

SOCIAL COHESION
& EDUCATION
SECTOR ANALYSIS

STATE OF
PALESTINE

*Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy in
Conflict-Affected Contexts Programme*

This report summarizes findings from several analyses undertaken to explore the situation in the State of Palestine, in particular the underlying causes of vulnerability and protracted instability. The analyses were conducted to inform UNICEF’s Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy (PBEA) programme, funded by the Government of the Netherlands. This report explores factors affecting social cohesion and triggering fragmentation of the social fabric within Palestinian society, in particular the role of education. It also identifies ways to support national efforts to enhance social cohesion in the country, particularly through the education system.

The PBEA programme seeks to build peaceful societies by strengthening the role of education in peacebuilding and integrating peacebuilding within the education system.

Methodology

This report builds on findings from the desk review of several United Nations (UN) documents including the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and its annex on Conflict Sensitivity: “Towards a conflict sensitive UNDAF”, a UNICEF-led analysis on social cohesion and education in East Jerusalem, the 2013 Situation Analysis of Palestinian Children undertaken by UNICEF State of Palestine, and related status reports from UN agencies.

Context

The current context of vulnerability and protracted instability in the State of Palestine is rooted in the ongoing 70-year Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is still far from a politically-agreed and sustainable solution.

Following the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel gained control of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. In the following decades, Israeli control over land, people and resources was established through a series of measures, including the settlement of the Israeli population within the then so-called “Occupied Territory” – Gaza and East



Jerusalem. Imposing military rule over the Palestinian Territory, Israel established a severe closure system of checkpoints and barriers, and as of 2015, at least 350,000 Israeli settlers lived in the West Bank. This has led to very strong internal as well as external resistance, resulting in a number of outbreaks of violent conflict, beginning with the First Intifada in 1987.

The Oslo Accords, brokered in 1994 between Israel and a newly created interim self-government body, the Palestinian Authority, brought temporary peace to the region. Despite intent the accords would be temporary, the deterioration of the security situation has meant the Agreement is still in place today. The agreements include a ruling framework which stipulates the division of the West Bank into areas A, B and C, with different levels of administrative and security control by the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority. The 'Paris Protocol' regulates economic relations between the two economies in four areas: labour, trade relations, fiscal issues and monetary arrangements. The protocol established that the Palestinian Authority has limited control over tax and budget management and no control over monetary and trade policies.

The paralysis following the Oslo Accords led to further insecurity and dissatisfaction, and the failures of subsequent attempts for peace agreements triggered new cycles of violence, including the outbreak of the Second Intifada in the year 2000. This period saw massive Israeli repression of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and the polarization of the Palestinian political spectrum after the victory of Hamas in the 2006 elections. A political split between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank followed. Since 2007 Israel has placed economic sanctions and a blockade on Hamas-controlled Gaza, with the population unable to enter or leave the strip.

As a result, for nearly 48 years the civilian population in the State of Palestine has suffered continued violence, displacement, dispossession and deprivation. The growing sense of powerlessness and hopelessness has contributed to tension and insecurity and a rise in the number of intra-family conflicts, domestic violence, and school and community violence. With the passage of time, such violence and internal conflicts have become accepted social norms within Palestinian society, triggering a fragmentation of the social fabric and a deterioration of social cohesion.

Despite efforts made by the international community to alleviate conditions and meet the most urgent needs, the humanitarian situation for specific population groups in Palestine has continued to deteriorate, especially in the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and Area C of the West Bank (which is under total control of Israel). The impact on children is particularly concerning. The protracted occupation has posed daily challenges and threats to the fulfillment of children's rights, including the rights to survival, growth and development, as well as the right to education.

Further, a child under six in Gaza today has already lived through three wars. Military escalations in 2008–2009 (under operation "Cast Lead") and 2012 (under "Pillar of Defense") were devastating to the Gazan community. On 7 July 2014, war broke out again causing an unprecedented scale of destruction and displacement. According to the Initial Rapid Assessment Reports issued by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Child Protection Cluster, at least 2,133 Palestinians were killed, including 551 children (representing 27 per cent of all deaths) in the most recent war. More than 11,000 people were injured, 3,436 of them children (36 per cent of all injuries), and more than 1,000 children will suffer from a life-long disability due to the injuries sustained. Another 6,000 children will now have a handicapped parent and up to 1,500 orphaned children will need sustained support from the child protection and welfare sectors.

Further, at the height of the conflict, at least 258 schools, 17 hospitals and 58 clinics were damaged and the houses of 18,000 families were destroyed or sustained major damaged, leaving more than six per cent of Gazans homeless. It is estimated that more than 100,000 people face long-term displacement as their homes are now uninhabitable. The deprivation of basic services and resources coupled with the long-term impact of the conflicts, has brought Gaza to its lowest point of social fragmentation. The coping mechanisms of families and communities have been overstressed and human development stifled in the face of extreme humanitarian needs.

Today, feelings of hopelessness, frustration, and desperation pervade Palestinian communities in both Gaza and the West Bank. This insecurity and lack of hope for future oportunities has led to a negative cycle of instability at all levels of society and an underlying volatility that suggests an outbreak of violence could occur at any time.

Underlying Causes and Key Dynamics of Conflict at the National Level

While many of the manifestations of social fragmentation in Palestine can be traced to the Israeli occupation, nearly 50 years of unresolved conflict has exposed dynamics within Palestinian society that have also contributed to the deterioration of social cohesion. The desk review identified the following underlying causes and factors affecting social cohesion. Links to education are established where possible.

SECURITY AND JUSTICE

- **Israeli settlements and settler violence:** Since 1967 the consistent expansion of Israeli settlements, together with land expropriation, the destruction of Palestinian property, forced displacement, and restrictions on movement and access to land and resources, have threatened the protection of Palestinians in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem). Land seizures to build settlements have resulted in shrinking space for Palestinians to develop adequate housing, basic infrastructure and services essential to sustain their livelihoods. Further, Israeli authorities continually fail to prevent settler violence, intimidation and harassment against Palestinians and their property and rarely hold settlers accountable for these unlawful acts.
- **Violence by Israeli Security Forces:** There has been a steady increase in incursions, raids on houses and refugee camps, the detention of children and youth, as well as clashes between Israeli security forces and unarmed Palestinians in recent years. Military incursions into cities, towns, villages and refugee camps have continued almost on a daily basis, even in Area A, where the Palestinian Authority ostensibly has full administrative and security control.
- **Child detention:** Children in Palestine are frequently detained for small crimes, such as stone throwing. Each year approximately 700 Palestinian children aged 12–17 years, the great majority of them boys, are arrested, interrogated and detained by Israeli soldiers, police and security forces. In the past 10 years alone, an estimated 7,000 children have been detained, interrogated, prosecuted and/or imprisoned within the Israeli military justice system – an average of two children a day.
- **Complex justice system:** Rule of law in Palestine and access to justice is both complex and challenging. This is in part because of the protracted Israeli occupation and in part due to the overlapping legal frameworks that were put in place under the Ottoman, Jordanian and Egyptian systems and remain in force today. The multitude of formal and informal legal mechanisms and an unclear demarcation of jurisdiction between judicial

institutions further exacerbate the already weak rule of law. While informal justice mechanisms fulfil an important function, particularly in civil and family law related cases, linkages between these systems are not strong, and as such common crimes, including gender-based violence, and other crimes that target women and children, are inadequately addressed. Further, despite the fact that youth make up nearly 60 per cent of the population, the juvenile justice system is weak.

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

- **Separation barrier and blockade:** The Gaza blockade and checkpoints, roadblocks and the separation “barrier” in the West Bank restrict not only the movement of Palestinian people, but also of access to resources, goods and basic social services, such as education and health. Bureaucratic constraints such as restrictions on permits and the designation of closed military zone also compound this issue. In the West Bank, the construction of the “barrier” by the Israeli authorities, which began in 2002, has created geographical and bureaucratic hardships for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Many Palestinians have been isolated from their farms, grazing lands and water resources, severely impacting their livelihoods. Children, patients and workers have to pass through military checkpoints to reach schools, medical facilities and workplaces and to maintain family and social relations. The impact on education is particularly alarming. Thousands of school children, adolescents and teachers have to travel long distances to school and are often confronted with delays and harassment by Israeli soldiers at checkpoints and exposed to violence from Israeli settlers on their commute. As a result, children suffer psychosocial distress and there are high rates of school dropout. Girls, particularly, tend to dropout when they must travel to a school outside their immediate community – as is often the case for secondary education.
- **Political divide between Hamas and Fatah:** The inter-Palestinian political divide between the Fatah faction in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza also affects social cohesion in Palestine. Following the 2006 elections, in which Hamas gained the majority of seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council, conflicts arose between the two factions, which they have been unable to resolve. In June 2007, Hamas, then considered as the de facto authority, took full control of the Gaza Strip. Although in April 2014 a reconciliation deal was reached leading to the formation of a Palestinian unity government in June, the situation is still in flux.
- **Gender inequality and Gender Based Violence:** Violence against women is widespread in Palestine, particularly at the household level. Social norms around gender roles are reflected in local laws that promote the inferior status of women and fail to adequately protect their rights. In addition, due to traditional patriarchal family structures, girls and women are generally discouraged from participating in organised activities and making their voices heard on matters of direct concern to them. The same is also true in the context of education, where violence and social tensions impact the ability of girls and boys to access education. Social pressures tend to drive adolescent girls away from school. Girls are often discouraged from taking part in after-school activities, as their mothers prefer them to stay home to help with household chores. Child marriage is also relatively high, with about one in ten Palestinian women married between the ages of 15 and 19 years. This is indicative of the difficult living conditions Palestinians face with some families encouraging early marriage to manage household poverty.
- **Violence against children and corporal punishment:** The use of physical, verbal and psychological violence against children is widely accepted as part of child rearing and discipline in Palestinian society. Corporal punishment is also commonly practiced in schools. Teachers are one of the most frequently cited perpetrators of physical and

psychological violence against boys and girls, followed by peer-to-peer violence.

- **Bedouins communities:** Around 27,000 of the population of Area C are Bedouins and herders. These are largely Palestinian refugees, who have suffered displacement over the decades and are some of the most marginalized groups. Food insecurity is particularly high among the Bedouin and herder communities despite the fact that they live in the areas that contains most of the agricultural and grazing land as well as the main water aquifers of the West Bank. This is caused by forced re-locations/evictions and demolition of their homes/tents and the lack of access due to closure of large areas of agricultural land by the Israeli authorities for military purposes, and growing restrictions of movement in Area C. The accessible land only provides a fraction of feed for herds. The herding communities are therefore forced to purchase expensive feed in addition to losing income generated by grazing.
- Growing up in such dire circumstances, Bedouin children and youth often suffer from psychological hardships that lead to school dropout. Families in these communities are also reluctant to send their children, especially older girls, to school, as schools are often located far away, either forcing children to walk long distances or imposing high transport costs on families.

NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

- **Land issue:** The Israeli occupation effectively deprives Palestinians of control over their land and natural resources. Around 64 per cent of the West Bank is under Israeli control and unavailable for use by the Palestinian Authority. The largest part of this region, Area C, contains about 5 per cent of the population of the West Bank, and is where all of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank are situated. Yet Area C is the main source of fresh water, natural gas, building material and minerals and is critical for the future growth of the Palestinian state. Israel has also expropriated significant amounts of West Bank territory in Areas A and B for the construction of bypass roads and other settlement-related uses.
- **Water:** The occupation is arguably responsible for the lack of access to safe, sufficient and affordable water in Palestine. The construction of the “barrier” in particular has contributed to the sporadic and disjointed nature of the water supply in the West Bank, effectively cutting off Palestinian communities from their water sources and damaging water networks. The Gaza Strip has suffered the devastating impact of pollution and the infiltration of seawater and wastewater in its coastal aquifer - Gaza’s sole source of freshwater. This has left 95 per cent of Gaza’s water supply unfit to drink, forcing families to purchase drinking water from vendors. The Israeli offensives in 2008, 2009 and 2014 also destroyed large tracts of public infrastructure, including the water and sewerage system, while the ongoing blockade has made repairs difficult.
- **Energy and power:** The West Bank does not have a power plant to generate electricity and its electricity distribution is inefficient as it is split into isolated distribution systems. Limited plant capacity and conflict-related restrictions have resulted in frequent power outages. Nearly all of the energy used in Palestine comes from electricity or petroleum products obtained from Israel. Thus, the Palestinian economy is critically dependent on Israel for around 95 per cent of supply. The lack of electricity affects households, economic establishments, health services, wastewater treatment plants and schools, all of which have severe implications for the health and well being of children.

Intersections between education and social cohesion

As noted in the previous section, the prolonged occupation has affected nearly all aspects of Palestinians' daily life, including education. While schooling can proceed relatively normally in the major towns in the West Bank under Palestinian Authority control, students and teachers risk intimidation, harassment and violence from Israeli Security Forces and Israeli settlers on their commute. This results in tardiness, absenteeism and low morale. The situation is even worse for students from Bedouin communities as they have to study in tents, caravans or tin shacks with minimal protection from the heat and cold.

In East Jerusalem, the access and mobility restrictions of the "barrier" also affect education at all levels. Teachers who hold West Bank identification cards face difficulties reaching schools in East Jerusalem due to permit restrictions. Further, thousands of children must pass through checkpoints every day to get to school because they live in areas separated from the rest of the city by the "barrier". Children navigate dangerous areas and travel long distances due to classroom shortages and the overcrowding of schools in East Jerusalem. Schools are often located in small spaces with poor infrastructure not designed for education. The environment is often demotivating, and does not provide safe spaces or play zones crucial for children's healthy mental and psychosocial development. Transportation costs add another financial obstacle to accessing education in East Jerusalem.

The situation in Gaza is more grim, where access to quality education in a safe, child-friendly environment has been heavily compromised by the protracted conflict and occupation. Israeli military incursions and exchanges of fire between Israeli forces and Palestinian groups and the resulting damage and destruction of facilities disrupted education and had negative psychosocial effects, such as stress, fear and distress. Students and teachers are also constantly in danger as they travel to and from school. Moreover, the Gaza public education system has never fully recovered from the disruption caused by the 2007 political separation between Gaza and the West Bank, which has complicated curriculum review and the implementation of a national teacher-training strategy. The severe shortage of classrooms in Gaza means that schools must operate on double-shifts, resulting in reduced instructional time which affects students' learning achievement.

Across the State of Palestine, teachers tend to use out-dated teacher-centred methodologies and rely on corporal punishment to instil discipline. This is a reflection of the lack of skills and knowledge about children's rights and of positive non-violent discipline among many educational staff. In turn, students are frustrated with rote learning and the sense that education is irrelevant and does not prepare them for any kind of social or economic mobility. This sense of hopelessness is further reinforced by poor results in education attainment, and the discriminatory policies and barriers to employment Palestinian youth encounter.

The lack of public awareness on the value of early childhood development (ECD) and the fact that ECD services are neither free nor compulsory are also significant impediments to quality learning in basic and secondary education. Parents do not understand the importance of ECD in fostering school readiness and developing resilience and pro-social behaviour that will benefit the child throughout her or his life, and potentially contribute towards positive change for society as a whole. This is matched by education providers' neglect of the ECD sector, resulting in the absence of trained professionals in pre-school centres. Too often they tend to use traditional methods of teaching and learning and do not adequately provide interactive learning and development for young children.

The occupation and periodic conflicts continually compromise access to quality and protective education in Palestine. Violence in schools is a clear manifestation of this wider context. It is also indicative of the increased acceptance of violence as a social norm and the growing sense of insecurity and vulnerability in children and Palestinian society at large. As children witness violence in school and their daily lives, their learning processes about how to co-exist peacefully and deal with disputes without resorting to violence are hampered. Thus, it is crucial that socially accepted violence and outmoded forms of teaching and learning are recognized as barriers to quality education that not only negatively affect children's psychosocial well-being and learning achievement, but also the social cohesion of the family and community.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

UN HDI Ranking (2012): 110/187

Population (2012): 4.2 million

Population Growth (1990-2012): 3.2%

Population Under 18 (2012): 2.03 million

GNI per capita (US\$) (2012): 2,810

Youth Unemployment (2012): 38.8%

Adult Literacy Rate (2008-2012) (%): 95.3%

Pupil: Teacher Ratio, Primary (2012): 24:1

(Statistics from UNICEF, World Bank, UNDP Human Development Indicators)

Despite this bleak picture, there are opportunities to strengthen the capacity of education to contribute towards social cohesion in Palestine, and to leverage cultural strengths to support a better future for all Palestinian children. The recommendations below are entry points to improve education in Palestine in the short- and medium-term and to empower Palestinians to support conditions for long-term change.

Political and policy responses

- **Link school to work:** Increase the relevance of education to employment through multi-sectorial cooperation and planning, mentorships and internships, career guidance and counselling services, and the expansion of vocational training institutions. Implement problem-based learning strategies to promote job readiness skills in school. With more opportunities to make a living, it is believed that young people's involvement in violent activities will also decrease.
- **Increase advocacy for children's rights:** Engage in increased advocacy promoting the right to education for all Palestinian children. Advocate for protected access to schools, improved infrastructure and resources, enhanced curriculum and higher quality teaching.

Structural and education reforms

- **Coordinate education service providers:** Create coordination mechanism across education sectors – formal, non-formal and vocational – to identify gaps in education service delivery and ensure equitable distribution of services and resources. Upgrade the quality of teaching and learning through coordination and sharing best practices to increase access to quality education for all girls and boys, from pre-school through to secondary education.
- **Use school spaces as community centres:** Build linkages between education and community stakeholders to increase youth participation; provide safe spaces for children; provide programmes for gifted students, children with special needs as well as children with disabilities; and increase parental and community engagement and family programming to

reduce social fragmentation. Leverage Parent-Teacher Associations to plan for infrastructure, supplies, extra-curricular activities, non-formal education and community-focused activities. The networks established through schools can also be leveraged to facilitate community dialogue to discuss and address social challenges.

- **Enrich curriculum:** Enhance existing curriculum to include skills associated with social cohesion, Palestinian national and cultural identity, civic engagement, and relevant life skills for the 21st century. Review and revise the curriculum, as needed, focusing in particular on learning competencies.
- **Train teachers:** Develop a system-wide teacher-training plan to coordinate training across diverse education providers, with a specific focus on improving the quality of teacher pedagogy. Train teachers and administrators in classroom management, including on how to manage large classrooms and diverse learning styles; positive discipline; non-violence; and interactive methods of instruction – particularly in the early grades – as well as student-centered teaching methodologies. Respect for the opinions of others can be built into methods of classroom teaching. Teachers’ motivation can also be enhanced with adequate compensation and remuneration.

Individual and interpersonal changes

- **Deliver violence prevention programmes:** Establish coordinated approaches to non-violence in schools across education providers. Train teachers, principals, parents, caregivers and community members, across a range of venues, in positive discipline, non-violent communication and conflict resolution.
 - Explore peer and community mediation strategies and programmes. Develop sports and recreational programming and youth leadership programmes to promote healthy competition and to bridge divides. Ensure accountability and ability of students to report incidents without fear of retribution.
 - Improve dialogue between and among teachers, students and parents, taking into account the importance of student’s involvement in school management. School councils and youth parliaments can provide frameworks for encouraging and developing civic and democratic engagement. Educate students on their rights to safety and not suffering violence at the hands of adults or their peers.
 - Ensure accountability and ability of students to report incidents without fear.
- **Support cultural identity programmes:** Combat isolation and separation by uniting Palestinians through activities to reduce concepts of “otherness”. Empower local communities to increase cultural pride and awareness of the Palestinian heritage through non-formal education.