CLIMATE CHANGE, SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE:

Interventions in the Palestinian Context

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Nature Palestine Society

This paper was developed by **Dr. Yara Dahdal /Nature Palestine Society** in collaboration with UNFPA and Palestinian Medical Relief

The Nature Palestine Society (NPS) is a non-profit organization established in 2017, dedicated to the research, protection, conservation, and education about the natural environment and biodiversity in Palestine. Guided by a vision for a Palestinian society that feels a strong sense of responsibility for its natural world, the NPS focuses on preserving wildlife, plants, open landscapes, and functioning ecosystems. Its goals, centered on being Devoted to the Environment and ensuring a better animal life, involve exploring and conserving fauna and flora, monitoring migratory and endangered species, and promoting respectful human-environment interactions. Crucially, the NPS is also involved in the policy making process for a better Palestine, contributing to community capacity building and national/international collaboration, and preparing essential conservation strategies for relevant governmental bodies. Through this multi-faceted approach, the organization ensures its work not only protects nature on the ground but also influences national environmental legislation and institutional capacity.

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Executive Summary:

This white paper presents the findings of a youth-led inquiry into the intersection of climate change, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and gender-based violence (GBV) in the Palestinian context—an area that remains critically underexplored both nationally and regionally.

Recognizing Palestine as a climate hotspot coupled with the impacts of occupation, Nature Palestine Society conducted a survey with 200 Palestinian youth from diverse backgrounds. The study aimed to assess their awareness and understanding of how climate change affects SRH and GBV, and to explore their perspectives on participation in policy-making processes related to these issues.

The methodology involved a comprehensive desk review, the development and piloting of a structured questionnaire, and the distribution of the survey electronically. The results were analyzed across demographic categories including age, gender, education level, and place of residence.

Key findings indicate a strong general awareness of climate change and its impacts, particularly among older and more educated youth. However, significant gaps were identified in the understanding of how climate change affects sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and contributes to gender-based violence (GBV). For example, many younger respondents and those living in refugee camps were unable to define SRH accurately, or held misconceptions about its scope, often limiting it to family planning. Similarly, awareness of the ways climate stressors—such as heat waves, malnutrition, and water scarcity— can affect maternal health, fertility, and hormonal balance was limited. Recognition of the connection between climate pressures and increased risks of GBV was also comparatively weaker among younger groups and male respondents. The survey further revealed that although youth are willing to participate in climate–health policy discussions, many feel disempowered due to a lack of resources or a belief that they cannot make a difference.

Based on these findings, this paper presents tailored policy recommendations for youth engagement, climate change action oriented education and communication strategies, and institutional reforms to ensure that climate resilience efforts in Palestine are integrated, inclusive, gender-responsive, and meaningfully youth-engaged.

🔸 Climate Change Stressors

Rising temperatures and heat waves

Water scarcity

Food insecurity

Environmental degradation

Extreme weather events



🔹 Disruptive Pathways:

Health system strain: overburdened clinics, limited SRH supplies

Economic stress: unemployment, higher cost of living

Social instability: displacement, conflict over resources

Psychological pressure: chronic stress, anxiety, trauma

🔸 Consequences on SRH & GBV



Reduced access to maternal care and contraception

-Increased risk of early marriage or transactional sex

-More frequent gender-based violence

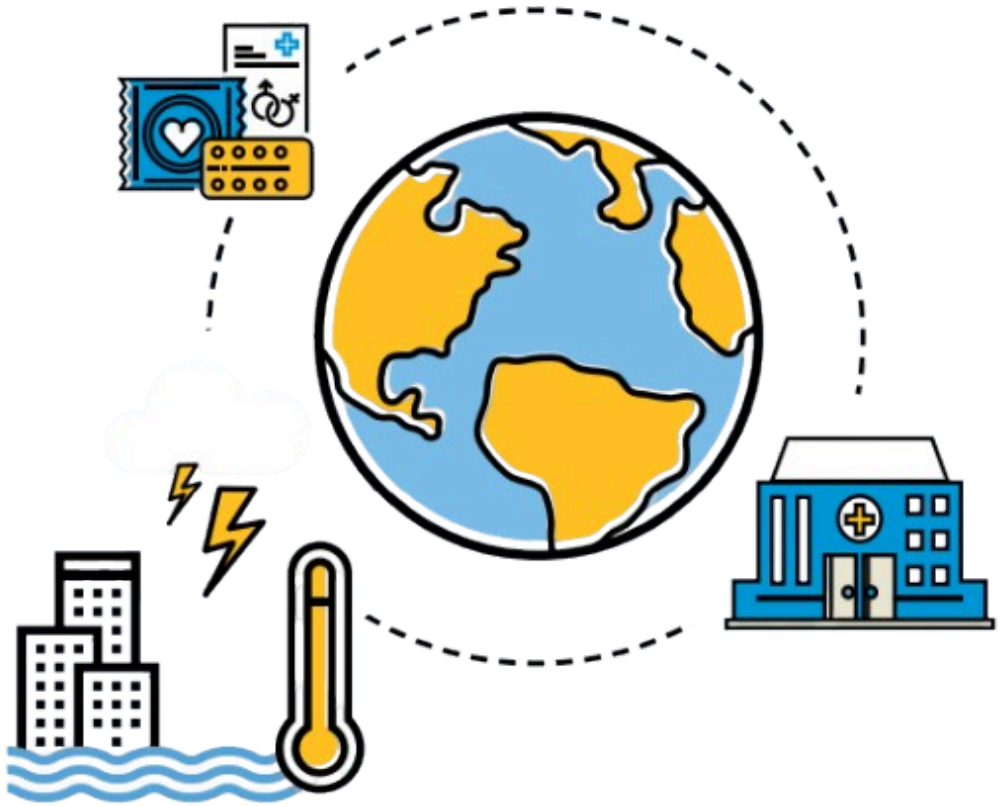
-Poor menstrual hygiene

-Hormonal imbalances and fertility issues

-Reduced help-seeking behavior due to overstretched systems

Diagram 1 illustrates how climate-related stressors such as heat waves, water scarcity, and food insecurity create cascading risks that directly and indirectly affect health and social wellbeing. Rising temperatures and extreme weather events put additional pressure on already fragile health systems, reducing access to essential services, including sexual and reproductive health care. At the household level, resource scarcity heightens stress and increases the likelihood of conflict, which in turn elevates the risk of gender-based violence. At the same time, economic pressures linked to climate change—such as loss of agricultural income—further constrain families' ability to access health services or exercise reproductive choices. Together, these interconnected stressors show how climate change is not only an environmental or economic challenge, but also a profound health and protection issue.

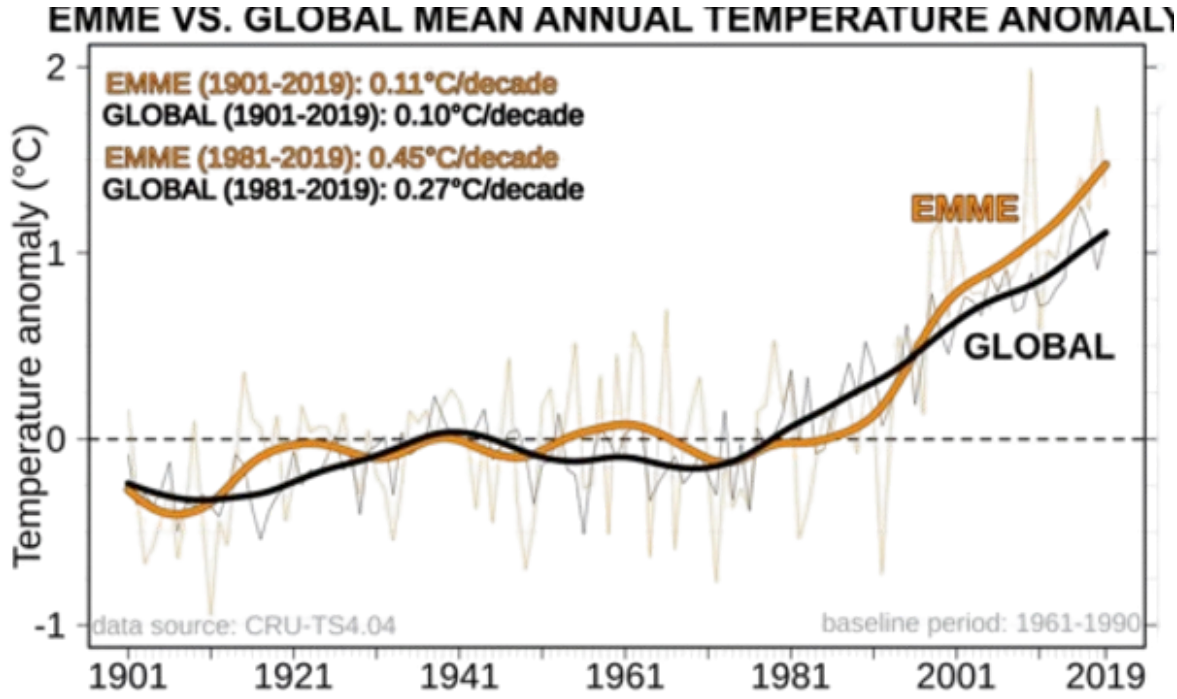
Diagram 1 : The Climate–SRH–GBV Nexus Map shows how climate stressors converge to limit SRH access, increase stress, and amplify GBV risks



Introduction:

Palestine stands at the frontline of the global climate crisis. As part of the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East (EMME) region, it is classified as a major climatic hotspot—a region experiencing the impacts of global warming at a rate significantly higher than the global average[1]. Climate change in Palestine is not a distant future scenario but a present and escalating crisis reality, interacting with-and often magnifying-existing structural vulnerabilities linked to the Israeli occupation, political instability, and economic hardship.

Figure 1: Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East versus global temperature anomalies since 19012



Projections for the region through the end of the 21st century are particularly alarming, especially within the EMME region. According to the study entitled “Climate Change and Weather Extremes in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East”, under a continued high-emissions trajectory, Palestine may witness a 49% increase in summer duration (adding two additional months), and a 56% reduction in winter length2. Average annual temperatures are expected to rise by 4.5°C, while annual precipitation is projected to decline by 25%. The frequency of extreme heatwaves could increase sevenfold, with their duration tripling compared to historical norms. These climatic shifts are expected to intensify wildfires, reduce air quality, degrade soil and water resources, and alter the timing and severity of seasonal health risks[2].

These challenges are deepened by rapid population growth and a highly constrained natural resource base. The Palestinian population is projected to reach 6.9 million by 2030

and 9.5 million by 20503. This demographic pressure will place further strain on already-scarce water resources, which is expected to shrink due to climate-induced hydrological changes. Increased demand for essential health services, coupled with diminishing environmental buffers, will exacerbate vulnerabilities, particularly for women, youth, people living with disabilities, as well as displaced communities; such as recently evacuated refugees from Nur AlShams camp, and Bedouin populations living in marginalized areas.

Yet despite the growing recognition of climate change's impacts on agriculture, infrastructure, biodiversity, and general public health sector, one critical dimension remains consistently overlooked: the impact of climate change on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and gender-based violence (GBV). While environmental risks receive policy attention, SRH and GBV are notably absent from both global climate dialogues and national adaptation strategies, including those of Palestine[4–6].

This is not merely a technical gap, but a justice-driven and multi-dimensional social issue. Disruptions to SRH services, such as maternal care, contraception, and menstrual hygiene during environmental shocks can have lasting health and social consequences. Simultaneously, climate-induced resource scarcity, displacement, and psychological stress are known to heighten risks of GBV, especially in contexts where protective mechanisms are weak, gender norms are restrictive, and youth participation is limited. The recently adopted National Health Strategy acknowledges environmental change as a critical determinant of health, yet the specific linkages between climate impacts, SRH, and GBV remain largely invisible in Palestinian climate discourse and policy[1].

A review of Palestine's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the official documents submitted under the Paris Agreement, reveals a gender-blind approach[7]. Despite references to vulnerable populations and community- based adaptation, the NDCs make no meaningful acknowledgment of how climate change disproportionately affects women and girls, or how SRH and GBV risks should be integrated into adaptation planning and implementation. As climate pressures intensify, this omission will not only deepen existing inequalities but also undermine national resilience efforts.

Meanwhile, Palestinian youth aged 18–29, who represent around 22% of the population according to PCBS2, remain insufficiently engaged in climate– health policymaking spaces. National frameworks, such as the Child & Adolescent Mental Health National Strategy 2023 to 2028[3], recognize young people as both beneficiaries and partners in shaping the health agenda. However, their perspectives have rarely been explored in relation to the intersection of climate change, sexual and reproductive health, and gender- based violence. Ensuring that youth are meaningfully involved in these neglected dimensions is essential for building inclusive and equitable responses to the climate crisis.



This paper attempts to address the gap highlighting quantitative and qualitative data which was collected by Nature Palestine Society through a national survey of 200 Palestinian youth from diverse geographic, gender, and educational backgrounds. This white paper presents the findings of that study-the first of its kind to explore how young Palestinians perceive and understand the intersections between climate change, SRH, and GBV. It also investigates their readiness to participate in climate-health policymaking and the structural barriers they face.

Through data-driven analysis and actionable recommendations, this paper aims to inform a more inclusive, gender-responsive, and youth-led climate adaptation agenda in Palestine-one that aligns with principles of climate justice, public health, and human rights[4].

The next section offers a brief overview of the national policy and institutional context shaping Palestine's climate and health response, and the gaps that remain.

1. National Context and Institutional Gaps:

Palestine's climate resilience efforts are shaped by a complex political, economic, and institutional landscape. The ongoing Israeli occupation has significantly restricted Palestinian access to natural resources, environmental governance, and critical infrastructure. This has created a fragile system where responses to climate change are constrained by limited sovereignty, financial instability, and chronic underdevelopment. These challenges are particularly acute in marginalized areas such as the Jordan Valley, refugee camps, and Area C, which constitutes around 60% of the West Bank and remains under full Israeli control[5].

Despite these structural limitations, Palestine has made important commitments to climate action. It ratified the Paris Agreement in 2016 and submitted its first Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) the same year, followed by updated NDCs in 2021. Currently, the Palestinian Government is preparing for the third round of NDCs, due in 2025. These documents identify key climate vulnerabilities and outline mitigation and adaptation priorities, especially in sectors like water, agriculture, energy, and health.

However, the reality on the ground in both the West Bank and Gaza underscores the scale of the challenge. In Gaza, recurrent conflicts, electricity shortages, and severe restrictions on movement and materials have created a public health and environmental crisis, with more than 97% of water from the coastal aquifer deemed unfit for human consumption[6]. In the West Bank, fragmented territorial control and Israeli restrictions on access to land and water in Area C (around 60% of the West Bank)5 limit the ability of Palestinian communities to implement adaptation measures or develop sustainable infrastructure. The construction of settlements and the segregation wall further undermine environmental governance and resource management. These overlapping pressures—occupation, blockade, resource scarcity, and underdevelopment— make Palestine uniquely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, as communities are often left without the financial or institutional capacity to respond effectively. However, a critical analysis of Palestine's NDCs and related climate strategies reveals three major institutional gaps:

2. Gender Blindness in Climate Policy:

Current Palestine's NDCs and national climate plans contain almost no reference to gender, and entirely overlook the specific vulnerabilities faced by women, girls, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups. In addition, issues such as sexual and reproductive health (SRH), gender-based violence (GBV), and the differentiated impacts of climate-induced displacement, economic stress, and resource scarcity are absent. This lack of gender mainstreaming reflects a broader policy gap and limits the effectiveness of adaptation measures.

The lived experiences of Palestinian women highlight these gaps clearly. In Gaza, repeated destruction of infrastructure, combined with energy shortages and restrictions on movement, has severely affected women's ability to access safe water, hygiene, and healthcare. During periods of acute crisis, many women reported being unable to secure water for personal hygiene or for their children, while the lack of fuel for cooking forced households to rely on unsafe alternatives. Similarly, in refugee camps such as Tulkarm and Jenin, weak water and sanitation networks leave women struggling to maintain menstrual hygiene and childcare under deteriorating conditions. The accumulation of solid waste—exacerbated by conflict and poor waste management—creates additional health risks, disproportionately affecting women as primary caregivers. These realities illustrate how climate-related vulnerabilities are compounded by conflict and occupation, and how the absence of gender- sensitive approaches in climate planning leaves women and marginalized groups facing multiple, intersecting risks.

3. Weak Integration of Health in Climate Planning:

While the health sector is included in adaptation discussions, the linkage between climate change and specific health domains—particularly sexual and reproductive health (SRH)—remains vague and underdeveloped. SRH services in Palestine already face significant challenges due to infrastructure fragility, funding shortages, and political restrictions such as movement barriers to reach maternal care, frequent shortages of essential medicines, and limited availability of specialized providers in marginalized areas.

In the Palestinian context, however, stressors extend far beyond climatic extremes. House demolitions, forced displacement, and overcrowded camps create unhealthy living conditions where infectious diseases spread rapidly. Inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure undermines infection prevention and control (IPC) measures, leaving women and children especially vulnerable. The destruction of health facilities and repeated disruptions to electricity and fuel supplies exacerbate these risks, limiting access to essential SRH services such as maternal care, safe deliveries, contraception, and menstrual hygiene management. When combined with climate-related pressures—such as extreme heat, water shortages, and disease outbreaks— these political and environmental stressors reinforce one another, producing a cycle of fragility. Yet, no comprehensive risk assessments or contingency strategies currently exist to address this compounded reality.

Limited Youth Engagement and Institutional Mechanisms for Participation: Palestinian youth are frequently cited as "key stakeholders" in national strategies but have minimal institutional access to climate or health policy design and implementation. There are no

formal and financed mechanisms to support youth-led climate-health initiatives, no structured platforms for their input into national climate dialogues, and limited investment in building their capacity for policy engagement. As a result, youth knowledge and innovation approaches are underutilized, and their concerns about the future remain largely unheard.

Moreover, the environmental governance in Palestine is fragmented for several reasons. For example, the Environment Quality Authority (EQA) leads climate efforts but has limited enforcement power, especially in Area C and East Jerusalem. Additionally, civil society organizations working on gender or youth empowerment efforts are often scattered, with limited access to environmental policymaking spaces.

Key Findings:

The results of this national youth survey offer a revealing snapshot of Palestinian youth perceptions at the intersection of climate change, sexual and reproductive health, and gender-based violence. Analyzing responses across variables such as age, gender, place of residence, and education level, uncover both promising levels of awareness and critical knowledge gaps. They also highlight the uneven distribution of information, engagement opportunities, and vulnerability across demographic groups. These insights not only reflect how climate-related stressors are experienced and understood by young people, but also point to areas where policy, education, and programmatic interventions can be more effectively tailored. What follows is a thematic analysis of the survey results, beginning with climate change awareness.

1. Climate Change Awareness:

The study results indicate that Palestinian youth across all demographics are highly aware of climate change and its consequences, although the depth of understanding varies significantly by age. A strong majority of respondents recognize climate change as a serious and immediate problem, particularly among older youth. In the age group 30 and above, 92% perceive climate change as a severe threat, while this figure declines to 71% among the youngest respondents aged 15–18. This age-related gap in perception reflects a clear trend: as individuals age, their comprehension of climate change appears to become more sophisticated, nuanced, and grounded in observable impacts within their communities.

Older participants were significantly more likely to acknowledge that the effects of climate change, such as rising temperatures, changes in rainfall, and water scarcity, are already visible in their daily environments. They were also more likely to link these environmental changes to Palestine's geographic vulnerability and chronic resource limitations. The oldest cohort, in particular, demonstrated a holistic understanding of how climate change intersects with national fragility, framing it not only as an environmental issue but as a social and economic one as well.

When disaggregating responses by gender, no significant differences were found in how males and females perceived the severity or causes of climate change. Both groups largely agreed that climate change is a human-induced phenomenon with both direct and indirect effects on people's lives. This indicates that awareness of climate change in Palestine has penetrated broadly across genders, perhaps due to widespread exposure to climate-related stressors such as water shortages and extreme heat.

Similarly, educational attainment did not appear to significantly influence basic awareness of climate change. Youth across various education levels demonstrated a general understanding of its causes and effects, suggesting that climate change has become part of the public consciousness in Palestine. This may be attributed to increasing coverage in the media, the visibility of environmental degradation, and national discourse surrounding water and agriculture challenges.

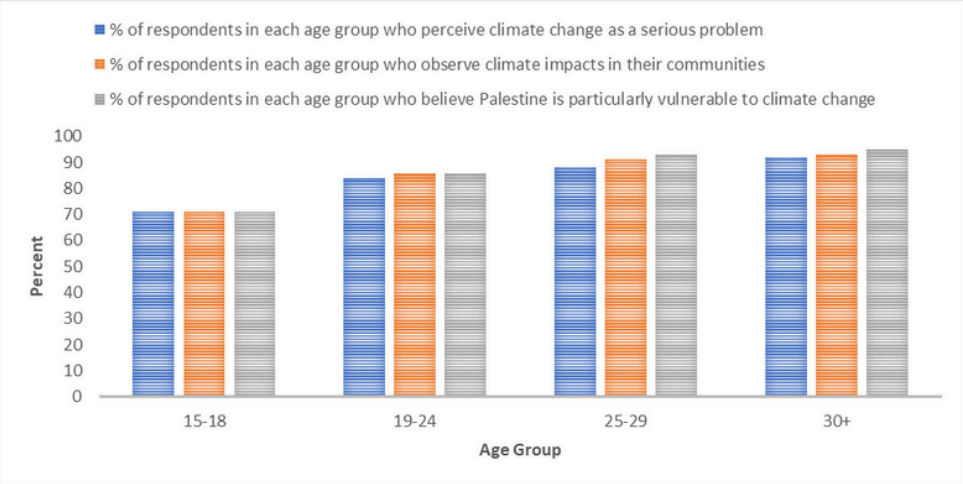
Place of residence, however, did reveal some subtle differences. Youth from cities and

villages showed consistently high levels of awareness, with around 90% considering climate change a major concern. Among youth living in refugee camps, this number dropped slightly to 84%. While the difference is not big , it may reflect disparities in access to environmental education, engagement with local initiatives, or the daily visibility of environmental change. Nonetheless, even among camp residents, opinions emerged that climate change is primarily caused by human activities and has substantial impacts on Palestinian communities.

Across all geographic contexts-urban, rural, and camp-there was strong agreement that climate change has both direct effects, such as heatwaves and water scarcity, and indirect effects, such as deteriorating living conditions, agricultural loss, and health stressors. Youth from cities and villages also overwhelmingly recognized Palestine's acute vulnerability to climate change, with over 93% agreeing with this statement. While slightly fewer refugee camp youth residents shared this view (84%), the majority still identified Palestine's environmental fragility as a key concern.

Taken together, these findings underscore that climate change awareness is widespread among Palestinian youth but is most robust among older age groups and residents of non-camp areas. This supports the need for targeted environmental education and youth engagement efforts that bridge generational and geographic gaps, particularly by focusing on school-aged children and youth and underserved communities in refugee camps.

Figure 2: Climate change awareness by age group, showing the proportion of respondents who perceive climate change as a serious problem, observe its impacts locally, and recognize Palestine's particular vulnerability



2. Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Awareness

The survey results reveal a clear age-based gradient in the understanding of sexual and reproductive health among Palestinian youth. While awareness of the term improves with age, younger participants demonstrate substantial gaps and misconceptions. Only 40% of respondents in the 15-18 age group could define the term accurately, with a significant portion equating it narrowly to fertility and family planning. In contrast, awareness rises to 61% among youth aged 19-24, 70% among those aged 25-30, and peaks at 78% in the 30+ age group. This progression reflects the accumulation of life experience and perhaps broader exposure to health services or educational content with age.

These generational differences extend to perceptions of how climate change impacts SRH. Among the youngest group, 40% believed that climate change has no impact on access to health care services, while only another 40% thought it did-a figure that rises significantly in older age categories. By age 30+, nearly 70% of respondents recognize that climate change does impact healthcare access, although it is notable that even in this group, around 20% remain unconvinced. This finding indicates an important educational gap that persists even among more experienced participants.

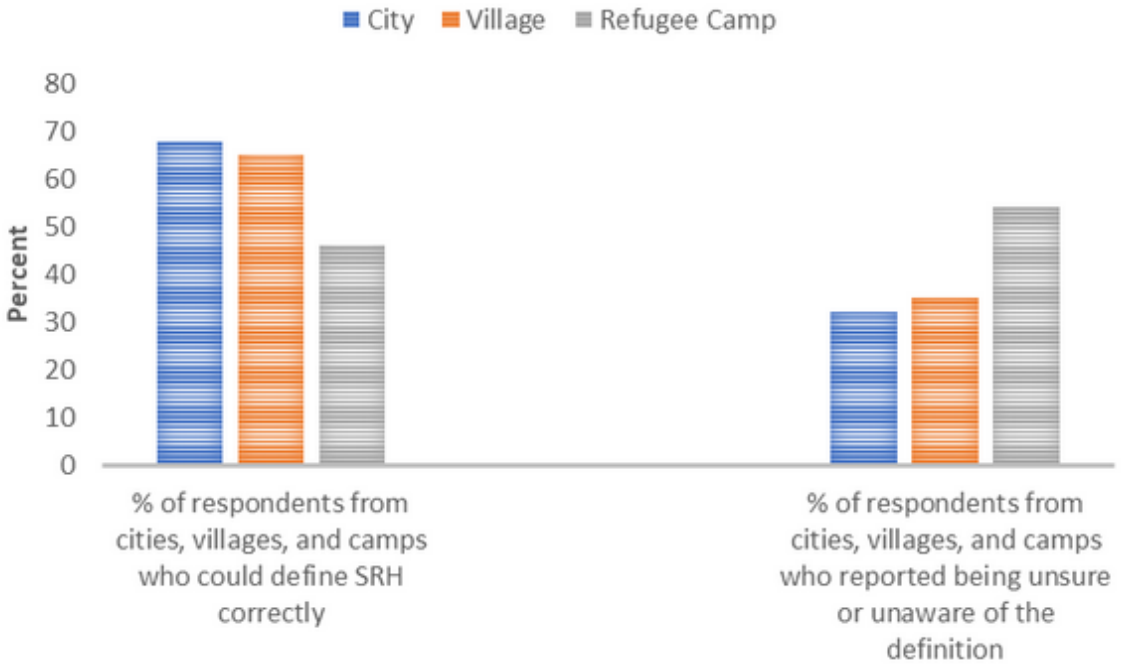
Understanding of how climate change might affect maternal health and fertility was also found to be more comprehensive among older participants regardless of their gender, level of education, or place of residency. Respondents over age 30 were the most likely to link climate stressors such as malnutrition, psychological distress, and pollution to reproductive outcomes, with 80% expressing this view. Among the youngest group, the figure was lower at 60%, and notably, 20% of these youth believed that climate change affects men but not women—a misconception that reflects both a lack of clarity on gender-specific vulnerabilities and a need for more inclusive health education. Across age groups, the majority of respondents agreed that climate change presents specific challenges to SRH, such as difficulty accessing clean water or affording healthcare, but once again, these views were most pronounced among older youth age categories. While 76% of respondents aged 30+ acknowledged these compounded risks, only 40% of the youngest group did so. Nevertheless, all age groups commonly cited awareness and education as the most important strategies for protection against climate-related SRH challenges.

The relationship between gender and SRH awareness produced more nuanced insights. Although both males and females demonstrated general familiarity with the topic, females were significantly more likely to link climate change to hormonal disruptions-78% compared to 61% of males. Males, on the other hand, were more likely to deny the connection entirely or to attribute such impacts solely to disruptions in endocrine gland function, suggesting a narrower understanding of how environmental stressors affect human biology. These findings point to the importance of gender-sensitive health communication that reaches all youth equitably.

When disaggregated by educational level, a strong positive correlation emerged: higher education was associated with broader and more accurate understanding of SRH, especially in the context of climate change. The trend was equally observed in both genders. The gap in comprehension between the most and least educated respondents reached nearly 30 percentage points, highlighting education as a critical enabler of informed health awareness. It is also worth noting that the survey included specific questions on sources of information (such as schools, universities, social media, and peers), which further illuminate how educational environments shape awareness levels.

Geographic disparities were also evident. Youth living in villages and cities demonstrated similar levels of understanding, with about 65% accurately defining SRH. In contrast, youth from refugee camps showed significantly lower awareness, with only 46% able to define the term correctly, and 54% stating that they did not know or were unsure. This suggests a serious need for targeted outreach and programming in camp settings, where vulnerabilities are often exacerbated by poverty, overcrowding, and service delivery gaps.

Figure 3: SRH awareness by living environment, highlighting lower knowledge levels in refugee camps



Interestingly, despite these lower awareness levels, youth in refugee camps showed the highest level of agreement that climate change poses challenges to SRH. This may be due to their lived experience with environmental and infrastructural stressors, which increase their sensitivity to the risks-even if their technical understanding of SRH remains limited. In terms of hormonal impacts, camp residents again showed the strongest belief in a connection between climate change and hormonal imbalance (84%), compared to 69% in villages and cities. This finding highlights the complex interplay between experience, perception, and education.

Taken together, the data illustrate that while SRH awareness is growing, it remains uneven across Palestinian youth. Age, gender, education, and place of residence all shape how young people understand and respond to the intersection of climate change and reproductive health. These disparities underline the urgent need for comprehensive, accessible, and context-specific health education that bridges knowledge gaps and empowers all segments of youth- particularly the youngest and most marginalized.

3. Gender-Based Violence Awareness and its Connection to Climate Change

The study showed a diverse range of awareness levels and perspectives on gender-based violence (GBV), with demographic factors such as age, gender, education, and place of residence shaping the depth and accuracy of understanding. While most respondents acknowledged GBV as a serious issue in the Palestinian society, their recognition of how climate change may exacerbate this form of violence varied widely.

Older respondents demonstrated a more general understanding of GBV, and were more likely to connect environmental stressors, such as water scarcity, economic hardship, and displacement, with heightened risks of violence, particularly against women and girls. Among respondents aged 30 and above, there was a clear tendency to view GBV through a

structural lens, recognizing how crises like climate change compound existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. Conversely, younger respondents, particularly those aged 15–18, while aware of GBV in general terms, showed less familiarity with the idea that climate stressors may increase its prevalence or intensity. Although many in this age group acknowledged the link between resource scarcity and conflict, their suggested resilience strategies often focused more on personal or localized responses rather than systemic solutions.

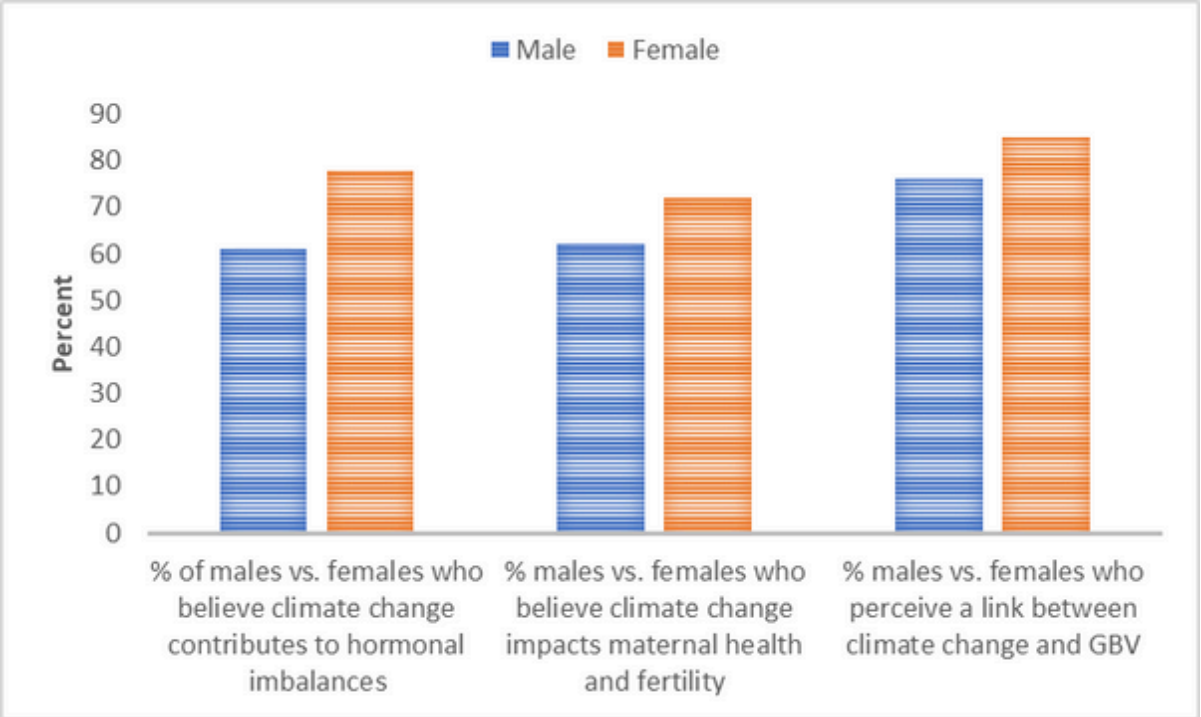
Gender differences in perception were notable. While both males and females agreed that conflict over dwindling resources could increase under climate stress, females consistently demonstrated a stronger understanding of GBV dynamics and were more likely to affirm the climate-violence nexus. They also proposed more gender-responsive resilience strategies, including community protection mechanisms and increased mental health support. Males, in contrast, more often emphasized infrastructure solutions or dismissed the gendered dimensions of the issue altogether, signaling the need for deeper gender education among young men.

Education level played a decisive role in shaping how participants interpreted GBV and its environmental dimensions. Respondents with higher levels of education were more likely to describe GBV as a spectrum that includes psychological, economic, and institutional forms of violence, not just physical abuse, and more likely to draw links between social stressors and climate- induced instability. Respondents with higher education levels understood how a breakdown in services or protection mechanisms due to climate-related crises could leave women and vulnerable groups at greater risk.

Place of residence added another layer to the analysis. City resident youth generally displayed a higher conceptual understanding of GBV and were more attuned to its structural drivers, including climate change. However, youth from refugee camps, despite having lower overall access to information, expressed a strong awareness of how climate change could contribute to violence, likely informed by their everyday exposure to water shortages, overcrowding, and precarious living conditions. In contrast, while rural youth acknowledged the role of scarcity in escalating tensions, they were more likely to frame GBV as an individual or family issue, disconnected from broader environmental and social stressors.

The findings collectively suggest that while GBV is widely acknowledged among Palestinian youth, its link to climate change remains a relatively underexplored concept, especially among younger males and those with limited access to gender-sensitive education. However, lived experience in high-risk environments, such as refugee camps, appears to elevate awareness of the broader structural causes of violence, even in the absence of formal knowledge. These insights underscore the need for integrated educational programs that not only raise awareness of GBV but also contextualize it within wider frameworks of environmental, economic, and social vulnerability, particularly in areas most exposed to climate risk.

Figure 4: Recognition of the climate-health and climate–GBV connection across demographic groups, with stronger awareness among women.

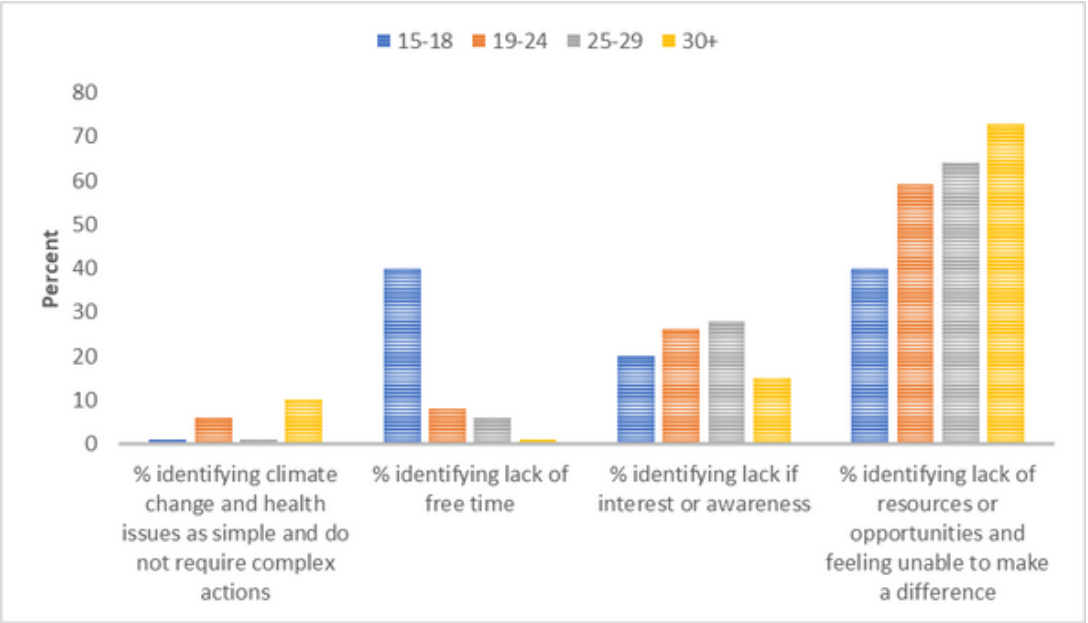


4. Youth Participation and Policy Awareness

One of the most encouraging results of the study was the widespread recognition among Palestinian youth of the importance of participating in climate and gender and health-related policy discussions. Across all age groups, there was a strong consensus that youth engagement is vital for building resilience and ensuring that policies reflect lived realities. However, the strength of this conviction varied by age. While the majority of respondents affirmed the importance of youth involvement, 20% of those aged 15–18 believed it was only important in certain cases or not at all. This suggests a notable gap in either confidence or perceived relevance among the youngest participants.

Despite these differences, a common thread among youth of all backgrounds was the expressed need for better tools to engage meaningfully in policy discourse. Respondents repeatedly emphasized the need for scientific knowledge, communication skills, and a basic understanding of how policymaking processes work. This need was most strongly articulated by respondents in the 30+ age group, who were more likely to have had exposure to institutional processes or civic engagement opportunities. In contrast, a segment of the youngest respondents, around 20%, felt that youth should focus on recreational activities or that no specialized knowledge was necessary to address these issues. This perception may reflect a lack of exposure to civic education or a broader sense of disconnection from decision-making spaces.

Figure 5: Perceptions of the importance of youth engagement in climate and health policy, showing generational differences in priorities



The results of the study also investigated how youth receive and trust information about climate, health, and participation. Schools, universities, and trusted media sources were cited as the most reliable sources of knowledge across all age groups. However, social media emerged as a particularly significant channel for youth aged 19–24 and 25–30, with nearly 30% in both groups relying heavily on digital platforms. For the youngest age group, family and friends were the primary source of information, with 40% indicating this preference. Meanwhile, older respondents (30+) were more likely to rely on formal and traditional sources of knowledge, suggesting a shift toward more institutionalized learning with age.

respondents (30+) were more likely to rely on formal and traditional sources of knowledge, suggesting a shift toward more institutionalized learning with age. Disaggregating by gender, both males and females relied primarily on educational institutions, but notable differences emerged in their secondary sources. Females were more likely to use social media (30%) compared to males (22%), while males reported slightly higher levels of trust in schools and universities. When asked about obstacles to participation, both genders identified the lack of resources and opportunities as a key barrier, but females were more likely to describe these limitations as acute. Nearly 70% of female respondents identified resource scarcity as a major barrier, compared to 54% of males. Males, on the other hand, were more likely to cite a lack of awareness, interest, or time as the primary challenge.

Education level again emerged as a powerful influence. Youth with higher levels of education placed a stronger emphasis on the need for technical knowledge, advocacy skills, and policy literacy. Those with lower education levels were less likely to see these elements as essential, pointing to the importance of incorporating civic and environmental education into foundational curricula.

Place of residence significantly influenced access to information and perceptions of participation. Youth from villages and cities were more likely to rely on schools, universities, and reliable media sources (64%), while youth in refugee camps were less likely to access these channels (35%) and more likely to rely on social media (39%). These findings point

to an information gap and highlight the role that environment and infrastructure play in shaping access to knowledge and opportunities for engagement.

The collective picture that emerges is one of willingness, aspiration, and resilience among Palestinian youth, tempered by structural inequalities and knowledge gaps. While most youth believe in the importance of their participation in climate and health policy, many feel disempowered or ill- equipped to engage. Bridging this gap will require sustained investment in education, accessible platforms for civic participation, and targeted outreach to marginalized communities, particularly those in refugee camps and among younger age cohorts.

Key Insight:

While Palestinian youth demonstrate growing awareness of climate change and its wide-ranging impacts, including on sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence, their ability to act is hindered by structural barriers, uneven access to information, and gaps in targeted education.

What This Means:

These findings point to an urgent need for coordinated, inclusive, and youth-centered interventions that move beyond awareness to empowerment.

Youth are not only witnesses to the climate crisis, they must be equipped to lead change within their communities and beyond

Recommendations

The findings of this white paper underscore the urgent need for multi-level, cross-sectoral action that addresses the compounded effects of climate change on health, gender, and youth engagement in Palestine. Recognizing that the responsibility for meaningful change lies across societal and institutional layers, the following recommendations are organized by key stakeholder groups. These pathways aim to move beyond awareness and into action—ensuring that policy, programming, and community engagement are inclusive, climate-resilient, and equity-centered.

1. Recommendations for Youth engagement

Palestinian youth must be regarded not merely as passive recipients of climate impacts, but as active agents of transformation. To achieve this, national and local actors should expand youth-focused programs and Youth Leadership Initiatives (YLIs) that provide young people with the knowledge and tools needed to shape climate resilience. This includes strengthening training opportunities on climate science, health, gender equality, and advocacy skills such as policy-making, public speaking, and environmental diplomacy. Youth- led educational and media campaigns should be supported so that young people can communicate in their own voices and highlight the often- overlooked connections between climate change, sexual and reproductive health, and gender-based violence. At the same time, safe and accessible platforms—both online and offline—are needed to allow youth to share experiences, debate solutions, and engage directly with policymakers. Building mentorship schemes that connect young leaders with professionals in health, environment, and gender can foster intergenerational exchange and bridge the gap between technical expertise and lived experience. Finally, allocating targeted funding for youth innovation projects and community-based initiatives, particularly in refugee camps and rural areas, will ensure that young people from marginalized groups are included and empowered to drive change. By shifting from symbolic participation to meaningful leadership, Palestinian youth can play a central role in shaping national responses and influencing international dialogues on climate, health, and gender.

Empower youth with science-based knowledge and policy tools to lead climate and health advocacy in their communities. Awareness without access leads to frustration—investment in youth participation is investment in resilience.

2. Recommendations for National Policy Makers

Policy reform and institutional integration are essential if Palestine is to build climate resilience that is inclusive and just. As a climatic hotspot with limited resources and a rapidly growing population, Palestine faces high vulnerability across all sectors. Yet national strategies, including the current Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), still fall short in integrating gender perspectives, addressing the specific vulnerabilities of youth, and ensuring meaningful youth engagement in climate response.

Policy makers must prioritize the development and adoption of climate frameworks that are gender-sensitive and socially inclusive. This requires: (1) revising the NDCs and sectoral climate strategies to include gender and youth indicators; (2) conducting gender- and

age-disaggregated vulnerability assessments across sectors such as health, water, and agriculture; and (3) mandating that ministries adopt cross-sectoral action plans that address the climate–health–gender nexus. Decision-makers should also strengthen national data systems by establishing a centralized climate-health observatory that monitors how environmental stressors affect health, safety, and social cohesion—particularly in marginalized areas such as refugee camps, Bedouin communities, and rural villages.

In addition, climate change response should be systematically integrated into the national education system, including higher education. This can be achieved by updating school curricula to include climate-health modules, establishing university research grants on climate–SRH–GBV linkages, and creating accredited vocational and technical training for green jobs. At the local level, integration within municipal, village, and camp governance structures is equally critical. This means mandating that local councils prepare community-level adaptation plans, allocating small climate funds to municipalities for health and resilience projects, and incentivizing participatory planning processes that involve women and youth. Together, these steps will ensure that climate resilience efforts are rooted not only in national policy but also in education and community practice.

Finally, youth participation in policymaking must move beyond tokenism and become institutionalized. Practical actions include establishing a National Youth Climate Advisory Council linked to the Ministry of Environment and Health, supporting regional youth dialogues in climate-vulnerable zones such as the Jordan Valley and Gaza, and embedding youth representatives in official delegations to international climate negotiations. Policy must not only be made for youth; it must be made with youth, ensuring that climate responses are grounded in community realities and oriented toward long-term sustainability.

National climate frameworks, including the NDCs, must integrate gender equity and protection dimensions, recognizing the disproportionate health and safety risks climate change poses to women and girls in Palestine.

3. Recommendations for Civil Society and NGOs

Civil society organizations, particularly those rooted in communities, are well- positioned to translate climate awareness into tangible support systems. Relevant CBOs and NGOs working in Palestine must be supported to localize educational and advocacy efforts that connect climate change to SRH and GBV. These issues are often addressed in parallel by separate programs, yet the reality of climate stress necessitates a more integrated approach.

Programs designed by and for young people should include content on reproductive health, protection services, and environmental risks caused by climate change, that are culturally relevant and accessible to diverse populations. Refugee camps, which showed lower levels of awareness in the survey but greater lived exposure to environmental stressors, should be prioritized for targeted interventions. To do so effectively, CBOs and NGOs need capacity building in climate-smart gender health programming, cross- sectoral advocacy, and participatory research methods.

Furthermore, CBOs and NGOs have a vital role in capturing and sharing best practices and lessons learned. Through pilot initiatives, community-based monitoring, and regional knowledge exchanges, civil society can elevate proven, locally rooted solutions and push for their integration into national policies and funding priorities.

Support CBOs and NGOs to bridge climate, health, and protection sectors. Their rootedness in communities makes them ideal channels to localize awareness, deliver integrated services, and document context-specific responses.

4. Recommendations for International Organizations and Donors

The international community must ensure that climate action in Palestine actively addresses social inequities, serving as a vehicle for inclusion, justice, and resilience rather than reinforcing existing disparities. Climate finance mechanisms, technical cooperation, and humanitarian aid programs must explicitly incorporate the intersections of climate change, SRH, and GBV-areas that have historically been siloed in program design and funding allocations.

National and international donors and UN agencies should support both innovative pilot programs and scalable models that prioritize youth leadership, gender sensitivity, and evidence-based planning. This includes investments in longitudinal research to track the long-term impacts of climate stress on vulnerable populations, as well as in digital platforms that allow for wide and equitable youth participation.

Furthermore, Palestinian youth should be represented in regional and international forums on climate and health policy. Their experiences navigating conflict, occupation, and environmental degradation give them a unique and necessary voice in global climate diplomacy. Ensuring that these voices are heard requires not only funding, but intentional inclusion in agenda- setting spaces.

Lastly, equitable support must be extended to high-risk areas, particularly refugee camps, marginalized communities, and agricultural zones in the Jordan Valley. Climate-sensitive health and protection programming should be integrated into both emergency and long-term development responses, recognizing that climate change is no longer a distant threat but an immediate reality affecting every aspect of life.

Climate funding and programming must prioritize vulnerable populations—especially youth in refugee camps and rural zones—by aligning climate resilience with SRH and GBV response systems.

Conclusion

Climate change is no longer a future threat-it is a current reality that is reshaping lives, livelihoods, and the social fabric of Palestinian society. With population growth projected to increase pressure on already strained natural resources, particularly water, and climate models forecasting extreme warming, decreased rainfall, and more frequent heatwaves, the urgency to act has never been greater.

This white paper sheds light on an urgent yet overlooked dimension of the climate crisis in Palestine, the intersection of climate change, sexual and reproductive health, and gender-based violence. While Palestine is among the region's most vulnerable to climate change, policy frameworks and public discourse have yet to fully capture the complex and deeply gendered nature of these impacts. The findings from our national youth survey make it clear: young people understand the gravity of climate change and are eager to be part of the solution, but face structural, educational, and social barriers that limit their ability to act and engage in policy and decision making processes.

Palestinian youth represent a diverse and heterogeneous population. Differences in awareness and perceptions across age, gender, educational background, and place of residence reveal the unequal terrain upon which climate risks are unfolding. Particularly concerning are the lower levels of SRH and GBV awareness among the youngest respondents and youth from refugee camps, despite their heightened exposure to environmental and socio-political stressors. This disconnect underscores the need for more inclusive, context-sensitive, and gender-aware strategies at both national and community levels.

This paper not only reveals gaps, it outlines opportunities. Youth are ready to lead, provided they are given the tools, knowledge, and institutional space to do so. National policies must evolve to reflect the climate-health-gender nexus, and international partners must recognize the unique Palestinian context when designing climate resilience programs. The path forward demands cross-sectoral collaboration, grounded in data, driven by justice, and led by the communities most affected.

In amplifying youth voices and integrating gender-sensitive climate responses, Palestine has the opportunity not only to adapt—but to lead. The challenge is immense, but the momentum is building. The time to act is now.

Methodology

This white paper employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a focused literature review with a structured quantitative survey. The overarching aim was to explore how Palestinian youth understand and experience the interconnections between climate change, sexual and reproductive health, and gender-based violence, while also identifying knowledge gaps and pathways for engagement.

The research process began with an in-depth desk review of existing literature and policy documents. This included peer-reviewed journal articles, national strategies, and reports from international organizations, UN agencies, and local NGOs working in Palestine. The literature review provided a foundational understanding of the current state of discourse, both globally and locally, and informed the thematic focus and design of the questionnaire.

Following the review, a survey tool was developed to assess youth awareness and perceptions. The questionnaire underwent a pilot phase, tested with a small group of young participants to ensure clarity and relevance. After refining the tool, it was disseminated digitally through youth platforms, social media networks, and partnerships with community-based organizations across the West Bank.

A total of 200 valid responses were collected by distributing the online survey through youth clubs and groups from all over Palestine, representing youth from diverse geographic regions and social backgrounds, including urban, rural, and refugee camp settings. The survey respondents varied in gender, age, and educational level, ensuring a broad and representative sample.

Data analysis focused on identifying trends and correlations across four main demographic variables: age, gender, place of residence, and level of education. The analysis explored differences in knowledge and attitudes related to climate change, SRH, GBV, and youth participation in policymaking. Particular attention was paid to how social and environmental vulnerabilities intersect, and how these intersections are perceived differently across demographic groups.

The insights generated through this methodology formed the basis of the thematic findings, which are presented in this paper.

Glossary of Key Terms

Climate Change: Long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns, largely driven by human activities such as burning fossil fuels. In Palestine, climate change manifests as increased temperatures, decreased rainfall, and more frequent extreme weather events.

Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH): A state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality and reproduction. SRH includes access to safe and effective family planning, maternal healthcare, and information about sexual rights and responsibilities.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV): Any harmful act directed at an individual based on their gender. This includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse. GBV often increases during crises and environmental stress. Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs): National climate action plans submitted by countries under the Paris Agreement, outlining efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate impacts. Palestine's current NDCs lack gender-sensitive dimensions.

Science Diplomacy: The use of scientific collaborations among nations and institutions to address common problems and build partnerships. Nature Palestine Society employs science diplomacy to engage youth and influence climate-health policy.

Climate Vulnerability: The degree to which a system or population is susceptible to, or unable to cope with, adverse effects of climate change. Palestine’s geographic, political, and economic context heightens its vulnerability.

Resilience: The ability of individuals, communities, and systems to anticipate, absorb, adapt to, and recover from climate shocks. In this context, resilience includes social, health, and environmental dimensions.

Refugee Camps: Densely populated areas that host displaced Palestinians, often with limited infrastructure, public services, and environmental protection —making them particularly vulnerable to climate and health stressors.

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