

Situation Analysis of Children's Rights and Wellbeing in the State of Palestine

July 2023

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List of Acronyms

CO	Country Office
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
ECD	Early Childhood Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information, Communication Technology
IYCF	Integrated Young Child Feeding
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MODA	Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoSD	Ministry of Social Development
NIVACS	National Inter-Sectoral Violence Against Children Strategy
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
PA	Palestinian Authority
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PNCTP	Palestinian National Cash Transfer Programme
PWA	Palestinian Water Authority
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SitAn	Situation Analysis
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Introduction

Few children have experienced such a protracted crisis as in the State of Palestine⁽¹⁾, with the decades-long conflict and the occupation making life extremely hard for many Palestinian children. In this context, children have increasingly had their rights denied resulting in increased deprivations of their well-being across their life course.

This report summarises the analysis of the situation experienced by children and young people in the State of Palestine to take stock of what is known, and to investigate the multiple and interconnected causes of child deprivations. This report is structured into the following chapters: 1) country profile; 2) child rights overview; 3) enabling environment analysis; and 4) conclusions.

There are two types of data sources used in this report:

- 1- The primary data comes from key informant interviews and focus group discussions.
- 2- The secondary data comes from publications and databases referenced in the annexes.

The Situation Analysis of Children's Rights and Wellbeing in the State of Palestine was prepared by a team from Development Pathways and the University of Birzeit – Centre for Development Studies, under the technical guidance of UNICEF in the State of Palestine Office and in collaboration with the UNICEF Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Office.



(1) State of Palestine from UN Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 4 December 2012: N1247974.doc (palestineun.org)

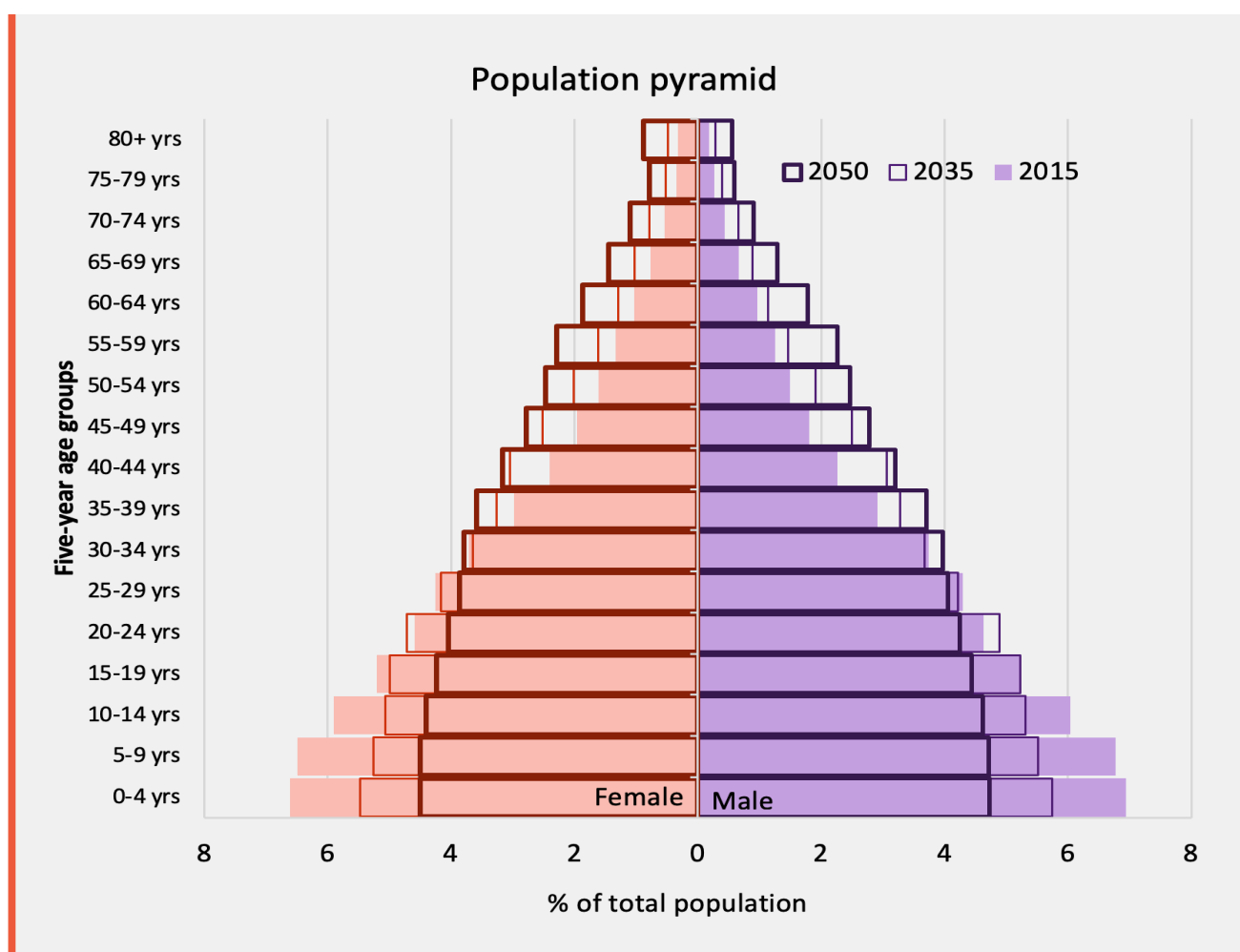
1. Country Profile

The population of the State of Palestine was estimated at 5,290,925 in 2021, with balanced gender parity. About 60 per cent of the total population lives in the West Bank, including approximately 300,000 people living in East Jerusalem, with 40 per cent of the population in the Gaza Strip⁽²⁾.

The State of Palestine has a high proportion of young people with almost half of the Palestinian population being children. The number of children (under 18 years) was 2.35 million in the State of Palestine in 2022, with 1.2 million boys and 1.15 million girls.⁽³⁾ As such children in the State of Palestine represent 43.9 per cent of the total population (41.7 per cent in the West Bank, and 47.3 per cent in the Gaza Strip).⁽⁴⁾

Population projections⁽⁵⁾ show that between 2017 and 2030, the population structure of the State of Palestine will move from a pyramid with a large base to one with a narrower base due to the decrease in fertility rates and higher life expectancy (Figure 1-1). The natural growth rate of the population in the State of Palestine was 2.5 per cent in 2019, with different rates between the West Bank (2.2 per cent) and in the Gaza Strip (2.9 per cent). In the last 25 years, the overall population growth rate for the State of Palestine has remained relatively stable, and it is significantly higher than the average for the Middle East, which was reported at 1.7 per cent in 2021. At the same time, decreasing mortality rates among both children and the elderly also contribute to the demographic shift. These two population groups, which accounted for 52 per cent of the Palestinian population in 1980, now account for 43 per cent⁽⁶⁾, and the child dependency ratio decreased from 105.2 per cent in 1980 to 68.2 per cent in 2022.⁽⁷⁾

Figure 1-1: Population pyramids, 2015, 2035 and 2050



(2) Census, 2017, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)

(3) Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022c.

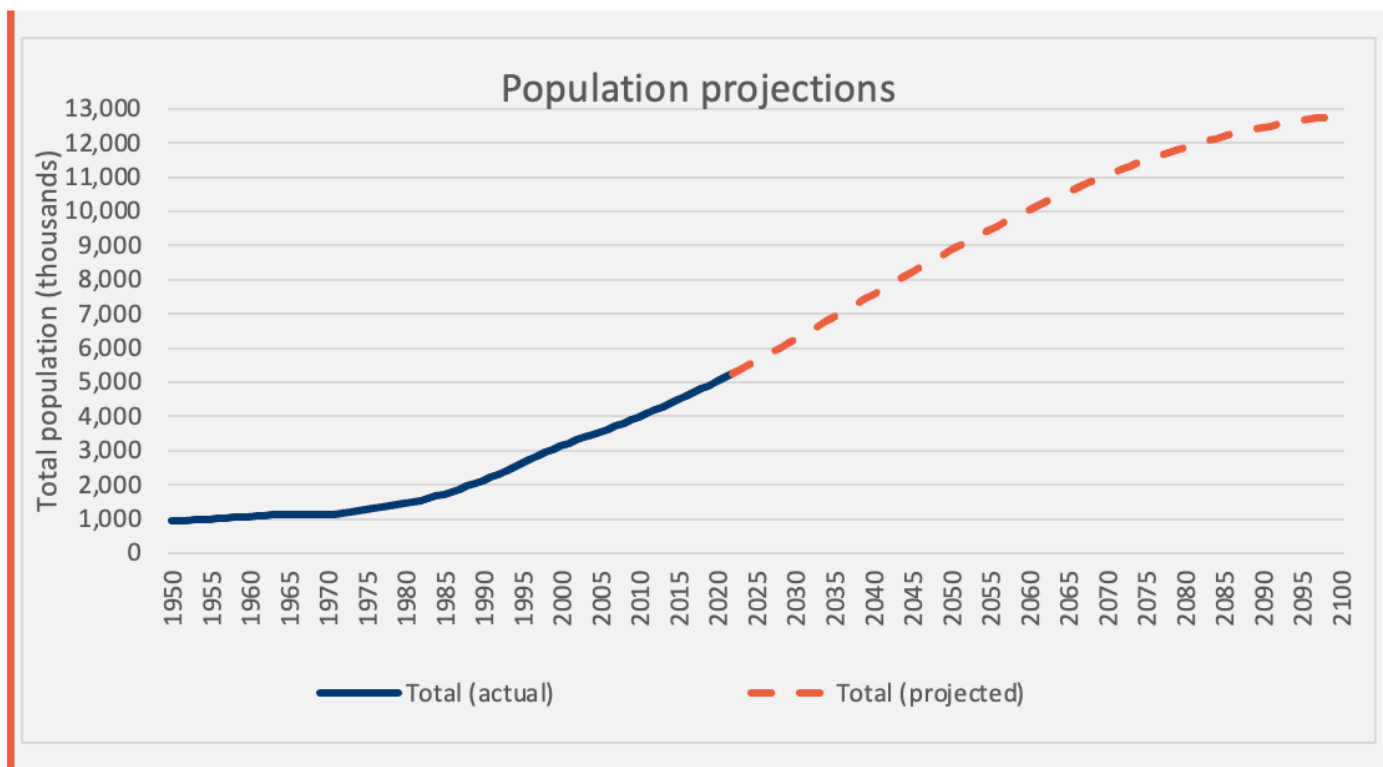
(4) Census 2017, PCBS

(5) United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition.

(6) Children under 14 years of age and elderly aged 65 years or more.

(7) https://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/indicators/methodology_sheets/demographics/dependency_ratio.pdf

Figure 1-2: Population trends, 1950-2100



Sources: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition.

As of June 2023, there were **over 2.47 million Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA** across the State of Palestine, with 1.57 million in the Gaza Strip and over 903,000 in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. There were almost 905,000 registered Palestine refugee children, 635,000 in the Gaza Strip (70 per cent) and 269,000 in the West Bank (30 per cent). Of the total registered child Palestine refugees 440,000 were girls (49 per cent) and 464,000 were boys (51 per cent), with no significant difference in gender distribution between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.⁽⁸⁾ The Gaza Strip has eight refugee camps while the West Bank has nineteen.

In 2017, an **estimated 2.1 per cent of the Palestinian population was reported to have any kind of disability**⁽⁹⁾. The Gaza Strip is reported to have a higher prevalence of disability with 2.6 per cent of the population recorded with a disability compared to 1.8 per cent in the West Bank. About 20 per cent of individuals with disabilities are children under the age of 18, suggesting that disability is a phenomenon that is more likely to occur to adults and the elderly. Looking more in depth at children with disabilities, the MICS in 2019/2020 found that 14.9 per cent of children aged from 5-17 years old had at least one functional difficulty, with 10.2 per cent of children 5-17 having anxiety.⁽¹⁰⁾

Economic growth in the State of Palestine is driven by the political and humanitarian context. The gap in GDP per capita between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has widened drastically after the political divide in 2007⁽¹¹⁾, and the closure imposed on the Gaza Strip (Figure 1-3). Although the economy of the Gaza Strip experienced a smooth recovery between 2009 and 2013, the escalations in 2014 and 2021 (amongst others) pushed the economy of the Gaza Strip into a chronic recession which has been exacerbated by the continuing closure. In the West Bank, the economy experienced an important expansion after the second Intifada but has been stagnating since 2016. Following the second Intifada in 2000, the unemployment rate increased and has never returned to the previous level, with unemployment and underemployment heavily affecting women and youth in particular. The COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on the Palestinian economy leading to a 12 per cent decrease in GDP per capita in 2020. Recovery from the effects of the pandemic in 2021 was sluggish, particularly in the Gaza Strip, with the economy of the Gaza Strip further affected by the escalations in May 2021, August 2022 and May 2023. The cost of living in the State of Palestine overall has remained stable with no remarkable disparities present at the regional level.

(8) UNRWA Registered Population Dashboard, UNRWA Registered Population Dashboard | UNRWA.

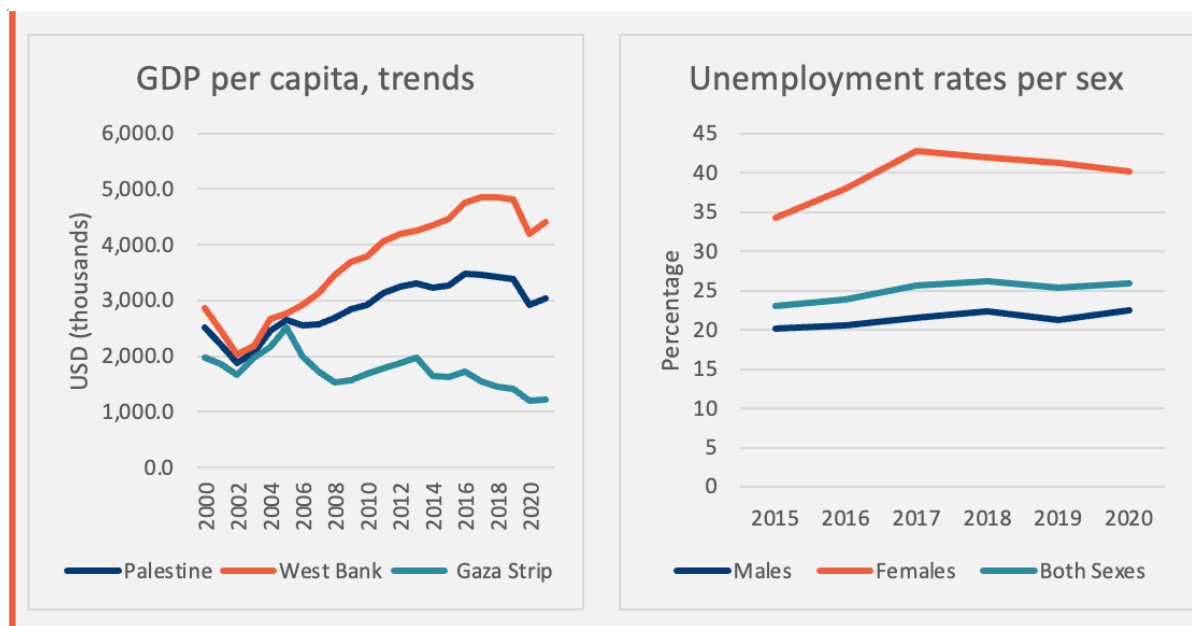
(9) Disability Survey, 2017, PCBS

(10) Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2019/20, PCBS

(11) PCBS Data Portal, 2022, PCBS | Main Statistical Indicators

However, the global inflation that hit all countries as a result of the war in Ukraine also had an impact on the State of Palestine.

Figure 1-3: Selected macro-economic indicators

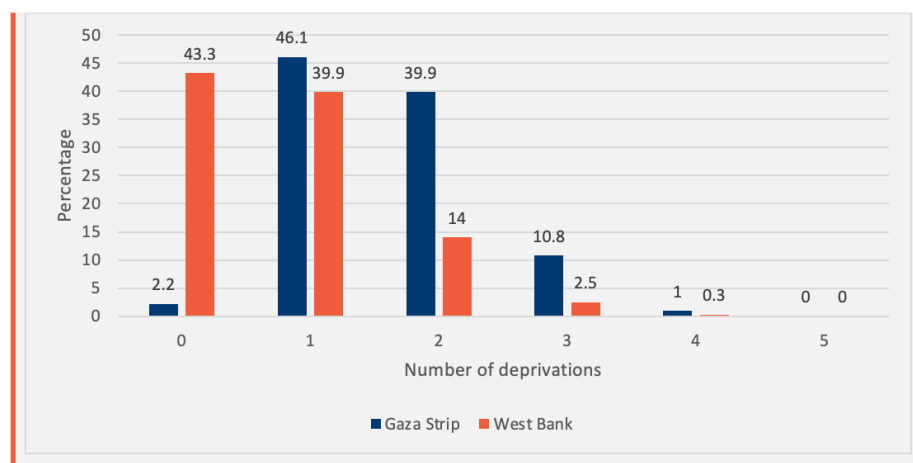


Source: PCBS data portal, 2022

Poverty is both widespread and deep in the State of Palestine. A large proportion of people living in poverty are young with 35 per cent of individuals aged 17 or less living below 60 per cent of the relative monetary poverty line. Household size, and the number of children in a household is a key driver of the depth of poverty. Considering that the average household size for the State of Palestine was five individuals in 2017, about 8.6 per cent of such households were living below 40 per cent of the relative poverty line, and 20.1 per cent of such households were living under 60 per cent of the relative poverty line.⁽¹²⁾ Some of the factors underlying child poverty are restrictions in workers' mobility, the closure of the Gaza Strip, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, many benefits of economic growth did not reach the poor due to weaknesses in national poverty alleviation policies.

Multi-dimensional child poverty: Furthermore, almost 75 per cent of children living in the State of Palestine suffer from at least one form of multi-dimensional deprivation (Figure 1-4)⁽¹³⁾. Nearly one in three children across the State of Palestine (32.1 per cent) are multidimensionally poor, meaning they are deprived in at least two dimensions. Children in the Gaza Strip are 15 percentage points more likely to be multidimensionally poor than children in the West Bank.

Figure 1-4: Proportion of children per number of deprivations



Source: Ferrone et al., 2021

(12) Palestinian Expenditure and Consumption Survey (PECS), 2017, PCBS

(13) Ferrone et al, 2021. This is measured against the global cc-MODA methodology until a national multi-dimensional child poverty measurement is agreed. The cc-MODA methodology applies global standard dimensions and indicators for child poverty measurement. Of note the cc-MODA measurement in the State of Palestine is driven by the water indicator which doesn't account for the fact that households in the Gaza Strip purchase their water from water trucks.

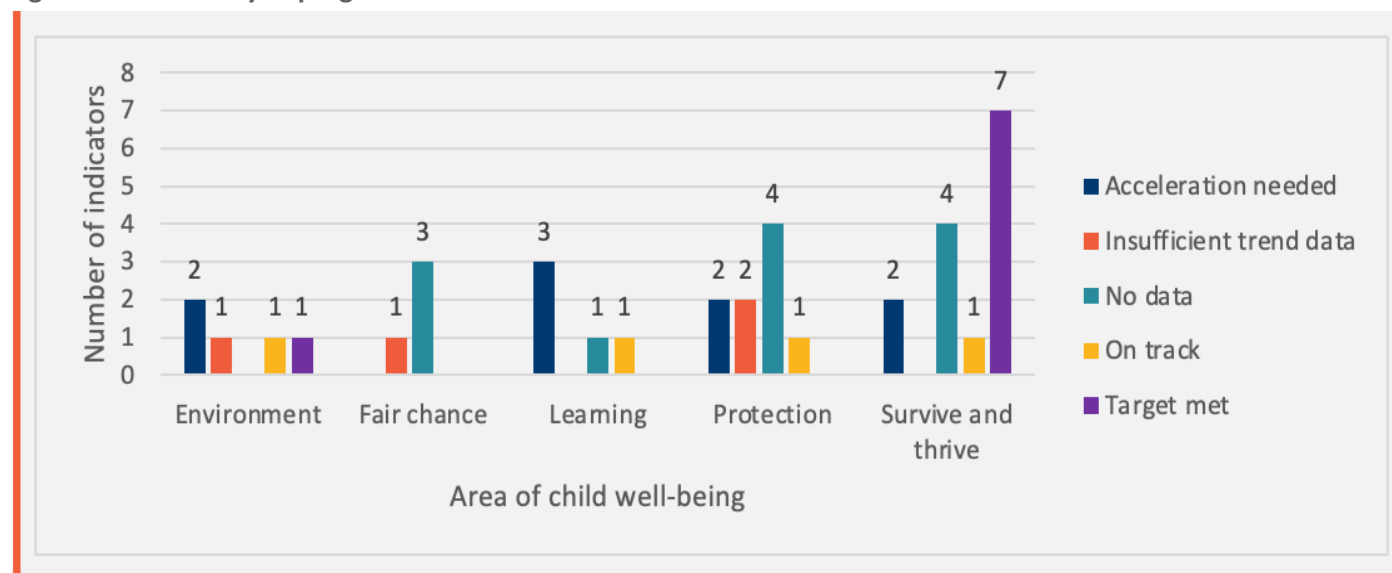
2. Child Rights Overview

This section presents an **overview of the results and data availability in the State of Palestine against the child-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** as organised around five overarching areas of well-being for every child grounded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁽¹⁴⁾ Figure 2-1 presents progress towards the achievement of child-specific targets for the SDGs in the State of Palestine against these five areas of: Survive and Thrive (Right to Survival and Health); Environment⁽¹⁵⁾ (Right to Safe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene); Learning (Right to Education); Protection (Right to Protection, Family Environment and Alternative Care); and Fair Chance (Right to Social Protection). This section also looks at the Right to Participation, Civil Rights and Freedom including Leisure and Cultural Activities.

Figure 2-1 presents, where data is available, whether the SDG indicators are met, on track or where acceleration is needed. However, there remain 16 of the 37 indicators (43 per cent) where there are no or insufficient data to report on the progress of these child-related SDGs. The subsequent sub-sections give an overview of achievement against the SDG target for each indicator where data is available.

For those indicators where data is available, in the area of Survive and Thrive⁽¹⁶⁾, eight of the ten indicators are either met or on track, with two requiring acceleration - which makes it the best performing of the five areas. For environment⁽¹⁷⁾ against the four indicators with data available one target is met, one is on track and two require acceleration. In learning⁽¹⁸⁾ of the four indicators with data available one is on track and three require acceleration. In protection⁽¹⁹⁾ of the three indicators for which data is available one is on track and two require acceleration. In fair chance fair chance⁽²⁰⁾ there is no data available.

Figure 2-1: Summary of progress towards the child-related SDG indicators⁽²¹⁾



Source: UNICEF, 2022

(14) Child-Related SDG Progress Assessment for State of Palestine - UNICEF DATA - <https://data.unicef.org/sdgs/country/pse/#cri>. UNICEF 2021. The list of indicators which are Met; Acceleration Needed; On Track can be accessed through this link.

(15) Safe access to water, sanitation and hygiene.

(16) This includes under-five mortality, malnutrition, adolescent birth rate, and immunization

(17) This includes access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene

(18) Includes children who are developmentally on track; participation in organized learning; the attainment of adequate learning outcomes; and access to WASH in schools.

(19) This includes sexual and intimate partner violence against girls, violent discipline, child labour, child marriage, and birth registration

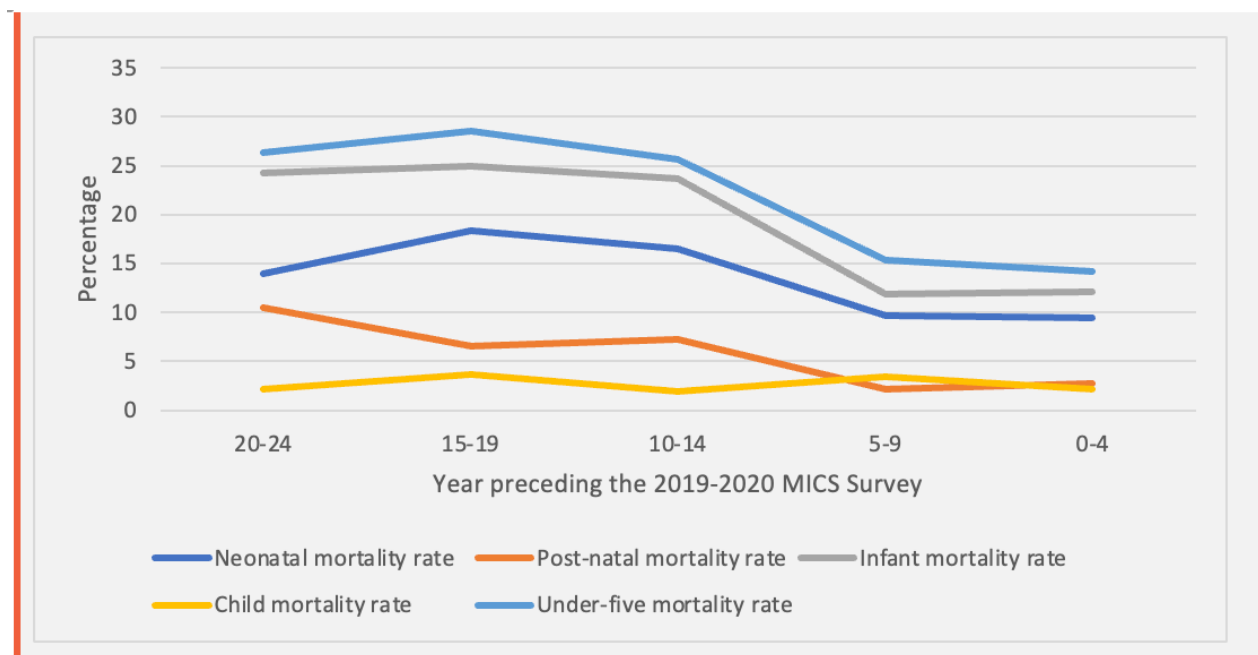
(20) This includes monetary and multidimensional poverty rates and social protection coverage

(21) No data does not necessarily mean that the country is not collecting data. For example, one child protection indicator is about female genital mutilations and cutting, a phenomenon that is not registered in the State of Palestine; while one indicator on child labour is registered in this dataset as no data but the indicator is collected in the MICS and is reported below.

2.1 - Survive and Thrive (Right to Survival and Health)

The State of Palestine has made noticeable progress in reducing the mortality of children. Under five mortality rates have decreased annually by 2.6 per cent between 1996 and 2019 (Figure 22). The infant mortality rate has decreased from 24.3 deaths per thousand births in 1996 to 12.1 in 2019-2020, an annual reduction of about three per cent. Neonatal mortality rates were also reduced from 14 deaths per thousand live births in 1996 to 9.4 in 2019-2020. The biggest reduction in childhood mortality was driven by a 5.5 per cent decrease in the post-natal mortality rate. However, gender disparities remain across the indicators, in 2021 mortality rates for boys were higher across all three indicators by approximately 4 per cent.⁽²²⁾ The stillbirth rates also reduced by a third, passing from 1,811 in 2020 to 1,499 in 2019-2020, decreasing at an annual rate of 0.9 per cent.

Figure 2-2: Early childhood mortality trends



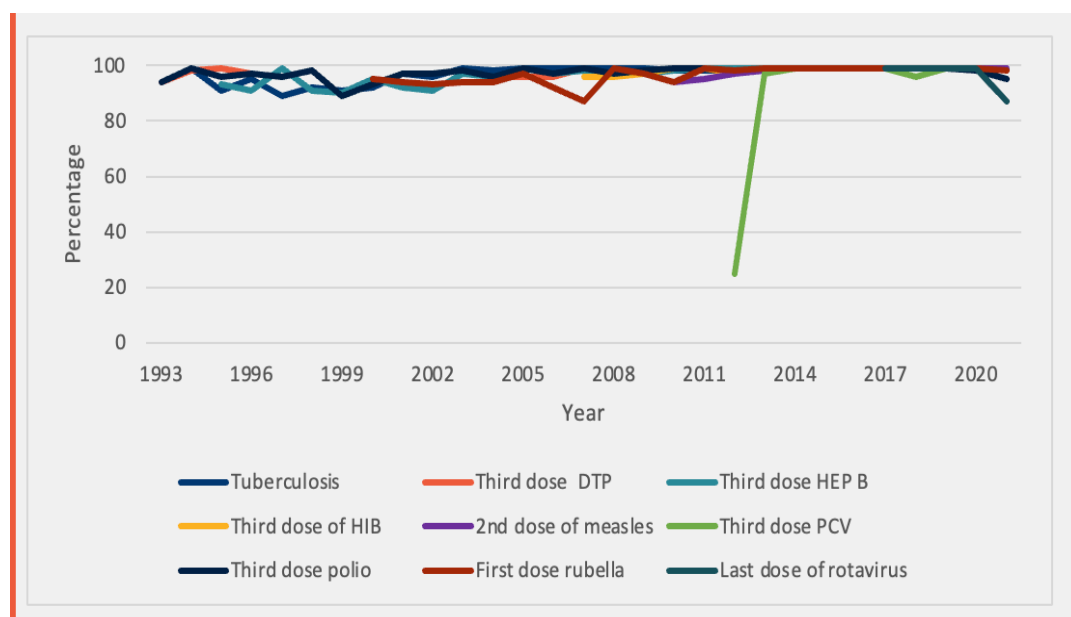
Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

The coverage of antenatal care is significantly high in the State of Palestine as notably few pregnant women did not attend any ante-natal care visit, and almost all pregnant women had four or more visits with any provider. Almost all deliveries happen in a health facility and are usually assisted by skilled birth attendants. However, some challenges in antenatal care remain. While after delivery, almost all infants' weight at birth is taken (98.5 per cent), one out of ten live births recorded weight of the infant at birth was below 2,500 grams (crude low birthweight). The post-partum stay in facility care can vary significantly according to geographical locations, with a duration of less than 6 hours more frequent in the Gaza Strip, while in the West Bank the average duration of stay is between one and two days. Furthermore, the rate of post-natal health checks for new-borns is low across the State of Palestine, with the rate of checks tending to be higher in the Gaza Strip (4.4 per cent) compared to the West Bank (2.5 per cent).⁽²³⁾

Immunisation coverage is very high (Figure 2-3). The full immunisation coverage rate in the State of Palestine is 86 per cent. Taken individually, vaccines have notably high coverage, all ranging between 95 and 99 per cent. Only the coverage of the vaccine against rotavirus is reported to have decreased in 2021, most likely because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

(22) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS
(23) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

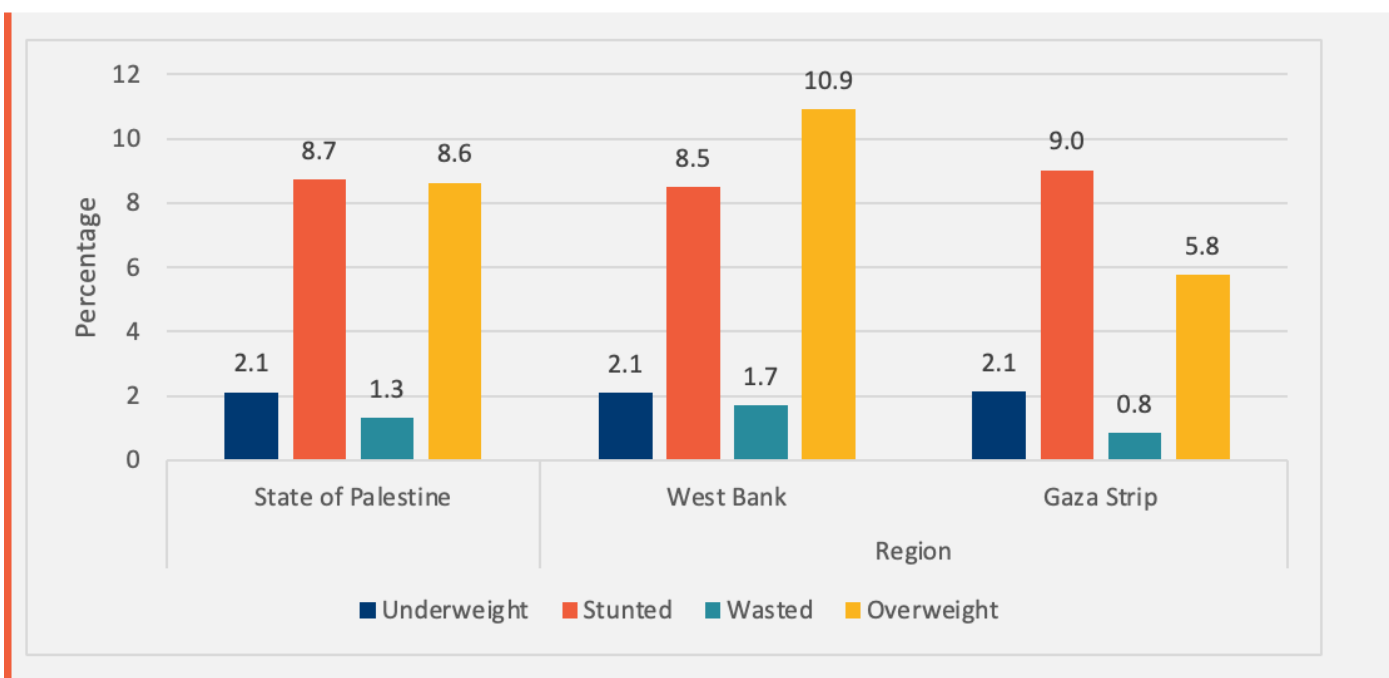
Figure 2-3: Trends in immunisation coverage of selected vaccines in the State of Palestine



Source: UNICEF, 2022

Malnutrition is a raising issue of concern (Figure 2-4) as a significant number of children are either stunted (height for age) and/or are overweight (weight for height). Stunting does not present major differences between boys and girls, nor across regions, however it is more prevalent in children with older mothers and mothers with a refugee status. Stunting rates decrease as wealth increases. Overweight is more prevalent in boys, it is more prevalent in the West Bank and slightly more prevalent in mothers with higher education. Breastfeeding is not widely practiced with only 40.6 per cent of new-borns breastfed within the first two hours of life; 43.3 per cent of children aged 0-5 months exclusively breastfed; and 47.4 per cent predominantly breastfed. The transition from milk-based towards more solid food shows inadequate infant and young feeding (IYCF) practices. IYCF practices are worse in the Gaza Strip than they are in the West Bank, and worse in rural areas compared to urban areas and camps.⁽²⁴⁾

Figure 2-4: Selected nutritional status indicators, children under age 5



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

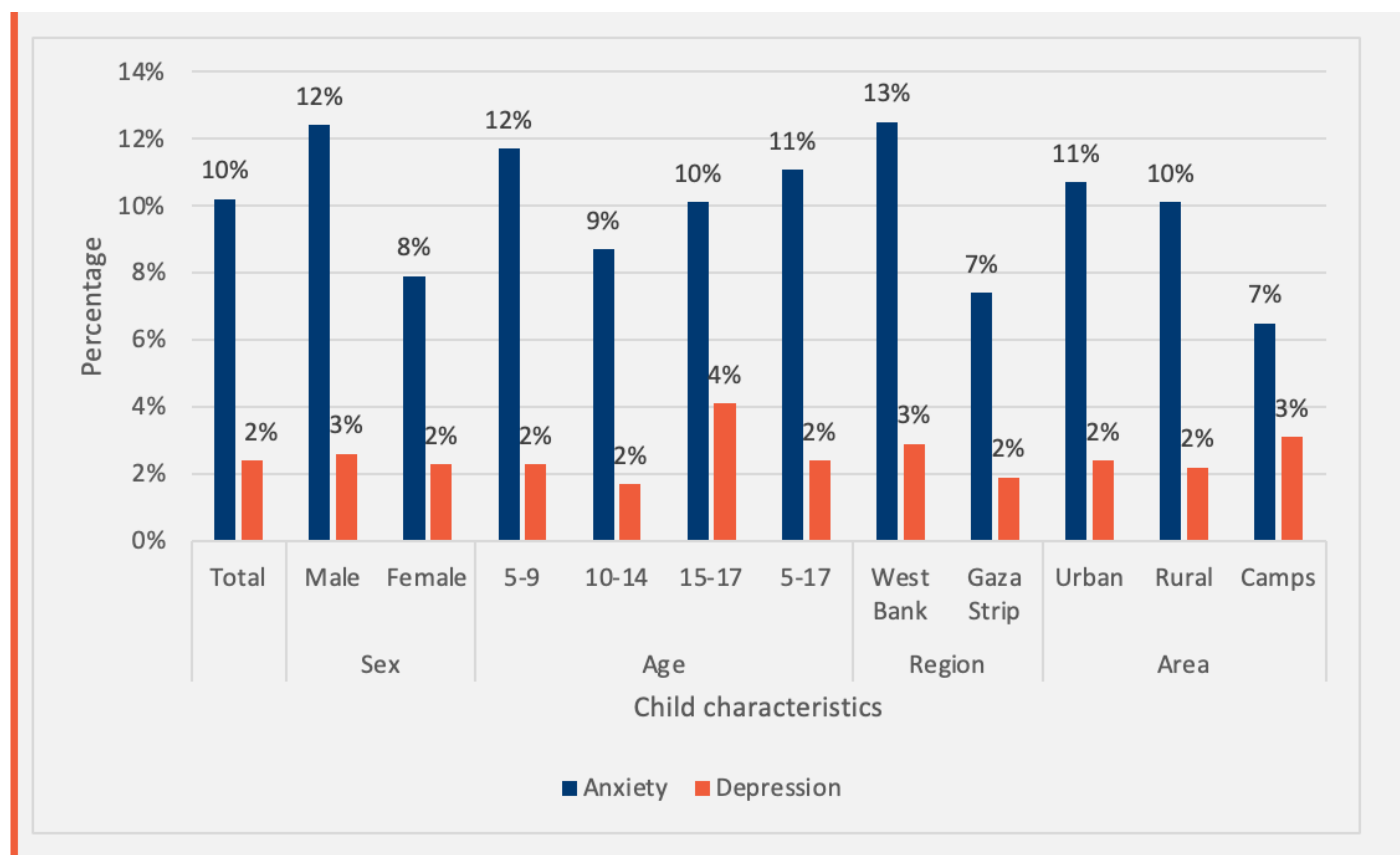
(24) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

Early pregnancy and childbirth can compromise the health of a girl, and it is often associated with school dropout and child marriage. There are 43 adolescent births per 1,000 girls and women aged 15-19 in the State of Palestine, with this rate higher in the Gaza Strip at 48 compared to 39 in the West Bank. According to other socioeconomic dimensions significantly higher rates are noted for girls with no education or basic education at 116 per 1,000, and those from the lowest wealth quintile at 72 per 1,000 as compared to 21 per 1,000 in the highest wealth quintile.⁽²⁵⁾

One way of avoiding early childbearing for girls and women is to access appropriate **sexual and reproductive health** measures. For married women aged 15-49, over 42 per cent are using (or whose partner is using) a contraceptive method. For girls and young women aged 15-19 who are married over 78 per cent are not using a contraceptive method.⁽²⁶⁾

Whether it is conflict-related, or due to congenital or developmental issues, mental health is an aspect where limited data is available. In 2022, about 678,000 children (345,800 boys and 332,000 girls) were estimated in need of child protection and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services. The majority of children in need of mental health and psycho-social support are residing in the Gaza Strip.⁽²⁷⁾ According to the MICS boys are much more affected by anxiety than girls (Figure 2-5), with depression higher for children aged 15-17 and anxiety higher for children aged 5-9 years. Data and studies on suicide prevalence, suicidal attempts, ideation, and behaviour in the State of Palestine are scarce and often not disaggregated for children. In 2018-2019, the Palestinian Civil Police and prosecution offices reported that 19 persons died of suicide in the West Bank, while in the Gaza Strip 20 persons died of suicide in 2018 and 16 in 2019.⁽²⁸⁾

Figure 2-5: Functional difficulties in the domain of mental health



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

(25) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

(26) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

(27) Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2022

(28) National Strategy for Suicide Prevention 2021-2026, State of Palestine, 2022

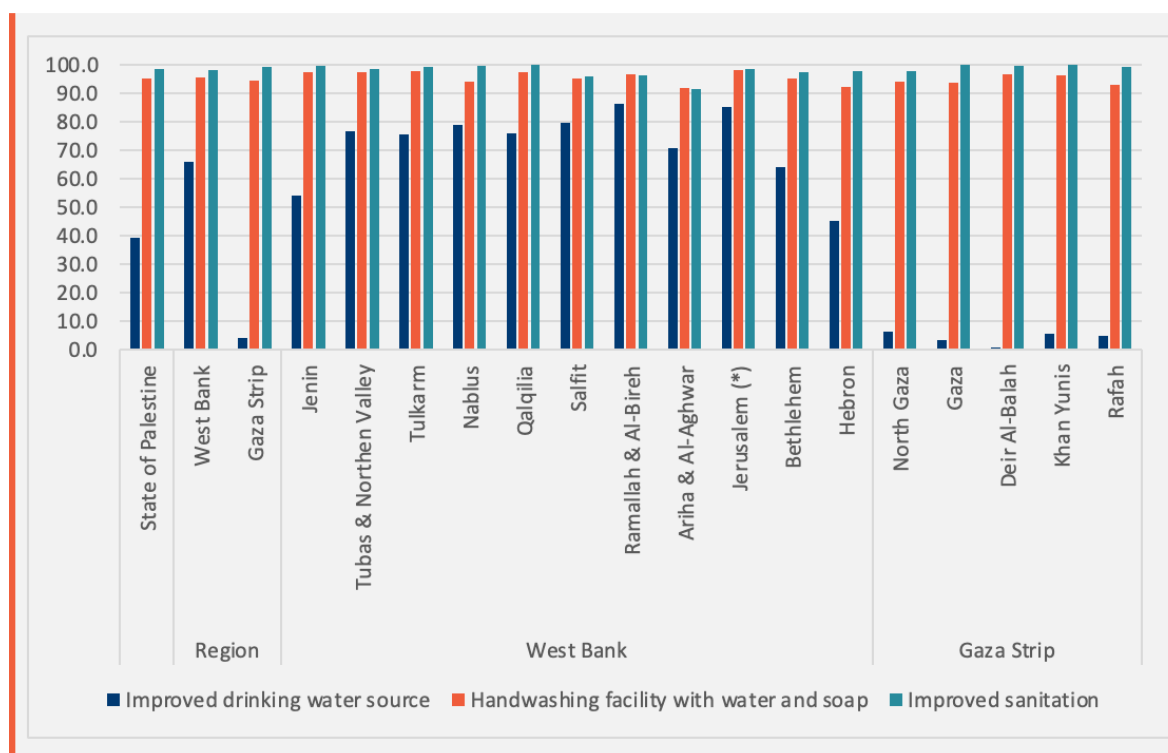
2.2 - Environment (Right to Safe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene)

Only about 4 in 10 households have access to an improved drinking water source located on premises, free of E. coli and available when needed.⁽²⁹⁾ This rate of access to an improved drinking water source is driven by geographical location and wealth, with only 4.3 per cent having access in the Gaza Strip, and 66.2 per cent with access in the West Bank. Furthermore, only 2.3 per cent of households in the poorest wealth quintile have access compared to 74.3 per cent of the richest households.⁽³⁰⁾ This can be partially explained by the fact that many households in the Gaza Strip access their drinking water through water trucking.

In the State of Palestine, 95.2 per cent of the household population have a **handwashing facility where water and soap are available** and about 99 per cent of the household population is using **improved sanitation**.⁽³¹⁾

Of girls and women aged 15-49 years, 78.8 per cent are using **appropriate menstrual hygiene materials with a private place to wash and change** while at home. This rate remains more or less similar when disaggregated by region, age and the education of the woman, disability status or wealth quintile. However, there are differences by governorate⁽³²⁾, in the West Bank rates range from 60 per cent in Ariha & Al-Aghwar (Jericho) to 95.8 per cent in Qalqilya, and in the Gaza Strip rates range from 65.9 per cent in Gaza to 91.6 per cent in Rafah. Women and girls who lack access to adequate menstrual hygiene management facilities and supplies experience stigma and social exclusion while having their development impaired by forgoing educational, social and economic opportunities. About 15 per cent of girls aged 15-19 did not participate in social activities, school, or work due to their last menstruation in the last 12 months.⁽³³⁾

Figure 2-6: Selected WASH indicators



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

There are many drivers of water scarcity in the State of Palestine including insufficient water infrastructure; limited capacities of sector entities; limited access and control over water resources; population growth; weak sector governance and law enforcement. Water availability in the State of Palestine must be viewed in relation to the existing Israeli-Palestinian agreements under the Oslo accords. The Oslo II agreement stipulates that Israel will retain control of water resources and specifies a limited predetermined amount of existing water resources to be made available for Palestinians, in addition to a specific yearly amount that Israel sells the Palestinians from Israel's national water company Mekorot. The agreement was designed as a five-year arrangement but agreed allocations from the available water resources have remained capped at 1995 levels, despite the Palestinian population growth. The water availability

(29) This indicator is an index of three indicators: i) Without e.coli in drinking water source; ii) With sufficient drinking water available when needed; and iii) Drinking water accessible on premises.

(30) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

(31) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

(32) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS - <https://pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/ZIP/2552-x.zip>

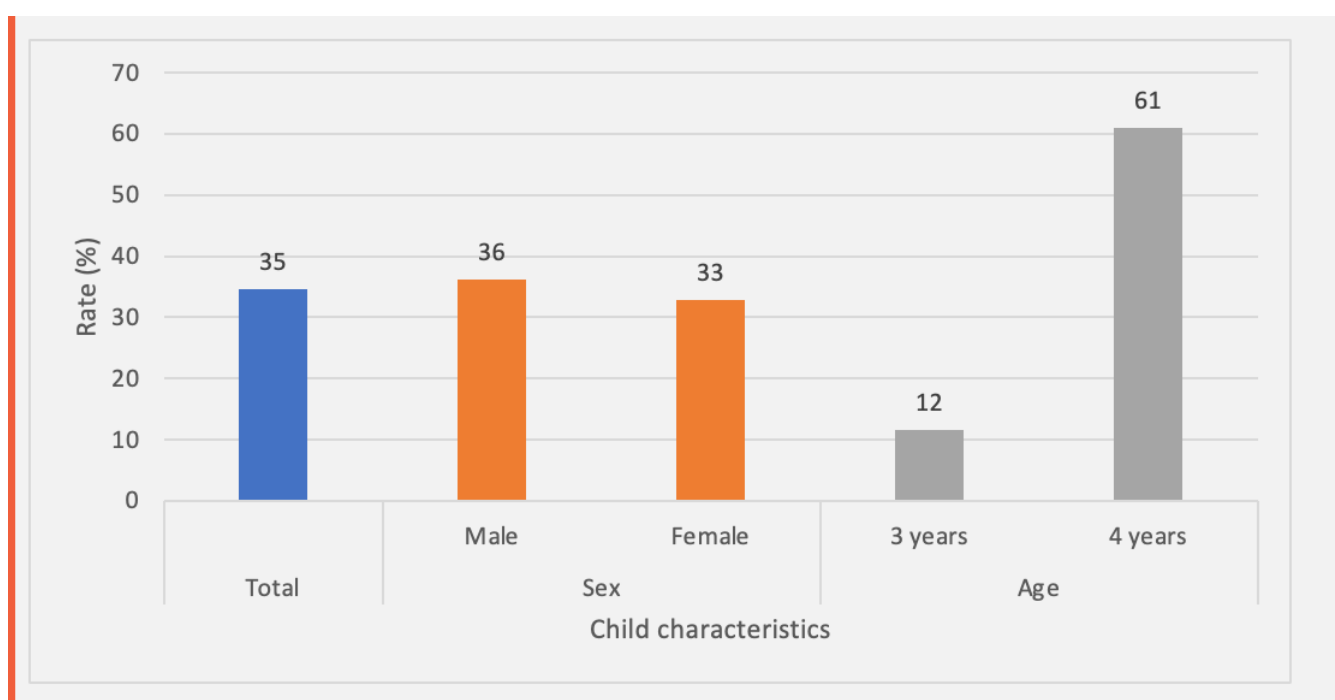
(33) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

is further limited by technical difficulties, leading to water extraction being even less than the agreed amounts, as the Oslo accords also require that Palestinians need to apply for permits from the Israeli authorities and its Civil Administration also for rehabilitation and development of water infrastructure. The State of Palestine experiences medium water stress and is the 28th most water stressed country in the world. Projections to 2040 suggest increasing stress levels. The State of Palestine has total renewable water resources per capita of the equivalent of 472 liters per capita per day, which is 40 percent lower than the MENA median, and 18 times lower than the global median.⁽³⁴⁾

2.3 - Learning (Right to Education)

Kindergarten attendance is five times higher among 4-year-olds than among 3-year-olds (61 per cent versus 12 per cent) (Figure 2-7). Children whose mothers attended higher levels of education are more likely to be attending kindergarten as 40 per cent of children whose mothers attended secondary education or higher are in kindergarten, while 28 per cent of those whose mothers' highest level of education attainment was lower than basic school attend kindergarten.⁽³⁵⁾

Figure 2-7: Children aged 36-59 months attending early childhood education



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

The development of children in their early childhood is captured by the **Early Childhood Development (ECD) Index**, which has physical health, psychological and educational components⁽³⁶⁾. The ECD index score for the State of Palestine is almost 84 per cent, meaning that the majority of children aged 3 and 4 years old are developmentally on-track. Children's achievement against the index does not vary with geographical location or with children's characteristics, the only major variation is whether the mother has functional difficulties.⁽³⁷⁾

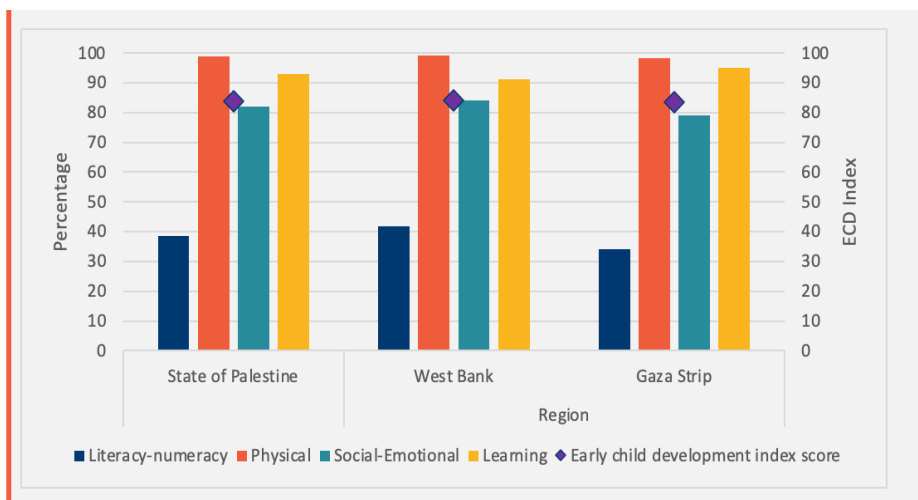
(34) FAO (2022) AQUASTAT Core Database. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Web: <http://www.fao.org/aquastat/en/>. Accessed February 2022.

(35) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

(36) The educational component (literacy, numeracy and learning) will be addressed under the section on the right to education.

(37) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

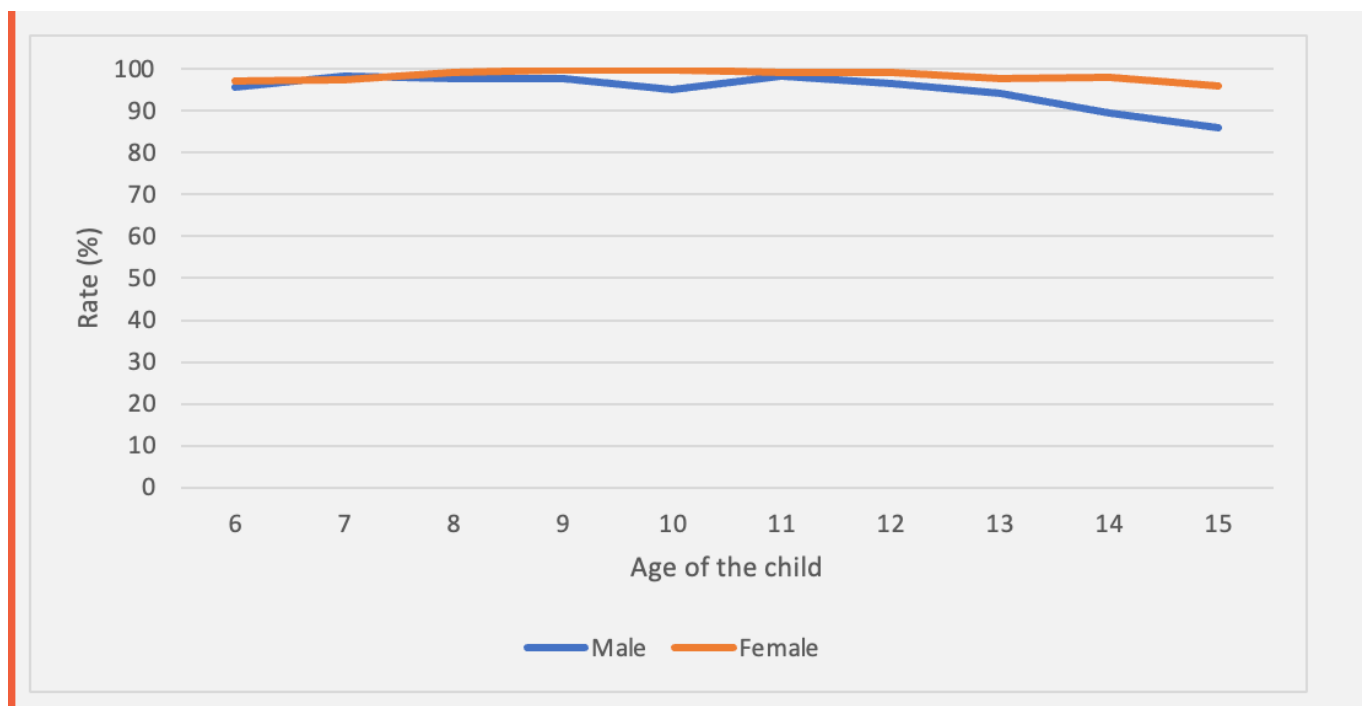
Figure 2-8: ECD Index and dimensions scores, children aged 3-4



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

School attendance for children aged 6-15 years is overall high, reaching 96.9 per cent. missing Girls' attendance rates are usually higher than for boys, and the gap between the sexes widens with the increase in the age of the children.⁽³⁸⁾

Figure 2-9: School attendance children 6-15

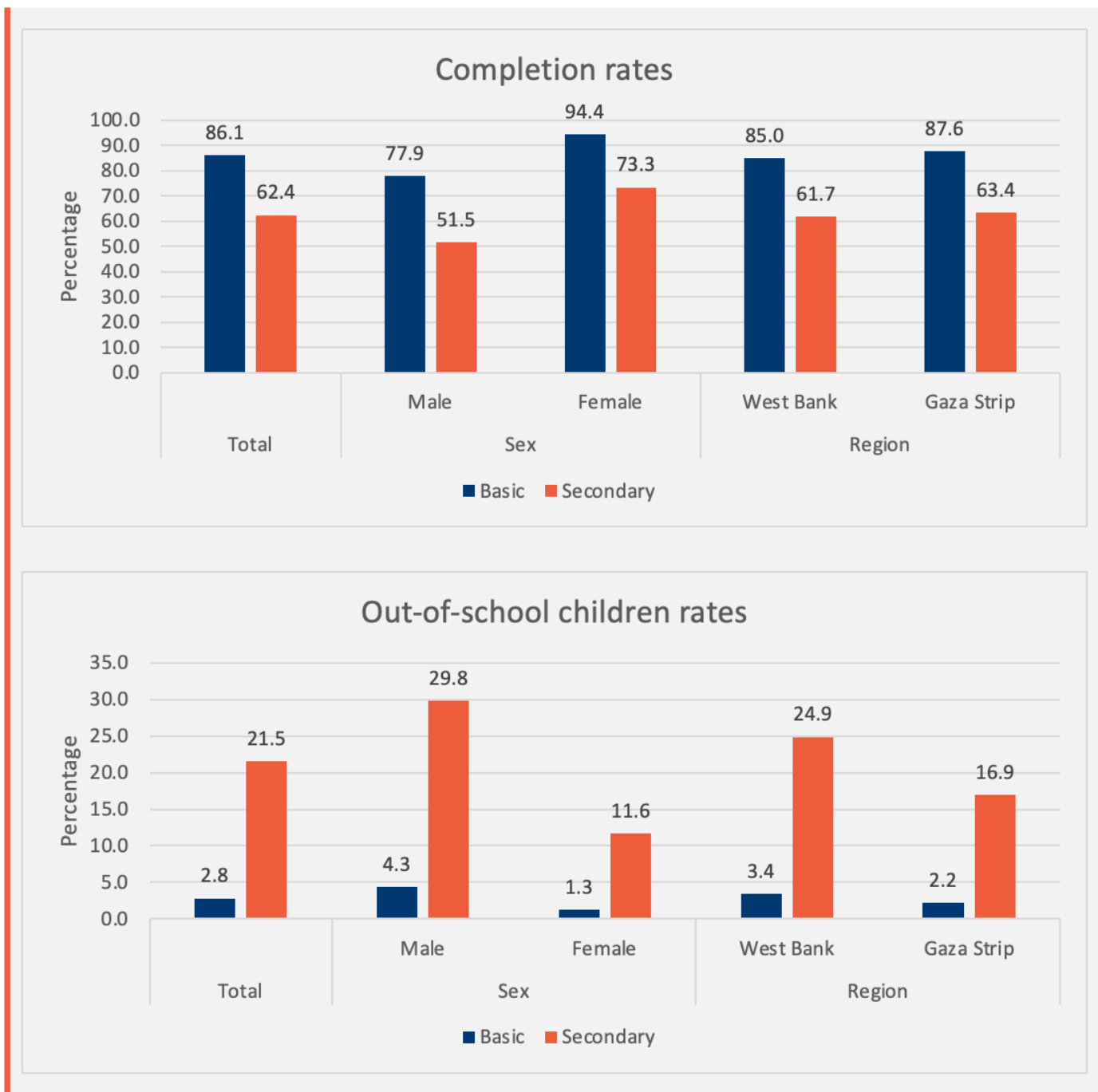


Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

The State of Palestine shows positive progress towards meeting the SDG on school completion rates (Figure 2-10), especially in lower grades. It is estimated that 86 per cent of Palestinian children complete basic education by the age of 20. However, there is a gender gap at the secondary level where three quarters (73 per cent) of girls finish while only half (51 per cent) of boys do so. More than one in five children aged 16 to 17 are out of school at the secondary level with out-of-school rates being the highest among rural children and children from the poorest wealth quintile, respectively at 28 per cent and 30 per cent. Boys are more likely to drop out of school than girls (four per cent versus one per cent), and children from lower wealth brackets are more likely to drop out.⁽³⁹⁾

(38) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS
 (39) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

Figure 2-10: Basic and Secondary education completion rates and out-of-school children



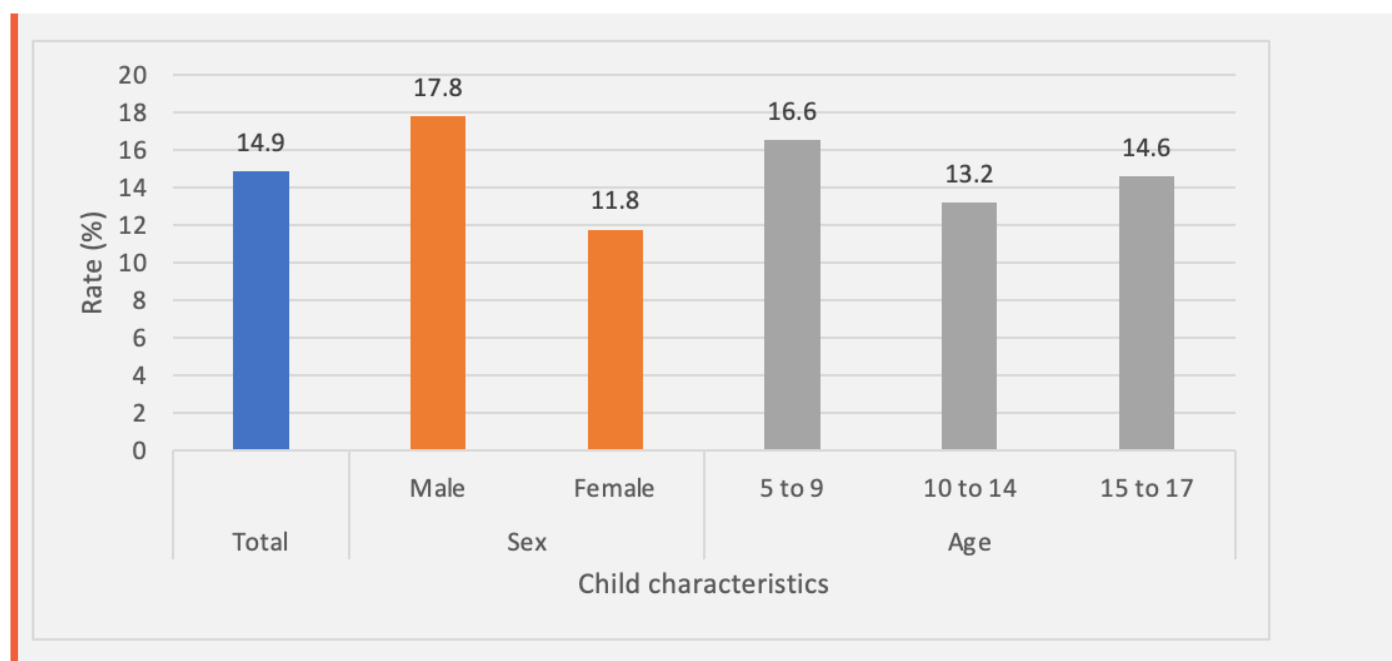
Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

Palestinian schools are not sufficiently adapted to be inclusive for children with disabilities (Figure 2-11). Only 15 per cent of children aged 5-17 with any functional difficulties attend school. The attendance rate of boys with disability is six percentage points higher than for girls with a disability.⁽⁴⁰⁾ School attendance rates of children with functional difficulties are higher in the primary cycle than it is in secondary.⁽⁴¹⁾

(40) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

(41) Education Sector Strategic Plan "UPDATED STRATEGY", Ministry of Education. (2020).

Figure 2-11: Inclusion of children with disabilities age 5-17: school attendance



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

Measurement of **foundational learning skills** (Figure 2-12) is made based upon children’s expected learning outcomes in numeracy and reading for children in grades 2 and 3.⁽⁴²⁾ For children in grade 3, 32 percent present the expected level of reading competencies for the grade, and 29 percent the expected competencies in numeracy. Children with foundational reading skills expected at grades 2 and 3 reach 62 per cent in grade 5 and 69 per cent in grade 8. Numeracy skills are acquired later than reading skills, with 42 per cent of children mastering minimum numeracy skills by grade 5, and 61 per cent by grade 8. The bottom two wealth quintiles are over-represented among children who are not meeting expected learning outcomes, jointly accounting for around half (52 percent) of children lacking reading and numeracy skills. Children from the Gaza Strip are also over-represented among children not meeting expected foundational skills given their share in the overall population. Children in the Gaza Strip constitute a slight majority of all children who are not meeting foundational learning targets, despite comprising less than 40 percent of all children in the State of Palestine.⁽⁴³⁾

Figure 2-12: Foundational skills: numeracy and literacy



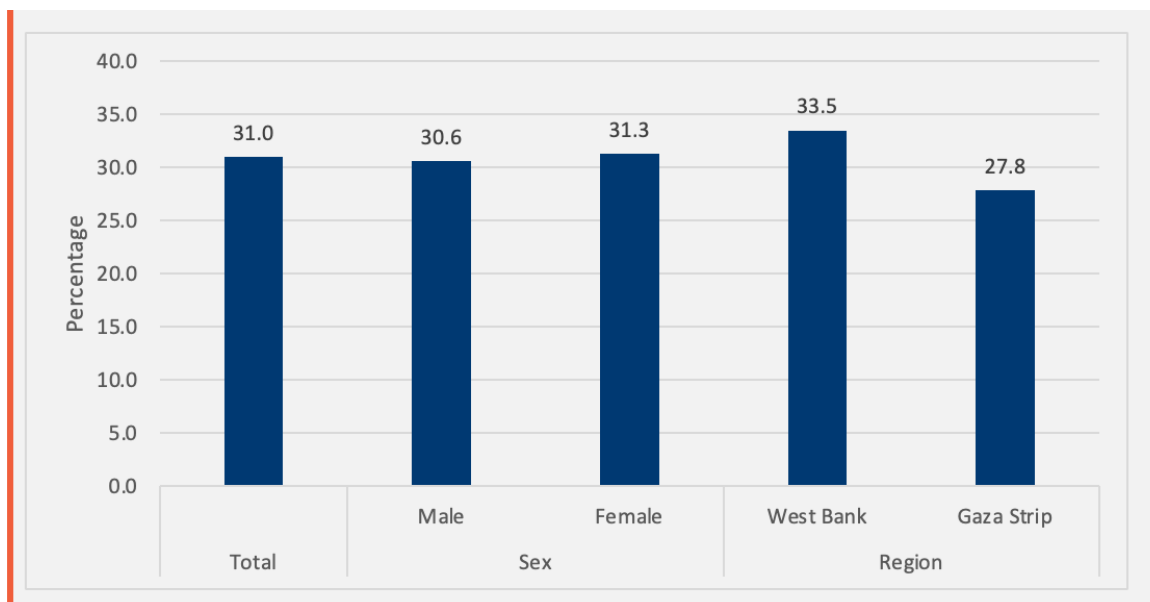
Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

(42) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

(43) UNICEF 2022, MICS Education Analysis for Global Learning and Equity (EAGLE), unpublished

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, radio, television and computers with internet connections have become more important as remote learning tools and devices, however access to devices remains limited. In 2019 over 2 in 10 children lived in homes without access to an internet connection. Furthermore, 67 per cent of children lived in households which did not own a computer or tablet.⁽⁴⁴⁾ The ownership of a device is associated with the household's wealth and/or income with only slight differences in gender rates. Access to different tools varies by region. In the West Bank, computers with internet are the most commonly available (50 per cent) remote learning tools, while in the Gaza Strip television is the most commonly available (52 per cent).⁽⁴⁵⁾

Figure 2-13: Share of students (3 to 24 years old) who do not have to access to either TV, radio or a computer with internet



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

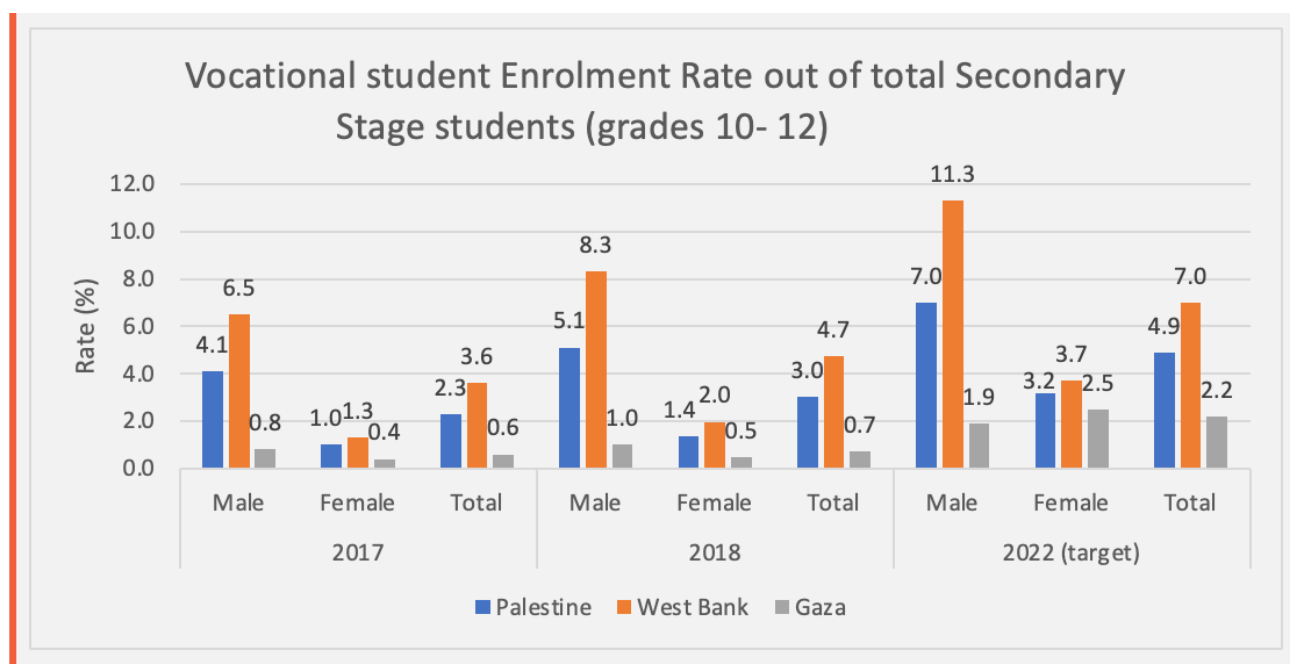
Youth unemployment in the Gaza Strip in the age group 19-29 years was higher than other age groups at 54.4 per cent in 2020. Youth unemployment was higher in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank, where 78.8 per cent of youth were unemployed, compared to 35.6 per cent in the West Bank in 2020. However, **uptake of technical and vocational educational training remains low in the State of Palestine**. In 2018, only 3 per cent of adolescents in grades 10-12 enrolled in vocational education, a 2.3 percent increase in comparison to 2017. The preferred specialisations were industrial education for boys and home economics for girls, with the industrial specialisation by far the most popular choice.⁽⁴⁶⁾ While efforts have been made to increase enrolment, adolescents prefer either more academic options or to transition to work. The Ministry of Education set the goal to expand the enrolment for vocational students by nearly two-thirds by 2022 promoting specialisations in hotel management and home economics. To achieve such ambitious targets further analysis for contributing to the new national strategies and links to the 'Learning for Earning' agenda would be necessary.

(44) PCBS data portal, https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_Rainbow/Documents/ICT_main_indic_2019.html

(45) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

(46) Education Sector Strategic Plan "UPDATED STRATEGY", Ministry of Education, 2020

Figure 2-14: Vocational education

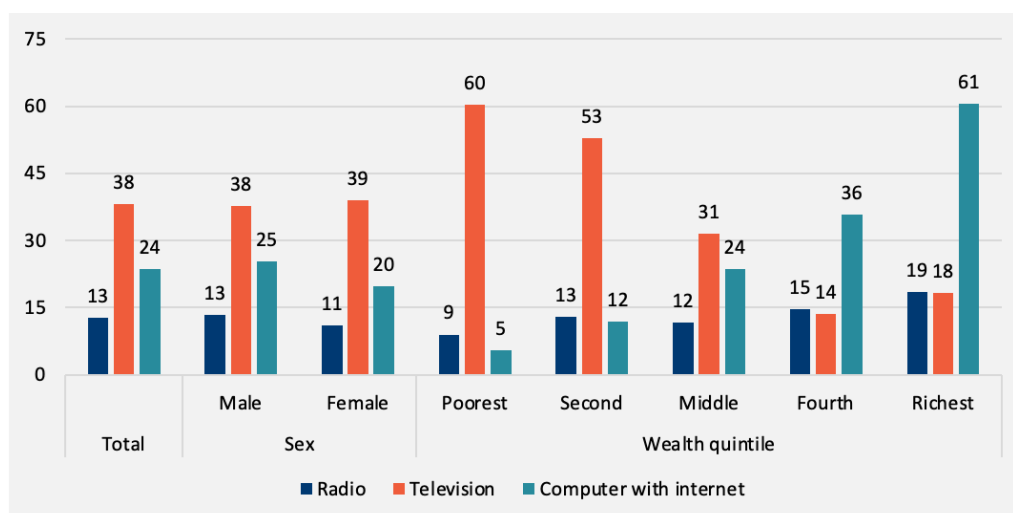


Source: Ministry of Education, 2020

The Ministry of Education implements three programmes for **non-formal education**⁽⁴⁷⁾: a) the Parallel Education Programme provided for those who dropped out after 5-6 years from basic school education; b) Literacy and Adult Education Programme designed for illiterate people aged 15 years and over; and c) Evening Educational Programme, which targets Grade 12 students with poor academic achievements. The numbers of learners enrolled in these programmes are quite low with, on average, around 2,000 learners per year. Graduation rates are also quite low, especially for boys.

For out of school children television has the highest level of access (38 per cent) of remote learning tools and devices, as compared to computers with internet (24 per cent) and radio (13 per cent) (Figure 2-15). The access patterns of out-of-school children from different areas and wealth quintiles mirror those of children attending school, poorer children generally have access to television, while richer children have access to computers with internet. In the Gaza Strip, 58 per cent of out of school children have access to a television while only 13 per cent have access to either a radio or a computer. In the West Bank, 30 per cent have access to a computer with internet, 26 to television, and 13 per cent a radio.⁽⁴⁸⁾ **Remote non-formal education should be promoted for out-of-school children.**

Figure 2-15: Share of out-of-school children (3 to 17 years old) with access to radio, television or computers with internet



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

(47) Education Sector Strategic Plan "UPDATED STRATEGY", Ministry of Education. (2020)

(48) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

2.4 - Protection (Right to Protection, Family Environment and Alternative Care)

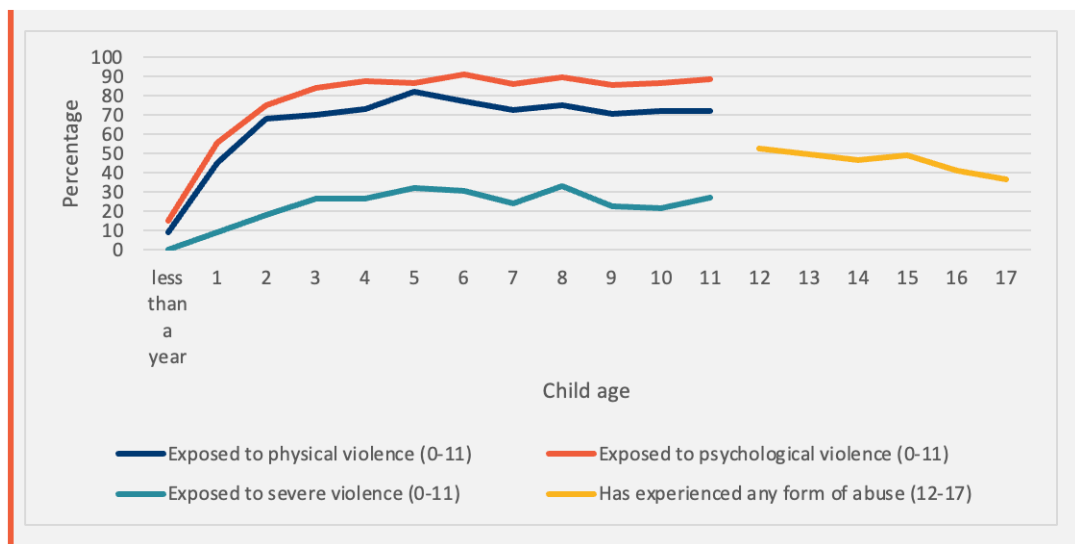
Children continued to be affected by a protracted protection crisis and the ongoing armed conflict, including Israel's military occupation, and the closure of the Gaza Strip. In 2021, the United Nations verified 2,934 grave violations against 1,208 Palestinian children and 9 Israeli children (915 boys, 302 girls) in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and Israel. A total of 86 Palestinian children (62 boys and 24 girls) were killed in 2021 of whom 69 in the Gaza Strip and 17 in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and two Israeli children were killed in Israel.⁽⁴⁹⁾

Children are also detained. 637 Palestinian children were arrested in 2021 for alleged security offences by Israeli forces in the West Bank, including 557 in East Jerusalem. Ill-treatment and breaches of due process during detention are reported by a substantial proportion of children: of 85 children interviewed in 2021, 75 per cent reported having experienced physical violence. Additionally in 2021 there was one case of a child recruited by armed groups in the Gaza Strip.⁽⁵⁰⁾

In 2019, 328 **education-related incidents against schools and students** were recorded affecting almost 20,000 students and educators. In contrast, education-related incidents declined by over 60 percent in 2020, with 119 incidents affecting over 7,750 students and 615 school personnel. In 2021, the number of education-related incidents against schools and students declined further, reaching 98 incidents and affecting almost 6,000 students and educators. This decline was likely related to COVID-19 restrictions which prompted school closures and distance learning.

Violence against children is widespread in the State of Palestine and is another major protection risk affecting Palestinian children (Figure 2-16). Nearly two out of three children aged 0-11 experience physical violence (64.8 per cent), and more than three quarters experience psychological violence (76.7 per cent). Such statistics are slightly higher for boys, for children with disabilities and for registered child refugees. Psychological violence is more common than physical violence.⁽⁵¹⁾

Figure 2-16: Percentage of children 0-17 years who experienced violence during the past 12 months⁽⁵²⁾



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019

Violence against children mostly happens at home (Figure 2-17). 85 per cent of girls aged 15-19 cited their home as the location of the last incident of violence which they were exposed to, while about 6 per cent reported at another home.⁽⁵³⁾

(49) Children Affected by Armed Conflict Bulletin 2021, UNICEF State of Palestine, 2022a

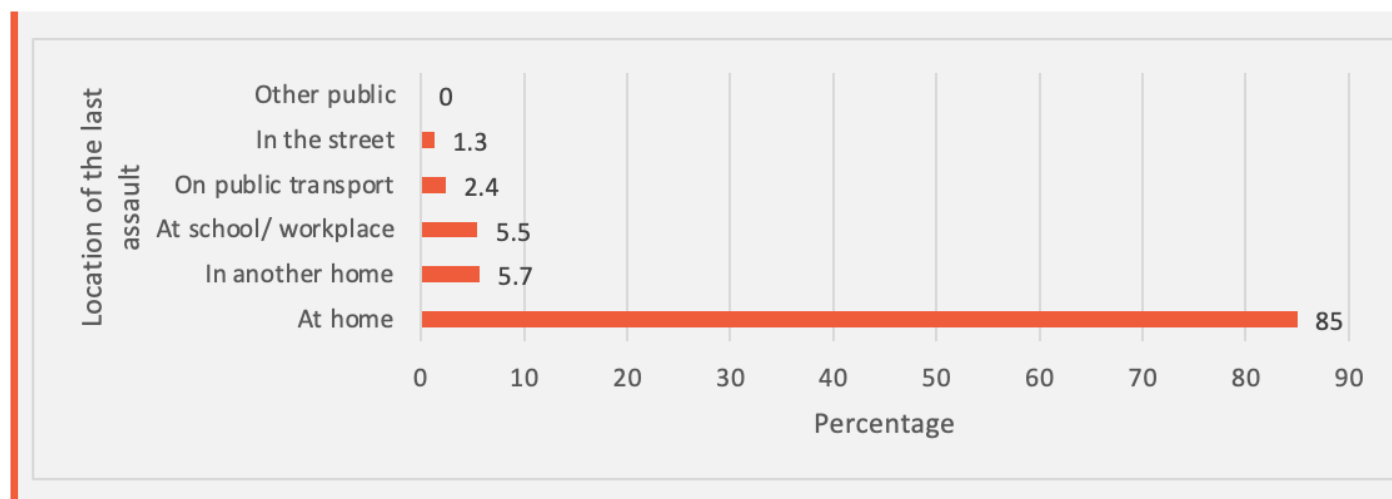
(50) Children Affected by Armed Conflict Bulletin 2021, UNICEF State of Palestine, 2022a

(51) Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society 2019. PCBS.

(52) Note: the break between age of 11 and 12 years of age is due to different questionnaires: for children aged 0-11 the question is asked to the mother/caregiver, while for children 12-17 is asked to the children themselves. The questionnaires also use different questions, so for children aged 12-17 it is not possible to have the same disaggregation of forms of violence as for children 0-11. The two questionnaires also make use of different terms in their English versions, using the term violence for children aged 0-11 and abuse for children 12-17.

(53) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

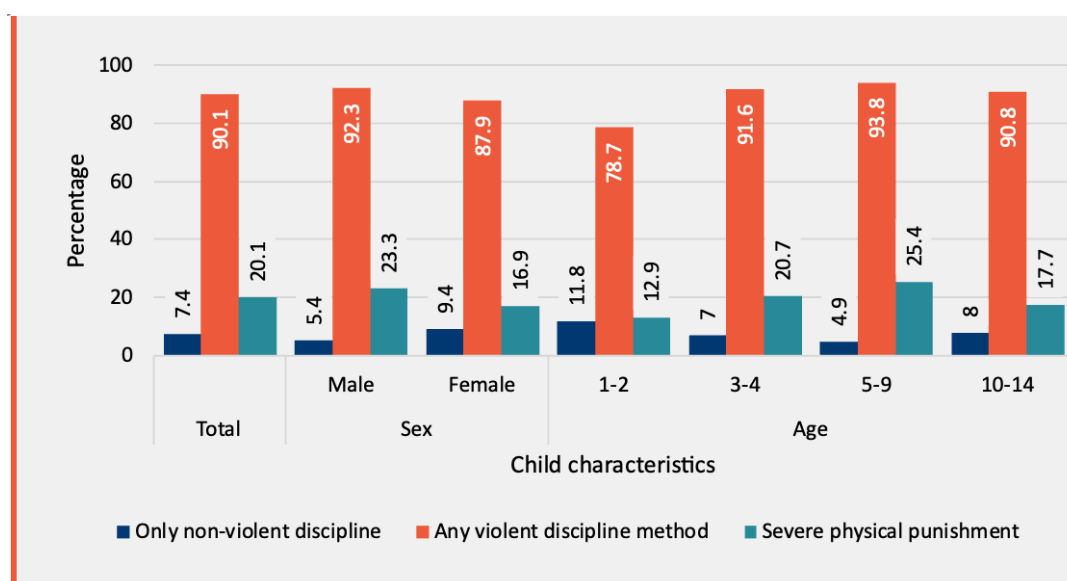
Figure 2-17: Location of the last incident of assault against girls 15-19



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

Child discipline remains one of the main reasons why children suffer from violence, with children often having violent interactions with their parents. The use of non-violent discipline methods is very low and further decreases as the child grows but increases again with the beginning of adolescence as shown in Figure 2-18.⁽⁵⁴⁾ This data is validated by data from the 2019 Violence Survey which found that the type of discipline experienced by children aged 0-11 is mostly psychological (76.7 per cent), followed by physical (64.8 per cent), while 22.3 per cent of children suffer from severe violence.⁽⁵⁵⁾

Figure 2-18: Percentage of children aged 1-14 years by child disciplining methods experienced during the last one month, 2019-2020



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

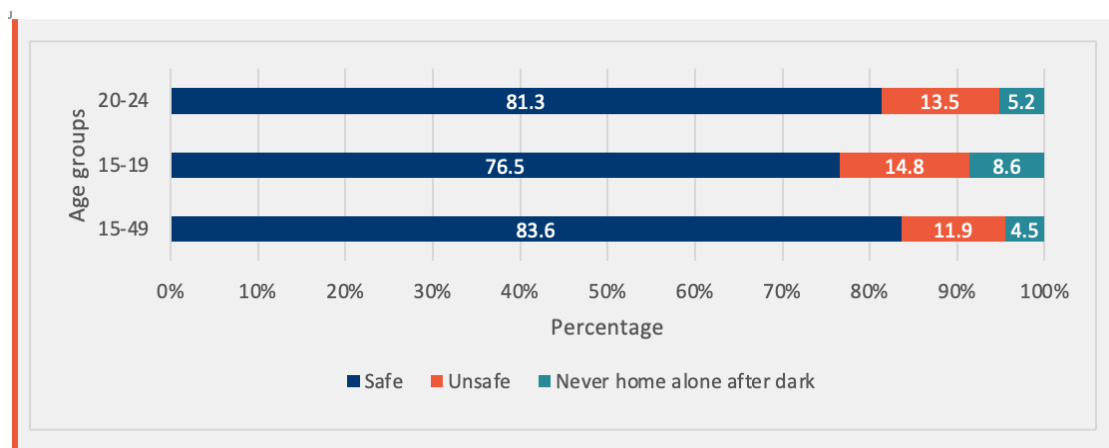
Violence against women and girls, including verbal, physical, or psychological violence, negatively impact their wellbeing including limiting their movement and participation. Almost 15 per cent of girls and young women aged 15-19 state that they don't feel safe in their homes after dark indicating a concern over violence in the home (Figure 2-19).⁽⁵⁶⁾

(54) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

(55) Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society 2019. PCBS.

(56) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

Figure 2-19: Feeling of safety at home in girls and women aged 15-49

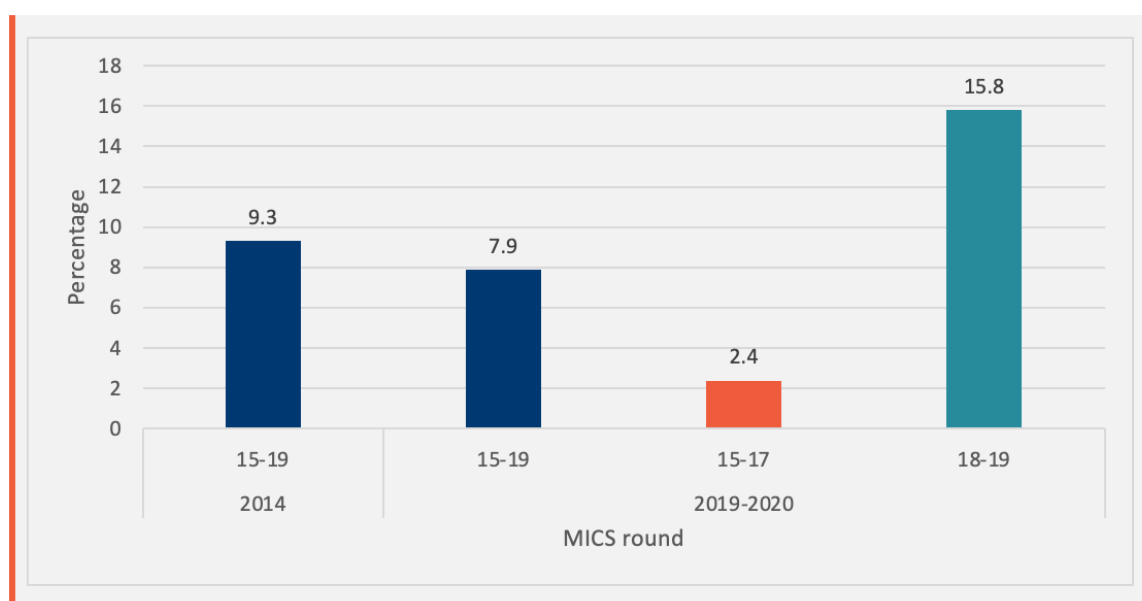


Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

Online violence is common with around three quarters of children aged 12-17 using the internet, predominantly to access social media. The most common forms of violence are hacking of emails, with boys being more exposed than girls; however, girls are more exposed to on-line violence and harassment than boys.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Child marriage is another form of gender-based violence that happens within domestic walls. The 2017 Palestinian census and the MICS reveal that child marriage is a phenomenon that almost exclusively affects girls. About eight per cent of girls aged 15-19 were married, with the proportion higher in the Gaza Strip at 9.1 per cent, than in the West Bank at 7.1 per cent. Of these girls 2.4 per cent aged 15-17 were married. Child marriage rates are higher for non-refugee girls (9.0 per cent) and for girls with no or basic education (10.9 per cent) (Figure 2-20).⁽⁵⁸⁾

Figure 2-20: Percentage of girls aged 15-19 who were married at the time of the survey, trend



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015, 2021

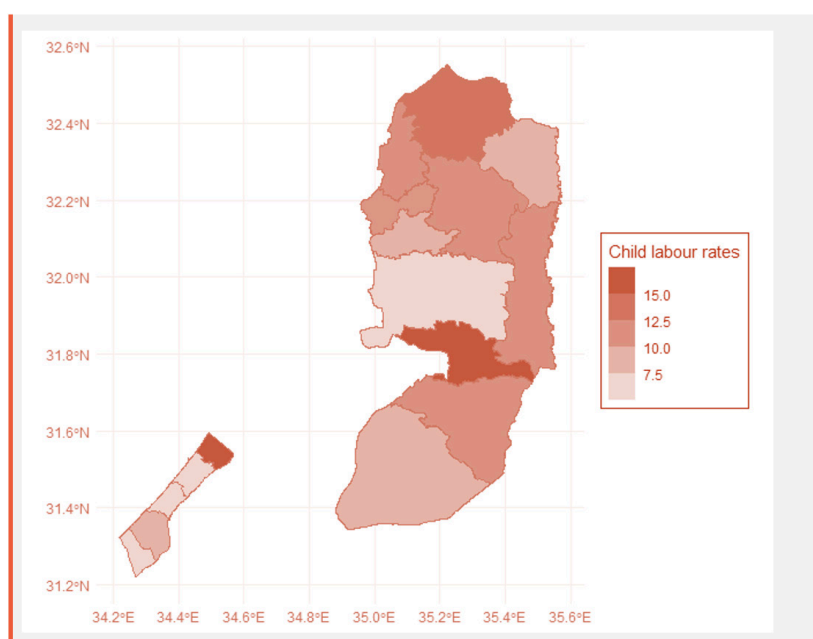
About 7.3 per cent of children aged 5-17 years are involved in **child labour** (Figure 2-21). Child labour is more frequent in East Jerusalem at 12.8 per cent, North Gaza at 11.7 per cent and Ariha and Al-Aghwar (Jericho) at 11.1 per cent. Child labour affects more boys than girls (9.6 per cent and 4.8 per cent respectively). About one in ten children who are not attending schools are involved in child labour. Wealth is an important driver of child labour with 22.8 per cent of 15-17-year-olds from poorer backgrounds working (less than 43 hours), compared to 16.4 per cent of those from the wealthiest backgrounds. Over one in twenty (5.1 per cent) of all children are engaging in hazardous tasks while working, including exposure to dust, fumes, gases, or extreme cold or heat. Of the out-of-school children 24.7 per cent are involved in such hazardous work.⁽⁵⁹⁾

(57) Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society 2019. PCBS.

(58) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

(59) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

Figure 2-21: Percentage of children aged 5-17 years engaged in child labour during the last week, State of Palestine, 2019-2020



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

Birth registration nationwide is nearly universal as 99 per cent of children’s births are registered.⁽⁶⁰⁾

Data on **justice for children** is quite limited. In 2020, 1,248 juvenile cases were registered in the State of Palestine. The recorded cases almost exclusively involved boys as the alleged perpetrators.⁽⁶¹⁾

2.5 - Fair Chance (Right to Social Protection)

Of all children 33.8 per cent are covered by any **social transfer or benefit**, with a major difference between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In the West Bank about eight per cent of children are covered by any social benefit against 67.4 per cent of children in the Gaza Strip. Coverage is higher in camps (56.2 per cent) compared to urban areas (36.2 per cent) and rural areas (8.2 per cent).⁽⁶²⁾

Table 2-1: Coverage of social benefits for children of all ages (percentage)

	Cash Assistance	Economic empowerment	Orphan s sponsorship	Any retirement pension	Any other external assistance	School tuition or school related other support	Total
Total	13.8	0.1	1.1	1.6	24.9	9	33.8
Urban	15.2	0.1	1.2	1.6	27.4	8.7	36.2
Rural	2.7	0.1	0.5	0.9	0.1	6.1	8.2
Camps	19.7	0.2	1.5	2.7	45.7	16.4	56.2

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

The cash assistance programme represents the **Palestinian National Cash Transfer Programme (PNCTP)**. Administrative data from the first 2019 payment of the PNCTP show that over 107,500 households were beneficiaries, corresponding to 573,639 individual Palestinians. Out of these, 214,877 (37.5 per cent) were children up to age 17; 57,445 (10.0 per cent) were elderly aged 60 and above; and 48,545 (8.5 per cent) were persons with disabilities (all ages). About two-thirds of beneficiaries (70,878 households corresponding to 426,090 persons) reside in the Gaza Strip.⁽⁶³⁾

(60) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

(61) Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022c

(62) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

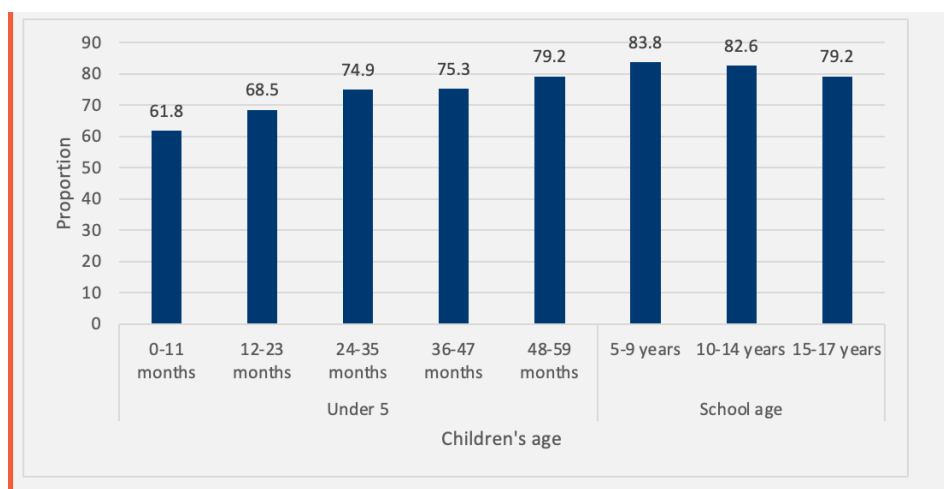
(63) Ministry of Social Development, 2023

Persons with disabilities face greater hardship throughout their life course but receive government cash assistance at rates similar to the general population. In that sense, there is a large coverage deficit of persons with disabilities living in deep poverty with insufficient access to government cash support to cover the additional costs related to their disabilities.

Coverage of **school support programmes** is limited as 91 per cent of persons aged 5-24 years are not covered by any programme. There is a difference between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with coverage of 13.1 per cent in the Gaza Strip and 5.8 per cent in the West Bank. Schools in the State of Palestine are free, so this support is meant to cover costs such as transport, meals or school materials.⁽⁶⁴⁾

Coverage of **health insurance** (Figure 2-22) is higher as 71.8 per cent of children under 5 years of age, and 82.4 per cent of children aged 5-17 years covered by health increases. Coverage of health insurance for children is increasing as children get older and it reaches a peak as they enter school age but then tends to decrease.⁽⁶⁵⁾

Figure 2-22: Health insurance coverage for children according to their age



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

The two major health insurance providers for children are the Palestinian Government and UNRWA. They provide health insurance to 69.1 per cent and 50.7 per cent of children under five respectively, and to 78 per cent and 48.4 per cent of children aged 5-17. Because of the UNRWA scheme, the coverage is much higher in the Gaza Strip (85 per cent of children under five and 95 per cent of children aged 5-17 respectively) than it is in the West Bank (62.4 per cent of children under five and 71.9 per cent of children aged 5-17).⁽⁶⁶⁾ The high level of coverage in the Gaza Strip is due to the fact that there is a higher rate of refugee children.

(64) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS
 (65) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS
 (66) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

2.6 - Right to Participation, Civil Rights and Freedom including Leisure and Cultural Activities

Information on children and young people's right to participation, civil rights and freedom is scarce such information and mostly does not relate to children and young people. Palestinian children and adolescents, accounting for almost half of the total population, have limited opportunities for participation and civic engagement in an environment marked by economic hardship, violence, conflict and a lack of employment prospects.

Youth **participation in political life** is limited by structural barriers including limitations on their fundamental freedoms and difficult economic conditions. Young people are largely absent from the processes of decision-making, community development and participation in peace building. Young people assess their involvement and participation in the broader community as somewhat limited, particularly in terms of a lack of encouragement and lack of space for participation. This lack of opportunities for participation is a demoralising force and negatively influences the wellbeing of young people.

Access to information is another domain where limited information is available. Available indicators related to women, ICT and media show that over 88 per cent of women aged 15-49 have used the internet in the course of their lives, and almost 80 per cent had used the internet regularly over the three months preceding the survey. However, the difference by wealth quintiles indicates that 73 per cent of women from the poorest wealth quintile had ever used the internet, and only 54 per cent of women had used the internet regularly.⁽⁶⁷⁾

Palestinian children face significant barriers to exercise their rights to leisure, play, and participation in cultural and artistic activities due to the protracted conflict, including occupation, and insufficient infrastructure investment. Sport has not claimed a position of priority within Palestinian policy agendas and it remains a largely underfunded, under-supported and under-regulated sector. In urban areas, such as cities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and refugees camps, access to playgrounds and/or safe spaces for children to exercise and for leisure is rather limited. This is compounded by demolition orders in the West Bank Area C and East Jerusalem, as well as restrictions of movement impeding children to access some spaces. In the Gaza Strip, the 16-yearlong closure has resulted in severe shortages of basic goods, including sports equipment and facilities. Furthermore, there is almost no land available for playgrounds in the Gaza Strip. All of these factors limit the opportunities for children to engage in sports and outdoor activities, and limit the efforts of the few organizations working to promote the rights of Palestinian children to increase their access to free play and sports, for example through the development of safe playgrounds and recreational spaces and providing equipment and while coaching does not suffice.

Violence against women and girls impacts on child participation and freedom, through violence in the home, community and online. As such women's organizations are actively supporting those most affected, including through the provision of shelters for domestic violence survivors. However, consultations and rapid assessments show that the COVID-19 pandemic created new challenges for women's rights organizations and exacerbated pre-existing challenges, including mobility restrictions and increased surveillance which further reduced organizing space, exacerbated poor working conditions and led to a decrease in resources while demands increased.

3. Enabling Environment Analysis

The realisation of child rights is the result of the interaction of different elements that constitute the enabling environment. This chapter highlights the drivers of inequality; as well as the legislative and policy framework; the public finance systems; the business environment; and the knowledge, attitudes, practices and social norms which impact on child rights and wellbeing in the State of Palestine.

(67) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

3.1 - Drivers of Inequalities

Geography is a key driver of inequalities in opportunities, with particular areas of vulnerability:

- The Gaza Strip: All of the Gaza Strip is vulnerable due to the closure and the recurrent escalations of hostilities. Within the Gaza Strip, the Access Restricted Areas (close to the fence) and the Palestine Refugee Camps are more vulnerable.
- The West Bank: Specific locations at risk include Area C which is under Israeli military administration; the Seam Zone between the separation wall and the Israeli border where the small population are disproportionately affected by a lack of access to services; and Hebron H2 where the population are affected by settler violence.
- East Jerusalem, particularly the neighbourhoods of Isawiya, Jebel Mukaber, Old City, Shufat Refugee Camp and Silwan.

Girls and women suffer from unequal outcomes in many aspects of their lives. For example, girls educational attainment is not reflected in their participation in the Palestinian society and economy. Women's unemployment was almost double that for men in 2020⁽⁶⁸⁾, and women occupy few senior positions in Palestinian political life and society in general. Patriarchal norms expose girls and women to violence with domestic violence and intimate partner violence ways in which men, as the head of households, exercise their power. Violence is endemic and normalised in a situation of protracted conflict and military occupation, with underreporting and a lack of prosecution of sexual harassment discouraging women to report. Shelters for survivors of gender-based violence have been established in the State of Palestine, but evidence suggests that women with disabilities, refugees and migrant women, as well as women with health issues still face challenges accessing these shelters. COVID-19 was a multiplier on all these factors.

Adolescent boys are among the most vulnerable and affected population. In education boys are more likely to drop out of school earlier than girls. Boys are also more likely to be involved in child labour including working under hazardous conditions. Violence particularly affects boys through killing, maiming, and detention, accounting for a significant percentage of grave violations. The protracted conflict is a root cause of many of these deprivations for adolescent boys. The conflict is a contributing factor on the normalisation of violence in Palestinian society, with adolescent boys lacking the experience on non-violent and constructive means of conflict resolution.

The situation of Palestinian refugees remains unresolved and is passed from generation to generation. Children in refugee households are in general deprived in one more dimension than non-refugee households as measured through child multi-dimensional poverty, with the exception of their access to education. About 99 per cent of refugee households are vulnerable in at least in one dimension of poverty, with refugees living in camps having higher rates of deprivation.⁽⁶⁹⁾

Bedouin and herder communities particularly suffer from the effects of inequalities. Most Bedouins live in Area C, much of which is declared as firing zones, as such they have limited access to basic social services, and face protection concerns. Their livelihood source comes from herding, but movement restrictions, as well as the threat of forced movements, places them at a higher risk. Children from Bedouin communities face severe restrictions in accessing social services. For example, many children are required to walk long distances to schools during which they are exposed to the risk of violence. Bedouin communities also suffer significantly from reduced access to electricity, water, sanitation and waste disposal.

Children with disabilities are often ostracised and restricted from fully participating in Palestinian society because of entrenched social norms. Many parents and caregivers feel a sense of shame and often keep children with disabilities at home. Some children with disabilities, especially girls, are not allowed to leave the house to go to school or to move around and this greatly reduces their chances to integrate into society. Monetary poverty can exacerbate the effects of the disability since poor households might not be able to afford the expenses to manage the disability of their children. At the same time structural barriers prevent many children with disabilities to fully enjoy their rights, such as a lack of accessible transportation, inadequate public facilities, insufficient education services for children with disabilities and gaps in legislation.

(68) PCBS, referenced in World Bank May 2022 Ad Hoc Liaison Committee report
(69) Trends in Multidimensional Child Poverty in Palestine, Ferrone et al, 2021

Lack of accessible, quality, resourced social services and justice systems for families and children have a detrimental impact on the survival, development and well-being of children and young people. The strengthening of social, health and educational services is undermined by fiscal resource constraints; the intra-Palestinian divide; and capacity gaps leading to shortcomings in good practices and standards.

3.2 - Legislation and Policy

The State of Palestine has been developing its legislative framework to promote and protect the rights of children and young people, including to support vulnerable groups such as children and young people with disabilities, women and girls. However, **four key drivers are impeding legislative development:**

- Legislation in the State of Palestine is made up of laws spanning at least 150 years from six different authorities – Ottoman, British, Egyptian, Jordanian, Israeli and Palestinian. With this complex legislative structure the harmonisation of laws to modern standards is challenging.
- There is ambiguity, and in some areas contradictions, between the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and some domestic legislation, for example the exception that allows marriage under the age of 18 years. The Committee noted that the CRC Convention should take precedence over national legislation after its official publication in the official Gazette and incorporation into national law.
- The Palestinian Legislative Council has not been functioning since 2006.
- The intra-Palestinian divide is also reflected in a dual system of legislation in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip.

The overall policy framework is driven by the National Policy Agenda 2017-2022, which was updated and extended in 2020 and at the time of the update renamed Public Policies 2021-2023. Under Public Policies 2021-2023, the national priorities and policies are under: Pillar 1 Ending the Occupation; Pillar 2 Excellent Public Service Provision; and Pillar 3 Sustainable Development. Under Pillar 2 the priorities are: 1) Citizen-Centred Government; and 2) Effective Government. Under Pillar 3 the priorities include: 1) Social Justice and the Rule of Law; 2) Inclusive Quality Education for All; 3) Inclusive Health Coverage for All; and 4) Resilient Communities. The respective sector strategies were updated to align to these priorities.

The National Health Strategy 2021-2023 is the reference document for securing and protecting children's right to health and it stems from the State's commitment towards SDG 3. The Strategy aims at achieving three strategic goals: a) Ensure the provision of comprehensive health care services for all citizens towards nationalization of health services in the State of Palestine; b) Promote programs for the management of Communicable Diseases and noncommunicable diseases, preventive health care and community health awareness; c) Institutionalize quality systems in all aspects of health service delivery; d) Provide adequate, efficient and qualified human resources in the Palestinian health sector; and e) Enhance health governance and institutional development, including enforcement of laws and legislations, cross-sectoral coordination and integration among service providers, enhance health financing and financial protection against health costs. Key informant discussions found that primary, secondary and tertiary health services are of better quality in the main cities compared to villages and the marginalised areas. There is a general lack of a specialized cadre of doctors at the Ministry, particularly on paediatrics, mainly due to the lack of funds, and challenges in attracting specialized doctors to the public health care system.

The National Water Policy for Palestine 2013-2032 provides the planning and management framework for the protection, conservation, sustainable management and development of water resources and for the improvement and sustainable management and provision of water supply and wastewater services and standards. The policy aims to: a) Reinforce the PA's approach to sustainable water resources management by ensuring that all arms of government work together in the pursuit of shared water resources management goals; and b) Establishes a framework for the coordinated development, regulation and financial sustainability of water supply and wastewater services to ensure concerted efforts towards improved water systems management, rehabilitation and maintenance. However there remain significant gaps in the operationalisation of this policy particularly in regards to the operations of maintenance of WASH systems. Moreover, the policy documents do not mention children or schools, with WASH in health facilities to be covered through the Health Sector Strategy, and WASH in Schools through the Education Sector Strategic Plan.

The Education Sector Strategic Plan 2021-2023 is the guiding document for education in the State of Palestine, and it stems from the State's commitment towards SDG 4. The Sector Strategic Plan has three strategic goals: a) Ensuring safe, inclusive, and equitable access to education at all levels of the system; b) Developing a student-centred teaching and learning pedagogy and environment; and c) Enhance Accountability and Results-Based Leadership, Governance and Management. However, key informant discussions found that challenges at schools have negative impacts on children's education including bullying that often involves violence; overcrowded classrooms; and poor infrastructure. Moreover, the current curriculum focuses on how students can obtain the largest amount of information possible, with insufficient focus on child-centred teaching, improvement of students' skills, and practical knowledge.

In the domain of Social Development, the National Social Development Sector Strategy 2021-2023 guides interventions in this sector. The Strategy aims at achieving three strategic goals: a) Preventing Multi-Dimensional Poverty; b) Effective national and local social protection measures, protecting the poor and vulnerable groups, both men and women, including ending all forms of marginalization, violence, exclusion, shocks, stresses, and disasters in the Palestinian society; and c) Enhancing government standards, integrity and transparency. The National Social Development Strategy, with the inclusion of Multi-Dimensional Poverty, is the most multi-sectoral of all national strategies which requires the Ministry of Social Development to work with many other line ministries on multi-dimensional poverty alleviation. However, while the Strategy seeks to promote poverty reduction poverty rates have continued to increase. Furthermore the Palestinian National Cash Transfer Programme, the flagship national Social Protection system, has made fewer payments to fewer households over the duration of the strategy partially due to the shrinking fiscal space faced by the PA.

The National Strategy for Multidimensional Poverty Reduction 2023-2030 was launched in 2023 to contribute to the reduction of poverty across seven dimensions endorsed by the PA: Education; Health; Employment; Housing Conditions and Access to Services; Safety and Use of Assets; Personal Freedom; and Monetary Resources.

The cross-sectoral Early Childhood Development (ECD) National Strategy 2017-2022 focuses on early childhood education and health. The ECD strategy represents the joint efforts of the Ministries of Health, Education and Social Development and targets mothers and families, and children in three age brackets: a) from zero to four years of age; b) four to six; and c) six to eight years. The ECD strategy emphasises all efforts towards an equitable inclusion of children with disabilities to overcome marginalisation and stigma. For children and persons with disabilities, specialised services are provided by civil society or the private sector, including through referrals. Neither the Ministry of Social Development nor the Ministry of Health deliver programmes for persons with disabilities at scale, and there remains an insufficient number of rehabilitation services.

The cross-sectoral National Inter-Sectoral Violence against Children Strategy (NIVACS) 2021-2023 is the reference document that guides efforts to address violence and abuse against children in the State of Palestine. The NIVACS and its Action Plan identifies three key areas of intervention: a) Coordination and law and policy formulation and amendment (macro-level of the socio-ecological model); b) Multi-sectoral child protection response services (meso-level); and c) Primary prevention and positive behaviour change (micro-level). The seven INSPIRE strategies⁽⁷⁰⁾ have guided the definition of key interventions of the NIVACS in each level of the socioecological model, including prevention, response and mitigation to violence against children: Implementation and enforcement of laws; Norms and values; Safe environments; Parent and caregiver

support; Income and economic strengthening; Response and support services; and Education and life skills. However the national legal framework to make the strategy operational is limited, including with corporal punishment at home lawful in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and not explicitly banned in school settings.

The cross-sectoral Youth Strategy for 2017 to 2022 provides a foundation to promote youth issues and encourage youth participation across sectors. The Strategy is founded on six main themes: 1) Economic empowerment and combatting poverty; 2) Education, training, and capacity building; 3) Community and political participation; 4) Health, environment and positive behaviours; 5) Sports, culture and recreation; and 6) Media and information technology. The recent endorsement of the Minimum Standards for Adolescents and Youth Centres is a positive advancement, although a comprehensive set of standards and regulations for children's participation have yet to be developed.

(70) Implementation and Enforcement of Laws; Norms and Values; Safe Environments; Parent and Caregiver Support; Income and Economic Strengthening; Response and Support Services; Education and Life Skills.

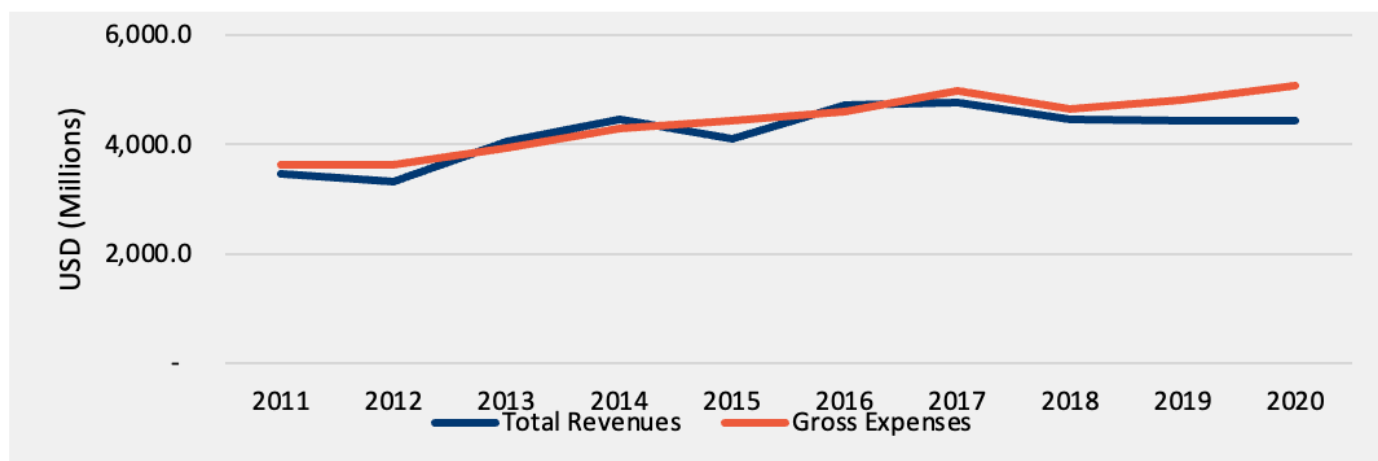
Despite normative revisions, there remain legal provisions which allow disproportionate and arbitrary restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, privacy, and protection of data. Children’s right to participation and civic engagement thus remain limited.

3.3 - Public Finance

While the State budget is available, publicly available information on Government expenditure is scarce. The lack of clarity on the budget process makes a structured understanding of funding of social services challenging. The limited available information on public expenditure highlights that the preparation, approval, execution and monitoring of national budgets lack both a child-rights perspective and the participation of civil society and children.

The Government is running a fiscal deficit with estimates for 2022 amounting to US\$ 526 million, with consequences on service provision. To finance this deficit, the PA mostly relied on arrears to the private sector and the public pension fund. Across all sectors, salaries and wages account for nearly half of the expenditures in the Government-financed sector. Furthermore, in 2023 the increased deductions in Clearance Revenues received by the PA has further exacerbated this fiscal deficit, leading the PA to operate on an emergency budget. With the government running an emergency budget this further limits the link between budget planning and execution, and budget transparency.⁽⁷¹⁾

Figure 3-1: Palestinian Authority revenue and expenditure trends (2011-2020)

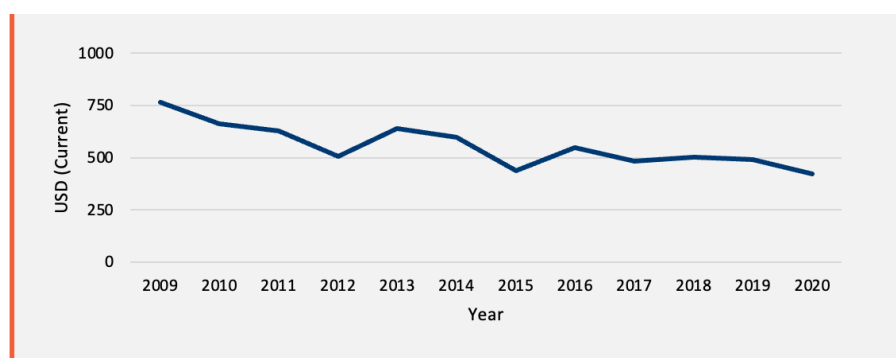


Source: World Bank, 2022

There is a pervasive sense of donor fatigue, and few partners remain willing to provide Direct Budget Support to the PA. Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) has declined from US\$ 750 per capita in 2009 to under US\$ 500 in 2020. The decline in overall Overseas Development Aid (Figure 3-2) has serious consequences for Palestinians’ access to services. Visible demonstrations of challenges to service continuity for vulnerable communities have been the education strikes which have affected PA schools in 2023 leading children to miss a prolonged period of their education. Other examples include the UNRWA strikes across the West

Bank and the cuts to the World Food Programme beneficiaries.

Figure 3-2: Net ODA received per capita



Source: World Bank, 2022

(71) World Bank April 2023 Ad Hoc Liaison Committee report

3.4 - Business

The relationship between business and child rights is not well developed in the State of Palestine. Evidence from the literature is scant and scattered, making a systemic overview difficult. The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility is not very common, but it has been the object of three recent studies, which however are not related to children's rights.

A notable gap in the business environment is **the limited participation of women and youth in the labour market**, and robust social policies that support their participation are essential and still missing. This should include childcare, flexible work hours, and policies that support a healthy work/life balance.

Despite not being prioritised in contributing to the enabling environment for child rights, **the private sector provides some essential services.** Business impacts children's access to basic social services, for example in regards to the right to education with the majority of the kindergarten spaces provided through the private sector. However, limitations on private sector service provision include import restrictions into the Gaza Strip, and the continued reliance on the 2G network in the Gaza Strip as a result of these restrictions. In areas such as Area C in the West Bank, the limitations in construction of new buildings directly impacts the construction sector thus contributing to a shortage of schools and classrooms.

The private sector is supporting the PA's liquidity challenges through bank loans but this is a short-term fix given the deficit faced by the PA.

3.5 - Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Social Norms

In the State of Palestine, patriarchy as a social norm manifests in various ways, including in the areas of education, employment, and child care. In education patriarchal attitudes often result in girls being encouraged to pursue traditional areas of study and careers, while boys are encouraged to pursue other fields. In employment, women in the State of Palestine often face discrimination in the job market and are underrepresented in leadership positions. They may also be paid less than men for the same work and have fewer opportunities for career advancement. In child care, patriarchal attitudes often result in women being primarily responsible for caring for children and managing the household. This can limit their opportunities for education and employment, and may also lead to them being financially dependent on men.⁽⁷²⁾

Men's participation in child-rearing shows that there is a disconnect between what men say and what they do. This indicates that cultural norms still strongly determine men's behaviour, regardless of their personal convictions. Men's limited role in child-rearing is linked to cultural preferences and perceptions of manhood. Prevailing inequitable gender norms remains one of the biggest challenges facing initiatives that aim to increase men's involvement in child-rearing. A man helping with domestic chores, or men who usually contribute to child-rearing within his family almost equally, are negatively perceived and are exceptional cases. These norms are sustained by the outdated legal system and by the reliance on traditional mechanisms for solving problems related to marital life and family issues, which often appear to compromise women's rights in favour of men's.⁽⁷³⁾

There is a lack of knowledge and awareness on child health and development among pregnant women, husbands and families. Pregnant women, mothers, husbands and households in general lack the necessary knowledge and appropriate healthy behaviours concerning sufficient prenatal and postnatal care which is the second cause leading to child mortality. This builds on the insufficient timely access to quality post-natal health services. Moreover, health education in schools, especially sexual and reproductive health, is of poor quality.⁽⁷⁴⁾

A detailed description of knowledge, attitudes and behaviours is available with regards to COVID-19. A large proportion of respondents under-estimated their knowledge directly linked to availability and accessibility of information. While many respondents understood key drivers that improved COVID-19 practices including on good information about the coronavirus, fines for non-compliers and police presence, nudges for hand sanitiser including through signs or billboards that promoted preventative practices.⁽⁷⁵⁾

(72) Robbins & Thomas, 2018; el Feki et al, 2017

(73) Bayoumi et al, 2021

(74) Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Ministry of Health, & Ministry of Social Development, 2017

(75) ABC, 2020

Negative attitudes in society often lead to discrimination and exclusion of people with disabilities. Disabilities are stigmatized in the State of Palestine and often start within the family. Especially in rural areas, there is a lack of awareness about disability rights, the needs of children with disabilities, and where to find necessary services. A lack of access to education for girls with disabilities is often the result of restrictive gender norms in the broader community, and disability is stigmatized so much that it can interfere with family honour and prevent siblings without disabilities from finding marriage partners. So children with disabilities are often hidden even within their families. These risks are multiplied when families have several children with disabilities, which is quite common.⁽⁷⁶⁾

Violence remains pervasive in the Palestinian context, whether inter-personal, intra-personal (i.e. self-inflicted) or systemic forms of violence. Because of the protracted conflict, the environment is inherently violent, with many children confronted every day with violence perpetrated in their homes and communities. Violent child discipline is not widely supported by women as a child rearing method⁽⁷⁷⁾, but nonetheless violent discipline remains very frequent in households. In the State of Palestine, more than half of women remain silent and do not talk about domestic violence. Furthermore, women's knowledge of available centres and institutions for survivors of violence remains limited.

4. Conclusions

The rights of Palestinian children in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip are protected under international human rights and humanitarian law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, many factors impact on the realization of children's rights and wellbeing in the State of Palestine hindering their survival, learning, and their physical, psychosocial and mental wellbeing.

The complex context in the State of Palestine characterized by recurrent humanitarian crises, protracted conflict including occupation and the closure of the Gaza Strip impacts the child life course and the child wellbeing deeply. The partial achievement of the child-related Sustainable Development Goal targets in the areas of Survival, Health, Environment, Learning, Protection, Social Protection and Participation reflect the intersectional impact of these factors on children's wellbeing and their development.

The geographical location of residence, socio-economic status, and gender also further affect the children's development across the life course. Examples of this include that children in the Gaza Strip in general have lower development outcomes than children in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, with children in the Gaza Strip 15 percentage points more likely to be multidimensionally poor than children living in the West Bank.⁽⁷⁸⁾ In Early Childhood, 74 per cent of children from the poorest households do not attend kindergarten compared to 55 per cent of those from the wealthiest households. Children from the poorest wealth quintile of the population are out of basic or secondary school at rates more than twice that of children from the richest quintile, with boys more likely to be out of school than girls. Of school-aged children, 36 per cent from the wealthiest households do not achieve functional literacy skills by the age of 14 while 60 per cent from the poorest households do not.⁽⁷⁹⁾ For adolescents the spaces for civic engagement are narrowing and there is an absence of an institutionalized approach to promote youth participation.

An example of the inter-sectoral impact on child development and wellbeing highlighted in this report is child mental health. The pressures children face at home, at school, and in their communities in the State of Palestine take a toll on their mental health due to economic and social insecurity; school dropout; protection risks such as early marriage, and child labour; physical health; and insufficient opportunities for engagement and participation. Furthermore, the violence deriving from the protracted conflict, as well as violence in children's homes and communities, significantly impacts on children's mental health. Witnessing, or worse, being victims of violence creates stress and anxiety, with a clear example being demolitions of children's homes which deprive them of a safe environment to grow and develop. Children living in areas of ongoing conflict are exposed to violence, exposing them to post-traumatic stress disorder, nightmares, flashbacks, and anxiety.

The protracted conflict and protection crisis have significantly impacted children in the State of Palestine resulting in numerous human rights violations including lack of freedom of movement, violence and abuse, restricted access to education and healthcare, and infringements of economic and social rights.

(76) Gustafson et al, 2019; Jone et al, 2016; AWRAD, 2021

(77) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS. As measured in the MICS in questions asked to mothers.

(78) Trends in Multidimensional Child Poverty in Palestine, Ferrone et al, 2021

(79) MICS, 2019/20, PCBS

The intra-Palestinian political divide, in place since 2007 - between the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the de facto authorities in the Gaza Strip, has also had a negative impact on the realization of the rights of Palestinian children. The divide has resulted in a lack of coordination and cooperation between the two entities, which has hindered the ability of Palestinian children to exercise their rights.

The first set of Concluding Observations from the Committee of the Rights of the Child, issued in 2020, highlighted a number of factors which continue to hinder the realization of children's rights in the State of Palestine. The observations covered by the CRC Committee include for the PA to: explicitly and fully prohibit all corporal punishment; allocate adequate human, technical and financial resources and measures to protect children from abuse and neglect; develop a strategy on early childhood; establish a comprehensive strategy for the inclusion of children with disabilities; increase investment in poverty-

reduction measures and social welfare policies; and utilize a child-rights approach in the budgeting process.⁽⁸⁰⁾

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a significant impact on the realization of the rights of Palestinian children by exacerbating pre-existing challenges and inequalities, particularly in the areas of education, healthcare, and economic and social rights.

(80) Concluding observations on the initial report of the State of Palestine, Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2020

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