series of Israeli military offensives since the imposition of the blockade, in July-August 2014 and in August 2018. These factors have led to catastrophic living conditions, including extremely high poverty and unemployment rates, continuous electricity cuts and a dire water and sanitation situation. The United Nations Country Team in the occupied Palestinian territory projects that at the current rate Gaza will become "unlivable" by 2020.⁸ This context has engendered a visible deterioration in the living conditions of women and girls in Gaza and has deepened their vulnerability (box 1).

Box 1. Daily lives of women and girls in Gaza

The year 2017 marked ten years of the Israeli blockade of Gaza by land, air and sea. Over the decade, the tight restrictions on movement of people and goods, three successive military assaults in 2008/09, 2012 and 2014 and the internal political divide between the Government of Palestine and the de facto authorities in Gaza, have taken a heavy toll on the daily lives of women and girls.

Gaza's economy has been decimated over the past decade. The poverty rate has jumped up from 38.9 per cent in 2011 to 53 per cent in 2017. The private sector has stagnated, leading to sky-high unemployment rates, especially among young educated women. Between the first quarter of 2007 and the second quarter of 2018, the unemployment rate of women in Gaza soared from an already high 29.8 per cent to a staggering 78.3 per cent. During the same period, the gap between female and male unemployment rates in Gaza steadily increased (from 0.7 to 33.8 percentage points). Gaza's infrastructure and service delivery have rapidly deteriorated and been further undermined by the chronic energy shortages. According to UNFPA and the GBV sub-cluster the "electricity and fuel crisis has only further intensified the situation making the living conditions of women worse, disrupting almost all aspects of daily life, especially the household tasks, which by society are considered the job of women". Concurrently with the increasing impoverishment and deteriorating living standards, population density has continued to grow in Gaza, from an estimated 4,140 persons per km² in 2007 to 5,204 persons per km² in 2017, compounding the shortage of

⁵ [S/RES/478](#).

⁶ See [E/ESCWA/30/5](#); [A/73/45717](#); United Nations, 2018b.

⁷ See for example, International Criminal Court, 2014, p. 6; [A/HRC/37/75](#).

⁸ United Nations Country Team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2017, p. 3.

Box 1 (continued)

housing and living space. This has potentially dire consequences for the quality of life for women given the association between overcrowding, loss of privacy and increased vulnerability to domestic violence. While accurate data remains difficult to obtain, various reports suggest that the dire humanitarian situation and ongoing violence perpetrated by Israeli forces have led to increased incidences of gender-based violence and protection violations.

Sources: State of Palestine, Central Bureau of Statistics, 2007, p. 19, 2009, p. 1, 2018g, pp. 3-4, 2018b, p. 9, 2018d; United Nations Population Fund and Gender-Based Violence Sub-Cluster Palestine, 2018, p. 1.

On 29 November 2012, pursuant to General Assembly resolution [67/19](#), the State of Palestine was granted non-member Observer State status at the United Nations. Having submitted ratification instruments, Palestine is now a State Party to and bears legal obligations with respect of international human rights treaties. Since 2014, the State of Palestine has acceded to over 55 international agreements and treaties, affirming the State's commitment to international human rights standards and solidifying its status internationally.⁹ Accession to international treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), is a positive step towards enhancing the promotion and protection of women's rights in the State of Palestine, given that they impose legal duties on States Parties with regard to individuals living under State jurisdiction.

Despite advances in the international recognition of the State of Palestine and the continuation of international efforts to revive Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, prospects for a just, lasting and peaceful two-State solution and an end to the occupation have eroded. Over the course of the reporting period, the Government of Israel continued its policy of land appropriation and settlement activity in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in clear violation of Security Council resolution [2334](#), adopted on 23 December 2016, which affirms that all Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory constitute a flagrant violation of international law. The Secretary-General reiterated in February 2018 that ongoing settlement construction and expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is illegal under United Nations resolutions¹⁰ and international law and issued a rebuke, pressing the parties to make the two-State solution a reality.¹¹

During the reporting period, settlement expansion continued unabated. Peace Now's annual report on settlement construction in 2017 in the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) reveals 17 per cent more building activity than the yearly average over the better part of the past decade.¹² Moreover, in March 2017, for the first time in more than 25 years, the Government of Israel approved the establishment of an entirely new settlement in the West Bank, Amihai. "The settlement was established for the families who were evacuated from the Amona [in the central West Bank] outpost after the Israeli High Court declared the outpost to be illegal".¹³

Settlement expansion has been accompanied by a worrying number of new legislative and policy measures aiming to extend Israeli jurisdiction and control over Area C. On 6 February 2017, the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset, enacted the Law for the Regulation of Settlement in Judea and Samaria [West Bank], 5777-2017 that allows for the retroactive "legalization" under Israeli law of settlements built illegally on

⁹ [CEDAW/C/PSE/1](#), para. 11.

¹⁰ Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016) addresses Israel's establishment of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory and notes their lack of "legal validity". This resolution also affirms that settlements "constitute a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace".

¹¹ United Nations, 2018a.

¹² Peace Now, 2018b, p. 1.

¹³ [A/HRC/37/75](#), para. 9.

private Palestinian land. During the reporting period, laws aiming to tighten Israeli control over Jerusalem were also presented, advanced or adopted. In addition, military order No. 1789 was issued in August 2017, establishing a “civil services administration” for settlements in the area of Hebron under Israeli control (H2), amounting to a consolidation of the settler presence in Hebron, in violation of international humanitarian law.¹⁴ According to the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, these “new laws and policy shifts, accompanied by the continued proposal of various legislative measures seeking to annex specific settlements and municipalities in the West Bank, represent what has been called a paradigm shift in the way the Israeli government conducts the occupation”.¹⁵ During the reporting period, a draft of the so-called Nation-State Law declared that the Government of Israel views “...Jewish settlement as a national value and will labour to encourage and promote its establishment and consolidation.” Israel’s proposed constitutional legislation to confirm its status as the nation State of the Jewish people also raises an alarm about the promotion of unrestrained building of settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.¹⁶

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has noted that, “businesses play a key role in facilitating the overall settlement enterprise, contributing to Israel’s confiscation of land and the transfer of its population through commercial development”.¹⁷ International law recognizes that non-State actors, including businesses, also have the responsibility to respect human rights and humanitarian law also applies to businesses in conflict zones.¹⁸

The decision of the United States on 6 December 2017 to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to relocate the American Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem has been condemned by an overwhelming majority of Member States as contravening relevant Security Council resolutions,¹⁹ international law and international humanitarian law. In the aftermath, the General Assembly passed a resolution declaring the status of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital as “null and void”.²⁰ The decision was also perceived as a major blow to the Oslo Peace Process resulting in the abandonment of the United States as mediator. The move also exacerbated Israel’s sense of impunity, reinforcing the perception that Israel will not truly be held accountable for its violations of various instruments of international law, which includes increasing settlements, responding with greater violence against civilians and passing laws that undermine prospects for a two-State solution.

For these reasons, the occupied Palestinian territory remains a site of aberrations. The ongoing occupation has manifested in different ways throughout the territory, with a long-term blockade and perennial sieges and strikes in the Gaza; a wall, checkpoints, illegal settlements and repeated incursions in the West Bank; and the wholesale annexation of and illegal settlements in East Jerusalem. Such impunity may have a disproportionate impact on Palestinian women and girls.

2. *Security situation*

The security situation in the occupied Palestinian territory continued to deteriorate during the reporting period. Palestinian civilians faced various threats to their lives and physical security. Conflict-related violence, including Israeli military operations, search and arrest campaigns, excessive use of force by Israeli security

¹⁴ [A/HRC/37/43](#), para. 12.

¹⁵ [A/HRC/37/75](#), para. 20.

¹⁶ The law was passed on 19 July 2018.

¹⁷ [A/HRC/37/39](#), para. 46.

¹⁸ [A/HRC/17/31](#); International Committee of the Red Cross, 2006.

¹⁹ [A/RES/ES-10/19](#).

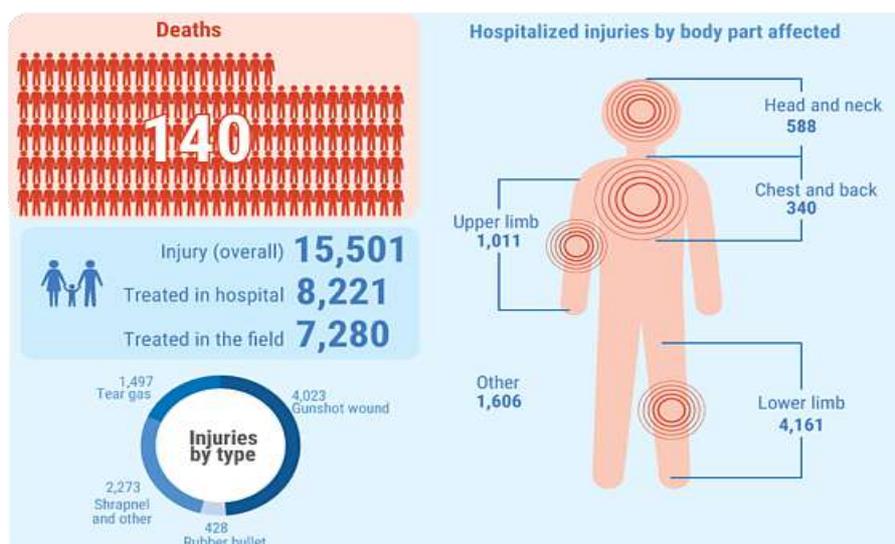
²⁰ [A/ES-10/L.22](#).

and military forces against Palestinian protestors and intimidation and attacks by Israeli settlers prevailed with differentiated impact on women, men, girls and boys.

Conflict-related casualties spiked in 2018. The United States administration’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital increased tensions across the occupied Palestinian territory. In Gaza, a series of mass protests, known as “The Great March of Return”, was launched on 30 March 2018 along Israel’s border fence by Palestinian refugees who demanded their right to return to their homes and land and a lifting the 11-year blockade imposed by Israel. The excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by Israeli forces, including the use of live ammunition against protestors, led to a high number of casualties and fatalities among unarmed Palestinian demonstrators.²¹ During the period 30 March – 12 June 2018, 140 Palestinians were killed (including one woman and one girl) and over 15,501 were injured (figure 1).²² According to OCHA, as of 26 June, over 1,400 people with severe injuries are at risk of longer-term physical disability. Of those with long-term disabilities, 53 received lower limb amputations, eight lost upper limbs and 10 have been left paralyzed due to spinal cord injuries.²³ Gaza's health sector, already severely struggling from the impact of the blockade, the ongoing internal divide in the Palestinian civil services (see more below), depleted medical supplies and a chronic energy crisis, was barely able to function with the mass influx of injuries. The death and/or disability of men may impact gender dynamics at the household level. This could manifest in increased levels of violence against women by extended family members and may also place an increased burden on Palestinian women (and girls) to assume greater responsibility within the household, particularly if the male that was killed or disabled was the family breadwinner.

The adult female casualty noted above was Razan An Najjar, a 21-year-old woman from Gaza who was fatally shot by live ammunition on 1 June 2018 while carrying out humanitarian duties as a volunteer first responder (box 2). Events such as this are representative of how severely the violence has escalated since the 2014 military assault against Gaza and have raised serious concerns about the outbreak of a new assaults and a complete collapse of order in Gaza.

Figure 1. Deaths and injuries from Gaza demonstrations and other incidents, 30 March - 30 June 2018



Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2018a.

²¹ A/ES-10/L.23, para. 2.

²² OCHA, 2018a.

²³ Ibid., pp. 1-2.

Regarding the worsening security situation in Gaza, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Fatou Bensouda, called for an end to violence and stated, “Violence against civilians - in a situation such as the one prevailing in Gaza – could constitute crimes under the Rome Statute of the ICC, as could the use of civilian presence for the purpose of shielding military activities.”²⁴

Box 2. Najjar, Volunteer Paramedic

United Nations officials and agencies expressed their outrage in the face of the killing of Razan An Najjar, a 21-year-old female volunteering as a first responder, while carrying out her humanitarian duties with the Palestinian Medical Relief Society [PMRS]. Razan was hit by live ammunition fired by Israeli forces while trying, with other first responders, to reach those injured during the “Great March of Return” demonstrations close to Israel’s perimeter fence around 18:30. She was taken immediately to a trauma stabilization point, and then to the European Gaza Hospital, where she died just after 19:00. Three others in her team were also injured

Reports indicate that Razan was assisting injured demonstrators and wearing her first responder clothing, clearly distinguishing her as a health-care worker even from a distance,” said James Heenan, Head of Office, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in the occupied Palestinian territory. “Under international human rights law, which applies in this context along with international humanitarian law, lethal force may only be used as a last resort and when there is an imminent threat of death or serious injury. It is very difficult to see how Razan posed such a threat to heavily-armed, well-protected Israeli forces in defensive positions on the other side of the fence.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has called for the protection of health workers and patients at all times. Dr. Gerald Rockenschaub, Head of the WHO office in the occupied Palestinian territory, stated, “...our thoughts are with the family of Razan, and with our colleagues from the PMRS. Such attacks on health care must not happen and we need to enhance our efforts to ensure the protection of our frontline health workers.”

Source: WHO, 2018c.

Occupation-related violence has exacerbated pre-existing gender inequalities. Most notably, there are growing indications that the mass demonstrations are impacting the psychological stress of women and increasing their risk of gender-based violence (GBV), among other harms. Mothers reported increased psychological and emotional violence as husbands and other family members blamed them for “allowing” their children to become injured while participating in protests. Widowed women are at a heightened risk of psychological and economic violence by family members, as some are expected to remarry, sometimes even to the brother of their late husband.²⁵

The reporting period also saw multiple escalations in violence in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. After a three-year decline, Israeli settler violence against Palestinians, including women and girls, has been on the rise since the beginning of 2017: between January and April 2018, OCHA as documented 84 incidents of settler violence, representing a 50 and 162 per cent increase compared to 2017 and 2016, respectively.²⁶ Violence by settlers in Area C and East Jerusalem ranged from physical assaults to stone throwing, vandalizing of farmland, fields and olive groves to damaging cars and property. Only 8.1 per cent of investigation files into offenses perpetrated by Israeli civilians against Palestinians in the West Bank, monitored by Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights organization, have led to an indictment, which demonstrates the continued impunity and lack of accountability.²⁷

²⁴ International Criminal Court, 2018.

²⁵ Gender-Based Violence Sub-Cluster, Palestine, 2018, p. 1.

²⁶ OCHA, 2018c, p. 14.

²⁷ Yesh Din, 2018, p. 1.

In her report, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, reported that settler violence, to which an estimated 70,000 Palestinians living in Area C were vulnerable, “has a psychological impact on women, as they constantly fear for themselves and their children increasing the pressure on and within the family and being conducive to domestic violence”.²⁸ Testimonies collected by the Palestinian women’s rights organization, the Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), show that many women living near settlements are constantly on alert and are scared to leave their houses alone after experiences of settler attacks.²⁹ Najwa, a 52-year old woman in Silwan, East Jerusalem, who, along with her two grandsons, was violently attacked by settlement guards and a settler on 12 July 2017, explained, “It was a difficult and tiring experience, the amount of fear, helplessness and insecurity is indescribable.”³⁰

3. *Internal political divide*

The ongoing political and administrative divide between the West Bank and Gaza, particularly between the Fatah and Hamas movements, and the suspension since 2007 of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), further impeded national policymaking, legislative reforms and economic development during the reporting period. In September 2017, the Palestinian parties embarked on another round in the reconciliation process. In October 2017, with mediation by Egypt, the two sides reached an agreement on measures to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and to achieve the goal of Palestinian unity. However, actual progress to date has been limited. In fact, as the political divide deepened, the Government of Palestine introduced a number of financial measures to end subsidies to the de facto authorities in Gaza, including the reduction of public employee salaries and electricity payments. The Palestinian governance crisis in general, and the related measures undertaken during the reporting period, have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.³¹

As a direct result of this political divide and the inability to come to a consensus among the Palestinian parties, the municipal elections which were held in May 2017 in the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) were not held in Gaza. The last Palestinian local elections that were held in 2012 also excluded Gaza. (Women’s political participation and representation will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3).

B. LIFE UNDER OCCUPATION

1. *Movement and access restrictions*

Over the period July 2016 – June 2018, the Israeli authorities continued to impose wide-ranging and systematic movement and access restrictions applicable only to Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory. Through a complex system of permit regimes, administrative procedures and physical obstacles, freedom of movement for Palestinians between cities and villages in the West Bank, between East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, between the West Bank and Gaza and between Gaza and the outside world, remained restricted. Israeli policies have cut off occupied East Jerusalem, once the centre of Palestinian political, commercial, spiritual and cultural life, from the rest of the West Bank and Gaza. Restrictions on movement including the wall in the West Bank, checkpoints, a permit system for entry into Jerusalem and the blockade of Gaza, have exacerbated the geographical fragmentation of the occupied Palestinian territory. They have undermined economic growth, restricted women and girls’ access to basic services and opportunities and infringed on their economic, social and cultural rights.

In the West Bank, the daily lives of many Palestinian women and girls are 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 (especially in areas near closed military and firing zones), in villages in the

²⁸ [A/HRC/35/30/Add.1](#), para. 66.

²⁹ Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 2017, p. 15.

³⁰ Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, 2017.

³¹ Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, 2018, pp. 15-16.

vicinity of Israeli settlements and within the H2 area in Hebron. Israeli barriers to movement entail violations of a wide range of human rights law and international humanitarian law. They also “have a gender-specific impact and pose a substantial risk especially for (expectant) mothers, female students and workers, resulting in systematic denial of their socioeconomic rights”.³²

In East Jerusalem, a key driver of women’s vulnerability has been the wall in the West Bank. Its deviation from the 1949 Armistice Line, also known as the Green Line, has resulted in tens of thousands of Palestinian Jerusalemites, especially from the village of Kafr Aqab and the Shu’fat refugee camp, being “walled out” of the city. Although households in walled out communities of East Jerusalem have retained their permanent residency status and continue to pay municipal taxes, their access to health, education and municipal services has become even more restricted. The neighborhoods and enclaves cut off by the wall suffer from limited provision of basic infrastructure and services; movement restrictions, including crossing checkpoints, have also rendered their access to services that are only available on the other side of the wall difficult.

In Gaza, the blockade has trapped nearly two million residents. This isolation has been exacerbated by restrictions imposed since June 2013 by the Egyptian authorities at the Rafah Crossing. During the reporting period, access of people and goods out of Gaza to Israel remained severely restricted. The year 2017 was the worst in terms of exit through the Erez Crossing, the main crossing for people, since 2014.³³ Access of people out of Gaza through the Rafah Crossing was also severely restricted during the same period. The Rafah Crossing was partially opened for only 36 days in 2017, compared to 263 days in 2013 before the restrictions were introduced. In the first half of 2018, there was a slight easing, and the number of days the Rafah Crossing was open climbed to 65.³⁴

The blockade of Gaza has adversely impacted all aspects of Palestinians’ daily lives and has led to a dire humanitarian situation, particularly for women and girls. These restrictions have reduced women and girls’ access to secure livelihoods and have disrupted family life (box 3).

Box 3. The Blockade and Disruption of Family Life

In March 2017, Rima Shaqfah-Muhammad decided to visit her cancer-stricken father in her hometown of Rafah, which she had left over a decade prior to moving to Egypt with her husband:

“I came to visit my family in Rafah when I was nine months pregnant. Ten days after I got here, I gave birth to my daughter Salma in a C-section. I was planning to stay with my parents in Rafah for a month – have my baby and then go back to Egypt. Three days after I got here, I registered with the Ministry of the Interior to leave via Rafah Crossing, but I’ve been stuck here with my three girls for ten months already. Since I got here, the crossing opened about five times but I never managed to get through, although I am a resident of Egypt and my daughters have Egyptian passports. Every time the crossing opened, I went there every day. My eldest daughter, Habiba, was supposed to start school but unfortunately, that didn’t happen. My husband keeps calling, asking how we are and trying to find out what’s happening at Rafah Crossing, when it will open again. He tells me how much he misses the girls and me. He hasn’t even met the baby, Salma. My other daughter Siniora doesn’t really know him either. She’s only two and a half years old, and she has spent almost a year with me here. I’m totally depressed, sad and exhausted. It’s very hard raising our daughters alone ... Sometimes I attend the rallies that women hold in Gaza and at Rafah Crossing. We raise protest signs saying, “Open Rafah Crossing!” and, “Our families are ruined, and our children scattered”, but it hasn’t helped so far. ...We can’t leave via Erez Crossing, either. The Israeli authorities forbid it. All I can do is keep hoping that they open Rafah Crossing, so we can get back safely to my husband and our home.”

Source: B’Tselem, 2018a.

³² A/HRC/36/NGO/106, p. 2.

³³ Gisha – Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, 2018, p. 1.

³⁴ OCHA, 2018g.

2. *Residency and Family Reunification*

While Palestinians living in East Jerusalem are permanent residents of Israel and as such entitled to receive services such as social assistance, national insurance, health and education, they lack secure legal residency status. Between 1967 and 2017, 14,595 Palestinians had their Jerusalem residency revoked by the Israeli authorities; in 2016 alone, the residency status of 95 Palestinians in Jerusalem, including 41 women and 11 children, was revoked.³⁵ Israel has consistently expanded the criteria for revoking the residency status of Palestinians, and the reasons stated for revocation have included: acquiring residency or citizenship in another country; living abroad (including in the rest of the West Bank or Gaza) for more than seven years; and being unable to prove that their “centre of life” is Jerusalem.³⁶ During the reporting period, restrictions posed by Israel on Palestinians for maintaining residency in East Jerusalem were tightened with the passage of the amendment to the Entry into Israel Law. This amendment, approved by the Knesset in March 2018, allows the Israeli Minister of Interior to revoke the permanent residency status of those whom the Minister deems to have “committed acts that constitute breach of trust against the State of Israel”.³⁷

Women’s right to family life and protection of the family unit, enshrined in various international human rights instruments, continued to be undermined during the reporting period. In June 2017, the Knesset renewed – for the fourteenth time – the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (Temporary Order-2003). This law prohibits Palestinians married to citizens of Israel or permanent residents of East Jerusalem from acquiring citizenship or residency status. While the ban is absolute for inhabitants from Gaza, Palestinians from the West Bank have been able to obtain limited temporary residency only since 2005. This legislation poses serious limitations on Palestinian women from the West Bank or Gaza who are married to, or intend to marry, citizens of Israel or permanent residents of East Jerusalem.³⁸ Either couples “choose to (i) live separately with one spouse deprived of seeing the children grow up; (ii) live together with the spouse from the occupied Palestinian territory being considered illegal, deprived of basic rights and subject to deportation if found living in East Jerusalem; and (iii) live in the West Bank in which case the Israeli spouse risks losing Israeli citizenship, and the permanent residents risk losing residency status”.³⁹

3. *Home Demolition and Forcible Transfer*

The confiscation of land for settlement construction and discriminatory planning and zoning policies has made it all but impossible for Palestinians in Area C and East Jerusalem to secure building permits for homes, schools, clinics or businesses. These policies of the Government of Israel, in violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, are the primary triggers for the forced displacement of Palestinians. Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem and Bedouin and herding communities in Area C are the most vulnerable. There are over 10,000 people living in 63 communities in Area C of the West Bank at heightened risk of forcible transfer – 62 per cent of them are refugees.⁴⁰ As a result of the planning regime, at least one third of all Palestinian households in East Jerusalem lack Israeli building permits, which places 100,000 residents at risk of demolition-induced displacement.⁴¹

³⁵ Association for Civil Rights in Israel, 2017, p. 1.

³⁶ Al-Shabaka, the Palestinian Policy Network, 2017.

³⁷ The Knesset, 2018.

³⁸ Al-Haq, 2017, p. 2.

³⁹ [CEDAW/C/ISR/CO/6](#), para. 40 (b).

⁴⁰ OCHA, 2017a, p. 3.

⁴¹ OCHA, 2017d, p. 9.

During the period January 2016 through December 2018, in East Jerusalem alone, 206 housing units without permits were demolished, affecting 594 people.⁴² Reinstated by the Government of Israel in 2014, the policy of “punitive home demolitions” (targeting the homes of perpetrators of attacks against Israelis) continued throughout the reporting period, leaving 184 persons homeless.⁴³ The purpose of this policy “is to harm the family members of someone suspected of a crime, [which is] in clear violation of the basic tenets of international law” and amounts to collective punishment.⁴⁴ Legal action by settler groups to evict Palestinians in East Jerusalem from their homes also continued during the reporting period.⁴⁵ Settler groups are also increasingly petitioning the Israeli Supreme Court to enforce the State’s implementation of pending demolition orders in Area C.⁴⁶

The demolition of property, forced evictions and forcible transfers adversely affect women’s right to adequate housing, their quality of family life and have a serious impact on the emotional well-being of Palestinian women and girls. Home demolitions generally have a disproportionate impact on women because of their roles as primary caregivers of their families and managers of household livelihoods.⁴⁷ As noted by the Israeli Committee Against House Demolition, women suffer a double tragedy: not only do they lose their own domestic space, they are also often forced to move into the homes of other women, commonly their mothers- or sisters-in-law (see box 4).

Box 4. Impact of home demolitions on women

“Demolitions alter, even destroy, a woman’s entire persona and role in the family. Palestinian women generally do not have careers outside the home. Their identity as an individual and status as wives and mothers is wrapped up in their domestic life. When their homes are demolished, women often become disoriented, unable to function without that organizing domestic sphere. Some sink into a kind of mourning, although in some cases, especially if the husband has withdrawn, they take on more assertive roles in the family. Demolition represents a double tragedy for women. Not only do they lose their own domestic space, but they are forced to move into the homes of other women, their mothers- or sisters-in-law. The overcrowding and tension this generates is exacerbated by the fact that the “guest” woman has little control over the domestic sphere, over the care of her own husband and children, further diminishing her role and status. In many cases this results in severe tensions within the families, including domestic violence spawned by the wife’s demands (even unspoken) for a home of her own, and the husband’s inability to provide it. Eventually families may move into their own rented quarters – another expense – or even rebuild their home, having no choice but to risk another demolition. Whatever the case, for many women a demolished home, like a loved one, can never be replaced, and the wound never heals”.

Source: The Israeli Committee Against House Demolition, 2017, p. 9.

The reporting period also witnessed the Israeli Supreme Court’s final ruling on the emblematic and long-standing case of Khan Al Ahmar – Abu Al Helu, a Palestinian Bedouin community near the outskirts of East Jerusalem. The residents of Khan al Ahmar – Abu Al Helu were forcibly relocated from the village of Tel Arad in Israel’s Negev (Naqab) Desert in 1951, and were again relocated in 1975, when the land they had leased was expropriated, declared State land by Israel in 1975, and zoned for the establishment of an industrial zone and later for the creation of the Ma’ale Adumim settlement. On 24 May 2018, the Court rejected the petition to prevent the demolitions of all structures in the community, marking an end to a nearly decade-long legal effort to protect the community. The ruling paves the way for the forcible transfer of the community of Khan al Ahmar – Abu Al Helu, and for the expansion of the adjacent settlement of Kfar

⁴² B’Tselem, 2018b.

⁴³ B’Tselem, 2018c.

⁴⁴ [A/71/554](#), para. 27.

⁴⁵ OCHA, 2017a, p. 9.

⁴⁶ United Nations Country Team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2016, p. 135.

⁴⁷ UN Women, 2016, p. 18.

Adumim. This settlement had petitioned the Court for the implementation of the outstanding demolition orders against the Palestinian community. This ruling is considered a dangerous precedent as “Khan al Ahmar – Abu Al Helu is one of 18 communities located in or next to an area slated in part for the “E1 settlement plan”, aimed at creating a continuous built-up area between the Ma’ale Adumim settlement and East Jerusalem.”⁴⁸ This ruling raises grave concerns about the forcible transfer of some 2,000 additional Bedouin residents in the E1 area. The forcible transfer of Khan al Ahmar – Abu Al Helu would cause “far-reaching social and economic problems especially for the women of the community, as seen in past experience of forced displacement of Bedouin communities”.⁴⁹

4. *Night raids and daytime incursions*

During the reporting period, Israeli military night raids and daytime incursions leading to mass arrests in the West Bank persisted. Physical insecurity has been particularly acute in the 19 refugee camps in the West Bank. From January to September 2017 alone, Israeli military operations in West Bank refugee camps took place on an average of 14 times per week, totaling 581 raids, with some lasting up to four hours.⁵⁰ Military incursions in refugee camps are accompanied by constant and unpredictable use of tear gas with a devastating effect on the mental and physical health of residents including pregnant women – especially the most vulnerable, such as children and the elderly.⁵¹ Women’s rights organizations assert that night raids deny Palestinian women their privacy and regularly submit women to violence within their own homes, with long-term effects, such as depression and insomnia adversely impacting the personal development of young girls.⁵²

5. *Arrests, Detention and Political Imprisonment*

Since the beginning of the occupation more than 50 years ago, over 10,000 Palestinian women have been arrested and detained by Israeli military and security forces.⁵³ As of June 2018, there were 60 females among the 5,900 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli prisons.⁵⁴ The increasing targeting of human rights activists, including adolescent girls and women, and the criminalization of protests and criticism of the Israeli occupation are of deep concern. During the reporting period, Palestinian female activists were detained and arrested under the pretext of “incitement” for infractions such as posting occupation-related practices on Facebook and other social media.⁵⁵

The arrest and detention of the teenager Ahd Tamimi sparked the world’s attention. The 16-year-old was arrested in the middle of the night by armed Israeli security forces on 19 December 2017 and questioned by Israeli security officials without a lawyer or family members present. A military court charged her on 1 January 2018 with several counts of security-related offences, including aggravated assault of a soldier in her West Bank village of Nabi Saleh, and she spent eight months in prison in addition being fined. Her case highlighted the extent to which girls are vulnerable to rights violations under military occupation. As emphasized by OHCHR, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Israel is signatory, clearly

⁴⁸ OCHA, 2018h.

⁴⁹ Peace Now, 2018a.

⁵⁰ OCHA, 2017a, p. 12.

⁵¹ Haar and Ghannam, 2018.

⁵² WCLAC and the General Union of Palestinian Women, 2017, p. 5.

⁵³ Addameer, 2018a.

⁵⁴ Addameer, 2018b.

⁵⁵ WILPF, 2017, p. 24.

stipulates the “deprivation of liberty of children shall only be used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, and the best interests of the child are to be a primary consideration.”⁵⁶

Various reports by human rights organizations reveal that women and girls are subject to multiple forms of ill-treatment during their arrest and interrogation by Israeli forces, including sexual harassment, verbal abuse and physical assault. In her report, the Special Rapporteur on violence, its causes and consequences, stated that former female detainees reported that beatings, insults, threats and sexual harassment were “common practices as well as intrusive body searches, which often occur before and after court hearings or during the night as punitive measures”.⁵⁷ Moreover, women are “incarcerated in old prisons, with facilities designed for men that rarely meet the gender-specific needs of its female prisoners and [which] do not provide gender-sensitive social services”,⁵⁸ including, for instance, Arabic-speaking medical staff. As mothers, daughters or siblings, women and girls also experience high psychosocial distress witnessing the arrests and detention of their male family members (box 5). Palestinian women political prisoners are labeled as “security prisoners”, which means that they are placed in the same cells as female Israeli criminal offenders. In March 2017, 42 female prisoners were held in HaSharon Prison and 13 were held in Damon Prison; both prisons are located in Israel meaning that the women’s incarceration was in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention because civilians can only be detained under certain circumstances and prisoners ideally should not be detained on the soil of the occupying power.⁵⁹

Box 5. Testimony of a Mother

Om Abdel-Nasser, a Jerusalemite had been married for 25 years when her 14-years-old son was arrested. When the Israeli soldiers raided their house to arrest him, she explained in an interview, “*it was three o’clock in the morning. Since that time, I wake up terrified every night at the exact time. He is just a kid... Looking at his empty bed is a daily torture; visiting him [in prison] another type of torture*”. His arrest has adversely affected the well-being of his mother and has compounded the difficulties the family has already endured due to her husband’s insecure residency status. She holds a Jerusalem identity card while her husband holds a West Bank identity card. When they first married, she continually applied for family unification so that her husband could be a permanent resident of East Jerusalem, with her and their children. “*He was only offered a stay permit... After the imprisonment of our son, the Israeli authorities have revoked his permit; my husband cannot live with us in our home in Jerusalem anymore.*”

Source: Dhafer, 2017, pp. 37-38.

The mass arrests of Palestinian men also increase women’s responsibilities in providing for their families. The heavier economic burden resulting from men’s imprisonment has various ramifications on women’s status. For some households, it may increase their economic vulnerability and even lead to impoverishment, given women’s limited access to economic opportunities. For others, it may lead to improvements in gender relations and status. Notably, a 2017 study on understanding masculinities in the Arab region found that Palestinian men’s political imprisonment might be driving more gender-equitable care giving. Several of the male Palestinian former political prisoners interviewed indicated that “the extraordinary ability of women” to carry out this larger burden gave them greater respect and appreciation for women; the study suggests that this may have been the driver for some men to begin “undertaking conventionally female household tasks after they were released, such as feeding and bathing children and changing diapers”.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018.

⁵⁷ [A/HRC/35/30/Add.1](#), para. 54.

⁵⁸ Palestinian Working Women Society for Development, 2017, p. 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Kuttab and Heilman, 2017, p. 55.

II. DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC TRENDS AMONG PALESTINIAN WOMEN

Demographic and socioeconomic indicators throughout the reporting period highlight that entrenched gender discrimination and inequalities persist and continue to hinder Palestinian women and girls' enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

A. POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

By 2017, the total population of the State of Palestine was estimated at 4.78 million, with 2.88 million in the West Bank, and 1.9 million in Gaza.⁶¹ The population includes a large number of refugees, particularly in Gaza. There are nearly 775,000 refugees in the West Bank⁶² and 1.4 million refugees in Gaza, registered with UNRWA.⁶³

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS, BY REGION, 2017

Indicator	Palestine	Gaza	West Bank
Population (millions)	4.78	1.9	2.88
Ratio of men to women	103.3	---	---
Life expectancy female	75.4	74.9	75.7
Life expectancy male	72.3	71.7	72.6
Fertility	4.4	4.5	4.3
Population density (capita/km2)	794	5,204	510
Household size	5.1	5.6	4.8
Female-headed household	11%	9%	12%

Sources: PCBS, 2017b, 2018d.

The Palestinian population is young: the share of persons aged 0-14 years is an estimated 39 per cent of the total population.⁶⁴ The “youth bulge” (meaning the proportion of 15 to 29-year-olds to the total population) reached nearly 30 per cent in 2017.⁶⁵ The share of the elderly in the population (60 and above) is relatively low at 4.6 per cent of the total population: as women have longer life expectancy than men (75.4 compared with 72.3 years), there are fewer elderly men than women (86 males to 100 females).⁶⁶

Elderly women are more vulnerable to poverty than elderly men largely because of their lower educational levels and more restricted access to productive resources and income. They also are more vulnerable to disease and have limited access to services compared to elderly men and the rest of the population.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2018d.

⁶² <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/west-bank>.

⁶³ <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/gaza-strip>.

⁶⁴ PCBS, 2018d.

⁶⁵ PCBS, 2018j.

⁶⁶ PCBS, 2017a.

⁶⁷ OCHA, 2017a, p. 13.

The still-high fertility rate of 4.4⁶⁸ is largely attributable to early marriage, a low prevalence of divorce and a relatively low rate of contraceptive use. Palestinian women marry young: the median age at first marriage among females in the State of Palestine is 20 (compared to 24 for males).⁶⁹ Child marriage continues to be a cause for concern. According to the Population, Housing and Establishments Census of 2017, nearly 11 per cent “of women aged 20-24 were married under the age of 18 years (8.5 per cent in the West Bank and 13.8 per cent in the Gaza)”.⁷⁰ Most cases of child marriage concern girls between the ages of 15 and 17; nevertheless, numerous cases of girls being married at the age of 14 persist. In 2017, 761 cases of such marriages were registered⁷¹. Defense for Children International – Palestine asserts that the prevalence of child marriage might be even higher as some girls who marry below the legal age may not register or may delay formal registration until they reach the legal age.⁷²

The Palestinian culture maintains a strong commitment to the institution of marriage; nevertheless, marriage is not universal. While in some Arab States the proportion of never-married women diminishes rapidly after the age 30-35, the share of never-married women aged 45-54 in the occupied Palestinian territory is relatively high at 8.5 per cent (especially in the West Bank where it is more than twice that of Gaza: 10.7 per cent compared with 5 per cent).⁷³ It is unclear why this phenomenon exists, though some scholars have previously noted that those impacted have been among the most and the least educated women in Palestinian society.⁷⁴

In total, female-headed households make up an estimated 11 per cent of households, with relatively similar rates between the West Bank (12 per cent) and Gaza (9 per cent).⁷⁵ The practice of polygamy is on the decline. According to a 2017 study, only 1 per cent of men and less than 1 per cent of women reported currently being in polygamous unions, consistent with findings of national surveys.⁷⁶

Divorce rates remain low in the occupied Palestinian territory. The divorce rate is at a notably higher rate for females (1.8 per cent) than for males (0.3 per cent).⁷⁷ Similarly, the percentage of women who are separated or widowed is also considerably higher (5.9 per cent) than for males (0.6 per cent).⁷⁸ The rate of divorce, separation, or widowhood among women is thus higher than for men. The higher proportion of widowhood among women than men may be due to factors such as higher life expectancy of women than men especially given that husbands often marry younger wives and there is a higher tendency among males than females to remarry after the death of a spouse. In Gaza especially, the high prevalence of political violence has also raised concerns about the increasing number of widows. There are also reports that divorced and separated women are more likely than their male counterparts to experience social restrictions that interfere with their ability “to move freely, engage in extra-domestic productive activities, and in general exercise their agency to choose the course of their lives and those of their children”.⁷⁹

⁶⁸ PCBS, 2018d.

⁶⁹ Personal communication with PCBS, October 2018.

⁷⁰ PCBS, 2018h.

⁷¹ PCBS, 2018i.

⁷² Defense for Children International Palestine, 2016.

⁷³ State of Palestine, Prime Minister’s Office and United Nations Population Fund, 2016, p. 66.

⁷⁴ Johnson, 2010.

⁷⁵ PCBS, 2018d.

⁷⁶ Kuttab and Heilman, 2017, p. 51.

⁷⁷ PCBS, 2017b, p. 20.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ State of Palestine, Prime Minister’s Office and United Nations Population Fund, 2016, p. 50.

Among elderly women, only 54 per cent are married compared to 93.5 per cent of elderly males. The percentage of widowed among the elderly was 37 per cent for women compared to 5.2 per cent for men.⁸⁰

B. FOOD SECURITY AND POVERTY

Given the recurrent military operations of the occupation and the lack of progress towards national reconciliation, economic growth has decelerated. Overlaid with the continued decline in donor aid and subsequent contraction of reconstruction activities in Gaza, economic growth slowed to 2.4 per cent in 2017, and even that growth was mainly led by the West Bank; in Gaza, economic growth was a mere 0.5 per cent compared to 8 per cent in 2016.⁸¹ In this context of sluggish economic performance, living standards have continued to decline, especially in Gaza. In 2018, around 2.5 million Palestinians, half of the population, required humanitarian assistance.⁸²

The extremely precarious socioeconomic situation in Gaza is rooted in the consecutive military attacks, the protracted blockade and the ongoing electricity crisis, and has been exacerbated by the internal political divide. Poverty, food insecurity and unemployment have increased in Gaza, widening regional disparity with the West Bank (table 2). Poverty is not only more widespread in Gaza, it is also deeper, indicating a significantly higher proportion of poor persons unable to even meet their minimum need for food, clothing and housing.⁸³ About 80 per cent of Palestinians in Gaza receive aid, including food assistance that enables scarce cash resources to be spent on other essentials, preventing a further deterioration of food security and livelihood status, and reducing the impact of negative coping mechanisms.⁸⁴

TABLE 2. SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS, BY REGION

Indicator	West Bank	Gaza	Year
Poverty	13.9%	53%	2017
Deep Poverty	5.8%	33.7%	2017
Food Insecurity	13%	39%	2016

Sources: Data taken from PCBS, 2018g; and World Food Programme, 2017a.

Women tend to experience higher economic vulnerability due to their limited integration in job markets and restricted access to productive assets and land, all of which are exacerbated by discriminatory inheritance laws. Furthermore, women with disabilities tend to be the most economically marginalized, suffering from employment discrimination, often compounded by accessibility constraints.⁸⁵

As reported by the World Food Programme (WFP), “the prevalence of food insecurity among households headed by women is 15 percentage points higher than that among households headed by men – 36 versus 21 per cent”.⁸⁶ Poverty rates between female- and male-headed households were relatively similar in 2017: 30.6 per cent and 29.2 per cent respectively.⁸⁷ However, female-headed households are one of the highest

⁸⁰ PCBS, 2018a.

⁸¹ World Bank, 2018, p. 9.

⁸² OCHA, 2017a, p. 17.

⁸³ PCBS, 2018g, p. 3.

⁸⁴ OCHA, 2017a, p. 8.

⁸⁵ The Non-Governmental Women Coalition for the Implementation of CEDAW in the Occupied State of Palestine, 2017, p. 17.

⁸⁶ WFP, 2017a, p. 4.

⁸⁷ PCBS, 2018g, p. 4.

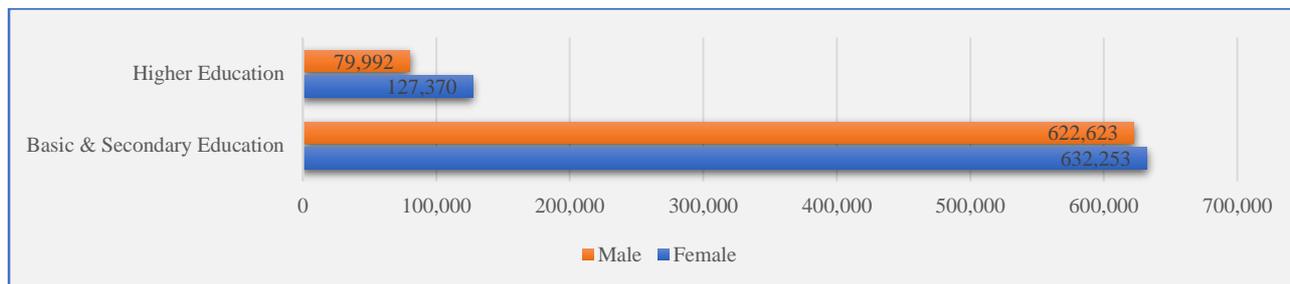
recipients of public assistance in both Gaza and the West Bank. It is likely that without such social protection and assistance, a greater number of female-headed households would fall deeper into poverty. In addition to the gender of the head of household, other determinants of food insecurity and poverty are the employment status of household head, being a refugee, urban poor or a small-scale farmer or herder, living in a refugee camp, having a high dependence ratio and having a household member with a disability or chronic illness.⁸⁸ Bedouin communities in Area C are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. While the overall food insecurity rate in the West Bank is 13 per cent, food insecurity among Bedouins in Area C is a staggering 61 per cent.⁸⁹ Pregnant and lactating women are particularly vulnerable to the risks of malnutrition due to food insecurity.

Palestinian women in East Jerusalem also face the general constraints that have led to low living standards for all the population. The separation wall in the West Bank and the discriminatory policies implemented by Israel, including those related to the delivery of basic services, land zoning and planning, have contributed to the impoverishment of Palestinian women and their families. An estimated 76 per cent of Palestinian adults and 83.4 per cent of children in East Jerusalem live below the poverty line, compared to average poverty rate of 21.7 per cent, and 30 per cent among children, in Israel.⁹⁰

C. EDUCATION AND LITERACY

Basic education is almost universal in the occupied Palestinian territory and the recently enacted Education Law of 2017 ensures a mandatory minimum of ten years of education. Gender parity in education has been achieved, and there are now a higher number of females enrolled in basic and secondary and higher education than males. At the university level the gap between females and males widens, with the number of females vastly surpassing that of males (figure 2).⁹¹

Figure 2. Number of Students, by Level of Education and by Gender, Academic Year 2017/2018



Source: PCBS, 2018f.

The educational attendance rate of girls is also consistently higher than that of boys across all age groups. This is particularly so within the 15-17 age group: 89.3 per cent of girls and only 73.3 per cent of boys in that group attended school during the 2017/2018 term.⁹² Boys are more likely to drop out of secondary school due either to low academic achievement or family pressures that encourage adolescent boys to enter the workforce to support their families. Overall, according to a 2017 report “girls’ comparatively higher school attendance,

⁸⁸ Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute, 2017, p. 16.

⁸⁹ WFP, 2017b, p. 2.

⁹⁰ Association for Civil Rights in Israel, 2017, p. 2.

⁹¹ PCBS, 2018f, pp. 28-29.

⁹² PCBS, 2018f, p. 32.

particularly at the secondary level, seemingly contradicts the numerous reports arguing that education for boys is more highly valued and, therefore, prioritized by Palestinian families”.⁹³

While considerable progress has been made to improve educational enrolment and attendance rates and to achieve gender parity, girls with disabilities, especially those with multiple or intellectual disabilities continue to face particularly high risks of exclusion. They are excluded from educational systems not only relative to girls without a disability, but also relative to boys with disabilities. A 2018 UNICEF country report on out-of-school children revealed that girls between the ages of 10-15 years “with a disability are out of school at higher rates (36.6 per cent) than boys (26.3 per cent). The gender difference arises mostly as a result of higher rates of girls with disabilities never attending school (28.5 per cent), compared to boys with disabilities (18.3 per cent)”.⁹⁴

Girls’ right to education has been compromised by the military occupation and Israeli policies and practices, many of them in violation of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Girls in East Jerusalem face specific constraints that limit their access to education. In a recent survey of women in East Jerusalem, only half of the respondents had finished high school. Women who were interviewed reported several factors that led to dropping out of school, including a lack of security in reaching school (checkpoints, confrontation with soldiers) and increasing rates of early marriage.⁹⁵ Similar results have been found in the West Bank where the quality of education in a safe learning environment remains a critical and long-standing challenge. This is particularly true in Area C, where over one third of residential communities lack primary schools and girls are forced to travel long distances, sometimes on foot, to reach the nearest school, often crossing one or two checkpoints. Some children in H2 must cross a military checkpoint and/or are exposed to harassment by Israeli settlers on their way to school.⁹⁶

Between the months of October and December 2016, 103 education-related incidents, including attacks on schools, forced closure of schools, delays at checkpoints on the way to and from schools, interruption of classes and, in some instances, injury of children, were recorded in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. These incidents affected a total of 8,992 children, and represented a sharp increase compared to 2015.⁹⁷ Faced with increasing education-related violations, “families often adopt negative coping mechanisms, including withdrawing children from school, a practice particularly affecting Palestinian girls”.⁹⁸ Despite higher school dropout rates for boys, evidence suggests that, “when there are security-related obstacles to accessing schools, adolescent girls are more affected than boys”.⁹⁹

In Gaza, the long-standing blockade and recurrent military assaults have deteriorated school infrastructure and chronic power shortages have affected the ability of students to study at school and at home, adversely impacting the overall quality of education, girls’ right to education and the potential employment prospects of young women. Seventy per cent of UNRWA schools and over 63 per cent of governmental schools in Gaza operate on a double or triple shift system; this has reduced instruction time to four hours a day, restricting the time available for remedial education, support to slow learners, and extracurricular activities.¹⁰⁰ These conditions could worsen further should the UNRWA funding crisis remain unresolved.

⁹³ Pettit and others, 2017, p. 8.

⁹⁴ UNICEF, 2018, p. 41.

⁹⁵ Juzoor for Health and Social Development, 2018, p. 138.

⁹⁶ OCHA, 2017c, p. 20.

⁹⁷ UNICEF, 2017, p. 5.

⁹⁸ OCHA, 2017c, p. 20.

⁹⁹ United Nations Country Team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2016, p. 133.

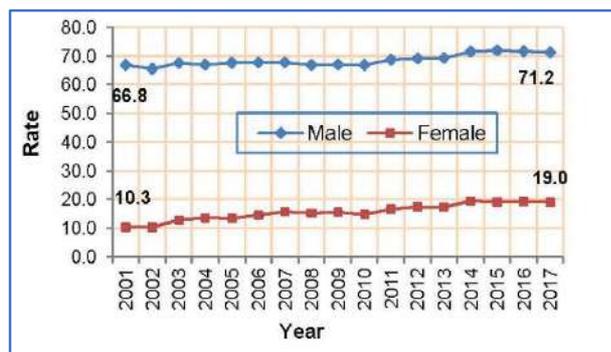
¹⁰⁰ OCHA, 2017a, p. 7.

In terms of overall quality of education, the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education in its Education Sector Strategic Plan for 2017-2022 highlights the importance of ensuring that teacher training and supervision activities are free from gender-based stereotypes and reviewing curriculum and school textbooks for gender-sensitivity.¹⁰¹ The Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) has also noted that despite education reforms, much remains to be done to “change the stereotypes towards women and persons with disabilities”.¹⁰²

D. EMPLOYMENT

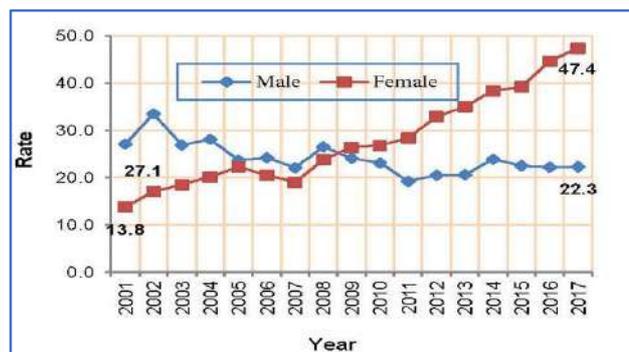
Despite high educational attainment rates, women’s access to employment remains severely restricted. With unemployment across the occupied Palestinian territory among the highest worldwide, Palestinian women’s labour force participation remains among the lowest in the world. In the fourth quarter (January–March, 2018) round, the vast majority of women (81.1 per cent) remained outside of the labor force, meaning that they were not seeking or engaged in employment.¹⁰³ Female labour force participation rates are especially low in East Jerusalem: in 2017, only 6.7 per cent of women were in the labour force, compared to 56.4 per cent of men.¹⁰⁴ While low by regional and global standards, overall trends in female labour force participation in the occupied Palestinian territory do show a notable rise in women’s economic participation, albeit from a very low starting point (figure 3).¹⁰⁵ Similar to other States, more educated women exhibit higher participation rates than their counterparts with less education.

Figure 3. Labour Force Participation Rate, by Gender, 2001-2017



Source: PCBS, 2018e.

Figure 4. Unemployment Rate, by Gender, 2001-2007



Source: PCBS, 2018e.

Employment statistics suggest that the traditional gender division of labour, whereby women are perceived as primary caregivers and men as breadwinners, persists. In explaining their reasons for remaining outside the labour force, 63 per cent of women surveyed in the occupied Palestinian territory reported housekeeping responsibilities (for men, this was zero per cent).¹⁰⁶ The World Bank reports that the Palestinian labour market suffers from structural problems of inclusion particularly for women, and that social norms and mobility restrictions play a key a role in keeping women outside the labour market.¹⁰⁷ A 2017 study on Palestinian men’s attitudes toward gender equality – the first of its kind – revealed that perceptions of gender

¹⁰¹ State of Palestine, Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2017, pp. 78 and 116.

¹⁰² Independent Commission for Human Rights, 2017, p. 5.

¹⁰³ PCBS, 2018k.

¹⁰⁴ PCBS, 2018c, p. 60.

¹⁰⁵ PCBS, 2018e, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ PCBS, 2018c, p. 104.

¹⁰⁷ World Bank, 2017, p. 10.

roles play a significant role in determining women’s entry into the labour force. Only 52 per cent of male respondents stated that women should have the same right to work outside the home as their husbands (compared to 73 per cent of female respondents), and 83 per cent of male respondents stated that men’s access to work should take priority over women’s when such opportunities are scarce – which is the case in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in Gaza. The majority (70 per cent) of female respondents agreed with this.¹⁰⁸ Limited access to employment and income opportunities, and subsequent dependence on male relatives, restricts women’s personal autonomy and may lead women to be trapped in dangerous situations, such as marital or domestic abuse.¹⁰⁹

When women do enter the labour market, they encounter significantly more difficulties than their male counterparts in finding employment. This has given rise to a female unemployment crisis over the past decade. Female unemployment has increased exponentially from 19 per cent in 2007 to over 53.7 per cent in the first half of 2018. By contrast, over the past decade, the male unemployment rate has been in the range of 22-27 per cent. Women are also significantly more likely than men to experience long-term unemployment. This is especially detrimental to the employability of women, as most employers “would not consider hiring jobseekers who have been inactive or unemployed for extended periods due to perceived high costs of reintegration and training”.¹¹⁰ Politically, the occupation impacts women’s access to employment through the imposition of movement restrictions and through the continued restrictions on the Palestinian domestic economy where women might be employed. Additionally, the reduction in the number of Palestinian men working inside Israel has made local markets more competitive.¹¹¹

In Gaza, which suffers from hyper-unemployment in general, female unemployment is strikingly high (table 3). In the second quarter of 2018, female unemployment in Gaza was 78.3 per cent compared to 44.5 per cent for male unemployment.¹¹² The unemployment rate of young women (15-29) was a staggering 92.6 per cent (vs. 62.4 per cent for their male counterparts).¹¹³ While unemployment in Gaza is driven by the economic impact of the political context (the blockade, the political violence, and the internal political divide), the large discrepancy between unemployment rates of women and men suggests structural factors influenced by sociocultural attitudes, including the many forms of discrimination – some subtle, some explicit – that women encounter in their search for decent employment.

TABLE 3. FEMALE UNEMPLOYMENT DATA, BY REGION

Unemployment Indicators	2017			Second Quarter of 2018		
	Palestine	West Bank	Gaza	Palestine	West Bank	Gaza
Unemployment	28.4%	18.7%	44.4%	32.4%	19.1%	53.7%
Female Unemployment	48.2%	32.1%	69.1%	53.7%	31.8%	78.3%
Female Youth Unemployment ^a	70.8%	55.1%	87.9%	71%	48.4%	92.6%

Source: PCBS, 2018b, pp. 9 and 14; PCBS, 2018c, pp. 54-56 and 60.

^a For the year 2017, youth unemployment was defined for the ages of 15-24 years; and for the second quarter of 2018, a broader definition of youth (15-29 years) has been used by PCBS.

In the private sector especially, the discrepancy in unemployment rates between women and men in the occupied Palestinian territory could be due to employers favouring men over women. This could also explain why unemployment is systematically higher among female graduates than their male counterparts even in

¹⁰⁸ Kuttab and Heilman, 2017, pp. 32-33.

¹⁰⁹ Chawla, 2017, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ International Labor Organization, 2018a, p. 40.

¹¹¹ Al-Botmeh, 2016.

¹¹² PCBS, 2018b, p. 9.

¹¹³ PCBS, 2018b, p. 14.

specializations that are socially perceived as “feminine”. Male graduates in the education field, for instance, had an unemployment rate of 20.1 per cent, compared with an extremely high 58.6 per cent for females in 2017.¹¹⁴ The preference to recruit men over women may be the direct result of the lack of a universal social security system that means the costs of maternity leave are borne completely by employers.¹¹⁵ Perhaps even more importantly, especially in the context of Gaza, is the sentiment referred to above that men’s access to work should take priority over women’s when jobs are scarce. Men also are more likely to work inside Israel or the settlements; in 2017, fewer than 2 per cent of such workers were women.¹¹⁶

In the private sector, a mismatch between the skill sets of educated women and labour market demands is often cited as one of the main reasons for high unemployment rates of female graduates, especially in the West Bank where female unemployment tends to be higher among better-educated young women than those with lower levels of educational attainment. In general, in the Palestinian context, “little policy attention has been paid to addressing the interlinkages between the supply and demand sides of the labour market to allow for the expansion of the demand for women’s labour”.¹¹⁷ In addition to policy gaps, legislative gaps have also been noted. For example, the Palestinian Labour Law addresses workers’ rights but “lacks details on non-discrimination” and does not make explicit reference to sexual harassment in the workplace.¹¹⁸

Equally important in determining the labour force participation and unemployment rates of women are the underlying weaknesses of the Palestinian economy. For instance, the two sectors where women have been traditionally concentrated – services and to a lesser degree agriculture – are also the sectors that have stagnated over the reporting period. The agriculture sector continued to suffer from restrictions imposed by the Government of Israel on trade, movement and access and contracted by 11 per cent in 2017.¹¹⁹ Services was the second worst performing sector in the same year, with an overall decline of nearly 2,000 jobs.¹²⁰

Overall, Israeli impediments in the occupied Palestinian territory have stifled the capacity of the private sector to generate growth. In the West Bank, the physical, geographic and social fragmentation caused by Israeli-imposed movement restrictions have negatively impacted the mobility of women and have decreased their access to employment and income opportunities. The blockade affects all residents of Gaza, but their impact on the employment of women is particularly severe, largely because of gender segmentation within the labour market. Without being able to study or travel abroad to acquire crucial professional skills that are unavailable in Gaza, women cannot develop a competitive edge to secure a job or advance within the job market. Women in Gaza rarely meet the criteria set by Israel for permits to exit Gaza or transport products out of it: since working women in Gaza are concentrated in public, non-profit or micro and small businesses, fewer women are able to obtain permits that Israel reserves for people engaged in trade. In 2016, only 2 per cent of trader permit holders were women.¹²¹

Statistics nor robust studies on women’s employment in the informal sector for the reporting period were not available. It is assumed that women are more likely to be employed in the informal sector, particularly with regards to unpaid family labour.

¹¹⁴ PCBS, 2018c, p. 92.

¹¹⁵ United Nations Country Team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2016, p. 92.

¹¹⁶ ILO, 2017, p. 22.

¹¹⁷ ILO, 2018a, p. 13.

¹¹⁸ United Nations Country Team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2016, pp. 16 and 91.

¹¹⁹ World Bank, 2018, p. 10.

¹²⁰ ILO, 2018b, p. 12.

¹²¹ Gisha, Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, 2017, p. 2.

E. HEALTH

1. *Availability and access to health care*

In the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in Gaza and the “walled out” communities of East Jerusalem and Area C of the West Bank, women’s right to health is undermined mainly by the numerous restrictions imposed by Israel on the movement of people and goods that includes patients, medical personnel and supplies. The intra-Palestinian political divide has also exacerbated these conditions, particularly in Gaza. In tandem with the growing pressure on the public health system due to rapid population growth, the delivery of health care continued to deteriorate in Gaza during the reporting period. The number of doctors, nurses and hospital beds, relative to the population, declined by 15, 12 and 5 percentage points respectively between 2010 and 2017.¹²² The population continued to be affected by the protracted shortages of essential medicines, as well as wheelchairs, mobility aids and other assistive devices needed by women and girls with disabilities in their daily activities.

The blockade and internal political divide have also exacerbated the chronic shortages in electricity and fuel needed to operate health centres, adversely impacting upon the health of women and girls. Power outages of 18-20 hours a day have led to health and rehabilitation centres reducing their hours of operation with surgeries, including life-saving procedures, being delayed, and diagnostic services put on hold.¹²³ As the supply of back-up generators has been depleted, the functioning of 70 primary health-care facilities have been severely impacted: at least 30 hospitals face risk of partial closure and over 300 pieces of essential lifesaving medical equipment in public hospitals have stopped functioning.¹²⁴

The blockade has exacerbated the difficulties for women and girls that need specialized medical and rehabilitation services not available in Gaza. Permits for patients to access specialized services in East Jerusalem, Israel or neighboring States, have been delayed or denied without explanation. The WHO reports that 2017 marked the lowest rate for approvals since the organization began active monitoring of medical referrals. In 2017, 46 per cent of Gaza patients did not get permits from Israeli authorities – sharply contrasting to 2012, when approximately 93 per cent of patient applications were successful.¹²⁵ In 2018, there trend improved: in June 2018, 63 per cent of permit applications to Israeli authorities for exit via Erez Crossing were approved.¹²⁶

Of the 1,072 breast cancer deaths in 2016 in the occupied Palestinian territory, 643 women died prematurely; these deaths could have been prevented if effective screening, early detection and referral pathways were in place.¹²⁷ For women with breast cancer in Gaza, denial or delays of permits to patients and their companions by the Israeli authorities still remain the greatest challenge in accessing life-saving services outside of Gaza. Women’s rights organizations, based on testimonies collected, have concluded that, “border crossings (and even permit applications) regularly involve intrusive and aggressive questioning of female patients, even when medically weak or vulnerable”¹²⁸ (box 6).

¹²² United Nations Country Team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2017, p. 3.

¹²³ OCHA, 2017a, p. 7.

¹²⁴ WHO and Health Cluster, occupied Palestinian Territory, 2017, pp. 1-2.

¹²⁵ WHO, 2017, p. 1.

¹²⁶ WHO, 2018a, p. 1.

¹²⁷ UNFPA, 2018, pp. 13 and 47.

¹²⁸ WCLAC, 2018, p. 6.

Box 6. Testimonies of Women in Gaza - Health Rights Undermined by the Blockade

Nidaa T., a 32-year-old mother of three, was been suffering from arterial aneurysm, a potentially life-threatening condition. Hospitals in Gaza were unable to provide her with the medical treatment she needs. Since 2015, she applied ten times for a permit to travel for health services unavailable in Gaza. Her applications were systematically rejected. In October 2017, she was finally ‘invited’ to a security interview [by the General Security Services at Erez Crossing]. She was invasively searched, left for hours in a freezing room and then interrogated. Her permit application was still pending as of February 2018.

Subhuyeh S., a 50-year-old mother of six children, had cancer and needed specialized life-saving treatment outside of Gaza. At the border crossing, she was stopped and questioned by Israeli security officials, asked to wait for over an hour in a tiny cubicle, and then interrogated for well over two hours, about her sons. After her security interrogation, she was denied an exit permit. Her health was rapidly deteriorating, and her malignant tumors were growing while awaited permission to leave Gaza.

Source: Adapted from WCLAC, 2018, p. 6.

In Area C, the restrictive planning and zoning regime applied by Israel has made it virtually impossible for Palestinians to obtain building permits, impeding the development of health structures. An estimated 220,000 Palestinians, especially those living in Area C, H2 and in the closed areas behind the wall (the Seam Zone), lack permanent clinics and face critical challenges in accessing basic health services.¹²⁹ Many of these vulnerable communities are scattered across the West Bank and Israeli-imposed movement restrictions force women and girls take circuitous routes to access the nearest clinics and rehabilitation centres. In East Jerusalem, an estimated 10,000 Palestinian women continue to face major challenges in accessing health-care services, due to Israeli policies such as revocation of residency and family reunification, which have left women without access to Israeli health insurance and even basic health-care services.¹³⁰

Women’s rights organizations also report that in providing health services to girls and women, the Palestinian Ministry of Health focuses on child-bearing, paying much less attention to women’s health needs throughout their life cycle. Most women-oriented health services focus on providing family planning, maternal, antenatal and post-natal services, with less emphasis on other components of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services including adolescent and youth-friendly services.¹³¹ Given the strong focus on maternity-related care services as well, single women have a lower level of engagement with the health system; this is exacerbated by health professionals’ assumptions about health-related behaviors of single women.¹³² Furthermore, while inclusive health services are a cornerstone of the National Health Strategy for 2017-2022, the needs and priorities of women and girls with disabilities are not explicitly addressed.

2. Health status of women

With health systems on the verge of collapse in Gaza, the overall health status of women, including maternal and reproductive health, has been impacted: the health sector estimates 150,000 women out of 500,000 women in need of reproductive health services are acutely vulnerable due to critical challenges in delivering health care.¹³³ The volatile political environment risks reversing gains made over the past decades in improving the health status of women and girls and widening the gaps in health outcomes between the West

¹²⁹ OCHA, 2018f, p. 12.

¹³⁰ OCHA, 2017a, p. 32.

¹³¹ The Non-Governmental Women Coalition for the Implementation of CEDAW in the Occupied State of Palestine, 2017, p. 18.

¹³² Bates and others, 2017, p. 6.

¹³³ OCHA, 2017a, p. 32.

Bank and Gaza. For instance, according to the Ministry of Health, maternal mortality is 15.5 per 100,000 births in the Gaza Strip compared to 12.4 in the West Bank in 2016.¹³⁴

Across the country, the burden of non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, cancer and cerebrovascular disease has continued to rise in the occupied Palestinian territory.¹³⁵ In 2016, breast cancer ranked the most prevalent form of cancer in the West Bank among all types of cancer.¹³⁶

Recent health studies have indicated that the political situation and insecurity, including threats of home demolitions, arrests and night raids in the West Bank and the aftermath of consecutive military assaults in Gaza, have had an adverse impact upon the mental health and psychological well-being of the population. The occupied Palestinian territory has one of the highest burdens of mental disorders in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, with 47 per cent of Palestinian girls aged 6 to 12 years (compared to a higher 54 per cent of boys) displaying emotional and/or behavioral disorders.¹³⁷ Moreover, there are reportedly high rates of anxiety and depression among women especially in Gaza.

F. ENVIRONMENT, WATER AND SANITATION

During the reporting period, Gaza continued to face immense challenges related to environment, water and sanitation, with adverse impact on the well-being and the fulfillment of the rights of women and girls, including the right to safe drinking water. Recurrent military operations, the long-standing blockade and the ongoing power crisis have disrupted the delivery of water and sanitation services and affected the already precarious living conditions in Gaza. The power crisis has adversely affected the delivery of water and sanitation services in Gaza, exposing residents to a range of diseases, contaminating soil and sea water, and restricting access to potable water. In 2018, around 1.8 million Palestinians needed humanitarian water, sanitation and hygiene assistance.¹³⁸

According to OCHA, over 108 million liters of almost totally untreated sewage are being discharged into the Mediterranean Sea every day and the risk of outbreaks of waterborne diseases is increasing. Most households receive piped water for only 6-8 hours once every four days, due to insufficient power supply and desalination plants functioning at 15 per cent of their capacity.¹³⁹ This critical situation has led to a decline in water consumption and hygiene standards, which has disproportionately affected women and girls since the management of household water supply, hygiene and sanitation is usually part of the responsibilities undertaken by Palestinian women inside the household.

Due to restrictive Israeli planning and zoning policies, and restrictions on Palestinians' ability to develop, repair or construct basic water and sanitation infrastructure, the Government of Palestine and development agencies have faced persistent challenges in delivering water and sanitation services, particularly in Area C. Inadequate water for drinking, domestic consumption and for livestock has affected the overall well-being and resilience of these communities, making them more vulnerable to disease. In East Jerusalem, more than 40 per cent of the residents are not legally connected to the water grid. Palestinians thus suffer from substandard water and sewage connections due to the ongoing lack of proper planning for neighborhoods.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Palestinian Ministry of Health, 2017, p. 25.

¹³⁵ WHO, 2018b, p. 4.

¹³⁶ Palestinian Ministry of Health, 2017, p. 98.

¹³⁷ Charara and others, 2017, p. 9.

¹³⁸ OCHA, 2017a, p. 27.

¹³⁹ OCHA, 2017b, p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ Association for Civil Rights in Israel, 2017, pp. 4-5.

In the West Bank, Israel applies less rigorous regulations for industrial zones in settlements and even offers financial incentives such as tax breaks and government subsidies, making it more profitable to build and operate waste treatment facilities on the occupied territory rather than inside Israel. According to B'Tselem, Israel has adopted the practice of transferring various types of waste to the West Bank, including urban and industrial by-products generated within Israel, which constitutes a breach of the international legal provisions Israel must uphold. Polluting plants located within Israel are subject to advanced air pollution control legislation, while those in settlements' industrial zones are under no restrictions at all.¹⁴¹

G. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Violence against women and girls continued unabated, posing a significant challenge to the attainment of their economic, social, civil and political rights, despite several commendable measures put in place by the Government of Palestine over the reporting period.

With the combined impact of the Israeli occupation and violence from within their own communities, Palestinian women and girls suffer from a double burden of violence. Decades of occupation-related violence and the patriarchal structure of Palestinian society render women vulnerable to different forms of abuse in both public and private spheres, endangering their right to life and physical safety. Furthermore, the prohibition of the self-determination of women is a fundamental form of political violence against them. Within their own communities, Palestinian women and girls are at risk of all forms of violence, notably domestic violence, sexual harassment, so-called honour killings and physical, psychological and verbal abuse, denial of resources and forced and child marriage. Complex linkages between exposure to occupation-related violence and increased exposure of women to GBV have been documented. For instance, a 2017 study revealed that men who reported having experienced “occupation-related violence were more likely – at a statistically significant level – to also report depressive symptoms, perpetration of physical or sexual intimate partner violence (ever), and perpetration of sexual harassment (in the previous three months)”.¹⁴²

In 2016-2017, civil society organizations and service providers recorded 22,222 registered GBV cases.¹⁴³ On an annual basis, approximately 3,000 cases of violence against women are reported to the Family and Juvenile Protection Units of the Palestinian Civil Police.¹⁴⁴ The actual prevalence rate of GBV is likely higher than the number of cases registered or reported, given that women and girls may be strongly discouraged from reporting or seeking recourse. In a recent example, 87 per cent of respondents (132 women and 18 men) in a survey in the Jordan Valley indicated that women should not report domestic violence; critically, the vast majority (more than 90 per cent) stated that they did not know where to go to report domestic violence.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, in the case of East Jerusalem, women “desist from getting Israeli police involved or seeking support of Israeli social affairs institutes for fear that it might imperil the entire family”.¹⁴⁶ Women and girls with disabilities encounter an additional range of challenges in reporting on violence and accessing justice, due to their heightened vulnerability resulting from their impaired ability to report crimes as well as the stigmatization of disability and/or their inaccessibility to protection services.

WCLAC reports that against the backdrop of increasing economic deprivation and political violence, “femicide is prevalent and is on the increase”, with many of the femicides based on ‘honour’.¹⁴⁷ The annual reports of the Public Prosecution’s Office in the West Bank confirm that murders of women and girls are

¹⁴¹ B'Tselem, 2017, pp. 13-14.

¹⁴² Kuttab and Heilman, 2017, p. 71.

¹⁴³ OCHA, 2017a, p. 13.

¹⁴⁴ Mousa and Lukatela, 2017, p. 37.

¹⁴⁵ OCHA, 2018e, p. 13.

¹⁴⁶ United Nations Country Team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2016, p. 50.

¹⁴⁷ WCLAC, Equality Now and Al Muntada, 2017, p. 8.

predominantly committed by close relatives. WCLAC documented 23 killings of Palestinian women and girls across the country in 2016 and 28 in 2017.¹⁴⁸ In its report, the Palestinian NGO, Women Media and Development (TAM), asserted that many of these murders, in reality, are related to inheritance, revenge or disputes but that the perpetrators claim that they are carried out to preserve family honour in order to receive a lighter sentence.¹⁴⁹

Girls and women in communities impacted by conflict and displacement tend to suffer from higher incidents of GBV in its various forms, including higher incidence of intimate partner violence, sexual abuse and forced marriage. Such communities, such as in Gaza, Area C, and East Jerusalem, also tend to be characterized by limited availability and access to multi-sectoral protection services.¹⁵⁰ A report launched in December 2017 by UN Women on GBV services in Gaza revealed that impoverishment, the absence of economic opportunities for breadwinners and their households and overcrowding are central drivers of GBV in Gaza. The report also found that women were at higher risk of GBV if they were from low-income households, had less than a university-level education, were not participating in the labour market and/or were victims of child or forced marriage. A significant number of perpetrators were found to be abusers of the highly addictive opioid Tramadol and a minority suffered from mental health problems.¹⁵¹

The number of specialized centres that provide protection and dedicated services to female survivors of violence remains limited because of the Government of Palestine's precarious financial situation, due in part to withheld taxes that are owed by Israel. The Government is also unable to consistently provide services throughout the occupied Palestinian territory because of Israel's control over Area C. During the reporting period (April 2017), a new centre, the One Stop Centre in Ramallah, was established in conjunction with UN Women, UNDP and UNICEF, to provide protection services to women and children. In the West Bank there is the Mehwar Centre in Bethlehem, run by the Ministry of Social Development; the Family Defense Society shelter in Nablus; and the emergency shelter in Jericho, run by WCLAC. In Gaza, the Al-Hayat Centre, managed by the Center for Women's Legal Research and Consulting with support from UN Women, and Beit Al Aman, run by the de facto authorities in Gaza, provide emergency shelter to women exposed to or at risk of GBV.

Protecting women and girls from GBV is challenged by patriarchal gender norms, a lack of progress in ensuring legislative reforms, including no specific laws or provisions concerning violence in the family and sexual violence and overall political volatility (box 7).

Box 7. Visit of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences

The Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, on her 17-22 September 2016 mission to the State of Palestine, highlighted that the "occupation is a real obstacle to the State's due diligence obligation to prevent violence against women in areas where it does not have full jurisdiction, because of the fragmentation of the areas under different control (prosecution can only happen in area A and B under the Palestinian justice system) and the political divide between the Gaza de facto authority and the Government of the State of Palestine". The Special Rapporteur moreover noted that "the occupation does not exonerate the State of Palestine from its due human rights obligation to prevent, investigate, punish and provide remedies for acts of gender-based violence in the areas and for persons under its jurisdiction or effective control."

Source: [A/HRC/35/30/Add.2](#).

¹⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch, WCLAC, and Equality Now, 2018, p. 9.

¹⁴⁹ Chemonics International and Women Media and Development, 2016, p. 21.

¹⁵⁰ UNFPA and GBV Sub-Cluster Palestine, 2018.

¹⁵¹ UN Women, 2017, p. 105.

H. MEDIA

Women continued to be vastly underrepresented in Palestinian media content during the reporting period. In its initial report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the State of Palestine reported that Palestinian media continues to “devote space to discussion of women’s affairs, but most discussion focuses on such aspects of the traditional role of women as cooking, health, the family, children and fashion”. Furthermore, when Palestinian media grants attention to women, it is in favor of “women who work in elite and professional positions, instead of on the most vulnerable women, such as rural women, women in refugee camps and women in Bedouin villages”.¹⁵²

Palestinian media has tended to represent women as victims of human rights violations, whereas men are represented as experts and official speakers. Based on media monitoring conducted in 2017, the Palestinian NGO TAM concluded that Palestinian women continue to be underrepresented in news related to peace and security, despite their active role in this field. Monitoring of Palestinian news outlets indicated that women made up a mere 12 per cent of people interviewed or who were talked about in news related to decision-making processes, creating and achieving peace and security and/or reflecting on violations related to Israeli military occupation.¹⁵³

I. THE GIRL CHILD

A number of factors contribute to the persistence of child marriage in the occupied Palestinian territory: high poverty rates that push families to marry off their daughters to decrease household expenses; a lack of legislation explicitly prohibiting child marriage; and a coercive environment emanating from occupation-related policies and practices, such as the blockade of the Gaza, forcible displacement, movement restrictions, restrictions on access to education and political violence throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, but especially in Area C and East Jerusalem.¹⁵⁴ Legislative frameworks governing child marriage remain fragmented and inconsistent. The Child Law No. 7 of 2004 and its amendments specify a minimum marriage age of 18 years in the State of Palestine, but this is not enforced. The Jordanian Personal Status Law of 1976 (applicable in the West Bank) allows for the marriage of a female from the age of 15 and the Egyptian Law of Family Rights of 1954 (applicable in Gaza) sets the minimum marriage age at 17, but allows for a judge to approve the marriage of a girl over nine years of age “if she is ruled to be sufficiently mature and her physical constitution is equal to it”. Eastern Christian churches and the Roman Catholic Church allow for marriage of girls at 14 and for the Syriac Orthodox church at 16.¹⁵⁵

Child marriage is a violation of child rights and human rights and has devastating long-term effects on girls’ well-being and personal development. It is often associated with forced sexual relations, early childbearing, vulnerability to intimate partner violence and higher risks of poor health outcomes. It often means an end to girls’ schooling and limits their future economic prospects.

¹⁵² [CEDAW/C/PSE/1](#), para. 78.

¹⁵³ Women Media and Development, 2017, pp. 5 and 8.

¹⁵⁴ Protection Cluster, GBV Sub-Cluster Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2016, pp. 2-3.

¹⁵⁵ [CEDAW/C/PSE/1](#), paras. 328-329.

III. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION, LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND THE RIGHTS OF PALESTINIAN WOMEN

A. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND PROCESS

Ensuring women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life is one of the key targets of Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality, among other international frameworks. Palestinian law largely conforms to international standards regarding women’s political participation. The political rights of women in the State of Palestine to vote and stand for election are guaranteed by General Elections Law No. 9 of 2005 which regulates parliamentary and presidential elections and by Local Municipality Councils Elections Law No. 10 of 2005. These legislative measures introduced quota systems and represented significant steps towards improving women’s political representation at the local level. However, the quota system does not apply to camp committees in refugee camps, which do not participate in local elections.¹⁵⁶

Even so, women’s formal participation in the realms of political life overall continues to be limited. National indicators confirm the low level of participation in public life, with female representation in governmental and non-governmental institutions palling in comparison with that of men (table 4).¹⁵⁷

TABLE 4. PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE, 2016
(The most recent available data)

Percentage of Women that are	Palestine	West Bank	Gaza
In the Palestinian Legislative Council	12.1	11.3	13.6
Ambassadors	5.8	--	--
Judges	17.3	18.8	10
Public Prosecutors	18	21.2	12.8
Chambers of Commerce	3.8	4.4	0
Union members	21.5	25.2	17.9

Source: PCBS, 2017b.

During the reporting period, women were underrepresented at all levels in decision-making bodies, including the cabinet, municipal councils, camp committees, diplomatic corps, the judiciary and the police. As of June 2018, women held three out of 19 ministerial positions in the Palestinian Government. Following the municipal elections in 2017, the election of women to local councils stood at 21 per cent, barely passing the 20 per cent quota. Despite these low numbers, three women assumed mayoral positions in West Bank communities; this included 25-year old Yusra Badwan of Azzun in the Qaliqilya governorate, the youngest female mayor elected in the State of Palestine. Furthermore, while Palestinian women have been at the forefront of the national movement, their representation in political factions and in the PLO remains limited. Only one of the 19 members elected to the Fatah Central Council in December 2016 was a woman. As asserted by human rights organizations, there is a concerted need to secure the commitment of political factions and “ensure the implementation of bylaw reform with the view to promoting the political participation of women and youth, particularly at the decision-making levels”.¹⁵⁸ Women also made up a mere 3.8 per cent of the police force in the West Bank – slightly higher than the Arab regional average of 2-3 per cent, but well below

¹⁵⁶ See UN Women, n.d.

¹⁵⁷ PCBS, 2017b, pp. 53, 54, 57, 59, 58 and 62.

¹⁵⁸ Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, 2018, p. 28.

the global average of 10 per cent – with only 6 per cent of female officers holding leadership positions.¹⁵⁹ As reported by the human rights organization Al-Haq, women are not represented in the Supreme Constitutional Court formed by a decision made by the Palestinian President in April 2016.¹⁶⁰

That said, political participation is not limited to being elected to, holding public office or performing public functions at all levels of government, it also encompasses political activism and community participation. Yet young women made up only 12.4 per cent of student council members in universities in the West Bank.¹⁶¹ According to a 2017 study on youth, peace and security based on United Nations resolution 2250 and involving 63 youth, family restrictions hinder the community and political participation of adolescent girls and young women: female participants stated in some instances their families prevented their participation in peaceful protests and various youth community initiatives.¹⁶² The prevalence of violence also affects to a high extent their movement and their ability to participate in community affairs.¹⁶³ Despite manifold restrictions and general societal discouragement of women’s political participation, women, especially young women, have played an active role in the ‘Great March of Return’ in Gaza and the weekly protests dubbed the “Women’s March of Gaza”.¹⁶⁴

The increasing incidents of arrests and detention of women political leaders and activists, without charge or trial, such as Khalida Jarrar, an elected member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, and Khitam Saafin, General Coordinator of the Union of Palestinian Women’s Committees, by Israeli forces is also a critical challenge to women’s political participation and activism. For many Palestinian women, there is no difference between political participation and political activism (box 8).

Box 8. Interview with Manal Tamimi

“I will never stop resisting occupation, and I will never lose hope. Hope is our strongest weapon,” affirms Manal Tamimi, a prominent Palestinian human rights defender and an active board member of the Popular Struggle Coordination Committee (PSCC). Through the PSCC, she states, *“we engage in nonviolence popular resistance; we protest against the systematic violations of our rights”*. Manal explains that Palestinian women have been at the forefront of the national struggle. *“Women participated actively in the first intifada and were politically active as far back as 1936 [during the Great Revolt, the nationalist uprising by Palestinians against the British administration of Palestine]”*.

Manal is from Nabi Saleh, a village in the West Bank surrounded by the Israeli settlement of Halamish. Like most of her family members, including her niece Ahed Tamimi (who was arrested when she was just 16 years old), Manal has been imprisoned for her political activism. *“I was arrested multiple times. The first time was in early 2010, a bit after we started organizing in December 2009, weekly demonstrations to protest the appropriation of our land and our water. I was released about 10 days later. The second time was in 2016. I was arrested on International Women’s Day. Israeli soldiers stormed into our home at around 2 a.m. It was rather ironic of the Israelis to arrest me on International Women’s Day. It just illustrates that while the world is celebrating this important day, the rights of Palestinian women continue to be violated. I was arrested again in December 2017 and released a week later.”* Israeli soldiers often use live ammunition during protests and Manal has been injured, including having been shot in her leg, during peaceful demonstrations against Israeli violations of human rights.

“Ever since I remember, I have considered myself a political activist. My father was killed 27 days after I was born. When I was a child, I realized that many of my family members were simply not there – they were exiled,

¹⁵⁹ State of Palestine, Ministry of Interior and Palestinian Civil Police, 2016, pp. 22-23.

¹⁶⁰ Al-Haq, 2018, p. 3.

¹⁶¹ PCBS, 2017b, p. 55.

¹⁶² Interpeace and Mustakbalna, 2017, p. 30.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁶⁴ ActionAid, 2018.

Box 8 (continued)

killed, or in prison. As a teenager, I was active in the first intifada. I felt a strong sense of responsibility to carry forward the work that the older generation was doing. My children are politically active too, so I guess it is hereditary! My 23-year old son was just released from prison, and my 19-year old son is still in prison". She adds, "as a Palestinian activist, I feel like I don't have the luxury of falling into despair. There is much to struggle for, but there is also much to enjoy in life too. I spend my days in protests full of teargas and casualties and feel deep sadness, but I also enjoy with my family and friends and feel happiness. I live my life moment by moment, knowing that our resistance must go on".

Source: Personal communication, 13 November 2018.

B. ALIGNING NATIONAL LEGISLATION WITH OTHER NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

1. National Policy and Policy Developments

During the report period, the National Policy Agenda (2017-2022): Putting Citizens First of the Government of Palestine was adopted. The National Policy Agenda (NPA) sets an ambitious path for statehood, effective governance, and sustainable development. Gender equality figures prominently in the NPA, through a call for action to mainstream gender in public policies, legislative reforms, planning, and budgeting (National Policy 9 on Strengthening Accountability and Transparency); creating job opportunities, including for women, especially young graduates (National Policy 12 on Creating Job Opportunities); ensuring women's fair access to judicial services (National Policy 17 on Improving Access to Justice); and combating discrimination and violence against women and girls while promoting their engagement in all aspects of public life (National Policy 18 on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment).¹⁶⁵

The concurrence of the launching of the 2030 Agenda with the preparation process of the NPA 2017-2022 presented an opportunity for the Government of Palestine to work towards integrating the SDGs into the NPA from the onset.¹⁶⁶ For SDG 5 (achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls), the three stated priority policy interventions are to (1) eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls; (2) remove barriers that prevent the full participation of women in community and economic development and public life; and (3) institutionalize gender mainstreaming in policymaking, planning and budgeting. During the reporting period, the Government of Palestine published its National Voluntary Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In reporting on progress achieved in light of SDG 5, the review concluded that, "despite the decision of the Council of Ministers that gender should be taken into consideration in planning and budgeting, the consideration of gender remains limited".¹⁶⁷ This highlights that, although there is the commitment to address gender-based concerns in policy, there are legal and structural impediments that act as obstacles to properly addressing concerns specifically impacting Palestinian women and girls. The ICHR asserts that financial resources allocated for the promotion of women's rights, including in the fields of health, labour and education remain insufficient, and concludes that more gender responsive budgets are needed.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ State of Palestine, 2016b, pp. 32, 37, and 39.

¹⁶⁶ State of Palestine, 2018, p. 13.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁶⁸ ICHR, 2018b.

2. CEDAW

The State of Palestine's accession to CEDAW is seen as an important driving force for the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls. As the occupying power, Israel is responsible under international law for the implementation of CEDAW in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza. While these human rights obligations in the occupied Palestinian territory have been continuously asserted in relevant General Assembly resolutions and reports of the Secretary-General and OHCHR, Israel has consistently refuted the applicability of international conventions, including CEDAW, to the occupied Palestinian territory, asserting that the conventions are "territorially bound" and as such do not apply, nor were intended to apply, to areas outside its national territory.¹⁶⁹ However, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women continues to reiterate its recommendation that Israel give "full effect of the Convention and implement its obligations under international humanitarian law with regard to all persons under its jurisdiction or effective control."¹⁷⁰ Palestinian civil society has also called upon the CEDAW Committee to ensure that Israel meets its obligations.¹⁷¹

While Israel is responsible for application of CEDAW in the occupied Palestinian territory, the State of Palestine is also responsible for the Convention's application as it seeks to build a more gender equitable State with legislation and policies that are in line with international standards. During the reporting period, the State of Palestine submitted its initial report on the implementation of the Convention to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, to which it acceded in April 2014 without any reservations. OHCHR, in collaboration with UN Women, had worked closely with all stakeholders to prepare the initial State party report.¹⁷² In its initial report on the implementation of CEDAW, submitted in March 2017 – two years after the due date – the Government of Palestine affirmed that it "has declared its recognition at the highest political level of the definition of gender discrimination contained in those instruments and its commitment to taking all measures necessary to prohibit such discrimination in all its forms".¹⁷³

A number of commendable measures have been put in place to promote women's rights since the ratification by the State of Palestine to CEDAW (box 9).

Box 9. "Marry Your Rapist" law repealed and other key reforms

Following long-standing legal advocacy efforts by the Independent Commission for Human Rights and women's rights organizations, Article 308 of the 1960 Penal Code, the law that had exempted a perpetrator of rape from prosecution and punishment if he married his victim, was repealed through Law No. 5 of 2018 on 14 March 2018. The decision of the President of the State of Palestine to restrict the use of this mitigating article was welcomed by human rights organizations. The new law also amended Article 99 to prohibit judges from reducing sentences for serious crimes, such as the murder of women and children. Previously judges were empowered to reduce sentences if the case had extenuating circumstances, including protection of "family honor". Another key reform announced by the Palestinian Prime Minister in March 2018 allows women that have custody of their children to open bank accounts for them, transfer their children to different schools and apply for passports on their behalf.

Source: Human Rights Watch, 2018.

Nevertheless, overall progress achieved in harmonizing outdated and highly fragmented legislative frameworks (Egyptian, Jordanian, Ottoman, British Mandate, religious law and Israeli military law) and

¹⁶⁹ CEDAW/C/ISR/6, para. 8.

¹⁷⁰ CEDAW/C/ISR/CO/6, para. 15.

¹⁷¹ The Non-Governmental Women Coalition for the Implementation of CEDAW in the Occupied State of Palestine, 2017.

¹⁷² E/CN.6/2018/6, para. 50.

¹⁷³ CEDAW/C/PSE/1, para. 6.

aligning national legislation with CEDAW remains limited. Most notably, to date, the Jordanian Personal Status Law of 1976, effective in the West Bank, and the Egyptian Family Rights Law of 1954, in force in Gaza, have not been amended in compliance with CEDAW. These laws regulate issues relating to marriage and family relations and encompass discriminatory provisions regarding, in particular: age of marriage, divorce, polygamy, guardianship, custodianship, adoption, inheritance, child support, common properties and testimony. The Draft Penal Law of 2011 has still not been enacted, and current laws (Jordanian Penal Code no. 16 for 1960, still applicable in the West Bank; and Penal Code no. 74 for 1936, applicable in Gaza) are not aligned with the State of Palestine's human rights obligations as defined in conventions to which it has acceded. For instance, the Penal Law does not recognize marital rape and criminalizes abortion.¹⁷⁴ Local studies show that the Personal Status Law and the Penal Code have the highest impact on women's lives, as they directly regulate social relationships among individuals in the private domain (the family) and the public domain (society and State).¹⁷⁵

An important new piece of proposed legislation, the draft Family Protection from Violence Law, which was prepared with the participation of non-governmental women's and human rights organizations and with the support of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Justice, was in the final stages of review during the reporting period. It is expected that the law will be submitted to the President for enactment in the near future. To ensure alignment between national legislation and international human rights frameworks, the Council of Ministers in 2017 approved the establishment of the Legislative Harmonization Committee, comprised mainly of government structures. Civil society organizations have urged the State of Palestine, as part of the harmonization process, to immediately adopt a comprehensive definition of discrimination against women in national legislation.¹⁷⁶

The ICHR and leading human and women's rights organizations have called on the State of Palestine to reference CEDAW in the Amended Basic Law (2005) and to publish CEDAW in Palestine's Official Gazette, in order to make it legally binding and to ensure that judiciary bodies (courts and public prosecution) enforce CEDAW in cases before them.¹⁷⁷ Women's rights organizations have called on the State of Palestine to ratify the Optional Protocol, which will strengthen the enforcement mechanism for CEDAW.¹⁷⁸ Women's organizations have acknowledged the impact of the occupation on CEDAW's implementation in the occupied Palestinian territory while also noting the "poor and limited legal and procedural measures taken by the State of Palestine to effect social and cultural change that contributes to realizing equality and social justice for women, and which led to the marginalization and discrimination against women on the ground".¹⁷⁹

3. UNSCR 1325 and Women, Peace and Security

Just as in the case of CEDAW, as the occupying power Israel is obligated to implement the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda within the occupied Palestinian territory. This is in accordance with article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations, which requires States "to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council". While Israel has affirmed support for the WPS agenda through its CEDAW reporting, there has been no attempt to apply the agenda towards the situation of women and girls in the occupied Palestinian territory. As of 2018, Israel does not have a National Action Plan (NAP) on Security Council resolution [1325](#).

Palestinian women have long played an active role in the struggle against the occupation and for peace and security. The State of Palestine's strong commitment to engage women at all levels of peacebuilding and

¹⁷⁴ Al-Haq, 2018, p. 6.

¹⁷⁵ The Non-Governmental Women Coalition for the Implementation of CEDAW in the Occupied State of Palestine, 2017, p. 27.

¹⁷⁶ Al-Haq, 2018, p. 4.

¹⁷⁷ ICHR, 2017, p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ HRW, WCLAC and Equality Now, 2018, p. 11.

¹⁷⁹ The Non-Governmental Women Coalition for the Implementation of CEDAW in the Occupied State of Palestine, 2017, p. 4.

security efforts has been demonstrated by launching the NAP for the Implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 for the State of Palestine for the period 2017-2019. The NAP was developed through a consultative process, led by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and supported by UNFPA, UN Women, ESCWA and the European Union, building upon the Strategic National Framework for Implementing Security Council resolution 1325 that was endorsed by the Council of Ministers in June 2015, after extensive advocacy by the Palestinian Women's Coalition of Security Council resolution 1325. With wide representation from a range of civil society organizations, especially women's rights organizations in the West Bank and Gaza,¹⁸⁰ and under the leadership of the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW), the coalition in partnership with the Ministry of Women's Affairs has actively engaged in promoting the WPS agenda and is playing a crucial role to ensure the implementation of the NAP.

The NAP has three inter-related strategic objectives: (1) enhancing the protection of Palestinian women and girls, especially from the violations of the Israeli occupation; (2) holding the Israeli occupation accountable; and (3) enhancing the participation of Palestinian women in local and international decision-making processes.¹⁸¹ Global experience suggests that women's participation in peace processes, as negotiators, mediators, witnesses, or signatories, has a significant positive impact on the duration of peace deals. When women are included in a peace process, the resulting peace agreement is 20 per cent more likely to last at least two years and an agreement is 35 per cent more likely to last for 15 years if women participate in its creation.¹⁸²

Steps taken by the Government of Palestine have been noteworthy as international frameworks, particularly CEDAW and the WPS agenda, provide a basis for protecting and empowering conflict-affected women and girls. However, the application of CEDAW and the WPS agenda have not yielded the desired progress in the occupied Palestinian territory. First, the persistence of the occupation and the Government of Israel's refusal to apply such frameworks to the territory or to even acknowledge its obligation to do so has neutralized the impact of the frameworks locally. This, in turn, has impacted upon the ability of the Government of Palestine to fully implement the frameworks and initiate meaningful gender-sensitive political and legal reform, particularly in light of the territory's fragmentation, the suspension of the PLC and the inability to reach the most marginalized women, particularly in Gaza, Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In parallel, the Government of Palestine has a role to play in challenging discriminatory communal attitudes and institutional barriers that prevent the full implementation of both CEDAW and the WPS agenda.

C. NATIONAL WOMEN'S MACHINERY AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS

1. *Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs and Ministry of Social Development*

Established in 2003, the Ministry of Women's Affairs is the principle national machinery for coordinating gender policy development, monitoring and reporting. It sets and develops the Government's gender strategies and plans, based on the principles set forth under CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the SDGs and other relevant international instruments. It also works to combat violence against women as per the National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women for 2011-2019. It is the ministry in charge of implementing CEDAW and, as the head of the Higher National Committee for the Implementation of Security Council resolution 1325, it has also spearheaded the development of the NAP, together with women's rights organizations. During the reporting period, the ministry launched the Cross-sectoral National Gender Strategy 2017-2022, as an integral part of the NPA which was prepared based on the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. This strategy outlines a number of strategic and specific objectives including increasing the

¹⁸⁰ The Palestinian Women's Coalition of UNSCR 1325 is comprised of: the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW), the Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC), the Palestinian Working Women Society for Development (PWWSD), Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH), Filastiniyat, Women, Media and Development (TAM), the Women Studies Center, Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), YWCA of Palestine, the Center for Women's Legal Research & Consulting (CWLRC), the Culture & Free Thought Association (CFTA) and the Women's Affairs Center (WAC).

¹⁸¹ State of Palestine, 2016a, pp. 12, 30 and 44.

¹⁸² O'Reilly and others, 2015, p. 12.

political participation of women; combating GBV; and ensuring that gender is mainstreamed in policies and programmes of ministries. During the reporting period the Ministry of Women’s Affairs implemented several strategic initiatives with the support of UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral donors and in cooperation with civil society organizations, including launching a flagship programme to eliminate violence against women (2018 – 2022).

During the reporting period, efforts were underway to estimate the cost of marital violence in the State of Palestine under the leadership of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs. In partnership with ESCWA and UN Women, interviews were held with almost all national stakeholders in an effort to understand the situation of violence against women, including its scope and data availability, which resulted in a detailed situation analysis. This was followed by national consultations involving all concerned parties, which informed the development of a tailored operational plan for costing marital violence through the national violence survey administered by PCBS.¹⁸³

In its efforts to promote women’s rights, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs works in close collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development, which runs shelters for women victims of violence and provides services to women and girls with disabilities and to older women. Despite these commendable efforts, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and the Ministry of Social Development, continue to be constrained by limited human, technical and financial resources. The delivery of protection services to vulnerable women is moreover constrained by Israeli restrictions, particularly on access and movement, especially in areas under Israeli control (*Area C, H2, East Jerusalem*). These constraints have impeded effective implementation of programmes and strategies, including those to promote the rights of women and girls with disabilities.

2. *Palestinian Civil Police*

In February 2017, the Palestinian Civil Police, with the support of UN Women and the European Union Coordinating Office for Palestinian Police Support (EUPOL COPPS), launched the Palestinian Civil Police Gender Strategy. The five-year strategy is the first of its kind in the Palestinian security sector and more broadly in the Arab region. It is a culmination of efforts of the police to promote gender equality in the police, starting from the establishment of its Gender Unit in 2011. The main objectives of the strategy include mainstreaming gender in the police; increasing the percentage of women working in the police; increasing the participation of women at the decision-making level; and strengthening partnerships with supporting institutions concerned with gender issues. The strategy also fully recognizes the need to develop police “specializations and capabilities for dealing with crimes against women”, especially GBV.¹⁸⁴

D. CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Civil society organizations in the State of Palestine continued to play a crucial role in advocating for the advancement of the rights of women and girls. Leading Palestinian human rights and women’s rights organizations put forward shadow reports for consideration by the CEDAW Committee respectively on the Government of Israel and the State of Palestine’s implementation of CEDAW.

During the reporting period, Al-Haq, the Palestinian Working Women Society for Development (PWWSD), WCLAC and the GUPW respectively presented their submissions with regards to Israel’s sixth periodic report, highlighting Israel’s systematic violations which deprive Palestinian women and girls of their dignity and economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. In their reports, the organizations, demonstrated the detrimental impact of Israel policies such as family reunification and citizenship laws, demolitions and forcible transfer, residency revocations, arrests and detention.

¹⁸³ Duvvury and Ozonas Marcos, 2017.

¹⁸⁴ State of Palestine, Ministry of Interior and Palestinian Civil Police, 2016, p. 16.

Under the leadership of the GUPW, 35 civil society organizations mobilized as the Non-Governmental Women Coalition for the Implementation of CEDAW in the Occupied State of Palestine (CEDAW Coalition) and prepared and submitted a shadow report to the Committee, reviewing measures taken by the State of Palestine to incorporate CEDAW in its legislation and other policies, directives, and measures. The CEDAW Coalition asserted that the State of Palestine's initial report did not address discrimination against women with disabilities, who suffer from double discrimination.¹⁸⁵ The national human rights institution, ICHR, also raised concerns in its submission to the CEDAW Committee that, "the initial report of the State of Palestine did not incorporate the policies and measures undertaken to ensure that women with disabilities benefit from the equality principle as mentioned in Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women".¹⁸⁶ In 2017, WCLAC, together with Equality Now and Al Muntada, prepared a pre-session report on Palestine for consideration by the Committee. In 2018, together with Human Rights Watch and Equality Now, WCLAC also prepared submissions to the Committee at its 70th session, as did Al-Haq and the CEDAW Coalition.

Civil society has also contributed to influencing the Universal Periodical Review (UPR) process. In August 2017, WCLAC, the Community Action Centre (CAC), the Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) submitted a report to assist the process of the UPR on Israel. The report outlined the gendered impact of the occupation.¹⁸⁷ Subsequently, in December 2017, WCLAC participated in the 29th UPR pre-session at the Human Rights Council in Geneva in order to brief permanent delegations on human rights violations perpetrated by the State of Israel for the UPR in January 2018. The UPR process resulted in numerous recommendations directed towards Israel concerning violations against Palestinians, including female prisoners. However, while Israel noted most of the recommendations, it did not commit to the application of all of them.¹⁸⁸

As of September 2017, the State of Palestine, led by four civil society organizations, has submitted four communications to the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) at the ICC. The Palestinian Women's Coalition of UNSCR 1325 has monitored the progress of these communications, which are in the preliminary examination phase. In response to a delegation from the OTP that visited Jerusalem and Ramallah on 9-10 October 2016, the Coalition issued a statement criticizing the OTP's decision to not visit Gaza, as well as the exclusion of women's organizations from the delegation's agenda, highlighting the disproportion impact of the conflicts under review on women in Gaza.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ The Non-Governmental Women Coalition for the Implementation of CEDAW in the Occupied State of Palestine, 2017, p. 11.

¹⁸⁶ ICHR, 2018a, p. 4.

¹⁸⁷ WILPF, 2017.

¹⁸⁸ A/HRC/38/2, p. 116.

¹⁸⁹ Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, MIFTAH, 2016.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the reporting period, the daily lives of Palestinian women and girls continued to be adversely impacted by the Israeli military occupation. The policies and practices of the Government of Israel continued to negatively impact the social, economic and political advancement of women and girls in the West Bank, including those living in East Jerusalem and Gaza. They also undermined the State of Palestine's capacity to implement cohesive policies for all Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory. That said, the occupation does not exonerate the State of Palestine from its due human rights obligation as outlined in the international conventions to which it has acceded, as noted by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women. The Government of Palestine, in partnership with civil society organizations and with the support of international development agencies, must do more to advance the status of women and girls in line with international standards and conventions including CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the SDGs, Security Council resolution 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

Furthermore, the international community has an obligation to ensure the realization of the right to self-determination and the human rights of Palestinian women and girls, in line with international legal frameworks and mechanisms. This includes the provision of needed programming and comprehensive services. Consequently, cuts to or withholding funds from necessary programming and life-saving services to the Palestinian people, particularly women and girls, can exacerbate an already dire humanitarian situation and create a regressive environment in which women's rights are rolled back. This is especially so for in Area C of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, where access is deeply impacted by the occupation and the provision of services are especially crucial.

Lastly, the occupation must end. Until it does, Israel, as the occupying power, must be held accountable under international human rights and humanitarian law for its obligations to Palestinian women and girls. This includes women and girls living in East Jerusalem, whose situation merits particular attention and intervention in light of their increasing marginalization in the city. The occupying power has an obligation to provide relevant services to Palestinian women and girls living in all of the occupied territory, as per the requirements of CEDAW and the WPS agenda.

The following recommendations build upon previous ESCWA reports, comply with recommendations made by leading civil society and human rights organizations in the State of Palestine and are in line with the Government of Palestine's commitments to human rights instruments, conventions and treaties.

- **National legislation and CEDAW**

Steps to ensure that the provisions of CEDAW are fully incorporated into domestic law must be expedited. Legislative reviews and the adoption of draft laws (the draft Penal Code of 2011 and draft Family Protection from Violence) should be concluded and a comprehensive and explicit definition of discrimination adopted. Personal status laws should be amended to ensure that women have equal rights with men in relation to inheritance, marriage, divorce, custody and guardianship of children. The State of Palestine should also immediately publish CEDAW in the Official Gazette in order to make it legally binding and ensure that judiciary bodies (courts and public prosecution) enforce the Convention in cases before them. It should also ratify the Optional Protocol, which will also strengthen the enforcement mechanism for CEDAW.

- **Child Marriage**

The Government of Palestine should develop and enforce regulations to reduce child marriage by immediately raising the minimum age of marriage for girls to 18; expanding awareness-raising and campaigning initiatives, together with civil society organizations, on the negative consequences of child marriage on girls' rights, health and personal development; and addressing the issues of poverty which drive child marriage.

- **Gender and employment**

More must be done to ensure the economic participation and empowerment of women in the State of Palestine. There is a strong need to focus on the interlinkages between the supply and demand sides of the labour market, including promoting the demand for women's labour, for instance through affirmative policies, while continuing to address institutional and market impediments facing women's participation in the labour market. To ease the entry of women into the labour force, the availability of childcare facilities and flexible working arrangements must be enhanced and the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, in line with the Equal Remuneration Convention of the International Labour Organization, must be enforced.

- **Health**

Public health should not be limited to maternal and child health but should also address women's multiple health needs, regardless of their age and marital status. More efforts should also be expended to ensure that health and rehabilitation needs of women and girls with disabilities are met especially in vulnerable communities of Area C and Gaza.

- **Media**

Much more needs to be done to enhance the representation and participation of women in media, including women with disabilities, through building the capacities of journalists, media specialists and decision makers in media outlets on gender equality, CEDAW and UNSCR 1325, and increasing skills and leadership abilities of women in media through mentoring and capacity development programmes.

- **Violence against women**

In line with its commitments under the Palestinian National Voluntary Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Government of Palestine should develop safety nets for abused women. Legal representation, specialized mental health and psychosocial services, rehabilitation and integration programmes, harmonized standard operating procedures, and coordinated referral systems or other specialized services should be provided to women and girls at risk of or exposed to GBV. For women residing in East Jerusalem, Area C and Gaza, where services may be limited or the government cannot reach, greater effort must be taken to partner with and offer support to civil society organizations. Protective services need to be tailored to the needs of women and girls with disabilities to ensure accessibility of services and outreach programmes should be promoted to ensure access to information on such services. Completion of the exercise on costing marital violence and conveying the results to stakeholders will contribute to developing concrete steps to implement reform. The Government should also intensify efforts to ensure that perpetrators of violence against women and girls with disabilities are prosecuted. Legislative reforms criminalizing domestic violence and marital rape are needed. Efforts to address attitudinal beliefs on intimate partner violence are also needed, alongside efforts to strengthen women's access to justice.

- **Women's political participation**

Women's rights organizations continue to call on political factions and parties to ensure that women represent at least 30 per cent of any list running for local elections. Stronger local and national stakeholder commitment to women's political participation, targeting political leaders and parties, civil society organizations and, very importantly, community and religious organizations, is needed. Programmes that provide for political and social empowerment for young women that could give them skills and knowledge to become leaders in their communities are needed especially in Area C, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

- **The Women, Peace and Security agenda:**

The launch of the NAP for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 for the State of Palestine for the period 2017-2019 is to be commended. The Government of Palestine should ensure that sufficient resources are allocated for the implementation of the strategic objectives of the NAP, in accordance with UNSCR 1325 and the WPS agenda. The Government should expend efforts to promote the participation of Palestinian women in formal national reconciliation processes, in holding the Israeli occupation accountable nationally and internationally for its violations against Palestinian women and girls, and in negotiations.

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