



# Social and economic situation of Palestinian women and girls

July 2020–June 2022

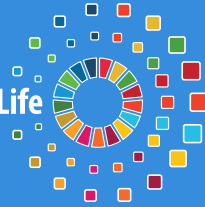


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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

# Social and economic situation of Palestinian women and girls



July 2020–June 2022

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# Executive summary



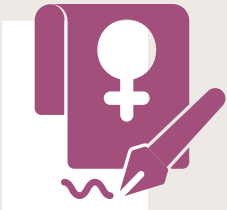
This present report reviews the complex situation of Palestinian women and girls in the occupied Palestinian territory from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2022. The report describes how Palestinian women and girls continued to suffer the adverse effects of occupation, political violence, and human rights violations. It highlights the gendered impacts of Israeli policies, including increasing settlement activity, threatened evictions and house demolitions, particularly in East Jerusalem and Area C of the West Bank, along with the consequences of the 15-year Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. Special focus is given to the gendered impacts of threatened evictions in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, and the consequences of the military escalation in Gaza in May 2021. Even before this latest escalation, Gaza was in a protracted humanitarian crisis owing to the cumulative impacts of the blockade and successive military offensives. This situation has been compounded by the ongoing internal Palestinian political divide, and exacerbated by the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the humanitarian impact has taken its toll on all Palestinians in Gaza, women and girls, owing to pre-existing gender inequalities and other sociocultural factors, have been particularly affected, including through greater risks of impoverishment and heightened vulnerability to all forms of gender-based violence.

Palestinian women and girls also continued to face entrenched discrimination and rights violations within their own society in the context of traditional patriarchal norms, inequitable power dynamics, and stalled progress of the State of Palestine in aligning national legislation and policies with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which is in part due to the fragmentation of the Palestinian territory and the inability to convene the Palestinian Legislative Council. Despite several measures implemented by the Government of Palestine over the reporting period, including the launch of the second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, violence against women and girls remains prevalent and women's political and economic participation curtailed. While all women and girls face gender discrimination, the present report recognizes that women in the occupied Palestinian territory are not a homogenous group, with their experiences shaped through intersecting identities, including but not limited to their socioeconomic status, education level and, in the context of an increasingly geographically and administratively fragmented society, their residence status. In addition to the work of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the report also describes the crucial role that women activists and civil society organizations continue to play in advocating the advancement of the rights of all women and girls, in the context of the rights of the Palestinian people as a whole. It concludes with a set of recommendations that encompass a broad range of gender-sensitive legal and institutional reforms along with economic and social measures to enhance the rights and well-being of Palestinian women and girls.

# Key messages



## WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS



## FACED A SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE



Palestinian civil society organizations, including women's rights organizations, faced a shrinking civic space owing to repressive measures put in place by the Israeli authorities.

## ONGOING POLITICAL DIVIDE



## DELAYED THE STANDARDIZATION OF LEGAL FRAMEWORKS



The ongoing political divide has delayed the standardization of legal frameworks in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, in line with international human rights instruments.

## THE GAZA BLOCKADE

## RESTRICTED ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES



### HEAVY TOLL ON WOMEN AND GIRLS



### INCREASING CARE BURDEN

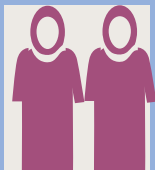


### GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The Gaza blockade has taken a heavy toll on women and girls by undermining living conditions, restricting access to essential services, increasing their care burden, and heightening vulnerability to all forms of gender-based violence.

## YOUNG WOMEN ACROSS THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

## MOBILIZED TO MITIGATE RISKS AND THREATS



During the reporting period, young women across the occupied Palestinian territory mobilized to mitigate risks and threats associated with the Israeli occupation, and to advocate for their rights.

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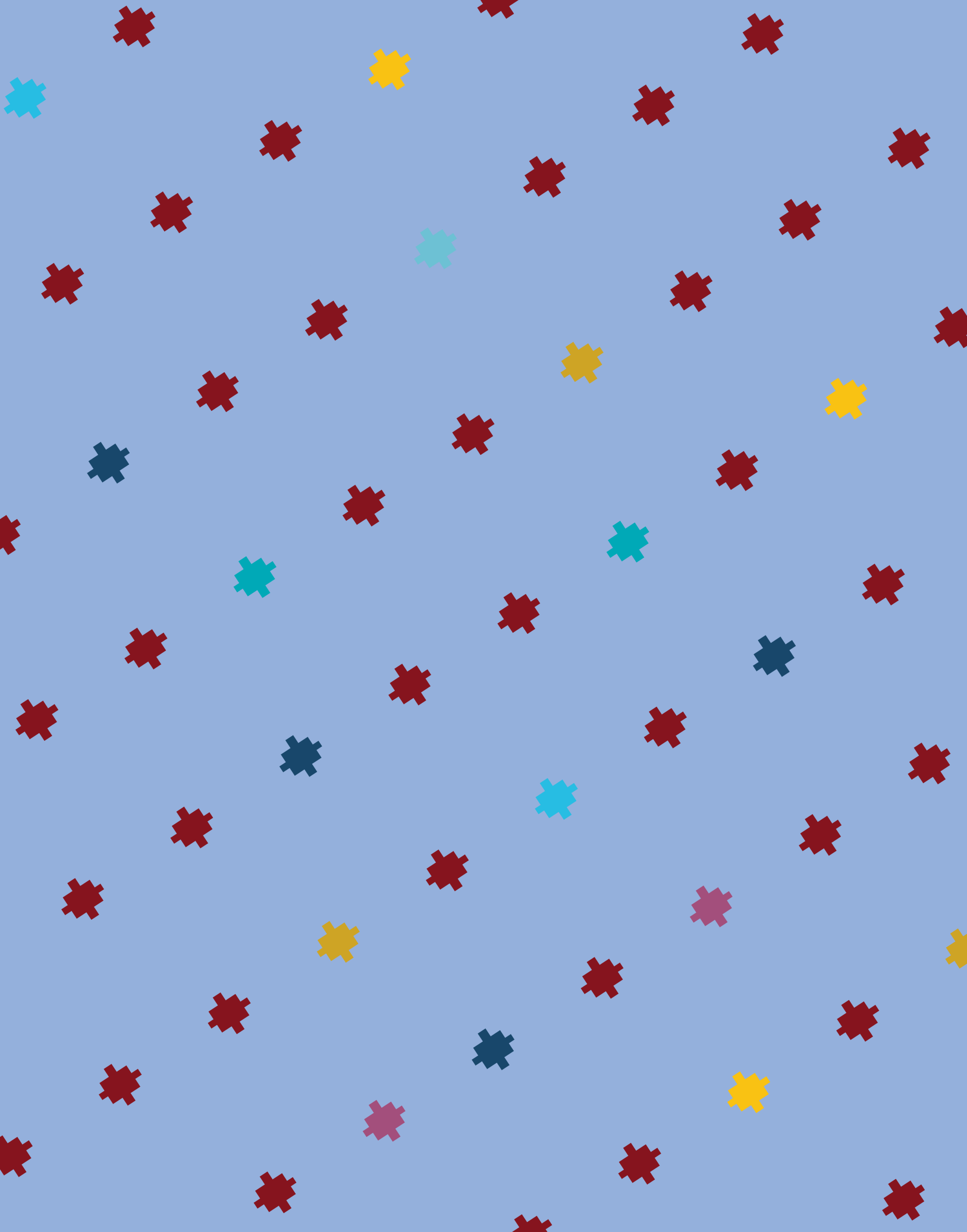
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# List of abbreviations

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<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
<b>CSO</b>	civil society organization
<b>ESCWA</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
<b>GBV</b>	gender-based violence
<b>GUPW</b>	General Union of Palestinian Women
<b>HWC</b>	Health Work Committees
<b>ICHR</b>	Independent Commission for Human Rights
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa
<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>PCBS</b>	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
<b>PLC</b>	Palestinian Legislative Council
<b>PLO</b>	Palestinian Liberation Organization
<b>PNGO</b>	Palestinian NGO Network
<b>PWWSD</b>	Palestinian Working Women Society for Development
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children’s Fund
<b>UNRWA</b>	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
<b>UNSCO</b>	United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process
<b>UN-Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council resolution
<b>WCLAC</b>	Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WPSA</b>	women, peace and security agenda



# 1 ■ Context and overview of the **occupied Palestinian territory**

# 1. Context and overview of the occupied Palestinian territory

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) issues biennial reports on the situation of women and girls in the occupied Palestinian territory, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolutions [2003/42](#) and [2021/5](#) on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, and ESCWA [resolution 330 \(XXX\)](#) that requests the secretariat to monitor, analyse and document the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation and Israeli violations of the rights of the Palestinian people and of international law. The reports provide an overview of progress and setbacks in advancing the political, social, economic and human rights of Palestinian women and girls in the context of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and of Gaza.

The information in the reports draws from published data by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), and analysis and cases documented by United Nations entities, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The analysis is complemented by data and information from the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Health, civil society organizations (CSOs), and international development agencies.

The occupied Palestinian territory, which has been under Israeli occupation since 1967, consists of the non-contiguous areas of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. Israel officially annexed East Jerusalem in 1980 in violation of international law and of United Nations Security Council resolutions.<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the Oslo Accords<sup>2</sup> between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Israeli Government, the West Bank is divided into three zones, known as Areas A, B and C. Area A falls under the civil jurisdiction and security control of the Government of Palestine,<sup>3</sup> whereas Area B is under Palestinian civil control and Israeli security control. Area C, which constitutes 60 per cent of the West Bank, is under full Israeli military control and partial civil control, and contains Israeli settlements, settler-only roads, and military and firing zones. Pursuant to the 1997 Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron, Israel has continued to exercise full control over 20 per cent of Hebron City, known as H2. Moreover, since June 2007, Gaza has been under a debilitating land, air and sea blockade, imposed by Israel.

## A. Major political and security developments

The populations of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and of Gaza, totalling an estimated 5.35 million persons,<sup>4</sup> have been

living under the longest occupation in modern history. The present study's two-year reporting period witnessed a further deterioration of

political and security conditions, seriously impacting the ability of Palestinian women and girls to live in peace and safety.

Israel continued to pursue unilateral measures that diminish prospects for the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian State, thus undermining the possibility of a two-State solution. The comprehensive Gaza blockade amounts to the collective punishment<sup>5</sup> of some 2.1 million Palestinians. Furthermore, while the Egyptian-controlled Rafah Crossing was opened for about half of the time during most of the reporting period,<sup>6</sup> many of those wishing to travel through the crossing did not meet the criteria set by Egypt. Moreover, receiving permission to cross Rafah takes time, and transit through the Sinai desert is arduous and often dangerous.<sup>7</sup> The human rights of women and girls, including their right to freedom of movement and their economic, social, and cultural rights, continued to be restricted or curtailed.

In the West Bank, the occupation has been further entrenched through continued land confiscation and seizure, access restrictions and other military measures, as well as rights violations of Palestinians. Since the formation of the Israeli Government in June 2021, there has been a significant increase in settlement activity, and a swift progression of plans for further expansion of settlements blocs (including in Hebron for the first time in 40

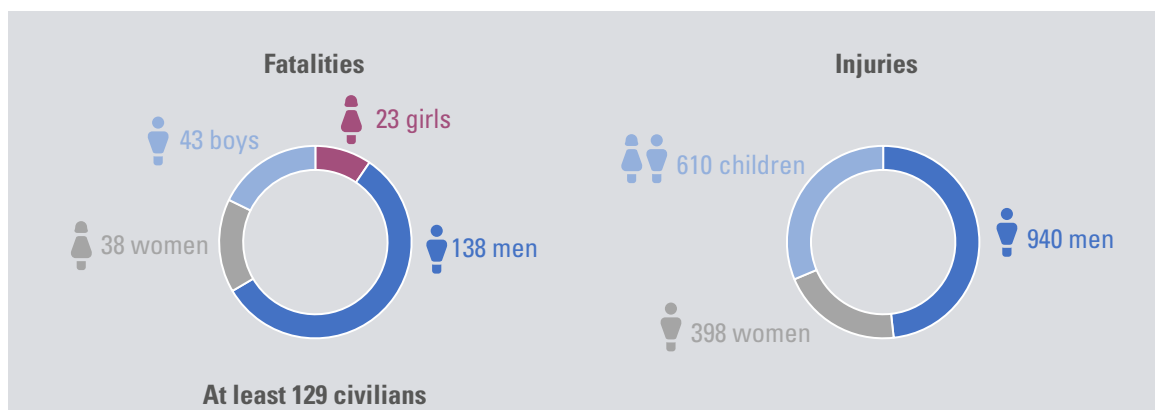
years), settler roads, and nature reserves in the West Bank.<sup>8</sup>

## 1. Security context in Gaza

During the reporting period, 265 Palestinians were killed (including 41 women and 23 girls),<sup>9</sup> and 2,401 were injured (including 482 women and 276 girls).<sup>10</sup> The vast majority of casualties occurred during the 10 to 21 May 2021 escalation, which was the most severe against Gaza since 2014. During that 11-day period, the Israeli military carried out strikes from the air, land and sea, compounding an already dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where longstanding access restrictions have undermined the delivery of essential services, destroyed access to livelihoods, and devastated the economy.

During the May 2021 escalation, 242 Palestinians, including 66 children (of which 23 were female), 38 women (of whom four were pregnant) and 138 men were killed, as verified by OHCHR (figure 1).<sup>11</sup> The Palestinian Ministry of Health reported that 1,948 Palestinians were injured, including 610 children, 398 women (of whom three were pregnant) and 940 men.<sup>12</sup> The military escalation resulted in further damage to Gaza's already dilapidated service infrastructure, exacerbating the devastating impacts of the blockade and previous military escalations (in 2008–2009, 2012 and 2014).

Figure 1. Palestinian casualties from May 2021 hostilities



Source: OCHA, 2021b, p. 1.

In total, 331 education facilities, 33 hospitals and primary health clinics, and 290 water, sanitation and hygiene facilities were damaged or destroyed during the escalation.<sup>13</sup> These damages, combined with an increase in COVID-19 cases, overwhelmed an already overburdened health-care system, and further restricted vulnerable households' access to water and sanitation. The physical damage as a result of the escalation was estimated at between \$290 million and \$380 million in one of the most densely populated regions worldwide, in addition to economic losses of between \$105million and \$190 million in an area that is still recovering from previous shocks.<sup>14</sup>

At the height of the escalation in May 2021, over 117,000 Gazans were displaced, seeking protection and refuge in relatives' homes or UNRWA schools. In total, 59,226 housing units sustained partial damages, while 2,604 were severely damaged or destroyed.<sup>15</sup> A year later, some 1,300 families (7,300 persons) whose homes were destroyed are still internally displaced and, owing to a lack of financial resources and restrictions on building material imports, 21,300 families are still living in unhygienic and overcrowded shelter conditions.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Security context in the West Bank

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During the reporting period, the Government of Palestine continued to have limited or no sovereignty, authority or jurisdiction in Area C, H2 of Hebron, and East Jerusalem. Lack of jurisdiction and barriers to movement, such as checkpoints, continued to stymie the ability of Palestinian governmental institutions to provide services in Palestinian communities, thus creating a gap in the operationalization of an inter-institutional national referral system for women survivors or those at risk of gender-based violence (GBV) and an inability to provide shelter or other safe spaces.<sup>17</sup>

Israel escalated the expansion of its settlements in the West Bank, including East

Jerusalem. These settlements are illegal and cause a wide range of human rights violations. Settlement and other related Israeli policies, including those that are discriminatory or amount to collective punishment, have led to the creation of an increasingly coercive environment for Palestinian women and girls in Area C, H2 and East Jerusalem, prompting them to leave their homes in what may amount to forcible transfer, which is a grave breach of international humanitarian law.<sup>18</sup>

The West Bank, including East Jerusalem, witnessed a rise in Palestinian casualties owing to settler-related violence, in threats of home eviction and forced displacement, and in arrest operations.<sup>19</sup> As reported by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, "the level of violence required by Israel to maintain its occupation has been steadily increasing".<sup>20</sup> During the reporting period, 156 Palestinians (of which 11 were women) in the West Bank were killed, mainly by live ammunition,<sup>21</sup> and 23,828 were injured, largely by tear gas inhalation and rubber bullets, of which nearly 30 per cent incurred injuries in Beita (Nablus)<sup>22</sup> during protests against the construction of a new settlement in their locality. In East Jerusalem, unnecessary and excessive force was systematically used by Israeli police to disperse Palestinians demonstrating against forced evictions and the Gaza offensive.<sup>23</sup> Tensions have been particularly high in East Jerusalem owing to the actions of Israeli extremist settlers and security forces at the Haram Al-Sharif compound, including the arrest, beating and shooting with stun grenades and sponge-tipped bullets of Palestinian worshippers, journalists and others.<sup>24</sup>

Pre-existing concerns about the culture of impunity and lack of accountability among the Israeli army and settlers who have perpetrated unlawful acts against Palestinians and other violations of international law were heightened with the killing of the Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu-Akleh in May 2022 (box 1). According to multiple sources,

**Box 1. Killing of veteran journalist Shireen Abu Akleh**

Born in Jerusalem on 3 January 1971, Shireen Abu Akleh joined Al Jazeera at age 26. "Soon after, the Second Intifada erupted, and Abu Akleh's frequent reports for Al-Jazeera from the field were beamed into millions of homes across the Arab world, connecting Palestinians who were otherwise separated and fragmented by Israel's closures, checkpoints, and permit regimes. In her distinguished career with Al Jazeera, Shireen reported on Israel's 2006 battles with Hezbollah in Lebanon and its four incursions into Gaza ... She would report from dangerous settings, explaining events in a voice that was simultaneously authoritative and calming" (Jerusalem Story, 2022).

As reported by her Al Jazeera colleagues, Shireen was a trailblazer for Palestinian women, and an exceptional role model for journalists in the occupied Palestinian territory and the Arab region. Her deep voice, her calm demure, and her professional reporting inspired a generation of female journalists. As young girls, aspiring journalists would stand in front of a mirror holding a hairbrush or a remote control and imitate her reporting, especially her closing line "Shireen Abu Akleh, Al Jazeera, occupied Jerusalem" (Al Jazeera, 2022).

In an interview with This Week in Palestine (2021, p. 26) several months before she was killed, she shared her experience of a previous visit to Jenin. "It was like going back to 2002 (during the Second Intifada) when Jenin lived something unique, unlike any other city in the West Bank... and became a legend in the minds of many... I did not expect to relive this overwhelming feeling. Jenin is still the same inextinguishable flame that is home to fearless young men who are not intimidated by any potential Israeli invasion."

In honour of her legacy, murals and artwork have been created, streets and memorials have been named after her, and awards and scholarships are now granted in her name, in the State of Palestine and other countries.

Source: Compiled by ESCWA.



including OHCHR, Israeli soldiers shot and killed the veteran journalist, who was covering an Israeli army operation in Jenin camp while wearing a clearly marked press flak jacket and a helmet.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Abu Akleh's funeral procession, attended by thousands of mourners, was attacked by Israeli police, drawing international condemnation.<sup>26</sup>

Settler violence, often backed by the Israeli army and security forces, including assaults on Palestinians and their property, has been on the rise in an atmosphere of impunity,<sup>27</sup> and has been among the main elements compounding the coercive environment

for Palestinians, especially in Area C and East Jerusalem. In the first half of 2022, OCHA documented 356 incidents of settler violence against Palestinians (leading to two Palestinian fatalities and 129 Palestinian injuries) and extensive damage to property (including more than 5,400 trees and 357 vehicles) – this is the highest level of incidents recorded since 2005 and represents a 46 per cent increase compared with 2021.<sup>28</sup>

Women living in small rural communities in Area C, especially those located in proximity to Israeli settlements; women in the Old City of Hebron, particularly in H2; and women living

**Box 2. Testimony of Maryam al-Khdeirat (55) from Khirbet Zanutah, Hebron**

"I live with my brother Amin and help with grazing the flock my three brothers raise. The sheep are what the entire community lives off. All the women milk the sheep, make cheese, gather firewood and bring food to our brothers and husbands while they're out grazing the sheep. In summer, I also grow vegetables for the family in the valley by the village. Since {an outpost on the hilltop opposite the village, about 100 meters from our home was established}, our lives have been disrupted... Since the settler attacked two of my brothers and threatened them, I haven't dared go far from the village to gather firewood as I've done for years... I've also stopped taking food out to my brothers in the pasture. The new outpost limits our movement around the village and our access to pastureland. I now stay in the village and focus on making dairy products... I don't see how we can grow the vegetables we used to rely on in summer."

Source: B'Tselem, 2021, p. 20.



in occupied East Jerusalem are the most vulnerable. Besides its role in exacerbating the coercive environment, the constant risk of settler harassment and violence not only has a negative psychosocial impact on women as they fear for themselves, their family and their children, but also contributes to eroding women's productive role and participation in the community by confining them to the home (box 2).

### 3. Shrinking space for civil society and for human rights defenders

During the reporting period, Palestinian CSOs, including women's rights organizations, faced a shrinking civic space owing to repressive measures implemented by the Israeli authorities. Such measures have put the safety and well-being of Palestinian human rights defenders at serious risk, and impede human rights organizations in their work of documenting human rights violations and advocating respect of human rights law.

In June 2021, under a military order, the offices of the Health Work Committees (HWC) in Ramallah were forcibly closed by Israeli security forces for six months, with major consequences for the provision of essential

health services, including a halt to the women's health programme.<sup>29</sup> A month later, in July 2021, the Israeli security forces raided the Ramallah home of the HWC Director, Shatha Odeh, and arbitrarily detained her. Odeh is a leading human rights defender and the Chairwoman of the Palestinian NGO Network, a coalition of over 140 Palestinian CSOs.<sup>30</sup> She was sentenced by an Israeli military court to 16 months in prison for charges related to her leadership role in HWC, which was designated an "unlawful" organization by an Israeli military order. In June 2022, Odeh was released after serving two thirds of her sentence.<sup>31</sup>

On 19 October 2021, the Israeli Minister of Defence designated six Palestinian human rights and humanitarian organizations, namely the Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, Al-Haq, the Bisan Centre for Research and Development, Defence for Children International-Palestine, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees and the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees, as "terrorist organizations" under the counter-terrorism law of 2016. Those organizations have worked for decades to promote human rights and provide critical humanitarian assistance in the occupied Palestinian territory, and are key partners of



the United Nations. The designation decisions, which were amended after some weeks, stated that the organizations were linked to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and had obtained financial resources that reached the latter. By March 2022, OHCHR was not aware of any credible evidence to support these accusations.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4. Internal political divide

The intra-Palestinian divide between the Hamas-led de facto authority in Gaza and the Fatah-led government in the West Bank remains unresolved, deepening territorial, political and economic fragmentation. The reporting period witnessed meetings between Fatah, Hamas and other Palestinian factions to coordinate positions in the context of regional political developments, including the normalization of relations between Israel and some Arab States in 2020.

In January 2021, following a dialogue between Hamas and Fatah, a presidential decree was issued scheduling legislative elections for 22 May 2021, and a presidential election for 31 July 2021. The elections were planned to include Palestinians across Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and generated hopes for democratization and national reconciliation. The Government of Palestine, however, announced the postponement of the elections in April 2021, citing the refusal of Israel to allow the inclusion of East Jerusalem. Tensions between the two major Palestinian factions fluctuated during the remaining months of the reporting period.

The ongoing divide has a sociocultural, economic, political and legislative impact on women's lives, notably the obstruction of the standardization of legal frameworks in the West Bank and Gaza in line with international human rights instruments.

## B. Impacts of the occupation

The Israeli occupation permeates every aspect of daily life in the occupied Palestinian territory, differently affecting women and girls. While the cumulative impact of human rights violations and political volatility has taken its toll on all Palestinians, women and girls, owing to pre-existing gender inequalities and other sociocultural factors, have been particularly impacted through greater risks of impoverishment and heightened vulnerability to all forms of GBV.

### 1. Gaza blockade

Israeli restrictions on the movement of Palestinians from and into Gaza infringe on the social, economic, political and civil rights of women and girls. During the reporting period, the ongoing Israeli blockade of Gaza continued to severely limit the exit of Palestinians through the Erez/Beit Hanoun Crossing, except

for permits for "primarily traders" (including day labourers in Israel) and for what is deemed "exceptional humanitarian circumstances", mainly patients with their companions who require medical treatment outside of Gaza.

Permits for medical treatment, however, are not automatically approved, despite the fact that many treatments, such as radiotherapy, chemotherapy, cardiac surgeries and essential drugs, remain unavailable or in short supply in Gaza, largely because of the longstanding blockade. According to WHO, from 2008 to 2022, an average of 30 per cent of applications by patients were delayed or denied, while 44 per cent of permits for companions of patients were delayed or denied during the same period.<sup>33</sup> Women's access to critical, sometimes life-saving, treatments has been rendered challenging due to the permit regime that is complicated, lengthy and lacks

transparency. Cancer patients, for instance, seeking treatment in an oncology hospital in East Jerusalem need to apply for a new permit for every medical appointment (even if the appointments are only days or weeks apart), and permit applicants can be required to undergo security interviews and to submit the results of biopsies and diagnostic imaging (whereas previously only a referral for medical care was required).<sup>34</sup>

The Gaza blockade has taken a heavy toll on women and girls by undermining living conditions, restricting access to essential services, and increasing their care burden. Coupled with damage from recurrent military escalations, the blockade has decimated the economy and, with the reversal in industrialization and agriculturalization, Gaza is now witnessing one of the worst economic performances globally.<sup>35</sup> At 47 per cent, Gaza has one of the world's highest unemployment rates,<sup>36</sup> with poverty estimated to rise above the COVID-19 induced peak of 2020 to reach 59 per cent in 2021 owing to the impact of the May 2021 escalation.<sup>37</sup> The economic demise of Gaza is also manifested by precarious livelihoods and negative coping strategies such as reduced consumption of food, with pregnant and lactating women acutely affected by insufficient food and dietary diversity.<sup>38</sup>

The Israeli blockade of Gaza severely limits construction and other materials from entering the enclave, hindering the reconstruction, rehabilitation and development of collapsing infrastructure to meet the needs of a growing population. As reported in March 2021, only 4 per cent of households in Gaza had access to safe water, and more than 97 per cent of the water pumped from the coastal aquifer in Gaza was below WHO water quality standards.<sup>39</sup> The situation has deteriorated owing to damages incurred during the May 2021 escalation.<sup>40</sup>

Due to the traditional gender division of labour in Palestinian society, the provision of household water is borne by women and girls

who are responsible for maintaining hygiene and cleanliness, caring for family members with water-related diseases, and for preparing food.<sup>41</sup> Women and girls in Gaza are also disproportionately impacted at the household level by daily limits on electricity hours (12–14 hours per day, decreasing to 8–12 hours during winter and summer peaks).<sup>42</sup> A 2020 study on the impact of the fuel crisis in Gaza indicates that 77 per cent of respondents perceive that the main effects of limited electricity are the inability to complete electricity-based household work, and the inability to store food and vegetables in the refrigerator for fear of damage.<sup>43</sup> As electricity is often available only at night, women have been forced to cut their sleeping hours or stay awake throughout the night to undertake household chores.<sup>44</sup> The pressure to meet household needs, despite power outages, has heightened the psychological distress faced by women and has exacerbated domestic tensions.

## 2. Impact of movement restrictions on the right to family life

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The ongoing Gaza blockade and other Israeli policies continue to erode the rights of women to marry and live with their family, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

A gender analysis of the Israeli imposed criteria for travel through the Erez/Beit Hanoun Crossing, conducted by the Israeli human rights organization Gisha – Legal Centre for Freedom of Movement, highlights that the permit regime has “unique” implications for Palestinian women living in Gaza, affecting them disproportionately.<sup>45</sup> Given that restrictions prevent family reunification in the West Bank, a West Bank ID-holder married to a Gaza ID-holder has often no choice but to live in Gaza. Gisha's report indicates that many women in Gaza are cut off from their families in the West Bank, including during emergencies such as complicated pregnancy or childbirth, by Israeli-imposed restrictions that only allow

limited circumstances in which Gaza residents can request a permit.<sup>46</sup>

During the reporting period, the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law, first enacted in 2003 as a temporary order, was re-approved by the Israeli Knesset. The law prohibits the granting of residency or citizenship status to Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza who are married to Palestinian citizens of Israel, thereby denying them their right to family unification, right to family life, and right to equality in marriage and choice of spouse. The temporary order was renewed on an annual basis until July 2021 when the Knesset failed to achieve the majority required to extend it. Despite the law's expiration, the Ministry of the Interior, which reviews family reunification requests, continued to implement the prior law as if it had not expired. On 10 March 2022, the ban on Palestinian family unification was officially reinstated.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, during the reporting period, a new directive for entry into and residence of foreigners in the occupied West Bank was issued by Israeli authorities. The Procedure for Entry and Residence of Foreigners in the Judea and Samaria Area adds new restrictions, severely infringing on the right to family life of Palestinians married to or in a relationship with a foreign national. The procedure states that Israel has the authority to approve requests by foreign spouses for residency status in the West Bank, despite the fact that the Oslo Accords granted this authority exclusively to the Palestinian Authority.<sup>48</sup> It also severely curtails the academic freedom of Palestinian universities by setting quotas for student visas and lecturers, among other measures.

### 3. Selected rights violations in the West Bank

**Movement restrictions due to the occupation:** The freedom of movement of women and girls in the West Bank continues to be curtailed by a complex system of administrative and physical restrictions and geographical fragmentation, including

settlements, the West Bank Wall, and nearly 600 checkpoints and physical obstacles, including roadblocks, mounds and gates.<sup>49</sup> Movement restrictions disrupt the daily lives of women and girls and undermine the enjoyment of rights by reducing access to services, stifling economic opportunities, and separating and even isolating Palestinian communities. Women and girls who need to cross checkpoints to access employment, education, healthcare or protection services, are routinely harassed, humiliated and forced to wait in line for hours, causing daily disruptions to their lives.<sup>50</sup>

A complex system of access permits, a discriminatory and strict planning and zoning regime, and multiple physical obstacles constrain Palestinian accessibility to health care. Israeli-imposed restrictions prevent the establishment of infrastructure, including health-care structures in Area C, forcing Palestinians to seek health care in other areas of the West Bank. At the same time, physical obstacles, including permanently staffed checkpoints, hamper access of health-care workers and patients, especially in areas such as H2 in Hebron. Furthermore, health workers can only access communities in the Seam Zone (the area that lies between the Wall and the 1949 Armistice border (Green Line), which comprises around 10 per cent of the West Bank) with Israeli-issued permits and through designated entry/exit gates that are not always open.<sup>51</sup>

**Demolitions, forced evictions and displacement:** During the reporting period, Israel pursued a discriminatory and restrictive planning regime in Area C and East Jerusalem that privileged Israeli settlement construction. This regime effectively prevents Palestinians from building homes and essential infrastructure by making it virtually impossible for them to obtain a building permit in these areas. Palestinians are therefore forced to build without Israeli building permits, and thus risk having their homes, livelihood assets

and infrastructure demolished.<sup>52</sup> In Area C alone, there are over 15,500 pending demolition orders against Palestinian structures that lack Israeli permits.<sup>53</sup> In East Jerusalem, at least a third of all Palestinian homes lack Israeli-issued building permits, potentially placing over 100,000 residents at risk of displacement.<sup>54</sup> This exacerbates that coercive environment that pressures Palestinians to leave their communities.

From 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2022, a total of 1,834 structures (384 of which were donor funded), including homes and livelihood and agricultural structures, were demolished, displacing 2,317 persons (including 561 were women 571 girls) and affecting 32,604 persons.<sup>55</sup>

In communities such as Humsa Al Bqai'a in the Jordan Valley, mass demolitions took place in February and July 2021 despite repeated calls by the United Nations and the international community.<sup>56</sup> Communities in East Jerusalem, in particular Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, and in Area C, including herding communities in Hebron, continue to face imminent risks of forced evictions and forcible transfer. OHCHR has noted that forced evictions are a key factor in creating a coercive environment that may lead to forcible transfer, which is a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention.<sup>57</sup>

In 2021, plans to evict Palestinian refugee families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood were met with Palestinian protests. Female activists played a leading role in campaigns that succeeded in mobilizing global support.

In May 2022, the Israeli High Court of Justice rejected a petition filed by herding communities of Massafer Yatta against the Israeli military's decision to use their land as an active firing zone. As a result, an estimated 1,144 persons, including 560 children, are at risk of imminent displacement.<sup>58</sup>

Women facing house demolitions and demolition threats are vulnerable to physical and verbal abuse by Israeli forces and Israeli settlers.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, demolitions have gendered impacts: owing to traditional patriarchal norms, the home is most often seen as the “woman’s sphere”, and mothers are often expected to continue caring for the family’s practical and emotional needs, including dealing with children’s trauma induced by displacement. Testimonies collected by the Women’s Centre for Legal Aid of Counselling (WCLAC) indicate that displaced families often move in with relatives on the husband’s side, which may lead to a decrease in women’s decision-making power and agency.<sup>60</sup>

**Detention and arrest:** As at April 2022, of the 4,450 of Palestinian political prisoners, 32 Palestinian females were held in Israeli prisons, under harsh conditions away from their families and children.<sup>61</sup> Among them were 11 mothers, 11 sick and six wounded women, one child, and one woman held under administrative detention without charge or trial. It has been documented that Palestinian female prisoners are subjected to some form of psychological torture and ill-treatment throughout the process of their arrest and detention, including various forms of sexual violence such as beatings, insults, threats, strip searches, and harassment.<sup>62</sup>

## 2. Legal developments and alignment with international frameworks

## 2. Legal developments and alignment with international frameworks

### A. Alignment with CEDAW

Israel, as an occupying Power, has responsibilities under international law for the implementation of CEDAW in the occupied Palestinian territory. While the occupation remains a major impediment to the attainment of women's rights in the State of Palestine, the ratification of international conventions also entails legal obligations to promote and protect the rights of women and girls. The State of Palestine acceded to CEDAW in April 2014 without any reservations or declarations, and to the Optional Protocol (OP-CEDAW) in April 2019. As a party to the Convention, the State of Palestine is responsible for its application as it seeks to ensure that legislation and policies are in line with international standards. In June 2020, the State of Palestine submitted its follow-up report in response to the CEDAW Committee's Concluding Observations on the initial report that was submitted in July 2018.<sup>63</sup> Follow-up shadow reports prepared by the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), the Women Civic Coalition for the implementation of CEDAW, and the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees highlighted stalled progress with regard to ensuring the equal protection and rights of all women and girls by harmonizing national legislation with CEDAW.

In March 2021, the CEDAW Committee reviewed the 2020 follow-up report of the State of Palestine.<sup>64</sup> It concluded that while a number of positive steps had

been made by the State party to adopt a definition of discrimination against women in specific areas of law (paragraph 11(a) of the Concluding Observations), its main recommendations had yet to be fully implemented. Despite the intense advocacy work of Palestinian CSOs, neither the Convention nor the OP-CEDAW have been published in the Official Gazette (Paragraph 13(c) of CEDAW Concluding Observations). A draft decree law on the publication of the Convention has been prepared by a committee comprising the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants, the Supreme Constitutional Court, and the secretariat of the Cabinet.<sup>65</sup> To date, however, the decree law has not been approved, and the Convention and OP-CEDAW are therefore not formally enforceable in the State party. Moreover, as stated by the ICHR Ombudsman, acceding to the Protocol will not create a change in the lives of women nor enable them to access all their rights at the national level unless the Government disseminates information on the Protocol (as per article 13 of OP-CEDAW), on the rights entrusted to them in the Protocol, and on procedures for accessing justice.<sup>66</sup>

During the reporting period, no progress was reported in unifying the outdated and fragmented legal systems in Gaza and the West Bank to provide equal protection under the law, in line with the Convention (paragraph 15(a) of CEDAW Concluding

### Box 3. Special focus: the draft family protection law

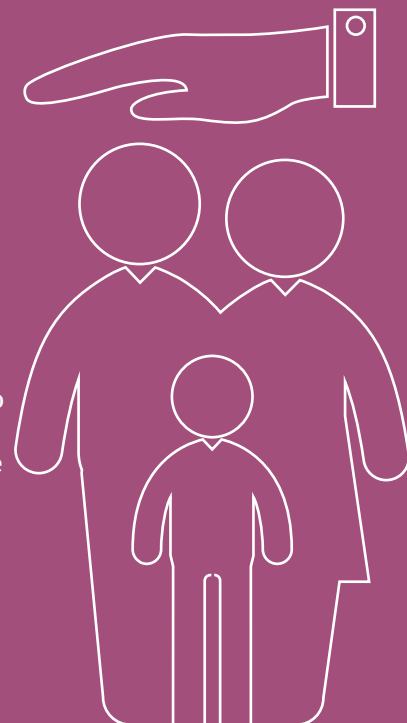
For the past two decades, Palestinian women's rights organizations have been tirelessly pushing for the adoption of national legislation to protect women and girls from GBV by replacing and amending the fragmented, outdated and discriminatory Jordanian and Egyptian laws still in place. These efforts complement and support the work of the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Between 2004 and 2006, WCLAC undertook an extensive legal review to prepare legal justifications for a stand-alone law on the protection of the family from violence. In 2006, WCLAC joined forces with other CSOs, including women's rights, human rights, and media organizations, to conduct a consultative preparation of a draft family protection from violence law. In 2007, the Palestinian NGO Forum to Combat Violence Against Women (*Al Muntada*) endorsed the draft law with the aim of advocating its adoption at the official level. At the same time, work began with the Palestinian government sector, in particular the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the then-Ministry of Social Affairs (now the Ministry of Social Development), and with the police and public prosecutor sectors. Consultations and specialized workshops were held with the civil and public sectors, extending from 2006 until 2008.

By the end of 2011, the legal dossier of the draft family protection from violence law was officially submitted to the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Women's Affairs. In 2012, the draft law was included for discussion at the Council of Ministers, and then referred to the Ministry of Justice, where it was reviewed by a legal committee, before being presented to diverse ministries for review and comment. This was followed by the preparation of three drafts during the period 2017–2020. During the period 2020–2021, a new version of the draft law was introduced by the Ministry of Social Development, submitted to the Council of Ministers, approved following the first reading, reviewed by a technical committee, and discussed at a Council of Ministers meeting in December 2021. Throughout this process, women's rights organizations and networks continued to monitor the reform process, and to provide their contribution to the latest versions of the draft law, based on their technical expertise and their practical experience working with women survivors of GBV, to ensure that their recommendations were incorporated for the next reading.

Despite a decree by the Council of Ministers in 2018 to refer the draft law to the President for approval and promulgation via a presidential decree law (in the absence of a functioning Palestinian Legislative Council), the draft law has yet to be submitted. The extensive delays have been attributed to the forecasted costs of implementing the law (such as increasing the number of safe houses, guidance counsellors, and other protection and legal aid services) and a lack of political will to enact what might be perceived as a socially controversial law. Women's rights and human rights organizations that have called on the Palestinian President to pass the law have been heavily attacked by conservative forces in Palestinian society. Online defamation and social media attacks against the draft law, CEDAW and women's rights in general have slowed the legislative review processes. Women and girls at risk of, or survivors of GBV, thus continue to be left without a comprehensive national legal protection system and without justice.

**Sources:** WCLAC, 2022b, pp. 6, 34; WCLAC, 2022c, pp. 36–38; and Palestinian Working Women Society for Development (PWWSD), 2021, p. 15.



Observations). The continued suspension of the Palestinian Legislative Council since 2007 and the ongoing political divide have impeded legislative reforms. Legal systems remain fragmented, with women and girls in Gaza and the West Bank subject to different sets of laws. For example, the 1960 Jordanian Penal Code and the 1976 Jordanian Personal Status Law are in force in the West Bank, while the 1936 Criminal Code and the 1954 Egyptian Family Rights Law apply in Gaza.

The fragmented legal context poses a major obstacle to the alignment of national laws with CEDAW. During the reporting period, limited progress was made towards expediting the review of draft laws, including the draft penal code, the draft personal status code and the draft family protection law, to ensure their compliance with the Convention, and towards repealing article 2 of decree law No. 21 (2019) that allows

for exceptions to the legal minimum age of marriage of 18 years (paragraph 15(c) of the Concluding Observations). Despite attacks by conservative actors in Palestinian society, including online defamation, threats and incitement,<sup>67</sup> women's rights organizations continue to advocate their full participation in legislative reforms and the immediate adoption by the Government of Palestine of legislation to protect women and girls from domestic violence (box 3). They also call for amending and expediting the review and adoption of the penal code and personal status code, in line with CEDAW. Gender-sensitive amendments to legislation that have been documented include the adoption of paternity leave for three days and the extension of maternity leave from 10 to 14 weeks, in line with international best practice.<sup>68</sup> The Cabinet also decided to adopt maternity leave as part of women's retirement benefits.<sup>69</sup>

## B. Beijing+25

To mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration, a study entitled "National report on Beijing+25: accomplishments, challenges and procedures" was prepared by the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs, with the active engagement of the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW), and issued in April 2019. The national report highlighted the following five main priorities to accelerate women and girls' advancement in the next five years: reducing violence against women; increasing women's participation in decision-making; institutionalizing gender equality and parity in official institutions; promoting women's economic participation; and improving the quality of life of disadvantaged and marginalized households.

In December 2020, WCLAC and the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH) launched a joint study entitled "Beijing+25 CSO follow-up report of Palestine". The report was drafted in consultation with more than 80 activists and representatives of women's and human rights organizations in the West Bank and Gaza. It provides an analysis of priorities, achievements, challenges and setbacks during the period 2014–2019 across the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. The report elaborates on the impact of the Israeli occupation on the environmental rights of women, including through practices such as the transfer or dumping of hazardous and industrial waste in the West Bank, and aerial spraying of herbicides in Gaza.<sup>70</sup>



## C. Women, peace and security agenda

During the reporting period, the State of Palestine took positive steps towards implementing the women, peace and security agenda (WPSA), and promoting women's leadership in peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development (SDG 16). Under the leadership of the National Committee for the Implementation of Security Council resolution 1325, chaired by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the National Action Plan 2020–2024 on the implementation of WPSA was issued,<sup>71</sup> following the conclusion of the State of Palestine's first National Action Plan. Its development was requested by the Palestinian Council of Ministers, as part of the national strategy development for the next three years. The second-generation National Action Plan focuses

on the pillars and outcomes summarized in table 1.

The second National Action Plan mirrors the first (2017–2019) in emphasizing the need to protect women and girls from the impacts of occupation, to hold Israel accountable, and to enhance women's political participation. According to human and women's rights organizations, the implementation of the first National Action Plan was impeded by the stagnation of formal peace processes in the State of Palestine, a lack of budget allocated to its implementation, limited political will and leadership, and a lack of awareness that presents a major obstacle to both the launching of viable campaigns for Security Council resolution 1325 and

**Table 1.** Summary of the Palestinian National Action Plan for Security Council resolution 1325, 2020–2024

Pillar	Outcomes
Prevention and protection	(1.1) Palestinian women and girls' participation in conflict prevention is promoted, including in response to the impact of the occupation and all forms of sexual and gender-based violence on their lives. (1.2) Women and girls have access to protection services against all forms of GBV, especially those resulting from the occupation practices.
Accountability	(2.1) Increased availability of periodic high-quality data, information and statistics on the implementation Security Council resolution 1325. (2.2) International and regional support mobilized to hold the Israeli occupation accountable for its violations of Palestinian women's rights.
Participation	(3.1) Palestinian women lead and participate in formal and informal peace and decision-making bodies and processes. (3.2) Security sector institutions mainstream gender and promote women's meaningful leadership and participation at all levels.
Relief and recovery	(4.1) Emergency/humanitarian response and early recovery plans and architecture are gender-responsive and address the needs and priorities of women and men. (4.2) Women most affected by occupation and conflict are more resilient and have access to economic recovery and multi-sectoral services.

the recruiting of actors necessary for its implementation.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, women have also been largely excluded from official reconciliation processes to end the internal political divide: the

overwhelming perception among women leaders is that men political leaders and decision makers consider reconciliation to be “a serious political issue” that does not have to consider gender issues.<sup>73</sup>

# 3. Demographic and health profile of **Palestinian women and girls**

### 3. Demographic and health profile of Palestinian women and girls

#### A. Population statistics

The population of the occupied Palestinian territory is estimated at 5.35 million, of which 2.63 million are female and 2.72 million are male: 3.19 million reside in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and 2.17 million in Gaza.<sup>74</sup> An estimated 311,000 Palestinians live within localities under the Israeli-defined Jerusalem municipality

(J1) and another 171,000 in communities located outside the borders and control of the Israeli Jerusalem municipality.<sup>75</sup> The population includes a large number of refugees, particularly in Gaza, where an estimated 1.48 million registered refugees reside, compared with 872,000 in the West Bank.<sup>76</sup>

**Table 2.** Summary of demographic indicators

Indicator	State of Palestine	West Bank	Gaza	Year
Population	5,354,656	3,188,387	2,166,269	Mid-2022
Female population	2,630,000	1,570,000	1,070,000	Mid-2022
Male population	2,720,000	1,620,000	1,100,000	Mid-2022
Registered refugee population	2,348,243	871,537	1,476,706	December 2020
Population growth rate	2.5%	---	---	2021
Population under 18	43.9%	41.7%	47.3%	Mid-2022
Population aged 18–29	22%	22.3%	21.8%	Mid-2021
Population aged 60+	5%	6%	5%	Mid-2021
Illiteracy rates for women aged 65+	35.6%	---	---	2021
Illiteracy rates for men aged 65+	7.9%	---	---	2021
Female-headed households	11%	12%	10%	Mid-2022
Marriages involving girls under 18	12%	4.3%	19.3%	2020

**Source:** PCBS, 2021a; 2021c; 2022a; 2022c; UNRWA, 2021; and World Bank, n.d., p. 1.

The Palestinian population is young and growing. At 2.5 per cent, the annual population growth rate, albeit on the decline, continues to be significantly higher than the global average of 0.9 per cent.<sup>77</sup> Girls and boys under 18 years of age represent 43.9 per cent of the total population,<sup>78</sup> while young women and men aged 18–29 account for roughly 22 per cent of the population, with a sex ratio of 105 males per 100 females.<sup>79</sup> Despite the high share of young people in the total population and their potential in influencing the future direction of society, young women face significant challenges, including high rates of joblessness, restrictions on mobility and personal freedom, imposed by patriarchal traditions and social norms exacerbated by the occupation, and an unequal distribution of social and political power.<sup>80</sup>

The proportion of older persons (aged 60 and above) remains relatively low at 5 per cent, but is expected to rise to 11 per cent by 2050.<sup>81</sup> As women have a longer life expectancy than men (75.3 compared with 73.1),<sup>82</sup> women are older on average and more frequently widowed. The COVID-19 pandemic has particularly affected the older generation, with about 78 per cent of deaths among those aged 60 and above, despite older persons comprising only 6 per cent of the total number of infected cases.<sup>83</sup> Beyond its immediate impact on health, the pandemic also put older women at greater risk of social isolation and impoverishment, owing to their lower income and education levels. While the country as a whole now has one of the lowest illiteracy rates in the world (2.5 per cent in 2020),<sup>84</sup> the illiteracy rate of older women is high at nearly 36 per cent (compared with 8 per cent among their male counterparts). Older women who missed out on education when they were younger are likely not to have the resources needed in later life to improve their living conditions. Furthermore, older women are often more socially and economically vulnerable than older men as they are still called on to be caregivers while, simultaneously, having less access to services, supports, assets or mobility.<sup>85</sup>

The share of female-headed households has remained at 11 per cent of total households.<sup>86</sup> Female-headed households are at high risk of impoverishment, and account for almost 20 per cent of households living in extreme poverty.<sup>87</sup> However, new studies in Gaza have indicated a relative decline in the gap between male-headed and female-headed households owing to effective targeting of female-headed households by the United Nations and other development agencies, and a worsening of the economic situation of male-headed households.<sup>88</sup> In addition, female-headed households in Gaza face various sociocultural challenges: abandoned and divorced women, and to a lesser extent widows, are not only exposed to social stigma, but are also at higher risk of violence owing to a loss of social protection.<sup>89</sup> Previously married women (divorced/widowed) are also less likely to remarry than their male counterparts, largely because of social and cultural norms.<sup>90</sup>

Child marriage is on the decline but still prevalent, especially in vulnerable and marginalized communities, particularly in Gaza, isolated communities in Area C, and in East Jerusalem. An estimated 12 per cent of marriages registered in 2020 were for girls under 18 (4.3 per cent in the West Bank and 19.3 per cent in Gaza) down from 24 per cent in 2010.<sup>91</sup> The higher rates of child marriage and forced marriage in Gaza compared with the West Bank may be attributed to differing legal systems, in particular the application of decree No. 21 of 2019 in the West Bank that raised the minimum age of marriage for both sexes to 18 (unless chief justices of sharia and other family courts apply legal exemptions), impacts of repeated outbreaks of military violence in Gaza, significantly higher poverty rates and financial hardships,<sup>92</sup> and a stronger adherence of families to conservative social norms.<sup>93</sup>

Studies by women's rights organizations in Gaza, such as the Aisha Association for Woman and Child Protection, highlight that forced/child marriage has a detrimental

impact on girls' higher education and employment prospects, and on their psychological, physical and reproductive health, and leaves them vulnerable to domestic violence.<sup>94</sup> In a pre-pandemic survey of girls in the West Bank and Gaza who married as children, 45 per cent reported experiencing violence in the marital home. Of those who reported experiencing violence, 94 per cent reported their husband as the

perpetrator and 21 per cent reported an in-law, while only 37 per cent had ever told anyone about their experiences of violence.<sup>95</sup> Complications related to child birth are also of particular concern for adolescent girls, especially in Gaza, where the adolescent birth rate for females aged 15–19 years, while on the decline, is still relatively high at 48 per 1,000 live births, compared with 39 per 1,000 in the West Bank.<sup>96</sup>

## B. Health indicators and trends

During the reporting period, women's access to quality health services continued to be undermined by Israeli policies, including through ongoing restrictions on the movement of people and goods, notably medical personnel and supplies; demolition/damages to health-care infrastructure; and building restrictions in Area C that prevent construction of health facilities. Access to life saving reproductive health and family planning services, which are also essential for preventing maternal mortality, continue to be greatly needed, particularly in emergency contexts such as the May 2021 escalation in Gaza,<sup>97</sup> and in highly insecure communities in East Jerusalem and the remainder of the West Bank. While men and boys face a higher risk of fatality and injury, women and girls suffer disproportionately from the indirect consequences of conflict, such as from a lack of reproductive health services and of accessible and adequate support to address increased risks of GBV.<sup>98</sup> Years of restrictive Israeli policies, including on the import of medical resources, have led to a serious deterioration in the availability and quality of health services, with risks of increasing maternal mortality rates.<sup>99</sup> According to a 2020 UNFPA-led national study, there was a 43 per cent rise in cases of maternal mortality in 2020 compared with 2019.<sup>100</sup>

The reporting period was also characterised by the impact of the pandemic. In 2021, COVID-19 was the first cause of all deaths in the occupied Palestinian territory.<sup>101</sup> As of June 2022, a total of 659,853 cases were reported (410,177 in the West Bank and 249,676 in Gaza), with 5,660 deaths recorded.<sup>102</sup> In both the West Bank and Gaza, the pandemic placed an immense strain on the Palestinian health-care system, already significantly undermined by decades of Israeli policies. The pandemic also affected women's health and well-being by reducing their ability to access health and information services not related to COVID-19. Pregnant and lactating women, especially those in high-risk categories owing to the "double burden of malnutrition" (obesity/overweight combined with a high level of micronutrient deficiencies) were particularly vulnerable to the decrease in health services, while usage of available services also dropped due to fears of getting infected and the stigma associated with the pandemic.<sup>103</sup>

Moreover, the pandemic impacted emotional and mental health needs, with women more likely to report higher levels of insecurity and distress compared with men, potentially due to an increased work burden.<sup>104</sup> Overall, given the prolonged humanitarian crisis, psychosocial well-being and mental health continue to be important health concerns in the West Bank

and Gaza, with vulnerable groups such as those displaced, persons with disabilities and GBV survivors exposed to increased threats of psychological distress.<sup>105</sup>

Women and girls' acute need for mental health and psychosocial services, however, is often unmet, owing to a restricted delivery of services in vulnerable communities and the stigma around mental health which remains higher for women. Moreover, cultural norms demand that most issues, including mental health issues, be resolved within families, hindering access to mental health and psychosocial support services, particularly for women and girls.<sup>106</sup> Women and girls also continue to grapple with the trauma caused by repetitive exposure to military escalations. A survey assessing the socioeconomic conditions of Palestinians after the May 2021 escalation revealed that nearly 70 per cent of Gazans showed symptoms consistent with

the clinical diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, with displaced women in particular manifesting such symptoms.<sup>107</sup>

As a result of declining access to health and protection services, women's care burden increased, with greater responsibilities caring for the injured, including those with disabilities, and for providing psychosocial and emotional support to family members, in addition to their caregiving roles towards children and older persons.<sup>108</sup> The escalation of violence, which also coincided with the spread of COVID-19 cases, also heightened a sense of insecurity and vulnerability in women and girls, especially displaced, wounded and widowed women.<sup>109</sup> An assessment conducted in the period August–September 2021 in Gaza highlights that insecurity stemmed from factors such as a lack of privacy and safe spaces; and fear of sexual abuse and exploitation by non-family members in shelters or with host families.<sup>110</sup>

### C. Gender-based violence

Women and girls in the occupied Palestinian territory face heightened risks of GBV owing to the manifold effects of Israeli policies and practices, combined with prevailing traditional patriarchal norms within Palestinian society and, most recently, compounded by the impacts of the pandemic. The various forms of GBV, a grave human rights violation, include intimate partner violence, rape, sexual exploitation, physical abuse, harassment, and verbal and psychological abuse. Palestinian women's rights organizations and health institutions have extensively documented how the pandemic exacerbated the threats of GBV, including domestic violence and femicide, owing to extended lockdowns, financial pressures, and general anxiety at the household level.<sup>111</sup> Among the 149 cases of femicide documented by WCLAC over the period 2015–2020, 25 per cent were recorded

in 2020.<sup>112</sup>

With increased vulnerability to GBV, women also experienced acute legal, economic and social hardships during the pandemic, including limited access to the justice system because courts were affected by lockdowns; loss of jobs; fragile referral systems for abused women under lockdown; and lack of access to health-care services, including mental health.<sup>113</sup> New forms of violence, such as cyberbullying, online harassment and extortion, have also emerged or become more acute. Fears of cyberviolence impede Palestinian women and girls' digital participation, including online political engagement.<sup>114</sup>

Growing evidence suggests that the experience of occupation-related violations is strongly associated with GBV. Pathways

between experiences of occupation-related violence and intimate partner violence include poverty, increased gender inequitable attitudes, mental health issues, and depressive symptoms.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, in a context of low female labour force participation, women's economic dependence on their husbands or other male family members is a risk factor for psychological, physical and sexual violence. This is especially the case for women and girls with disabilities, Bedouin women, and internally displaced women, who are left with few options for supporting themselves financially, and therefore are more likely to not report intimate partner violence if it means losing their only source of financial support.<sup>116</sup>

GBV has profound consequences for women's physical and psychological health, and also detrimentally affects children, families, communities, the economy and society in general. A study on the economic costs of marital violence, conducted as part of a project between the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs and ESCWA, indicates that out-of-pocket costs (costs incurred by survivors in accessing health and legal services, replacing property, and other financial costs), loss of unpaid household production (domestic work and care work for children and older persons), and productivity loss (absenteeism and presenteeism) amount to an estimated overall loss of between \$36 million and \$45 million per year.<sup>117</sup>

Women survivors of GBV continue to encounter challenges in accessing justice. Reporting of GBV is still low due to fear of reprisal, combined with the profound stigma that survivors of rape, intimate partner violence, and other forms of GBV often face. Furthermore, data from the 2019/2020 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey indicate that almost one in four women from Gaza believes that

husbands are justified in beating their wives, compared with one in ten women from the West Bank, with young women (15–19 years of age), especially from the poorest households, more likely than older women to believe this.<sup>118</sup> When they do report GBV crimes, women often end up withdrawing their cases from courts at early stages of the litigation process owing to social pressures and a loss of confidence in the judicial system.<sup>119</sup>

Moreover, many femicide cases are not pursued: they are either registered as “suicide cases” or “deaths for unknown reasons”, or closed immediately without proper investigation, especially in Gaza, under the pretext that the perpetrator was “insane or mentally unstable”. This contributes to concealing crimes of femicide and GBV, which encourages a culture of impunity and allows perpetrators to escape deterrent penal measures.<sup>120</sup> Femicide also has psychosocial and mental health impacts on family members and the wider community. An analysis of Palestinian women's experiences with the murders of their female relatives in Gaza reveals that female relatives experience continuous fear and severe anxiety because the murderers remain free. Familial consent and silence about the deaths cause women to feel depressed and to feel that they could be next to die.<sup>121</sup>

Given the delays in legislative changes (reforms to the penal code and personal status law and the adoption of the family protection law), measures to improve women's access to justice, including the establishment of a Gender Unit in the judiciary and, in March 2022, the launch of a specialized court for violence against women in the Nablus Court, the first court of its kind in the State of Palestine, are to be commended.<sup>122</sup>



# 4. Political and economic participation and trends

## 4. Political and economic participation and trends

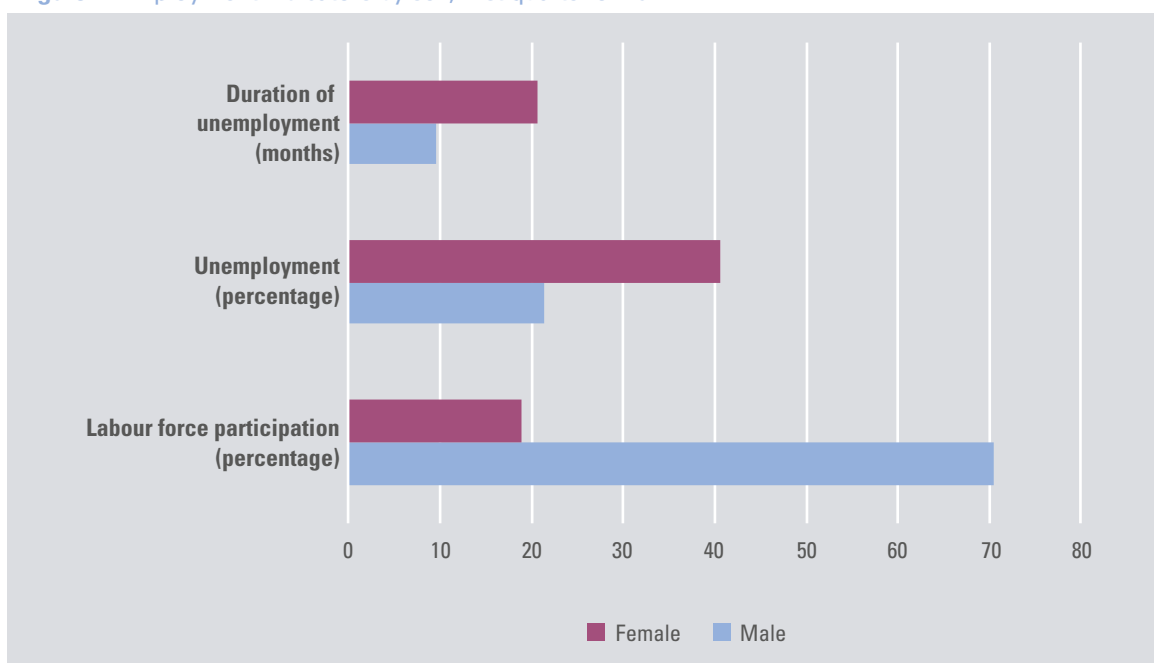
### A. Employment

The Palestinian labour market has long been characterized by gender disparities, as reflected in women's low labour force participation rates, high unemployment rates, and duration of unemployment, (figure 2). In the first quarter of 2022, only 18.9 per cent of women compared with 70.5 per cent of men in the occupied Palestinian territory participated in the labour market, and women's unemployment at 40.6 per cent was almost double that of men at 21.4 per cent.<sup>123</sup> At 59.2 per cent, the unemployment rate is particularly high for young women (aged 20–24).<sup>124</sup>

Similarly, the duration of unemployment of women (20.6 months) is more than double that of their male counterparts (9.6 months).<sup>125</sup>

There are clear regional disparities with regard to employment, reflecting the broader economic differences between the West Bank and Gaza. In the first quarter of 2022, unemployment reached 47 per cent in Gaza compared with 14 per cent in the West Bank. Notably, young educated women are the most vulnerable to joblessness in Gaza.

Figure 2. Employment indicators by sex, first quarter of 2022



Source: PCBS, 2022b, pp. 11,18–19.

#### Box 4. Women-owned agri-enterprises in Gaza

**Rooftop rabbit farm:** On her 90 square metre house rooftop, Reem has established a small rabbit breeding enterprise. She explains that her agri-enterprise must support her 10-member family owing to their lack of income; this being a common narrative for people in Gaza. Her husband had recently lost his farming job because the agricultural land he was working on was destroyed during the Israeli offensive on Gaza in 2014. In May 2021, Reem could not work in her rooftop rabbit farm for 12 days because of the Israeli bombings, which caused the death of several rabbits and countless other losses. Moreover, both her agri-enterprise and her farm were affected by the pandemic. Nonetheless Reem hopes that she will be able to expand her small agri-enterprise in the future.

**Solar-powered fruit and vegetable store:** In 2018, Hanady Sufian Khalil Abu-Herbeid began working on a solar powered dried fruit and vegetable business in Beit Hanoun, North Gaza. With the support of her family, two years later she launched her home business to nearby grocers, local markets and retailers. Hanady explains that because of its proximal location to Israeli borders, the community's lives, homes and livelihoods are vulnerable to aggressions. At university, Hanady studied renewable energy engineering, which is where the idea for SolarFood originated. In addition to war and bombings in Gaza, the pandemic also severely affected Hanady's business. However, she works hard every day to rebuild, so that her business can be even better than before. SolarFood seeks to create healthy supply chains and ethical food production, along with employment for women in the agricultural sector

Source: Gaza Urban Agricultural Platform, 2021, pp. 7, 15–16.



The pandemic exacerbated women's economic vulnerabilities, with women suffering more than men in almost all aspects of their labour market participation and well-being, including relatively higher job losses and business contraction.<sup>126</sup> In Gaza, the impacts of the pandemic were compounded by losses incurred in the May 2021 escalation. For example, the sustained bombing over 11 days led to major losses for many of the approximately 1,000 women-owned agri-enterprises in Gaza (box 4).

According to the World Bank, the State of Palestine scores lowest worldwide (26.3 out of 100) in laws and regulations that affect women's economic opportunities and labour force participation, including freedom of

movement, laws affecting women's decisions to work, women's pay, women's work after having children, constraints related to marriage, property and inheritance, regulations affecting women starting and running a business, and laws affecting the size of a woman's pension.<sup>127</sup>

Women continue to be economically excluded, despite their high education levels. For instance, the number of female students in basic, secondary and tertiary education is higher than that of men, while the proportion of women with post-secondary education has already exceeded the proportion of men at that level of educational attainment (table 3). Although the gender parity index is in favour of females in the occupied

**Table 3.** Education indicators by sex

Indicator	Female	Male	Year
Children of basic school age attending school	98.4%	95.4%	2019/2020
Number of students in basic and secondary education	673,059	665,294	2020/2021
Children aged 7–14 that demonstrate foundational reading skills	57.3%	47.8%	2019/2020
Children of basic school age that are out of school	1.3%	4.3%	2019/2020
Drop-out rate from secondary schools	1.56	2.95	2019/2020
Number of university students	126,700	76,921	2020/2021
Persons with educational attainment of a secondary degree and above	47.8%	41.4%	2020

Sources: PCBS, 2022d, pp. 29–30; PCBS, 2021b, p. 26; and UNICEF, 2021, pp. 8.

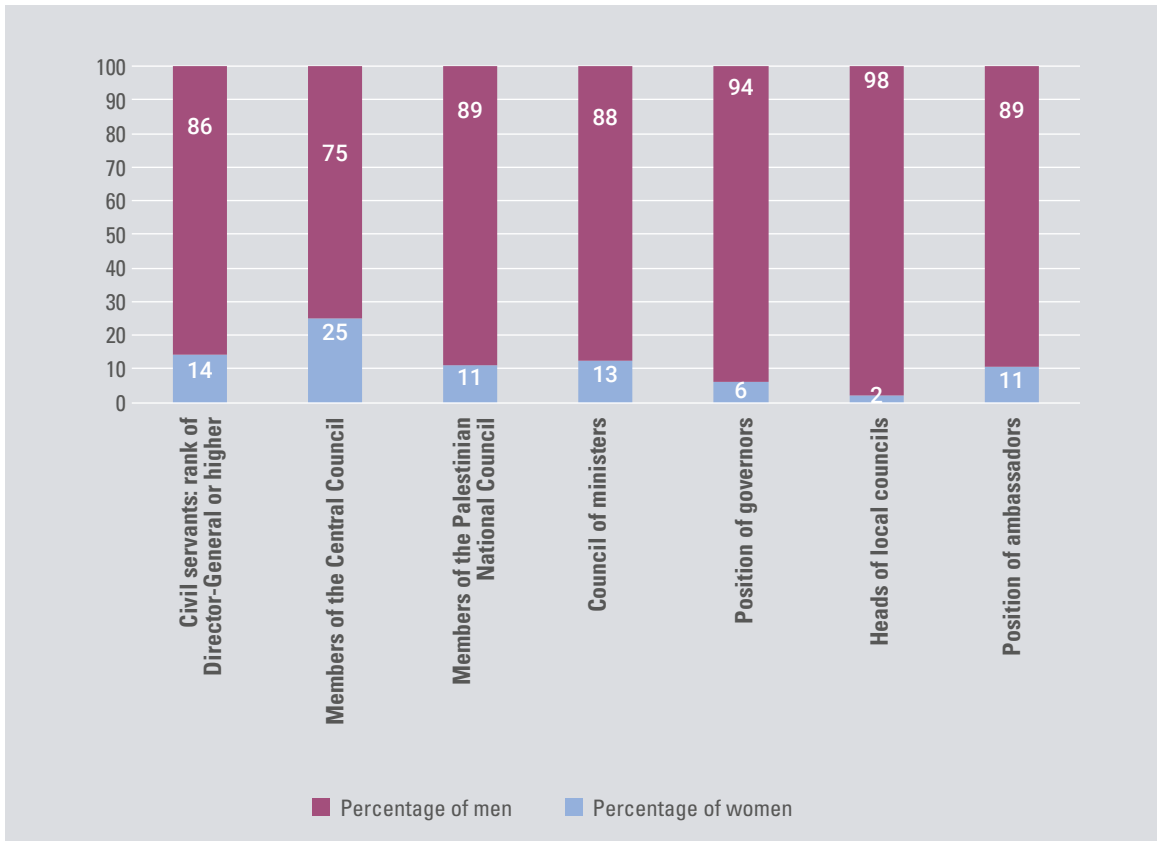
Palestinian territory (1.65 in the academic year 2020/2021, up from 1.38 in the academic year 2010/2011),<sup>128</sup> this improvement has not translated into employment gains. This paradoxical trend of rising educational attainment yet stagnant female labour force participation is observed in many MENA countries (often referred to as the “MENA paradox”).<sup>129</sup> Education is thus not enough to increase the rate of women’s participation in the labour force, and it is also not enough to ensure job security for women that are seeking employment.

Employment data also indicates that women are concentrated in the public sector: despite their low labour force participation, an estimated 45.7 per cent of civil public sector employees in the occupied Palestinian territory are women.<sup>130</sup> Consistent increases in female unemployment rates have been largely driven by limited wage opportunities in the formal private sector. Women are also less likely than men to start a business, owing to constraints such as limited access to credit. When they do, their businesses are mostly informal and unregistered,<sup>131</sup> with limited growth potential.

## B. Political participation

During the reporting period, women took on advanced roles in their communities, and actively contributed to resisting the impacts of the occupation. However, while positive measures have been announced to enhance women’s political representation and participation, including the adoption of

electoral quotas for women in legislative elections (which increased from 20 to 26 per cent in January 2021), women remain under-represented in formal decision-making processes and bodies, including the cabinet, the diplomatic corps, the judiciary, and municipal councils (figure 3).

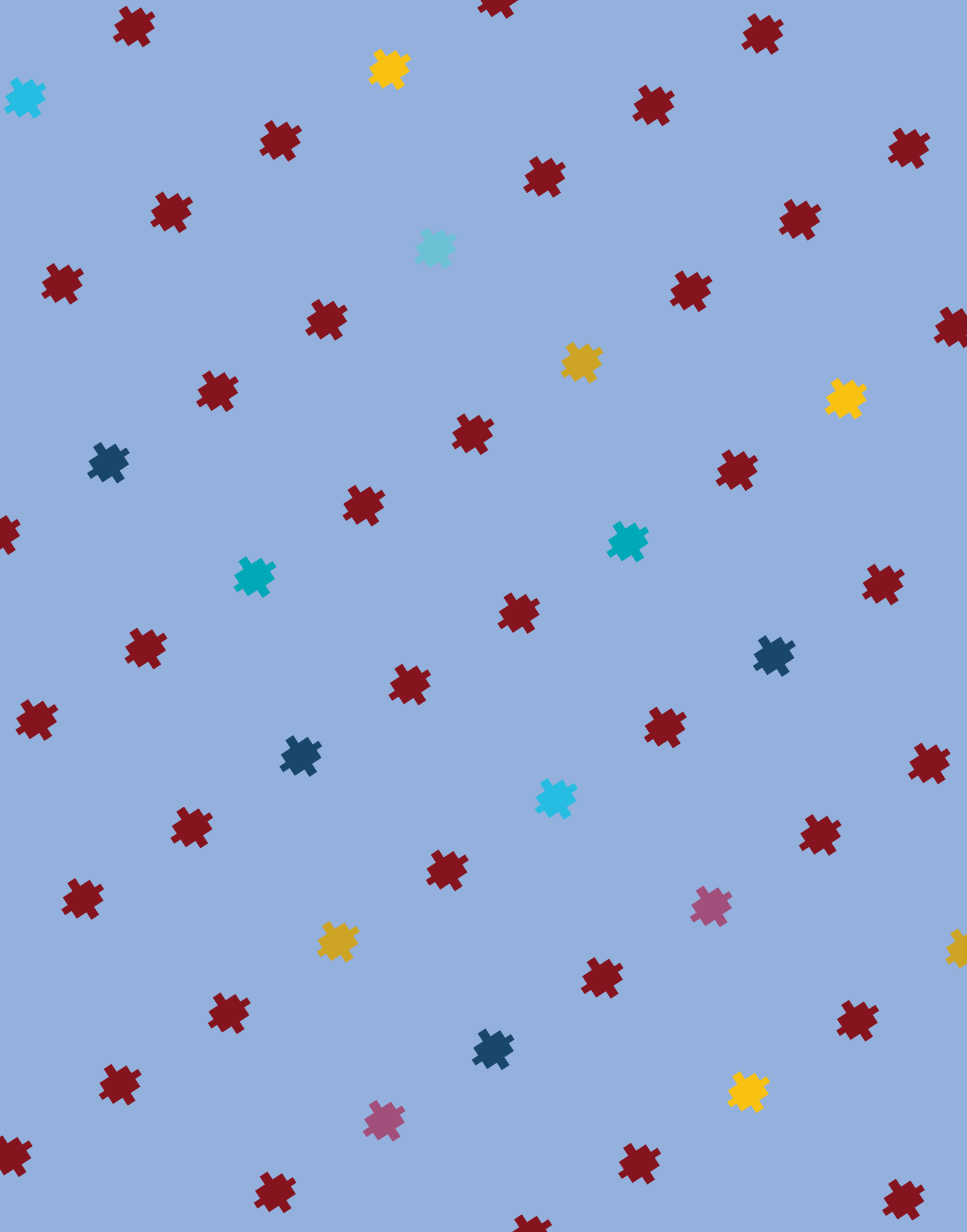
**Figure 3.** Women's political participation: percentage of women in decision-making bodies

Source: PCBS, 2022e, p. 1.

Reflecting the overall trend, women's formal participation in decision-making on COVID-19 emergency committees was also restricted, despite their important social role in preventing and mitigating the impacts of the pandemic. Women represent a majority of frontline health and care workers in the occupied Palestinian territory, yet are rarely represented in decision-making bodies. In the West Bank, the participation rate of women in central emergency and support committees at the governorate and local government levels ranged between 14 and 16 per cent, while in Gaza women were not represented at all in the emergency committee.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, women with disabilities were completely left out of pandemic emergency response plans.<sup>133</sup>

While there is no lack of capable women who are ready to take on leadership levels,

dominant patriarchal structures and mindsets consider them less capable or judge them for wanting to step out of the domestic sphere.<sup>134</sup> A study on well-being and gender equality among Palestinian young people (aged 18–29) indicated that while those surveyed had largely favourable attitudes towards women's rights in employment and education, this was not the case for women's leadership. The majority of interviewed young men and over half of young women believed that men were better suited for decision-making within the private sphere and for leadership positions in the public sphere. This may be due to the absence of women role models in the political and business sphere, and existing social norms around gendered leadership roles and capacities that reinforce the idea that men make better leaders.<sup>135</sup>



# 5. Progress, resilience and challenges

## 5. Progress, resilience and challenges

### A. Grassroots resilience and activism

Women and girls assume different roles during conflict, as witnessed during the multiple crises that have impacted the occupied Palestinian territory in recent years. In many instances, these roles serve as a form of resilience in the face of chronic insecurity and violence. The most recent major military escalation against Gaza in May 2021 highlights the contributions that women and girls provide during such times.

Women took an active role not only in maintaining households (or shelter spaces), but also in feeding the family, comforting children, and hosting displaced persons. In terms of coping strategies, women focused on playing with children and providing a comfortable atmosphere, despite the difficult situation. Women initiated conversations with women in shelters for entertainment and to reduce fear. Some exercised, choosing to walk in shelter spaces to reduce stress and anxiety. Girls utilized their hobbies to cope, including writing scripts and novels, journaling, making small videos, and turning to their parents for material and moral support, while others chose to participate in psychosocial support sessions to talk about their experiences during the escalation.<sup>136</sup>

Service providers, including women's rights organizations, have also practised positive coping mechanisms to ensure necessary service delivery, while also acknowledging their own exposure to violence and

instability. As seen during the May 2021 escalation, vicarious trauma and burnout are real concerns for service providers in Gaza, who faced difficulties in moving and communicating during the escalation (including because of the closure of some toll-free helplines owing to a lack of Internet services), making it nearly impossible to provide needed assistance. They continued their work, however, including following up on cases and providing remote counselling and psychological support. Providers also suffered from vicarious trauma, in addition to their own experiences of insecurity due to the escalation.<sup>137</sup> For example, staff of Sawa, an organization that works to combat all forms of violence and abuse against women and children, are limited to answering phones for a maximum of 20 hours a week to prevent counsellor burnout, while other organizations offer staff peer support.<sup>138</sup>

In the aftermath of the May 2021 escalation, a grassroots campaign entitled "We will rebuild Gaza" was launched, with over 150 male and female youth volunteers working to distribute food packages, conduct needs assessments for damaged infrastructure, and support street cleaning.<sup>139</sup>

To ensure a sustainable household with sparse resources, women employ various coping mechanisms. This may include adjusting the household food basket, reorganizing assets and expenses, and finding creative ways to make aid assistance last longer. Some



women take on informal labour roles to make ends meet, while also assuming socially appropriate roles.<sup>140</sup> Women's cooperatives have been established to help women working in agriculture to jointly obtain costly equipment to expand their work options.<sup>141</sup> In Area C, women's protection committees have been created to strengthen local service provision within the communities, address instances of GBV, and foment greater dialogue and peacebuilding locally.<sup>142</sup>

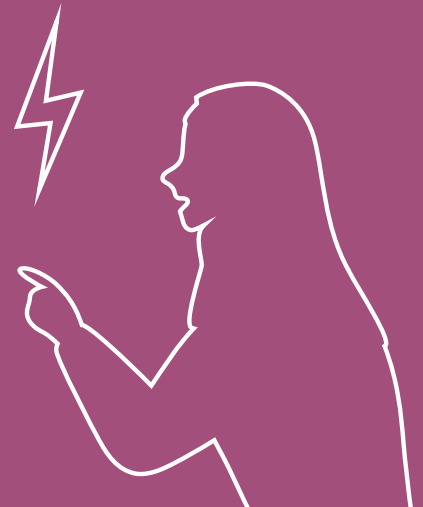
During the reporting period, young women across the occupied Palestinian territory mobilized to mitigate risks and threats associated with the Israeli occupation, and to advocate for their rights. Examples of women's resilience and activism include the

young Palestinian journalist Muna el-Kurd who rose to international prominence for her fight against forced evictions in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood (box 5), the women at the heart of Beita's resistance to settlement building in Nablus (box 6), Lina Abu Akleh advocating for justice and accountability for her aunt's killing, and demands for justice for veteran journalist Shireen Abu Akleh (box 7). Grassroots mobilization happened despite the challenges women face, and perhaps because their space for participation in formal decision-making is restricted: Palestinian women and young people have few places to go other than social media, international platforms and the streets.<sup>143</sup>

#### Box 5. Viral campaign #SaveSheikhJarrah

In April 2021, 23-year-old Muna el-Kurd caught the world's attention when, together with her twin brother Mohammad, she launched a vibrant grassroots campaign with the hashtag #SaveSheikhJarrah to protest against the Israeli occupation's policy of evicting Palestinian from their homes in East Jerusalem. For more than a decade, the El-Kurd family, along with other Palestinian families, had faced threats of forced eviction from their homes. When the Jerusalem District Court ordered the families to leave their homes by 2 May 2021, Muna and her brother relentlessly posted on social media, and gave interviews to mainstream media to draw Western media attention to the Palestinian cause and plight and to galvanize international support. Despite being temporarily detained by Israeli authorities, charismatic and bold, they became the most recognizable voices of those threatened with losing their homes in Sheikh Jarrah. Featured in TIME's 100 Most Influential People of 2021, they provided the world with a window into living under occupation in East Jerusalem, thus helping to prompt an international shift in rhetoric regarding Israel and the State of Palestine.

Source: TIME, Muna El-Kurd and Mohammed El-Kurd, 2021.



### Box 6. Women at the heart of Beita's resistance

The West Bank town of Beita, near Nablus, became a symbol of Palestinian resilience in 2021. The community mobilized against Israeli settlers' moves to rebuild an illegal outpost on top of Mount Sabih. All Israeli settlements are illegal under international law, but such outposts are acknowledged as illegal even by the Israeli Government. For 150 days and nights, young men from Beita protested and camped out on the mountain top. As a result of the Israeli army's use of live fire to suppress the protests, many were arrested, injured and even killed. The women of Beita organized themselves into a group called Aqal Wajib (Arabic for "the least we can do") to sustain the protests. They tirelessly prepared daily meals for the young demonstrators. "We all became involved early on," says Amal Bani Shamseh, a resident of Beita. "Some youth would come and ask their mothers to prepare sandwiches for their fellow protesters at Mount Sabih, so spontaneously we began to organise and cook together for all the protesters." Over 120 women worked together to assume the role of a collective kitchen for the protest movement. At the height of the protest movement, they produced 3,000 meals a week. Notably, most of the money came from women themselves: some took it out of their savings, and some donated their marriage jewellery.

**Sources:** +972 Magazine, [The women at the heart of Beita's resistance](#), 2022; and The New Arab, [Five months into Beita's protests: The human story behind the 'resistance icon'](#), 2021.



### Box 7. Fighting for justice and accountability for the murder of Shireen Abu Akleh

Lina Abu Akleh (27 years old) has become the face of an international campaign to advocate for justice and accountability from Israel, after her aunt Shireen Abu Akleh, the acclaimed Palestinian-American journalist, was killed while reporting in Jenin. In the months since, Lina, a Palestinian-Armenian born and raised in Jerusalem, has been actively campaigning, posting on social media, giving interviews, meeting with politicians, and seeking legal options to pursue justice for her aunt.

**Sources:** Compiled by ESCWA.



## B. Women's rights organizations and activism

In addition to the official work of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Palestinian women's rights organizations and other CSOs and networks are actively fighting to tackle violence against women and promote women's rights, in line with CEDAW, WPSA, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Their collective

efforts, including challenging harmful social norms that perpetuate and justify gender discrimination and GBV, delivering frontline services and political action, demonstrate their commitment and resilience in the face of growing conservatism, shrinking civic space, curtailed freedom of speech, and the impacts of the longstanding occupation.

## 1. Union of Palestinian Women's Committees

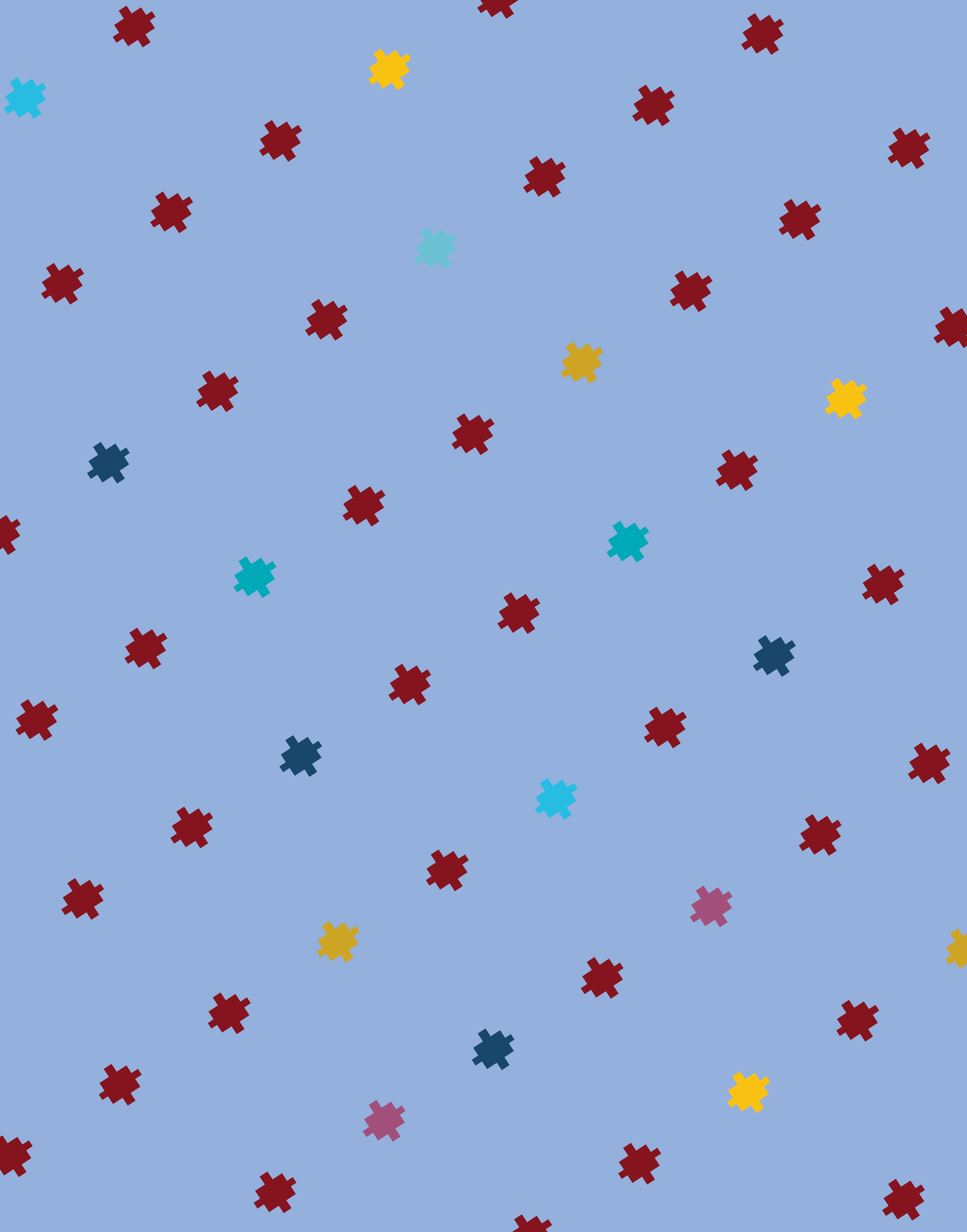
In October 2021, the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC) was one of six Palestinian CSOs designated as a "terrorist organization" by the Israeli Government. UPWC is a progressive feminist community organization that struggles to build a progressive, democratic Palestinian civil society free of all forms of discrimination in pursuit of justice.<sup>144</sup> As such, the designation of "terrorist organization" contributes to shrinking the civil society space in the State of Palestine, particularly for women's rights organizations, and limits access to international funding, which is a lifeline for such organizations.<sup>145</sup>

## 2. National Women's Coalition for the Implementation of the CEDAW Convention

The Coalition, led by GUPW, was formed in 2018, and comprises over 50 human rights and women's organizations, trade unions, women's frameworks and women rights activists, working on advocating, protecting and empowering women at the local and national levels in the West Bank and Gaza. As a national coordination coalition body, it aims to contribute to justice and equality in Palestinian society and, more specifically, seeks to organize work among member institutions that work on CEDAW, and to harmonize national laws and legislation with the Convention by working on follow-up and accountability mechanisms for the implementation of CEDAW in the State of Palestine at all levels (governmental, non-governmental and the private sector).

In its first years of establishment, the Coalition focused on strengthening the capacity of its members through training aimed at deepening understanding of the Convention, learning how to prepare reports submitted to the CEDAW Committee by relevant institutions, and coordinating and networking with various governmental institutions. In the previous reporting period, GUPW and the CEDAW Coalition submitted a report on violence against women and girls within the State of Palestine during the pandemic to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls its causes and consequences. During the current reporting period, factsheets on this national report and roundtables were organized to disseminate and discuss the report findings. Furthermore, the CEDAW Coalition focused on the preparation of a parallel report to the Government's follow-up report to the CEDAW Committee.

Feminist and human rights organizations, including the Coalition and its members, that have been advocating the alignment of national laws with CEDAW, have also been heavily attacked by conservative forces, including clan leaders and political religious parties. To counteract rising backlash and incitement, women's rights organizations have organized policy dialogues, meetings and academic and legal discussions with the Coalition.<sup>146</sup> The Coalition has also lobbied the Government of Palestine to address the incitements against CEDAW and women's rights organizations.<sup>147</sup>



# 6. Conclusions and **recommendations**

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

The vulnerabilities and threats faced by women in the occupied Palestinian territory cannot be separated from the overall deprivation and violation of rights and protracted humanitarian crises that affect all Palestinians. Consequently, as long as the Israeli occupation, policies and practices, including violence against Palestinians, continue, the enjoyment of rights by Palestinian women will remain unattainable.

Harmful patriarchal norms, the unequal distribution of power and resources between women and men, and an outdated, fragmented and discriminatory legal system are key drivers of gender discrimination and GBV in the occupied Palestinian territory. As a signatory to CEDAW, and in compliance with the Beijing Platform for Action, the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, and WPSA, the

State of Palestine must do more to address these challenges and advance and protect the rights and well-being of women and girls.

With the full participation of women's rights organizations and other CSOs, the Government must expedite legislative reforms that guarantee justice and gender equality for women (most importantly the endorsement of the unified Palestinian penal code, the personal status law, and the family protection law). In addition, with the support of the international community and local civil society, the Government of Palestine must invest in the effective implementation of policies to tackle gender disparities, particularly in economic and political participation, and to improve women and girls' security and well-being.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are addressed to the Government of Palestine and other Palestinian stakeholders. They should not be viewed as an alternative to the removal of the single most obstructive factor facing the advancement of the rights and socioeconomic conditions of Palestinian women and girls: the Israeli occupation and the policies and practices employed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Israel, as the occupying Power, must be held accountable for its violations of international human rights law and international

humanitarian law and for failing to uphold its obligations, including those towards all Palestinian women and girls. This includes providing relevant services and protection to Palestinian women and girls across the occupied territory.

Building upon previous ESCWA reports, the following recommendations are in alignment with international commitments made by the Government of Palestine, the CEDAW Committee's Concluding Observations, and recommendations made by leading women's rights and human rights organizations.

## 1. Legislative amendments and alignment with international commitments

In line with the Concluding Observations of the CEDAW Committee and recommendations of women and human rights organizations, it is imperative that national laws are amended in line with international commitments:

- ◆ CEDAW and the Optional Protocol should be immediately published in the Official Gazette, to give them a binding legal status.
- ◆ A definition of discrimination against women should be interpreted into national legislation, and clear and direct provisions prohibiting gender-based discrimination in the Palestinian Basic Law and all adopted Palestinian laws.
- ◆ The family protection law, which women's rights organizations have been advocating for since the early 2000s, should be approved, incorporating revisions proposed by CSOs to ensure consistency with international human rights standards. Adequate funding should be allocated by the Government of Palestine, with support from the donor community, to ensure the effective implementation of the family protection law, including the provision of protection services.
- ◆ A clear time frame for the review and adoption of the draft penal code and unified draft personal status law, in accordance with the provisions of CEDAW, should be provided and respected. The review and adoption of the penal code should be in full compliance with CEDAW, and support and complement the family protection law. Amendments to the personal status law should ensure that women have equal rights with men in relation to inheritance, marriage, divorce, custody and guardianship of children.
- ◆ The “exceptional” measures that enable child or forced marriages should be immediately repealed.

## 2. Consolidating women's participation in decision-making, conflict prevention, and national reconciliation processes

Measures to increase women's participation and representation in decision-making positions should be implemented:

- ◆ A 30 per cent quota, as stated in the Beijing Platform for Action, should be reserved for women's representation in free and democratic elections.
- ◆ The decision of the Palestinian Central Council to have women represent at least 30 per cent within PLO structures and in the frameworks of political parties is to be commended and should be swiftly implemented.
- ◆ To promote a substantial role for Palestinian women in peace and security, it is vital to focus on the promotion of women in the national reconciliation process, especially as global experience has demonstrated that women's participation in peace talks and negotiations render more sustainable peace agreements.
- ◆ Sufficient human and financial resources should be allocated to the implementation of the WPSA priority areas of the National Action Plan 2020–2024. This should include a costing exercise led by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, with the active engagement of the Higher National Committee on Security Council resolution 1325 and the National Civil Society Coalition on Security Council resolution 1325.
- ◆ Civic space must be protected and enhanced to ensure freedom of expression and protection, with measures in place to confront and deter hate crime and incitement against women and human rights activists, including in the cybersphere.

### **3. Changing attitudes and practices to reduce gender parities and promote women's empowerment**

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In parallel to legislative amendments, the State of Palestine, with the support of the international community and the active leadership of CSOs, should allocate gender-sensitive budgets to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women:

- ◆ Information on CEDAW and its Optional Protocol should be disseminated to all relevant actors, including the police, social, justice and health institutions, religious leaders, and the wider community.
- ◆ Legal efforts on child marriage should be matched by awareness raising on the law and the adverse impact of child marriage, and on the socioeconomic measures necessary to deter the violation of girls' rights.
- ◆ Efforts to raise awareness of women and girls' rights among both males and females should be intensified, including through social media campaigns, and community and school-based campaigns.
- ◆ Social outreach and change campaigns should be conducted, especially in rural communities and refugee camps, on the importance of changing attitudes on women's and men's roles in the family and society, so as to allow for women's increased participation in the labour force, political parties, public institutions, trade unions, and youth councils.
- ◆ The State of Palestine should invest in programmes to enhance the economic, social and political empowerment of adolescent girls and young women in Area C, East Jerusalem and Gaza.





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# Endnotes

- 1 See Security Council resolution [478](#) (1980).
- 2 The Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, signed in Washington, D.C. on 13 September 1993, frequently referred to as Oslo I; The Agreement on the Gaza Strip and Jericho Area, signed in Cairo on 4 May 1994; and The Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza, known as Oslo II, first signed in Taba, Egypt, by Israel and PLO on 24 September 1995, then signed in Washington, D.C. on 28 September 1995 by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, and witnessed by United States President Bill Clinton. The Oslo Accords also include the Protocol on Economic Relations, signed in Paris on 29 April 1994, which was included in annex IV of Oslo I.
- 3 The present report employs the following terminology: “Government of Palestine” is used to describe the legal entity governing the State of Palestine; “State of Palestine” is used to describe the Government’s engagement in the international sphere as a State recognised by the United Nations; and “occupied Palestinian territory” is used to describe the geographical space and division of the territory under Israeli occupation.
- 4 As of mid-2022 (PCBS, 2022a, p. 1).
- 5 A/HRC/49/83, para. 15.
- 6 1 January 2021–30 June 2022 data (OCHA, 2022a, pp. 1–2).
- 7 Gisha, 2021, p. 3.
- 8 Peace Now, 2022, pp.2–4.
- 9 OCHA, 2022b, p. 1.
- 10 OCHA, 2022c, p. 1.
- 11 OCHA, 2021a, p. 2.
- 12 OCHA, 2021a, p. 2.
- 13 OCHA, 2021c, p. 1.
- 14 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2021a, p. 16.
- 15 Shelter Cluster Palestine, 2022, p. 1.
- 16 OCHA, 2022d, p. 2.
- 17 UNFPA, 2021a, p. 7.
- 18 See A/77/90–E/2022/66; and A/76/336.
- 19 OCHA, 2021d, pp.11, 27–28.
- 20 OHCHR, 2022a, p. 1.
- 21 OCHA, 2022e, p. 1.
- 22 OCHA, 2022f, p. 1.
- 23 Amnesty International, 2021a, p. 3.
- 24 OCHA, 2022g, p. 2.
- 25 OHCHR, 2022b, p. 1.
- 26 European External Action Service Press Team, 2022, p. 1.
- 27 OHCHR, 2021a, p. 1.
- 28 OCHA, 2022d, p. 2.
- 29 Amnesty International, 2021b, p. 1.
- 30 Civicus, 2021, p. 4.
- 31 Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, 2022a, p. 1.
- 32 A/HRC/49/25, para. 36.
- 33 WHO, 2022a, p. 1.
- 34 Physicians for Human Rights, 2021, pp. 9 and 11.
- 35 A/75/310, paras. 2 and 21.
- 36 PCBS, 2022b, p. 8.
- 37 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2021a, p. 32.
- 38 UN-Women, 2021a, p. 16.
- 39 PCBS and Palestinian Water Authority, 2021, pp. 1–2.
- 40 A/77/90–E/2022/66, paras 91 and 92; and UNDP, 2022, pp. 43–48.
- 41 UN-Women, 2022a, p. 30.



- 42 OCHA, 2021d, p. 23.
- 43 ICRC, 2020, p. 12.
- 44 MA'AN Development Centre, 2021, p. 2.
- 45 Gisha, 2020, p. 13.
- 46 Gisha, 2020, p. 4.
- 47 Adalah, 2022, p. 1.
- 48 HaMoked – Centre of the Defence of the Individual, 2022, p. 1.
- 49 A/76/433, para. 13.
- 50 WCLAC, 2021, p. 44.
- 51 WHO, 2022b, p. 6.
- 52 A/75/86-E/2020/62, para. 2.
- 53 OCHA, 2021d, p. 51.
- 54 European Union, Office of the European Union Representative (West Bank and Gaza Strip, UNRWA), 2020, p. 2.
- 55 OCHA, 2022h, p. 1.
- 56 OCHA, 2021e, p. 1.
- 57 OHCHR, 2021c, p. 1.
- 58 OCHA, 2022i, p. 1.
- 59 WCLAC, 2022a, p. 30.
- 60 WCLAC, 2022b, p. 17.
- 61 Addameer, 2022b, p. 1.
- 62 Addameer, 2022c, p. 1; and A/77/90–E/2022/66, para. 24.
- 63 See CEDAW/C/PSE/FCO/1.
- 64 See B.J./follow-up/State of Palestine/78.
- 65 CEDAW/C/PSE/FCO/1, para 14.
- 66 ICHR, 2020, p. 5.
- 67 PWWSD, 2022, p. 1.
- 68 International Labour Organization, 2022, p. 46.
- 69 State of Palestine Council of Ministers, 2022.
- 70 WCLAC and the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH), 2020, p. 14.
- 71 See State of Palestine Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2020.
- 72 Doria Feminist Fund, 2022, p. 10.
- 73 UN-Women, 2022b, pp. 6 and 9.
- 74 PCBS, 2022a, p. 1.
- 75 PCBS, undated, p. 1.
- 76 UNRWA, 2021, p. 1.
- 77 World Bank, undated, p. 1.
- 78 PCBS, 2022c, p. 1.
- 79 PCBS, 2021a, p. 1.
- 80 Oxfam International, 2021, pp. 4 and 32.
- 81 HelpAge International, 2021, p. 1.
- 82 PCBS, 2021b, p. 13.
- 83 PCBS, 2021c, p. 1.
- 84 PCBS, 2021d, p. 1.
- 85 CARE and OCHA, 2020, p. 5.
- 86 PCBS, 2022a, p. 2.
- 87 WFP, 2020, p. 1.
- 88 UN-Women, 2022a, pp. 42, 56, 60.
- 89 Islamic Relief, 2020, p. 11.
- 90 PCBS, 2021b, p. 22.
- 91 PCBS, 2022c, p. 1.
- 92 UN-Women, 2021a, pp. 6, 13.
- 93 Abu Hamad and others, 2021, p. 9.
- 94 Aisha Association for Woman and Child Protection, 2020, p. 4.
- 95 Presler-Marshall, and others, 2021, pp. 19–20.
- 96 PCBS and UNICEF, 2021, p. 74.
- 97 UNFPA, 2021b, p. 1.
- 98 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2021a, p. 55.
- 99 UNICEF, 2020, p. 27.
- 100 State of Palestine Ministry of Health and UNFPA, 2020, p. 6.
- 101 State of Palestine Ministry of Health, 2022, p. 60.
- 102 Health Cluster Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2022, p. 2.
- 103 UN-Women, 2021b, p. 4.
- 104 Ghandour, and others, 2020, p. 5.

- 105 OCHA, 2021d, p. 32.
- 106 UN-Women, 2021c, p. 12.
- 107 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2021b, p.20.
- 108 UN-Women, 2022a, p. 51.
- 109 GBV Sub-Cluster, UNFPA and Women's Affairs Centre Gaza, 2021, p. 4.
- 110 E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2021/TP.6, pp. 30–31.
- 111 Global Protection Cluster, March 2022, pp. 5–6.
- 112 WCLAC and Palestinian NGO Forum to Combat Violence Against Women (Al-Muntada), 2021, p. 3.
- 113 UNFPA, 2021a, p. 13.
- 114 EuroMed Rights, 2021, p. 32.
- 115 Gibbs and others, 2020, pp. 10–12.
- 116 OCHA, 2021d, pp. 34–35.
- 117 E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2020/TP.30, p. 39.
- 118 PCBS and UNICEF, 2021, p. 257.
- 119 WCLAC and Al-Muntada, 2021, p. 7.
- 120 WCLAC and Al-Muntada, 2021, p. 5.
- 121 Daher-Nashif, 2021, p. 13.
- 122 UN-Women, UNDP and UNFPA, 2022, p. 1.
- 123 PCBS, 2022b, p. 11.
- 124 PCBS, 2022b, p. 18.
- 125 PCBS, 2022b, p. 19.
- 126 UN-Women, 2021d, pp. 5, 41.
- 127 World Bank, 2022, p. 1.
- 128 PCBS, 2021b, p. 30.
- 129 Assaad, and others, 2020, p. 12.
- 130 PCBS, 2021b, p. 56.
- 131 World Bank, 2021, p. 12.
- 132 CEDAW Coalition, 2020a, p. 1.
- 133 UN-Women, 2020, p. 22.
- 134 UN-Women, 2022c, p. 8.
- 135 Oxfam International, 2021, p. 28.
- 136 E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2021/TP.6, p. 22.
- 137 E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2021/TP.6, p. 34.
- 138 UN-Women, 2021c, p. 17.
- 139 UN-Women, 2021c, p. 17.
- 140 ACAPS, 2021, p. 7.
- 141 UN-Women, 2020, p. 21.
- 142 UN-Women, 2022c, p. 6.
- 143 UN-Women, 2022b, p. 4.
- 144 See UPWC [website](#).
- 145 By August 2022, several European donors had resumed funding. See German Federal Foreign Office, 2022, p. 1.
- 146 PWWSO, 2022, p. 4.
- 147 CEDAW Coalition, 2020b, p. 5.



The present report reviews the situation of Palestinian women and girls during the period July 2020–June 2022, focusing on political, social, economic and human rights developments. Building on research by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) on the status of Palestinian women and girls, and drawing upon the most recent data, the present report highlights the complex situation of women and girls, revealing both progress and setbacks in the context of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and of the Gaza blockade.

Palestinian women and girls also continued to face entrenched discrimination and rights violations within their own society in the context of traditional patriarchal norms, inequitable power dynamics, and stalled progress of the State of Palestine in aligning national legislation and policies with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which is in part due to the fragmentation of the Palestinian territory and the inability to convene the Palestinian Legislative Council. Despite several measures implemented by the Government of Palestine over the reporting period, including the launch of the second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, violence against women and girls remains prevalent and women’s political and economic participation curtailed.

