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Ministry of Women's Affairs

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Analyzing the reality of rural women in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip

On the occasion of Palestinian Women's National Day



October, 2025

Introduction

The twenty-sixth of October is the National Day of Palestinian Women, which highlights the exceptional circumstances faced by Palestinian rural women, particularly in light of the challenging economic and social conditions and the consequences of the two-year-long violence perpetrated by the Israeli occupation.

Palestinian women play a vital role in various fields, particularly in agriculture, which is a key pillar of the Palestinian economy and often symbolizes resilience and resistance. They are not only partners in agricultural work and contributors to the family economy but also essential to the process of national resilience and the preservation of Palestinian identity. This is particularly important given the multiple challenges faced by villages and rural areas, due to Israeli occupation policies that target land and resources and systematically seek to displace Palestinians and depopulate the countryside.

In this context, the struggle of Palestinian women encompasses complex dimensions, merging the fight for national liberation with the pursuit of social justice, equal rights, and opportunities within their society. Women in rural areas constitute 49% of the population in rural Palestine and represent 14.6% of the total Palestinian female population. Among these women, 62.7% are married, while 4.9% are widows. They reside in 774 villages across Palestine .

Rural women play a significant role in managing natural resources, caring for the land, and raising future generations, despite facing dual challenges: the constraints imposed by occupation, which limits their movement and threatens their livelihood security, and the traditional social structures that often position them as subordinates rather than leaders .

According to official statistics from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, women in rural areas have very limited access to education, with illiteracy rates among these women still higher than those in urban areas. The data also indicates that rural women have few opportunities to participate in the formal labor market; their involvement is primarily in informal sectors, particularly agriculture and

domestic work, which places them outside the frameworks of legal and social protections .

Furthermore, rural women face a clear lack of access to basic services, such as healthcare, transportation, and infrastructure. They also experience weak legal awareness and limited economic and political empowerment. These factors contribute to their marginalization and exclusion, undermining opportunities for achieving social and gender justice.The importance of this report on the reality of rural women in Palestine lies in the fact that this group is among the most vulnerable in the current political and economic climate. It provides a deeper understanding of how gender interacts with class and location within the Palestinian context. Women living in villages behind the wall or in areas threatened by land confiscation not only lack access to basic services, but they also face constant threats of losing their land and livelihoods to the occupation and settler militias. Meanwhile, they bear the heavy burdens of family, work, and societal expectations, often with very limited opportunities.

The inadequate political representation of rural women in local bodies and village councils leaves their voices unheard in decision-making processes, complicating the implementation of effective development policies and genuine empowerment programs. Despite these challenges, Palestinian rural women have shown remarkable resilience by engaging in agricultural cooperatives, starting small enterprises, and initiating community projects aimed at compensating for the lack of international support to the rural sector.

This report seeks to analyze the realities faced by Palestinian rural women by examining the economic and social challenges they encounter, assessing opportunities for their empowerment and active participation, reviewing current policies, and proposing practical recommendations. These recommendations aim to improve their situation, enhance their roles in society, and identify the necessary interventions to ensure justice and equality, ultimately striving to build a more equitable and sustainable society for all.

Mona Al-Khalili / Minister of women's Affairs

Executive summary

The report reflects the complex reality faced by rural women in occupied Palestine, with a focus on the West Bank and Gaza Strip under the shadow of the crime of genocide. The number of women in rural areas is about 432 thousand, and all these communities are in the West Bank only, where they face difficult conditions due to the lack of employment opportunities and limited services.

The unemployment rate among rural women rose significantly in 2024 to 30.1%, with labor market participation falling to 17.8%, due to economic and social constraints caused by conflict, poor infrastructure, and difficulties in accessing the workplace. The majority of employed women are concentrated in the agricultural sector at 14.6%, while the largest proportion are employed in services, trade and manufacturing.

Rural women in the West Bank face serious challenges due to Israeli occupation policies, which include land confiscation, military checkpoints, and the water crisis, which have led to a decline in agricultural production and increased production costs, as well as the isolation of large parts of agricultural land from their owners.

In the Gaza Strip, the aggression that has been ongoing since October 2023 has caused extensive destruction to the agricultural sector, with more than 94% of the land destroyed or rendered unfit for agriculture, and thousands of agricultural infrastructure such as wells, farms and greenhouses have been destroyed. this led to the collapse of agricultural production and significant economic losses estimated at about $2.8 billion.

The Ministry of Women ' s Affairs affirms its commitment to supporting rural women and enhancing their participation in economic and social development, by integrating their issues into national policies, providing access to agricultural resources, financial and technical support, training and capacity-building programs, improving infrastructure, promoting legal rights and representing rural women ' s issues at the national, regional and international levels. to ensure their empowerment and enhance their role in society.

Demographic indicators on women in the Palestinian countryside for 2024

Area and type of assembly	Both sexes	Male	Female
Palestine	**5,589,623**	**2,816,163**	**2,773,459**
He has arrived	**4,252,247**	2,157,890	2,094,357
The camps	**455,711**	230,844	224,867
" Only in the West Bank."	**881,665**	450,007	431,658

Source: Based on the General Population, Housing and establishments Census 2017: Final Population Results - detailed Report - Palestine.

The table shows that the number of women in rural areas in Palestine is about 432 thousand women, and all these communities exist in the West Bank only, as there are no rural communities in the Gaza Strip. Although rural women are close to men in the same areas, conditions for rural women are often more difficult because of the lack of employment opportunities and services. Therefore, it is important to pay special attention to supporting women in these areas by providing educational and economic opportunities commensurate with their needs, to enhance their role in society and improve their standard of living.in addition, an understanding of rural gender disparities helps in the development of development programs that respond specifically to the needs of rural women. this contributes to improving their quality of life and their role within the family and society.

****Economic Status of Rural Women****

The unemployment rate among women in rural areas increased significantly in 2024, reaching 30.1%, compared to 22.3% in 2022. This rise occurred alongside a decrease in their labor market participation rate, which fell from 19.5% to 17.8%.

Most notably, the consequences of the genocide have had profound social and economic impacts, leading to persistent challenges related to access to employment and inadequate infrastructure that supports the empowerment of women in these regions. According to

the data from "Women and Men in Palestine 2023," the distribution of women in the rural labor market is as follows: 60.6% are employed in the services sector, 14.6% in agriculture, 13.5% in trade, restaurants, and hotels, while 10% are employed in the manufacturing sector.

Security conditions and frequent closures have significantly affected the ability of rural women working in locations far from their homes to access their workplaces. After October 7, 2023, the number of fixed and temporary barriers, such as iron gates, earthen berms, and concrete blocks, in the West Bank increased to approximately 909 Israeli checkpoints, including occupied Jerusalem. This total includes 82 new barriers and gates erected since the beginning of 2025. During the first two weeks of September 2023, Israeli authorities installed at least 727 iron barriers and gates, mostly at the entrances to towns and villages. These obstacles have severely limited access to livelihoods and increased mobility costs, forcing many women to leave their jobs. Furthermore, the financial instability of the institutions where they work has led to a significant number of layoffs among these women.



The economic reality of Palestinian rural women working in the agricultural sector

The agricultural sector is one of the key components of the Palestinian rural economy, and women play an important role in it, despite poor formal participation and limited opportunities for empowerment. The challenges facing rural women working in this sector increased sharply after the seventh of October 2023, as a result of the Israeli escalation and systematic attacks, which affected agricultural land,

infrastructure and sources of income, and imposed further restrictions on farmers' access, especially women, to their land.

Despite the importance of the role of women in this sector, the data of the Labour Force Survey for 2023 show that the proportion of women working in agriculture in rural areas does not exceed 14.6%, and this percentage is limited to those working in productive agricultural projects officially registered with the competent authorities. This suggests that the actual numbers may be higher if informal employment is taken into account.

One of the fundamental obstacles facing women in this sector is poor agricultural tenure. According to the 2021 agricultural census data, only 7.7% of the total holders of agricultural land are women, with no significant differences between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The northern Jordan Valley, Tubas, and Jericho areas are among the lowest in terms of women's access to agricultural land, which limits their ability to manage their resources independently.

This tenure gap is reflected in women's access to agricultural finance, with most financial institutions relying on formal ownership of land as collateral for loans. The absence of such ownership thus weakens women ' s ability to invest in agriculture or develop their own businesses, and makes their dependence on others for access to resources imperative.

Rural women in Palestine face cumulative challenges as a result of the declining role of agriculture in the family economy and social transformations that have kept families away from land as a source of basic income. The Israeli occupation has contributed to the deepening of this decline by confiscating land and restricting access to it. These difficulties escalated after October 2023, calling for urgent development interventions to ensure women's economic empowerment and enhance their opportunities in agriculture.

1- The occupation authorities continue to pursue systematic policies aimed at confiscating Palestinian land in favor of settlement expansion, practices that are classified as part of the policies of the occupation that have been ongoing since 1948.

- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reports that the construction of the separation wall and the confiscation of land have led to the loss of more than 35% of Palestinian agricultural land.
- After October 7, 2023, the Israeli occupation authorities seized more than 52 thousand dunums of citizens' land, and issued 13 military orders that resulted in the establishment of buffer zones around the settlements. it established 60 new colonial outposts and also seized more than 24 thousand dunums of West Bank land under the pretext of "state land", in the largest operation of its kind in more than three decades, raising the areas under its control and various procedures to about 2382 square kilometers. this is equivalent to 42% of the West Bank and 70% of the areas classified as "C". [1]
- These violations were not limited to areas classified as (c) only, but also extended to areas (b), such as in Salfit Governorate (Raffa settlement), which prevents Palestinians from reaching 384 dunums, and in the village of al-Mazra al-Gharabih (Harasha outpost), where residents are denied access to 525 dunums of their land.
- Israeli military checkpoints isolate agricultural land from its owners, and deny farmers access to their land, especially in harvest seasons such as olives, which contributed to a significant decline in production.

2- The water crisis is one of the most significant challenges facing Palestinian agriculture, especially in rural areas. Israel maintains near-total control over water sources in the West Bank, with 2023 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) data indicating that the occupation controls about 85% of water resources, leaving Palestinians with access of only 15%.

- The average Palestinian consumption of water is about 70 liters per day, while Israeli settlers in illegal settlements receive about 300 liters per person per day, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

[1] A report issued by Ma'an News Agency entitled "Land Day Anniversary: The occupation has seized 52,000 dunums since the start of the aggression on Gaza, March 2025"

- This disparity has led to a decline in the proportion of irrigated land from 10% of total agricultural land in 2005 to 6.8% in 2022, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). This decline has resulted in reduced agricultural production and reduced arable areas, negatively affecting the livelihoods of farmers and women farmers.

3- As a result of Israeli restrictions and the tightening of the agricultural sector, the cost of production in the West Bank has increased significantly:

- According to FAO , agricultural production costs have increased by 40% to 60% over the past two decades, as a result of restrictions on the import of agricultural equipment, fertilizers, and raw materials.
- Restrictions on the movement of goods and movement have led to a significant increase in transportation and marketing costs, with an estimated 60% of Palestinian agricultural products facing difficulties in accessing local and international markets.
- According to the World Bank (2021), Palestinian agricultural output has declined by 11% since 2010 due to shrinking cultivated areas and rising production costs.

4- The 708-kilometer separation barrier is one of the biggest barriers for Palestinian farmers, especially women in rural areas.

- The construction of the wall has cut off about 9.4% of agricultural land from its owners, according to OCHA . An estimated 18,000 Palestinians are directly affected by the wall.
- Women in isolated areas face severe difficulties in accessing their land, with an estimated 40% of women working in agriculture in these areas finding it difficult to move around and access their land.
- Obtaining special permits to access agricultural land is often complicated or impossible, resulting in reduced agricultural production.

Challenges facing women working in agriculture in the Gaza Strip under the crime of genocide

Prior to the Israeli aggression, the Gaza Strip contributed about one-third of the GDP, while the agricultural sector accounted for about 11% of this output, and contributed to 44% of the population's needs for agricultural products. Agricultural exports accounted for 55% of total exports in 2022. With the escalation of the aggression, the initial losses in the Gaza Strip were estimated at about $ 2.8 billion in the agricultural sector, reflecting the magnitude of the massive destruction that affected various aspects of the economy, especially agriculture.

The agricultural sector in Gaza has been subjected to widespread destruction as a result of the ongoing Israeli aggression, with statistics showing that more than 94% of the agricultural land, out of 178,000 dunums, has been destroyed or rendered unfit for agriculture, and 1,223 agricultural wells have been destroyed, resulting in their complete decommissioning. in addition to the vandalism of 665 cattle, sheep and poultry farms, and the land planted with vegetables, there was a severe collapse, with the cultivated area falling from more than 93,000 dunums to less than 4,000 dunums. More than 85% of greenhouses in Gaza's governorates have been destroyed.

This catastrophic decline in agricultural infrastructure was directly reflected in production, with annual vegetable production falling from 405,000 tons to just 28,000 tons, while the fishing sector suffered 100% damage as a result of systematic targeting of fishing areas. [2]

The Ministry of Women ' s Affairs affirms its commitment to promoting the reality of rural women and supporting their active participation in economic and social development, by integrating rural women ' s issues into national policies and strategies, and in coordination with relevant actors. This includes working to ensure women's access to agricultural resources such as land and water, as well as launching agricultural training and capacity-building programs, as well as calling for improved infrastructure in rural areas, including roads, marketing centers and agricultural services. In partnership with relevant authorities, and within the framework of legal protection and empowerment, the Ministry works to promote women's rights to property and inheritance, and to provide protection from violence

[2] A report issued by Al Jazeera Mubasher entitled "Two Years of Genocide and Destruction.. This is what the occupation did in the Gaza Strip, 10-14-2025

and discrimination, especially in areas affected by occupation and settlement practices. It also seeks to represent rural women's issues in international forums and lead community campaigns to expand women's participation in decision-making at the local and national levels.