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occupied Palestinian territory

APRIL 2018

OCHA



Mohammed al-Ajouri Right leg amputated after shot and injured by Israeli forces during a demostration in Gaza on 30 March.

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 40 Palestinians killed by Israeli forces during mass demonstrations in the Gaza Strip, and 6,800 injured; nearly 30 per cent of injuries by live ammunition (as of 30 April).
- Humanitarian agencies appealed for US$5.3 million for Gaza, for healthcare, mental health and psychological support, and protection monitoring.
- Electricity cuts of up to 20 hours a day continue to undermine service provision in Gaza, including education
- Palestinian Bedouin community in Area C of the West Bank at heightened risk of forcible transfer following court hearing.

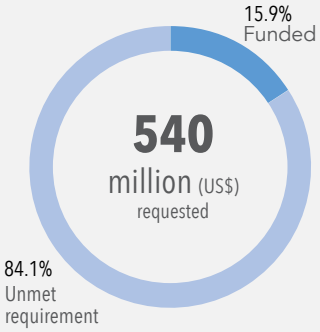
APRIL FIGURES

Palestinians killed (direct conflict)	21
Palestinians injured (direct conflict)	4,978
Israelis killed (direct conflict)	0
Israelis injured (direct conflict)	6
Structures demolished in the West Bank	40
People displaced in the West Bank	13

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PLAN 2018

540 million (US$)
Requested

15.9% funded



OVERVIEW

On 9 April, the right leg of Mohammed El-Ajouri, a 16-year-old boy and an athlete from Gaza featured in this Humanitarian Bulletin, was amputated. Ten days earlier he was shot and injured by Israeli forces while participating in the first of the "Great March of Return" series of Friday demonstrations, near the perimeter fence around Gaza. He is one of the nearly 2,000 Palestinians who, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health figures, were injured by live ammunition since 30 March in such events. As of 30 April, 40 Palestinians have also been killed by Israeli forces during these demonstrations, and another ten in other circumstances. On successive Fridays since 30 March, hundreds of demonstrators, out of thousands, have approached the fence and attempted to damage it, burned tires, thrown stones and, to a lesser extent, Molotov cocktails towards Israeli forces deployed on the other side of the fence. No Israeli injuries have been reported. At present, there is no evidence that the demonstrators killed or injured by live ammunition have posed an imminent threat of death or risk of serious injury to Israeli soldiers, hence raising strong concerns of excessive use of force, according to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In their responses, humanitarian actors have prioritized the delivery of immediate life-saving healthcare; the provision of mental health and psychological support for people injured or otherwise affected; and the monitoring and documenting of possible protection violations. As detailed in this Bulletin, while interventions in these three priority areas are ongoing, agencies have appealed for an additional US$ 5.3 million to scale up activities until 31 May 2018 - the expected six-week duration of the demonstrations, plus an additional two weeks. On 25 April, the Humanitarian Coordinator released $2.2 million from the oPt Humanitarian Fund reserve for unforeseen emergencies to support the three areas of intervention.

The surge in humanitarian needs as a result of the ongoing events takes place against an overall dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. The health system, in particular, is on the verge of collapse as a result of the 10-year blockade, the deepening intra-Palestinian political divide, deteriorating energy supply, inconsistent payment of public sector medical personnel, and growing shortages in

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medicines and disposables.

The same factors are also undermining the access of over 450,000 children in the Gaza Strip to school education, as detailed in another of this Bulletin's articles. The electricity shortage, with cuts of up to twenty hours a day, restricts students' study time at school and ability to concentrate at home, and increases the drop-out rate. Also of concern is the unprecedented financial crisis faced by UNRWA, which provides schooling to some 272,000 of Gaza's children. While the Agency has secured sufficient funding to complete the current school year and to maintain the delivery of other core services into the summer, the re-opening of schools in the second half of the year remains uncertain.

April also witnessed a number of worrying developments in the West Bank, including an increase in settler violence (to be addressed in the May issue of the Humanitarian Bulletin), and a tightening of the coercive environment faced by Palestinian communities in Area C. In a hearing held on 25 April on the fate of the Khan al Ahmar-Abu al Helu Bedouin community in the outskirts of East Jerusalem, the Israeli High Court of Justice indicated that it will not rule against the relocation of the community, despite the objection of the residents; a final ruling is expected in the near future. Without the genuine and informed consent of the residents, which is nearly impossible to obtain in the present coercive environment, such relocation may amount to forcible transfer, a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

"People should not be destined to spend their lives surrounded by borders they are forbidden to cross, or waters they are forbidden to navigate. They should not be destined to live under the control of Hamas, which invests in military activities at the expense of the population."

UN Special Coordinator Mladenov

An additional concern affecting many women living in Area C communities, also highlighted in this Bulletin, is domestic gender-based violence (GBV). A recent study conducted in five such communities in the Jordan Valley found that 46 per cent of the people surveyed believe that violence against women by their husbands is a legitimate practice, and 87 per cent indicated that women should not report domestic violence. A series of workshops targeting students and their parents at schools in the five communities, aimed at reducing the incidence of GBV, was carried out by two NGOs in recent months and concluded in March.

In his briefing to the Security Council on 26 April, the UN Special Coordinator issued a stark warning: "What is happening today in Gaza is an injustice that no man, woman or child should have to endure: the deplorable living conditions; the consequences of the continued, suffocating closures, the control by Hamas; and the mounting risk that Gaza could trigger a new conflict building up. People should not be destined to spend their lives surrounded by borders they are forbidden to cross, or waters they are forbidden to navigate. They should not be destined to live under the control of Hamas, which invests in military activities at the expense of the population. I firmly believe there is a way out. These challenges are political, they are man-made and, thus, resolvable if all sides firmly commit to supporting practical solutions that can be implemented quickly, effectively and sustainably."



The "Great March of Return" demonstration near the perimeter fence, east of Gaza city, 13 April 2018.

NUMEROUS CASUALTIES DURING DEMONSTRATIONS NEAR THE PERIMETER FENCE IN GAZA

A series of demonstrations in the Gaza Strip since 30 March, near the perimeter fence with Israel, have resulted in large numbers of casualties and have raised serious protection concerns.

The demonstrations, organized by Palestinian political factions and political and civil society movements, are part of the Great March of Return lasting up to 15 May, the 70th anniversary of what Palestinians refer to as the 1948 Nakba. The largest gatherings were recorded each Friday at tent camps set up 600-700 meters from the fence in different locations and attended by thousands of participants, including families with children, young people and seniors.

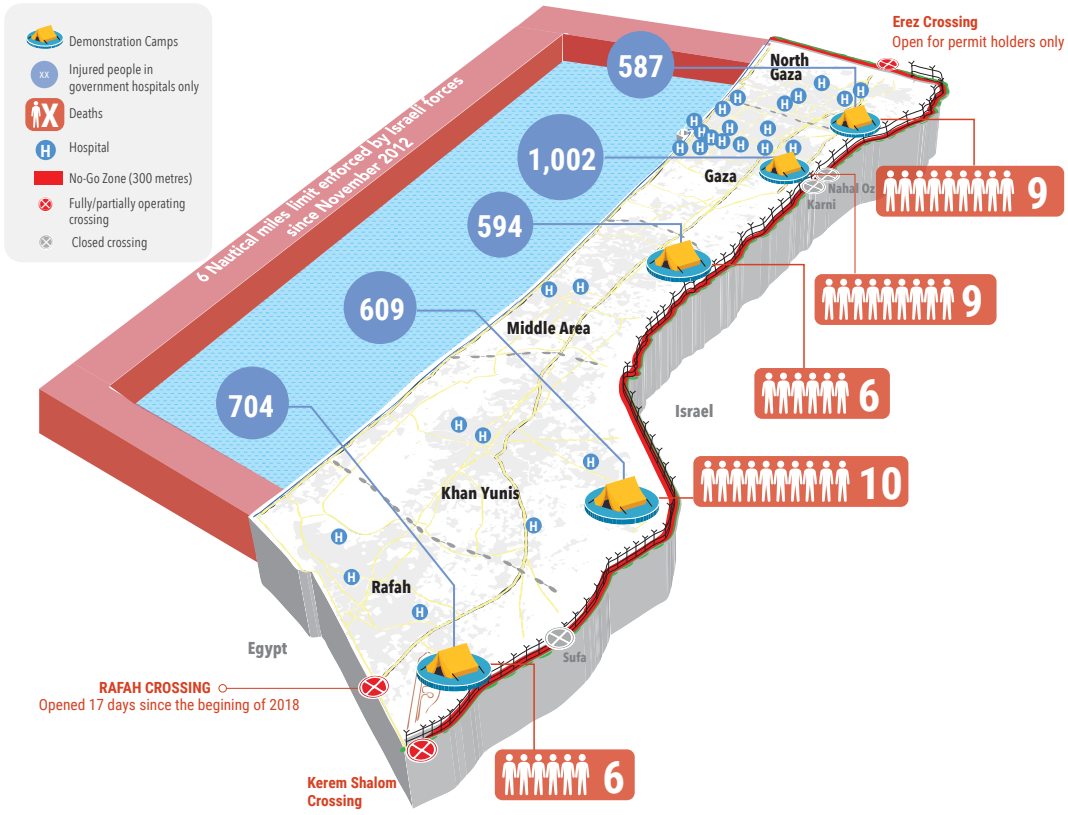
Each Friday, instances took place in which hundreds of demonstrators approached the fence in an attempt to damage it, burning tires, throwing stones and, to a lesser extent, Molotov cocktails towards Israeli forces deployed on the other side. On several occasions, demonstrators flew kites with flaming materials attached to them into Israeli territory, setting crops inside Israel on fire.

On two occasions, ahead of the expected demonstrations, the Israeli military dropped leaflets in the area of the tents warning Palestinians to stay away from the fence. Heavily armed Israeli forces stationed on the Israeli side of the fence behind defensive earth-mounds include one hundred snipers, according to statements by Israeli officials. These forces responded with firearms, including live ammunition, rubber bullets and tear gas canisters, some of them dropped from drones.

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

This article was contributed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

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This report was prepared by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in collaboration with humanitarian partners.

Between 30 March and 30 April, a total of 40 Palestinians, including five children, have been killed by the Israeli forces during the demonstrations. Another ten Palestinians, among them a child, were killed by Israeli forces during this period in other circumstances, including five shot and killed after breaching the fence and crossing into Israel, whose bodies have been withheld by Israel. The fatalities included a journalist wearing a vest marked Press, who was shot less than 100 meters from the fence.[1] Another 19 journalists were injured, 12 of them by live fire.[2]

During the same period, nearly 6,800 Palestinians have been injured during the demonstrations according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) in Gaza, including over 1,900 injuries from live ammunition. By 16 April, some 16 cases of injuries leading to disability had been reported by the Health Cluster. At least 96 health staff had been reportedly injured, including five with live fire, and 16 ambulances damaged.

At present, there is no evidence that the demonstrators killed or injured by live ammunition have posed an imminent threat of death or risk of serious injury to Israeli soldiers, hence raising strong concerns of excessive use of force.

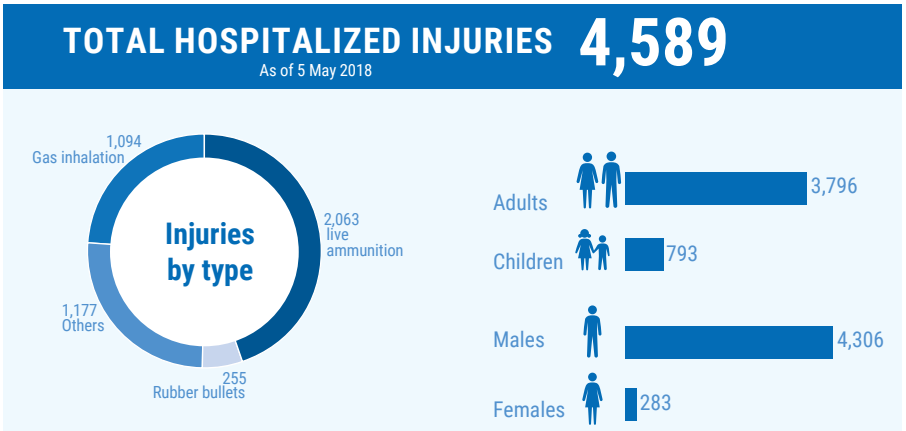
No Israeli casualties have been reported. The Israeli authorities have stated that many of the fatalities were members of Hamas and other armed groups, and have accused the MoH of inflating the number of those wounded by live ammunition.

Legal background and protection concerns

In Gaza, as in the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) apply concurrently. Policing activities during demonstrations or protests are regulated by the law enforcement paradigm derived from IHRL which restricts the use of lethal force to cases of extreme necessity only, as a last resort in response to an imminent threat of death or risk of serious injury. Medical personnel and medical units are to be respected and protected.[5]

So far, there is no evidence that the Palestinians killed during the demonstrations were posing such a threat, raising concerns of excessive use of force leading to arbitrary deprivation of life.[6] Under IHL, this may also constitute an act of wilful killing, a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and a war crime.[7]

On 30 April, the Israeli High Court of Justice heard petitions submitted by two groups of NGOs challenging Israel's open-fire regulations in the context of the current demonstrations. In the hearing, the state representatives rejected the applicability of IHRL to its operations in the oPt, including in the Gaza Strip, and stated that Israel's open fire regulations are in line with international law. The open fire regulations are not public and have not been disclosed. The case is still pending before the court.



This report was prepared by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in collaboration with humanitarian partners.

Calls for independent and transparent investigations into the incidents in Gaza since 30 March were made by the UN Secretary-General, and echoed by the spokesperson of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN human rights experts. The IDF Chief of Staff has reportedly ordered an internal investigation into the incidents.

An additional concern is the denial or delay of travel permits for injured demonstrators to seek urgent specialized medical treatment in the West Bank or Israel. According to WHO, of the 27 patients injured in the demonstrations from 30 March to 30 April who have applied for Israeli permits to exit Gaza for health care, nine applications were approved (33 per cent), significantly lower than the acceptance rate for such permits overall in the first quarter of 2018 (60 per cent). This has increased the life risk and suffering of injured demonstrators, and resulted in the loss of limbs in some cases. The Israeli authorities stated that they would not allow people who participated in the protests to exit Gaza for medical treatment in hospitals in the West Bank or Israel as a matter of principle.[8] Following a petition filed with the Israeli High Court of Justice (HCJ) by the NGOs Adalah and Al Mezan on behalf of two patients, the HCJ ruled on 15 April that the individuals met the criteria for medical referral and that no security grounds justified the denial of an exit permit.

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THE CASE OF 16-YEAR-OLD MOHAMMED AL-AJOURI[9]



Mohammed al-Ajouri is a 16-year-old athlete who participated in the first of the Great March of Return demonstrations on 30 March in northern Gaza. "I wasn't there to throw stones. I went there with my friends to participate peacefully. I was standing near the tents but I moved some steps ahead to help some of the injured people who were overcome by the tear gas fired by Israeli forces. As I was coming back, I was hit by a kind of explosive bullet below my right knee.

"I was transferred first to al-Awda hospital, but due to the serious condition of my injury I was then transferred to al-Shifa hospital in Gaza. I was in the operation room for six hours and was then transferred to the intensive care unit (ICU). I was supposed to stay in the ICU but there wasn't enough space due to the high number of injuries, so I stayed in the general ward for a week, during which I made two referral requests to the West Bank and Egypt but received no answer from either the Israeli or Egyptian authorities. Three days later, on 9 April, the doctors decided to amputate my leg as there was no other way to save my life.

"I used to play soccer, run, jump and swim. I was preparing to travel abroad to participate in a marathon competition as I play for a number of clubs and for the national team. Now, I can't play any of the sports I used to due to my new circumstances, but this will never stop me. I will continue my life as before and adapt and I will never stop playing sports."

This report was prepared by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in collaboration with humanitarian partners.

RESPONDING TO HUMANITARIAN NEEDS AMID VIOLENT EVENTS IN GAZA

Agencies urgently require $5.3 million to scale-up interventions

Humanitarian actors have identified three critical areas of intervention arising from the events in Gaza, namely: providing immediate lifesaving healthcare; scaling up the provision of mental health and psychological support for people injured or otherwise affected by the events; and monitoring, verifying and documenting possible protection violations.

While humanitarian responses in these areas are ongoing, agencies have appealed for an additional US$5.3 million to scale up the immediate response until 31 May 2018. This timeframe mirrors the expected six-week duration of the demonstrations, plus an additional two weeks to ensure an immediate response to any incidents on 15 May. Priorities and requirements will be revised in late May, should conditions require this, while broader contingency planning and emergency preparedness efforts continue in Gaza.

Humanitarian actors have identified three critical areas of intervention: providing immediate lifesaving healthcare; scaling up the provision of mental health and psychological support for people injured or otherwise affected by the events.

On 25 April, the Humanitarian Coordinator released $2.2 million available in the oPt Humanitarian Fund (HF) reserve for unforeseen emergencies to support the three areas of intervention. Additional pledges to respond to the crisis are under consideration and will be announced when confirmed

The immediate requirements are a small portion of the $406 million required for humanitarian interventions in the Gaza Strip during 2018, as identified in the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). As of end April, approximately 11.7 per cent of this amount has been provided.[10]



The "Great March of Return" demonstration near the perimeter fence, east of Gaza city, 27 April 2018.

Emergency healthcare

Emergency trauma management is vital, particularly in the initial hours of an injury to avoid loss of life and avoid disabilities. Essential medical supplies and access to blood are also needed to prevent avoidable death or disability.

Since the start of the events, Health Cluster partners and Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) have deployed six medical teams to Gaza, including general, vascular, orthopaedic and reconstructive surgeons. MSF is also providing post-operative care, but critical gaps remain. Partners have released lifesaving medical supplies, including 42 types of drug, 49 types of medical disposable, and trauma and surgical supply kits for TSPs (Trauma Stabilization Points) and the 14 public hospitals. Almost 80 per cent of the Health Cluster prepositioned stocks have already been released, including drugs, disposables, wound kits and assistive devices.

Of the $5.3 million requested, $4.5 million would support the health sector to deploy emergency medical teams (EMTs) for both TSPs and hospitals, to expand post-operative care capacity, and to procure urgent medical drugs and supplies. A total of $1.8 million of the sum requested for emergency healthcare will be covered by the oPt HF reserve allocation.

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Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)

Exposure to violence, whether directly or indirectly, has significant mental health and psychosocial ramifications. Left unaddressed, the results of these traumatic events since 30 March may lead to longer-term mental illness. The current violence comes against a backdrop of already high rates of mental health disorders in Gaza; an estimated 210,000 people are acutely vulnerable and suffer from severe or moderate mental health disorders.[11]



The "Great March of Return" demonstration near the perimeter fence, east of Gaza city, 20 April 2018.

WHO projections of mental disorders in populations affected by emergencies show that the 12-month prevalence for severe disorder can double to five per cent of the total population affected, while mild or moderate mental disorder can double to 20 per cent following an emergency. In the current Gaza events, it is estimated that over 1,100 people may have severe mental health problems and some 4,500 may have mild to moderate problems requiring MHPSS.

Humanitarian actors are currently providing acute care to patients through the Gaza MoH but the mental health and MHPSS response needs to be scaled up to ensure all who are affected by the crisis receive appropriate services. As of end April, partners in the MHPSS and Child Protection Working Groups of the Protection Cluster have provided initial psychosocial support to at least 203 traumatized children, affected by different types of injuries, out of at least 599 identified. Of them, 28 children with critical and severe injuries (live and rubber bullets) in need of more specialized care were referred for case management. More than one thousand adults in need of MHPSS responses have been also identified and about 342 have been reached with initial psychosocial support.

In the current Gaza events, it is estimated that approximately 1,141 people may have severe mental health problems and 4,564 may have mild to moderate problems requiring mental health and psychosocial support.

The Health and Protection Clusters and the Child Protection and MHPSS Working Groups require $520,000 to deliver an effective immediate response that would include: outreach to acutely injured patients; emergency psychosocial first aid for children and families impacted by violence; and specialized mental health services and psychological support, including at the community level. Of the sum required, $200,000 will be covered by the oPt HF reserve allocation.

Monitoring, verification and documentation of possible violations

The Protection Cluster has been monitoring the situation related to the protests closely since 30 March to collect information relevant to its protection mandate, including for identification of urgent humanitarian needs and ways forward to address possible gaps in response, in coordination with the Health and Education Clusters and OCHA.

Human rights actors in Gaza[12] have engaged in intensive monitoring and documentation of possible violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law. On this basis, the Protection Cluster contributes to an analysis of the developing crisis from a human rights and IHL perspective, including for advocacy. Protection Cluster partners continue to provide legal aid by petitioning the Israeli justice system on behalf of individuals in need of travel permits for urgent treatment outside Gaza, with at least two successful cases.[13]

Humanitarian partners require $240,000 for this response, of which $200,000 will be supported by the oPt HF reserve allocation. Pending full provision of financial requirements, humanitarian partners are seeking to enhance capacity by increasing the number and presence of civil society partners and their technical capacities; enhancing surveillance and verification of the high numbers of injuries and damage to healthcare staff and assets; and providing legal aid to address freedom of movement restrictions that impede medical patients from receiving treatment.

EDUCATION UNDERMINED BY DETERIORATING HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN GAZA

This section was contributed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

In the Gaza Strip, recurrent conflict and the ensuing damage and destruction of educational facilities have disrupted services and impacted the psychosocial wellbeing of children and teachers.[14] The educational system in Gaza is also affected negatively by 11 years of blockade and the continuing failure to effect real intra-Palestinian reconciliation, despite the agreement signed under Egyptian auspices in October 2017. Over 450,000 basic, secondary and kindergarten (KG) students and teachers are identified as 'people in need' in the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). Some 50 per cent of students (aged 5-17 years) do not achieve their full educational potential, meaning that the psychological impact of hostilities has led to a deterioration in learning outcomes, and difficulties in reading and writing.[15]

Schools in Gaza are chronically overcrowded: 70 per cent of UNRWA schools and 63 per cent of schools run by the Ministry of Education operate on a double shift system. This reduces instructional hours on core subjects and foundation learning. It also results in student difficulties in focusing on their studies and heightened levels of violence in schools. In addition to overcrowded classrooms, there is limited time available to reinforce learning, support slow learners, and provide remedial education programmes or extracurricular activities.

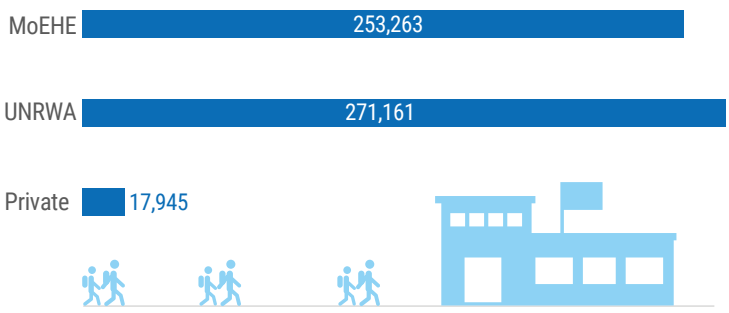
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According to the Ministry for Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), 86 new school buildings need to be built, and 1,081 classrooms added to existing buildings, by 2021 to provide a safe and adequate learning environment. In late April 2018, the MoEHE announced that it would build 100 new Palestinian Authority (PA) schools in Gaza and improve the KG system, which currently serves 66,150 children in 683 kindergartens. Currently, only 30 per cent of younger children (aged 3-6) attend licensed preschools in Gaza, leaving many neglected in this critical phase of learning and holistic development.

Impact of the chronic electricity deficit and poverty on education

Student performance and motivation are also undermined by the wider Gaza context of continuous power outages and electricity rationing, poor shelter and living conditions, and economic deprivation.

STUDENTS BY TYPE OF SCHOOL IN GAZA



Source: MoEHE's Educational Statistics Book for the school year 2017-2018. December 2017.

The chronic electricity deficit that causes power cuts of up to twenty hours a day restricts students' study time and their ability to concentrate and learn. It has a negative impact on their right and ability to access education at school and at home, and increases the drop-out rate. Children who drop out are at risk of child labour or of participating in life-threatening activities, increasing the demands on the already overburdened protection system in Gaza.

According to the MoEHE, $130,000 is required every month for fuel to run generators for 253,263 children to learn in a proper school environment, to use science and IT laboratories, and to attend vocational lessons. In 2017 the MoEHE requested financial support from the Education Cluster to administer the end-of-school Tawjihi exams in accordance with acceptable educational standards; the cluster responded by giving the ministry 10,000 liters of emergency fuel. Electricity cuts also disrupt the functioning of the 10 MoEHE water desalination plants in schools to provide safe drinking water. The deteriorating socio-economic situation in Gaza means that the cost of higher education is a significant burden for most families: some 20,000 graduates in Gaza have not been awarded their certificates due to their inability to pay all of their tuition and other fees.

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Impact of the internal division on teachers

In the aftermath of the Hamas takeover of Gaza in 2007, thousands of civil servants paid by the PA in Ramallah, including teachers, were either forced by the PA to stop work or were replaced by civil servants recruited by the Gaza authorities and not salaried by the PA. Hundreds of government projects in Gaza were halted and the PA's budget for Gaza branches of ministries, including the MoEHE, were cut. As part of the reconciliation process signed in October 2017, 1,200 MoEHE staff returned to work, including 800 teachers, but the ministry reported a critical need to recruit 231 new teachers for the 2017/18 school year to bridge staffing shortages. There is also the risk that teachers will stop work if their salaries are not paid or they are not transported to school. Currently, there is no operational budget for replacement teachers to cover for maternity or other temporary leaves of absence; this affects an estimated 54,000 children. There is also is a critical need to ensure that returning and newly recruited teachers are suitably trained in the new school curriculum.



© Photo by UNESCO/ Bilal Al Hamaydah.

Overcrowded classroom in Safad Basic School for Boys "B" in Eastern Gaza.

CASE STUDY: WE CAN ONLY KEEP GOING THANKS TO THE PARENTS AND TEACHERS.

Mr. Riyad Lubbad has been the principal of Al-Karmil High School for Boys in Gaza since 2006.



"We have 950 students in our school and around 50 employees. All of us are suffering as a result of the economic situation and the lack of electricity which is negatively impacting the academic achievement of the students. Some students miss school for work while others work after school at night to support their families.

Some teachers cannot come to the school because they don't have money for transportation; either they don't receive their salaries at all or they have deductions when they do get it.

Since October 2017, we have only received 300 NIS as operational expenses from the MoEHE, which can't cover our maintenance, stationery or other needs. To cope with the electricity cuts, we managed to get approval from the Ministry of Transportation, located next to us, to supply the school with an electricity line from their back-up generators. This is not enough to light up the classes and providing the fuel for the generator, which requires around 2.5 litres of fuel per hour, is another problem. The students' parents used to help us in providing the fuel but now that the economic situation is so bad, they can no longer do so.

Extra-curricular activities have been reduced to the minimum in order to decrease expenses, which is also supported by the parents. Last week, 45 of our students won first places in a number of competitions, but unfortunately we couldn't afford to reward them, we could only print them certificates. We can only keep going thanks to the contribution of the parents who enabled us to provide exams papers and do some of the needed maintenance. And because of the teachers, who despite the situation, are still committed to the students' performance and achievement."

"Some teachers cannot come to the school because they don't have money for transportation; either they don't receive their salaries at all or they have deductions when they do get it."

High school principal

UNRWA financial crisis

UNRWA currently provides primary education to 271,161 Palestinian refugee students in 275 schools across the Gaza Strip. This is an increase of about 10,000 students over the 2016/17 school year. The socio-economic situation has caused widespread poverty and soaring unemployment in Gaza, and the vast majority of UNRWA students come from poor and vulnerable families. Some 8,800 teachers are also employed in the Agency's schools.

To accommodate the growing number of students and provide them with an appropriate learning environment, UNRWA must continue to invest in its educational infrastructure, and improve access to safe drinking water, sanitation facilities and a continuous electricity supply. Approximately five new double-shift schools are needed every year, in addition to the rehabilitation of existing school premises.

This report was prepared by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in collaboration with humanitarian partners.

The rising numbers of students attending UNRWA schools puts increasing pressure on the Agency's education programme, especially in the current context of drastically reduced funding: the Agency is facing the most serious deficit in its 68-year history following the decision of the United States, UNRWA's main donor, to significantly reduce its financial allocation for 2018. While the Agency has secured sufficient funding to complete the current school year and maintain the delivery of other core services into the summer, operations in the second half of the year, including UNRWA education services, are not yet guaranteed. This threatens the continuation of the current scope and quality of the Agency's education programme. Overcrowded classrooms, a higher teacher-student ratio and higher drop-out rates may also be seen. UNRWA may not be able to maintain the same level of specialized support to low-achieving students or students with disabilities. The Agency may also be forced to make further cuts to critical routine maintenance for schools, generators, and sanitation facilities, and reduce the number of guards and attendants in schools.

ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN AREA C COMMUNITIES IN THE WEST BANK

This article was contributed by the Association of Volunteers in International Services (AVSI) Foundation

The extent of domestic, gender-based violence (GBV) across the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) is believed to be significant. A 2010 survey by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) revealed that 37 per cent of married Palestinian women had been subject to violence by their husbands, while nearly two-thirds of them (65.3 per cent) reported that they chose not to report the violence: only 0.7 per cent of these women sought assistance from specialized organizations. The survey indicated that the incidence of GBV in the Gaza Strip is significantly higher than in the West Bank.

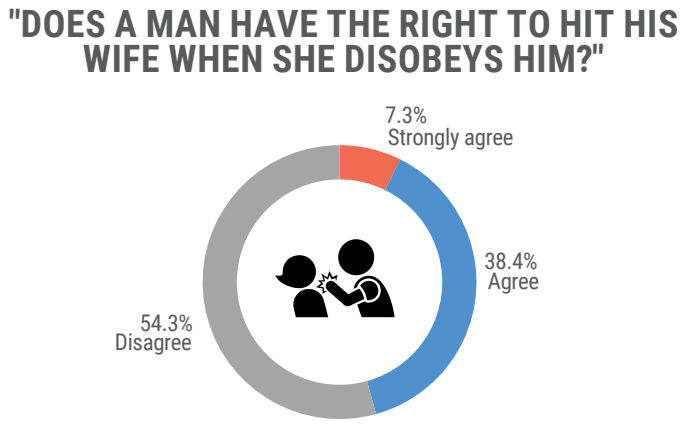
Literature on the subject and anecdotal evidence collected by aid agencies also suggest that situations of humanitarian hardship enhance the patriarchal nature of communities and increase the vulnerability of women to domestic violence. A recent study on gender equality in the Middle East and North Africa, for example, found a clear linkage between exposure to "occupation-related violence and adversity" and "increased experiences or perpetration of intimate partner violence", among other ramifications.[16]

Situations of humanitarian hardship enhance the patriarchal nature of communities and increase the vulnerability of women to domestic violence.

Palestinian communities in Area C of the West Bank, the Jordan Valley in particular, have been identified by humanitarian agencies as among the most vulnerable groups in the oPt. The restrictive planning regime applied by the Israeli authorities in Area C makes it virtually impossible for Palestinians to obtain building permits and impedes the development of adequate housing, infrastructure and livelihoods. Along with restrictions on access to farming and grazing land, plus other constraints, this regime contributes to the creation of a coercive environment for residents and the risk of forcible transfer.

In July 2017, two humanitarian NGOs (AVSI Foundation-Italy and the Youth Women's Christian Association-Jericho), with financial support from the government of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, launched an intervention addressing GBV in five Area C communities in the Jericho governorate. Completed in March 2018,[17] this was part of a larger project that included the provision of medical services, and the rehabilitation of toilets and drinking points at schools.

This report was prepared by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in collaboration with humanitarian partners.



The first component of the project entailed a survey targeting 151 residents (132 women and 18 men) of the five communities selected and addressing a range of issues that included domestic violence against women and children, early marriage, forced marriage and awareness of assistance mechanisms. Almost half of the respondents (46 per cent) reported that they had been subject to violence (mostly physical), a third indicated that they believe that violence by husbands is the result of abuse or neglect at an early age, and over 36 per cent pointed out that culture is an additional factor behind this practice.

More than 46 per cent of those surveyed believe that violence against women by their husbands is a legitimate practice, while more than 87 per cent indicated that women should not report domestic violence. The vast majority (more than 90 per cent) did not know where to go to report domestic violence, while less than 10 per cent indicated that they would report the incident at a police station. The survey revealed a high percentage of early and forced marriage: 36 per cent of the women surveyed reported that they married when they were less than 18 years of age, while 22 per cent said that they married against their will.

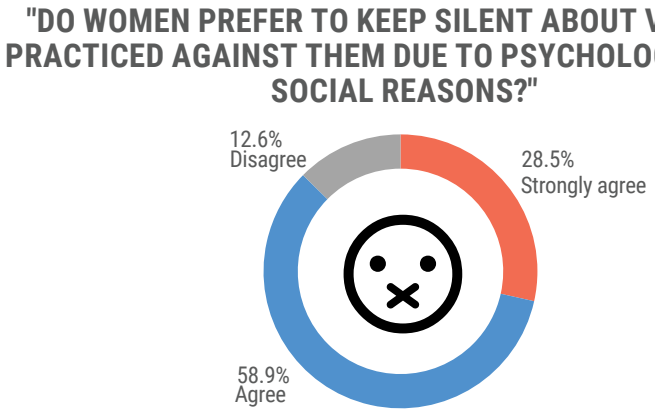
Almost half of the respondents surveyed in five communities reported that they had been subject to violence (mostly physical).

The second component of the project, implemented from October 2017, involved a series of workshops ("safety audit groups") in six schools serving the selected communities. The workshops carried out in each school entailed a series of six sessions with students and two sessions with parents. The sessions offered an introduction to GBV, women's rights and early marriage with the goal of mitigating the occurrence of GBV and raising the girls' awareness of specialized organizations and the GBV referral system. All participants took two tests, one before the workshops and one at the end, and these reflected an overall improvement in their awareness about the issues addressed.



One of the meetings of the GBV Safety Audit Groups with the mothers in Fasayel Coed School on the 5th of February 2018.

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More than 46 per cent of those surveyed believe that violence against women by their husbands is a legitimate practice, while more than 87 per cent indicated that women should not report domestic violence.

A concluding event entitled "My rights are my protective shield" was held on 6 March in Jericho with the participation of local authorities and representatives of civil society organizations. The participants heard the personal experiences of a student and a mother who took part in the workshops, and shared ideas about strategies for addressing GBV in Palestinian society. The project was presented by the implementing NGOs at the GBV Working Group of the Protection Cluster with a view to replicating the intervention in other vulnerable Palestinian communities.



Fadia Nawawreh, a mother of six, lives in Fasayel village (Jericho). She is one of the women who took part in the GBV workshops. Fadia was forced to marry when she was 17. After marriage, she repeatedly suffered sexual abuse from her father-in-law without any protection from her husband. Ultimately she decided to move away from home. Fadia presented her testimony at the final event of the project 'My rights are my protective shield'. "We are forgotten women in this area; we need to have our role and our voices raised", said Fadia. "Thank you for this project because now we know we have rights and that you can hear our voice. You taught us how to move forward."

ENDNOTES

1. OHCHR monitoring
2. Al-Mezan Centre for Human Rights
3. The applicability of IHRL in a situation of armed conflict or occupation concurrently with IHL has been widely affirmed. The International Court of Justice first addressed that issue in 1996 and then reiterated the concurrent application of both bodies of law in its advisory opinion on the wall, including in respect of the oPt. A situation of armed conflict or occupation does not release a State from its human rights obligations. (See, SG report, A/HRC/34/38, para. 9).
4. Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, Articles 2-3, and Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, Principles 5, 9 and 13-14.
5. See in particular Geneva Convention IV, Art. 18, and ICRC's Customary International Law Study, Rule 28-30.
6. Art. 6 ICCPR.
7. Art. 147 Fourth Geneva Convention; See SG report A/HRC/34/38, para. 45-48.
8. Response submitted to the Israeli High Court of Justice on 11 April 2018: HCJ 2777/18, Yousuf Karnaz and others vs IDF Commander and others.
9. This case study was prepared by OCHA.
10. The HRP was only 14.4 per cent funded overall (both West Bank and Gaza) as of end April.
11. 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview, p. 33.
12. Palestinian Center for Human Rights and Al Mezan Center for Human Rights
13. See Al Mezan Center for Human Rights' website.
14. In the 2014 conflict in Gaza, a total of 1,175 education facilities were damaged. Some 987 students and 60 teachers were killed, and 3,497 students and 108 teachers were injured.
15. MoEHE Study on Blockade Impact on Education 2006- 2016, Gaza- March 2016.
16. UN Women and Promundo, Understanding Masculinities, 2017, p. 243.
17. The selected communities were: Zbeidat, Marj Na'ajeh, Ghazal, Fasayel and Arab al Ka'abneh.

This report was prepared by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in collaboration with humanitarian partners.