

OVERVIEW

Recurrent episodes of violence in Gaza and the West Bank have affected Palestinians' social and material wellbeing. Disruption of support networks and livelihood systems affects people's ability to prevent negative impacts of the violence on their wellbeing and to avoid resorting to negative coping strategies.

This report approaches the analysis of the humanitarian situation in Palestine with a focus on social impacts. Drawing from frameworks of social impact analysis, it goes beyond the sectoral approach of the humanitarian system and places the focus on social and material wellbeing. It analyses the impact of recurrent conflict and escalation of hostilities on key categories of social and material wellbeing of the Palestinian population, taking into account how the immediate impact of the conflict interacts with pre-existing social and economic factors, recurrent episodes of violence, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ability to cope. The report furthermore outlines vulnerabilities of specific population groups to these impacts, and response capacity of national and international actors.

Background: an increase in tensions and violence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in April resulted in an escalation in hostilities from 10-21 May 2021 (ICG 14/05/2021). Palestinian armed group Hamas fired rockets into Israel and the Israeli army carried out airstrikes and artillery attacks in densely populated civilian areas of the Gaza Strip (OHCHR 27/05/2021; Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor 01/09/2021). 260 Palestinians, including 66 children, were killed and thousands of houses, livelihood structures, and critical infrastructure were destroyed during the escalation (OCHA 08/09/2021 and 06/06/2021; Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor 01/09/2021). In the West Bank, 26 Palestinians were killed in protests during the escalation. In Israel, Hamas rockets killed 13 people, including two children, and damage to civilian infrastructure and houses was reported (OCHA 04/06/2021; OHCHR 29/07/2021).

About this report

Scope: The analysis covers both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, with an emphasis on the Gaza Strip as the report looks at the consequences of the May escalation on the underlying social situation in Gaza.

Method: The report is based on publicly available information and key informant interviews. The methodology and process were developed with the support of a technical expert.

Limitations: The short timeframe of the project required ACAPS to focus on a limited number of social themes identified through key informant interviews and desk reviews. Those themes were selected based on their importance and are not exhaustive. The analysis was done remotely and did not include field research.



This report is part of a series of independent analytical products developed to support humanitarian decision-making in Palestine in the aftermath of the escalation of violence in May 2021. Read more [here](#). The project benefited from support by the H2H Network's H2H Fund, which is supported by UK aid from the UK government.

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METHODOLOGY

This analysis draws from Social Impact Assessment (SIA) methods, which are typically used to analyse the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of social change processes driven by policies, programs, plans, and projects (Karami et al. 2017). This analysis does not present a full social impact analysis, but makes use of elements of social impact analysis to build a framework appropriate for the scope of this report.

In a first step, key factors pertinent to the social and economic context in Palestine were identified, through a desk review on key events, social issues, and needs in the context of the crisis in Palestine. Given the complexity of the context and limited time, the list was narrowed down to a set of key categories that had particular relevance in the scope of this analysis. Those categories were further grouped together in a custom framework based on existing research (UN 2002; IAIA 2003 and 2015; Goldman 2000), and separated into two main categories: social wellbeing and material wellbeing. The categories presented are not listed in order of importance and are non-exhaustive.

In a second step, for each category, the impact of the escalation in hostilities in May was analysed.

Social wellbeing focuses on non-material factors (c.f. IAIA 04/2015). It considers inclusion in social groups such as clans, families, communities, and political organisations. It also analyses how literacy, political realities, and gender influence how people are impacted. This section explores a selection of factors related to social wellbeing and their interaction with the impact of the escalation of hostilities in May 2021.

Material wellbeing focuses on individuals' satisfaction with economic concerns such as the cost of basic goods, household income, livelihoods, and financial security (Sirgy 04/01/2018). This section explores a selection of factors related to material wellbeing and how they were impacted by the escalation of hostilities in May 2021.

SOCIAL WELLBEING

Shocks, such as the escalation in hostilities and COVID-19, disrupt the social structure in Palestine, for example by decreasing people's ability to comply with societal roles and gendered expectations. While family and community structures provide support networks, increased reliance on such structures increases the risk of people losing access to support when entire communities are impacted.

Gender

Societal norms and expectations for men and boys

Young men face pressure to provide for the household, save up for dowry, and provide for their family once married (Oxfam 15/04/2021; UN Women 23/06/2021; Care, OCHA 23/09/2021). Limited economic opportunities in Palestine hamper the ability of some men to meet their societal role of providers for the household, leading to increased levels of frustration, and raising the risk of become a perpetrator of violence – including GBV (UN Women 23/06/2021; Care, OCHA 23/09/2021).

[The economic impact of COVID-19, and the impacts of damages from the May escalation on livelihood activities in the Gaza Strip have disrupted income generation, and made it more difficult for men to meet societal expectations. Based on information from past episodes of escalation, boys are likely to face pressure to drop out from school and enter the workforce to offset their family's loss of income \(UN Women 23/06/2021; UN Women 05/2020\).](#)

Societal norms and expectations for women and girls

Religious laws and traditional societal perception and norms impact women and girls' behaviour and their ability to equally participate in economic and social life. Women and girls often face societal pressure to fulfil conservative and traditional roles, limiting them to domestic roles and excluding them from the paid labour force (Oxfam 15/04/2021; UN Women 23/06/2021; Care, OCHA 23/09/2021). In the aftermath of previous escalations, some households became more protective of women and restricted their freedom of movement. The risk of early or forced marriage also increases as families struggle to meet their basic needs (UN Women 23/06/2021).

[The conflict escalation in May caused injuries and deaths. In the affected families, women heads of household had to adapt to the new situation and change role, such as securing the households' livelihoods \(KII 23/09/2021; UN Women 23/06/2021\). In this situation, girls are more likely to take over household tasks and eventually assume a caretaker role if someone in the family is injured or impaired.](#)

Women's participation in the labour market

Nearly 84% of women in Palestine in 2020 were out of the labour force (neither employed nor actively seeking work). 40% of women in the labour force were unemployed. 93% of unemployed women had completed 13 or more years of schooling. The vast majority (between 84% and 92%, depending on the specific age bracket) of women ages 25-54 out of the labour force stated housekeeping as a reason for being in that situation (PCBS 05/2021). The high unemployment rate of skilled women is explained by an overall lack of job opportunities for skilled workers of both sexes. At equal competencies, men are prioritised over women. Skilled women are also less likely to accept occupying low-skilled position (World Bank 20/09/2018). Many skilled women have qualifications for specific careers such as education, health, and humanities, which limits their job prospects (UNRWA 22/11/2019).

Many women heads of household operate small businesses out of their homes. For those whose homes were damaged or destroyed during the escalation of hostilities in May, this implies that in addition to their housing, their ability to generate an income was also affected (UN Women 23/06/2021). This compounds COVID-19-related issues faced by women-led businesses. In an April 2020 study, a higher proportion of female (94%) than male respondents (70%) indicated they faced business issues (CARE, OCHA 09/2020).

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

Physical and psychological violence are a concern in Palestine, driven by traditional patriarchal values, exposure to violence, and economic uncertainty (OHCHR 22/09/2016; UNFPA accessed 14/09/2021; Islamic Relief 24/12/2020). Data from the 2019 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) Violence survey, conducted in Gaza and West Bank, shows 52% of married or ever married women had experienced at least one instance of psychological violence by their husbands in the past 12 months, while 18% experienced physical violence and 7% experienced sexual violence (PCBS 11/2019). These figures represent a reduction of around 5% to 6% compared to 2011 (PCBS 11/2019). Most women (61%) who experienced violence did not report it to anyone. Only 1% of women approached the police (PCBS 11/2019). The low rates of reporting and help-seeking behaviours can be attributed to fear of stigma, social exclusion, and retaliation, along with the lack of confidential and compassionate service providers, particularly female points of contacts such as police officers (UNFPA accessed 14/09/2021; UNRWA 22/11/2019). Initial reports suggest that the number of SGBV incidents increased at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, during the first lockdown (UN Women 2020; UNFPA 06/2020).

Data on the impact of the May escalation is not available; however, information from previous escalations of hostilities show that the risks of domestic violence increase, particularly for displaced women given stressors related for example to the destruction and the loss of livelihoods (UNRWA 22/11/2019; IIED 08/2017).

Political participation, activism

Space for political participation

While the political realities in the West Bank and Gaza are completely different, space for political participation is restricted in both territories. Perceived or actual public support of rival authorities (support for Hamas in the West Bank or Fatah in Gaza) places individuals such as opponents or journalists at increased risk of facing arrest and arbitrary detention (Oxfam 15/04/2021; Amnesty International accessed 25/08/2021; Al Jazeera 24/08/2021, Human Rights Watch 23/10/2018). Political participation is more restricted in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank, due to the Israeli blockade and the control by armed groups, particularly Hamas (Freedom House 2021; Freedom House 2021).

It is unclear how the escalation may have directly influenced the political repression enacted by governing authorities. However, the death of a critic of the Palestinian Authority in June 2021 led to protests and violent crackdowns by Palestinian Authority security forces (Al Jazeera 03/07/2021).

Political division

After winning elections in Gaza in 2006 and taking control of Gaza during clashes with Fatah in 2007, Hamas became the de-facto authority in the Gaza Strip (ECFR accessed 28/09/2021). The division between Fatah and Hamas continues to define politics in Palestine (ECFR last accessed 28/09/2021). Political division between the West Bank and Gaza has led to dysfunction of the public sector, including non-payment of salaries, absenteeism, and duplication of functions (OCHA 06/17). In the West Bank, discontent with the Palestinian Authority is driven by public perception of corruption, cooperation with Israeli authorities, and crackdowns on dissenting opinions (Al Jazeera 29/07/2021; The New York Times 07/07/2021). In Gaza, civil society's criticism towards Hamas has been related to the political divide, living conditions in Gaza, and favouritism for members of Hamas (The Arab Weekly 24/03/20219; BBC 18/03/2019).

Polling shows that Hamas gained public support in Palestine following the May escalation, but data from previous Hamas-Israel conflicts shows that this increase in support is typical in the immediate aftermath and returns to initial levels within 3-6 months (Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) 15/06/2021).

Youth activism

Youth activism independent from established political actors is developing. Through their activism, the youth are reshaping the narrative surrounding the blockade and the conflict by shifting away from vocabulary traditionally used to describe the conflict, and engaging with an international audience through social media (Interpeace 23/04/2018; KII 25/08/2021 a; Financial Times 12/07/2021; Equal Times 02/06/2021; Høigilt 2015; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 10/06/2021).

Despite the opening of new types of activism, the lack of opportunities, and spaces, can be demoralizing, and pressures from societal expectations can limit participation in such organisations even for youths coming from supportive families. The poor economic situation leads some young people to focus on their future and possible migration prospects, rather than enacting political change (Oxfam 15/04/2021; Interpeace 23/04/2018).

Young activists played a major role in the protests surrounding the Sheikh Jarrah evictions, including publicising the issue on social media (Foreign Policy 25/05/2021). The protests, along with clashes at Al-Aqsa Mosque, the postponement of the 2021 Palestinian Legislative Elections, and intercommunal clashes within Israel led to increasing tensions which ultimately resulted in the May escalation (The New York Times 15/05/2021). It is unclear whether the momentum gained by these youth movements will continue, or if it will be co-opted by established political actors (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 10/06/2021).

Literacy and education

In 2020, the net enrolment rate in Palestine for primary education stood at 92.7%, and at 88.7% for secondary education. Youth literacy rate (ages 15-24) stands at 99.3% (UNESCO accessed 27/08/2021). Educational attainment in Palestine is high due to a strong value placed on education within Palestinian society (KII 09/09/2021, UNICEF accessed 14/09/2021).

Access to schools, and the provision of quality education is a challenge, especially in periods of heightened security concerns. In Gaza, 70% of UNRWA schools and 63% of Ministry of Education schools operate in double or triple shifts due to the high number of students compared to the number of functional schools, leading to reduced hours of core subject learning (KII 21/09/2021; OCHA 23/12/2020). In Israeli-controlled Area C and Hebron H2, students and teachers on their way to school are sometimes harassed or intimidated by Israeli settlers. Schools built without permits are also at risk of demolition (OCHA 23/12/2020).

Statistically, adolescent boys and children with disabilities have a higher likelihood of dropping out of education. Boys who drop out of education face increased risk of child labour and participating in dangerous activities; girls who drop out face increased risks of child marriage (Education Cluster 09/04/2021).

School closures due to COVID-19 impacted access to education. While there was a distance learning platform available to students and families, a Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics shows that only 51% of households participated in distance learning during school closures. Most (49%) of the constraints came from a lack of internet access, but lack of teacher participation and refusal by children was also reported (Palestine Economy Portal 01/2021).

The May escalation in violence led to the premature end of the school year in Gaza (UNRWA 04/06/2021). As of 14 August, schools in the West Bank and Gaza have reopened with in-person attendance (OCHA 03/09/2021). Most of the UNRWA schools that were damaged during conflict have been repaired, but public schools, which were disproportionately affected, are facing slower reconstruction (UNRWA 01/09/2021; KII 20/08/2021; KII 25/08/2021; World Bank, UNSCO, EU 06/07/2021).

Mental health

Mental health issues in Palestine are driven by a series of factors related to the occupation, recurrent violence, a sense of hopelessness, and socioeconomic conditions (OCHA 05/10/2020). In the West Bank, settler violence, demolitions, and confrontations with Israeli forces drive mental health needs, while key drivers in the Gaza Strip are the long-term effects of the blockade and lack of economic opportunities (OCHA 23/12/2020; KII 18/08/2021; MDM 11/2017). In the Gaza Strip, these factors are leading to negative coping mechanisms such as drug use (UNODC 11/2017). Hopelessness about the future is also driving suicides among Palestinian youth (OCHA 05/10/2020). While the Great March of Return (GMR) demonstrations in 2018 and 2019 created hope and a sense of agency, the violence experienced in relation to the protests also led to further mental health problems (OCHA 06/04/2020; OCHA 05/10/2020).

These long-term issues are exacerbated by violent incidents such as the escalation of hostilities in May, leading to trauma and fear from witnessing the loss of lives and destruction (UNICEF 16/05/2021). In the July 2021 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA), 38% of households in Gaza Strip and 20% of households in the West Bank reported that at least one household member had showed indications of psychosocial distress in the month prior to data collection (REACH 07/2021). The economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have also increased the feeling of anxiety (Islamic Relief accessed 07/09/2021; ESCWA 09/09/2021).



Inclusion in social support networks

Tribes, clan and family networks

Clan-like structures in Palestine exist in the form of tribes, clans, and notable families. Especially in Gaza, clans play a role in providing assistance in times of need, and in wealth distribution (Robinson 01/2009), and were a particularly important social safety net before Hamas took control of Gaza in 2007 (Tannira 19/05/2021). Examples include emergency shelter in case of demolitions and food assistance (KII 25/08/2021; KII 15/09/2021). However, such structures can also limit social mobility and replicate social inequalities. In the job market, favouritism or nepotism (wasta) may benefit well-connected individuals and be a further source of inequality (Salameh 2013; Oxfam 15/04/2021; Interpeace 23/04/2018).

In periods of additional stress on households, such as the May escalation and the COVID-19 pandemic, reliance on these clan and family-based support structures may increase. When an entire community is impacted (for example in the context of demolitions in the West Bank), its ability to provide assistance to those in need is undermined (KII 09/08/2021; KII 18/08/2021; KII 25/08/2021).

MATERIAL WELLBEING

Restrictions on economic activity in Palestine, the import and export of goods, and people's mobility impact labour opportunities, household income, and households' ability to absorb shocks. COVID-19 restrictions and the escalation of hostilities in May have further impacted employment and income-generation. Gaza was already facing deteriorating infrastructure due to the effects of repeated cycles of violence in a densely populated territory with a growing population. Evidence from past escalations indicates that reconstruction is likely to be slow.

Economic situation

High poverty rate

In 2016-2017, the most recent data available, 13.9% of people in the West Bank and 53% in the Gaza Strip were living below the poverty line (PCBS 06/2020). Since 2011, the poverty rate has been trending downwards in the West Bank and increasing in the Gaza Strip (World Bank 19/10/2020).

Disruptions and shocks caused by COVID-19 and the May escalation are likely to have increased these figures. Projections of the overall poverty rate in Palestine based on GDP per capita growth show that 27.5% of the population – 1.4 million people – were living in poverty in 2020 (World Bank 02/04/2021). The GDP in Palestine is estimated to have decreased by 11.5% in 2020; before the escalation of hostilities in May, a 3.5% GDP growth was expected for 2021 (World Bank 02/04/2021). However, revised estimations for the Gaza Strip taking into account the impact of the May escalation point to a 0.3% decrease in GDP for 2021 and an increase of the poverty rate to 59.3% (World Bank 06/07/2021).

Gaza blockade: import regulations

All goods entering the Gaza Strip are subject to approval by Israeli-Palestinian and Hamas authorities. Dual-use items, which are civilian items with a potential military use, are subject to additional lengthy and unclear coordination process (Gisha 20/04/2017).

Some of the materials needed for rebuilding the damages of the May escalation are classified as dual-use, which delayed reconstruction efforts (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 04/07/2010; Al Jazeera 17/06/2021; Al Jazeera 25/09/2021). The adverse effect of dual-use restrictions is also felt in manufacturing, information and communications technology (ICT), and agriculture, impacting food security (World Bank 17/04/2019).

Kerem Shalom crossing, which is the only active commercial crossing between Gaza and Israel, was closed between 11-17 May. It briefly reopened on 18 May, and then remained closed until the ceasefire on 21 May, though operations resumed with tight restrictions after the ceasefire (Gisha 23/05/2021 and 22/06/2021). Israel finally resumed entry of construction material into Gaza for the private sector and international projects at the end of August (Gisha 01/09/2021).

Gaza blockade: geographic mobility restrictions

Mobility in and out of Gaza, between Gaza and the West Bank, and within the West Bank is greatly restricted by bureaucratic processes and checkpoints (UNCTAD 20/09/2021). Pedestrian travel in and out of Gaza is restricted to the Erez crossing (to Israel) and the Rafah crossing (to Egypt) (UNCTAD 13/08/2020). Crossings at Erez is only allowed in specific cases such as to seek medical treatment, for business purposes, and for specific purposes of family reunion, such as a funeral of a first-degree relative (Gisha 30/06/2021). Uncertainties about whether permits to exit Gaza will be granted, and about when return will be possible, creates challenges for planning. Families with relatives in both Gaza and West Bank face the same restrictions, leading to family members not being able to see each other for extended periods of time (Gisha 21/07/2015; KII 09/08/2021).

The pandemic led to a further tightening of mobility restrictions, with only a fraction of crossing permitted compared to the pre-pandemic situation (Gisha 30/06/2021). Exits of Gaza via Erez Crossing were greatly reduced beginning in March 2020. The number of monthly crossings dropped from more than 20,000 in February 2020 to no less than 1,800 as of July 2021, with medical patients and their companions making up the vast majority of people being allowed to cross (Gisha accessed 07/09/2021; OCHA 24/03/2020).

COVID-19 had a strong negative effect on entry and exits via Rafah crossing (with Egypt), which were well below the pre-pandemic average between March 2020 and February 2021, including several months with no crossings (Gisha accessed 09/07/2021).

Due to the escalation of hostilities in May 2021, monthly exits via Erez dropped, then quickly recovered to pre-escalation levels in June (Gisha last accessed 07/09/2021).

Gaza blockade: Access to fishing zones

The maximum distance for fishing in Gaza water permitted by Israel is restricted, and varies based on the political and security situation between Gaza and Israel. It stood at 15 nautical miles (the largest since 2007) from April 2019 until the May escalation. Around 4,000 fishers and their families rely on fishing as their livelihood (OCHA 23/12/2020). The limits to the fishing zones are enforced by the Israeli navy, which often fires warning shots, detains fishers, and confiscates equipment (OCHA 19/10/2019 and 23/12/2020; Reuters 02/04/2019). The import restrictions on dual-use items also affects the ability of fishers to maintain and repair their boats (Al Monitor 14/09/2021; KII 25/08/2021).

Access to fishing waters was forbidden during the 11-day escalation. Since 12 July, the fishing zone was 12 nautical miles, with a four-day decrease following the launch of incendiary balloons from Gaza into Israel (KII 09/08/2021; Times of Israel 30/07/2021). On 1 September, Israel re-instated a zone of 15 nautical miles (Times of Israel 01/09/2021; Gisha 01/09/2021). While the fishing zone restrictions have disrupted the livelihoods of fishers, and their lifting likely leads to some improvement, other restrictions such as on the procurement of spare parts for boats and engines is likely to continue to impact income-generation for families dependent on fishery.

Employment and income

In 2020, the participation in the workforce (which encompasses the population aged 15 and above that is either employed or looking for work) stood at 35.3% in Gaza and 44.4% in the West Bank. Labour force participation was 65.1% among men and 16.1% among women

(PCBS 05/2021). People who are not participating in the labour force are not counted in the unemployment rate, which stood at 46.6% in Gaza and 15.7% in West Bank in 2020 (PCBS 05/2021). Youth unemployment is a key concern. In 2019, the unemployment rate for youth aged 18-29 stood at 63% in Gaza and 23% in the West Bank (PCBS 12/08/2020).

Despite a high literacy and education level, there are constraints in terms of job opportunities. 98.5% of unemployed women and 68.4% of unemployed men have completed 10 years or more of schooling (PCBS 05/2021). High unemployment among a highly educated population is mainly caused by poor economic prospects, but is also partly caused by a mismatch between the education provided and the requirements of the Palestinian job market (KII 09/09/2021).

Informal employment¹ without a labour contract is common in Palestine, with 59% of workers in the West Bank and 51% in the Gaza Strip employed informally in 2019. This implies that they lack access to social protection mechanisms and are more vulnerable to shocks in the labour market (ILO 09/2020; PCBS 30/04/2020).

The first COVID-19 lockdown had a strong impact on employment: 96,000 people in Palestine and 25,000 cross-border workers in Israel lost their jobs in the second quarter of 2020. The pattern of openings and lockdowns based on the variation in COVID-19 cases is likely to have continued disrupting employment in 2021 (World Bank 02/04/2021). The number of people employed in Israel and West Bank settlements decreased from 133,000 in 2019 to 125,000 in 2020 (PCBS 23/02/2021).

Damages from the May escalation to productive and financial sectors are estimated between USD 75 million and USD 90 million, and losses between USD 35 million and USD 70 million. Social protection and employment losses are estimated between USD 60 million and USD 80 million (World Bank, UNSCO, EU 06/07/2021).

During the escalation, workplaces, assets, and infrastructure were damaged and destroyed, disrupting livelihoods and sources of income in Gaza. Deaths and injuries among breadwinners also contributed to temporary or permanent losses of household incomes (UN Women 23/06/2021). Of households interviewed in the July 2021 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA), 47% of refugee households and 55% of non-refugee households indicated that their household income had decreased a little or a lot due to the escalation (REACH 07/2021). The escalation added to the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 in Gaza, which had already reduced economic opportunities, and led to increased child labour as a negative coping mechanism (UN Women 23/06/2021).

¹ Defined by PCBS as working for an employer or being self-employed without the enterprise having tax records or book accounting records (PCBS 30/04/2020).

Remittances

Remittances from the diaspora are a source of income for Palestinian families, and have a positive impact on the (output) growth of the Palestinian economy (Ayhab 2015). Research on remittances in crises contexts shows that remittances have a multiplier effect on the recovery of local economies (Humanitarian Policy Group 05/2007). In 2020, personal remittances in Palestine were estimated to be worth 17.1% of the GDP (World Bank accessed 01/09/2021). The economic impact of COVID-19 also reduced remittance flows to Palestine. The value of remittances received by Palestine declined between 2019 and 2020 (World Bank accessed 01/09/2021; Knomad 05/2021).

Precise information on the role of remittances in the aftermath of the May escalation is not available.

Infrastructure

Deteriorating infrastructure in Gaza

Restrictions on the import of construction materials hampers infrastructure projects in Gaza, including rebuilding efforts following escalations in conflict (Oxfam 22/03/2021, Al Jazeera 17/06/2021). Population growth in the limited space of Gaza puts additional strain on infrastructure. The pressure results in a slow deterioration of the infrastructure and of the living conditions (KII 15/09/2021).

Following the May 2021 conflict escalation, damages to various types of infrastructure (municipal, transport, WASH, energy, and digital) are estimated to be between USD 60 million and USD 85 million, whereas social sectors (housing, health, education, social protection and employment) suffered between USD 140 to USD 180 million in damages (World Bank UNSCO, EU 06/07/2021).

More information on the impact of damages to social infrastructures is available in ACAPS' Political economy of Gaza – responding to economic vulnerability report.

Insufficient electricity in Gaza

As of September 2021, there is a 229 MW/day gap between electricity supply and demand in the Gaza Strip. In 2021, on average, electricity is available 13 hours a day (OCHA accessed 14/09/2021).

Following the escalation, the availability of electricity reduced to 9 hours per day in May and 11 hours per day in June before returning to 13-14 hours the following months. Electricity shortages impact the ability to work, and cause additional household spending due to damage to electrical devices and having to acquire alternative electricity sources (ICRC 15/07/2021; OCHA accessed 14/09/2021).

PEOPLE WITH HEIGHTED SOCIAL VULNERABILITY

Women-headed households

In 2019, 11% of households in Palestine were officially headed by women (PCBS 08/03/2020), though an unknown number of households is effectively headed by female breadwinners due to men being physically or economically absent (UNRWA 22/11/2019). They are more likely to be poor, and work opportunities have already been impacted by the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (UN Women 04/2020).

A significant portion of household coping mechanisms are employed by women to ensure sustainability of the household's resources. These mechanisms may include making adjustments to the household food basket, reorganising assets and expenses, and finding creative ways to make aid assistance last longer (UNRWA 22/11/2019). Women are increasingly adopting income-earning strategies in roles that are socially seen as appropriate for women – mainly in the informal economy, which presents a risk of exploitation (UNRWA 22/11/2019). A study in 2019 found that female-headed households resorted more than male-headed households to reducing non-food expenditures in order to prioritise food (NRC, Mercy Corps 11/2020).

In the context of the conflict escalation, destruction and damage of homes affected women heads of households who ran businesses out of their homes (UN Women 23/06/2021). Households that became newly headed by women due to injury or death of a male head of household are particularly at risk of relying on negative coping mechanisms because of the added economic pressure that comes with the loss of the primary earner (UN Women 23/06/2021). In households where family members have become injured or disabled, the care burden women is increased (ESCWA 08/09/2021).



Children and Youth

Children and youth in conflict contexts suffer from emotional distress and have additional protection needs. In the West Bank, children participating in survey research of households that experienced demolitions and forced evictions felt a sense of social isolation due to the uprooting (Save the Children 28/06/2021). Trauma stemming from violent incidents and the prolonged nature of the crisis are leading to a sense of despair and anxiety (Abdeen et al. 2008; Islamic Relief 30/11/2020).

The escalation in May has increased the risk of children, particularly those who were injured or developed a permanent disability, dropping out of school. Half of students who were injured during the Great March of Return dropped out of school (UN Women 23/06/2021). Furthermore, to cope with additional economic pressure on the household following escalations, boys are at increased risk of dropping out of school to generate an additional income, while girls are at risk of dropping out to participate in care or housework, or to be married (UN Women 23/06/2021; ESCWA 08/09/2021).

People with disabilities

People with disabilities in Palestine, both pre-existing and caused by the conflict, often face discrimination, stigmatisation, and barriers that restrict them from participating in the society on an equal basis and accessing services (UN 16/12/2016, HRW 03/12/2020). Due to the lack of services available to them and the many obstacles they face in their everyday lives, people with disabilities have generally poorer health, lower education achievements, fewer economic opportunities, and higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities (UN 16/12/2016). Depending on the condition of their disability, they are also particularly impacted by structural issues, such as electricity shortages in Gaza due to the blockade, which disrupt the functioning of elevators and impact mobility (HRW 03/12/2020). Import restrictions for Gaza impact the availability of spare parts necessary to repair assistive devices, such as hearing aids (HRW 03/12/2020; Gisha 06/20217).

Escalations of violence, such as the escalation in May, lead to injuries that can turn into long-term disabilities (MSF 28/05/2021). Often times people who live with a new disability in the aftermath of an escalation do not have the means to adapt their houses to their new needs (UN Women 23/06/2021).

Bedouin Communities

There are around 40,000 Bedouins in Palestine, most of which are refugees and displaced indigenous tribes settled around Jerusalem and in the West Bank, especially in area C (UN 09/2013). Bedouin clans and tribes today are impacted by the construction and expansion of settlements, restrictive zoning and planning regimes, and confiscations of land. Their nomadic lifestyle is affected by increasing restriction of movements (KII 31/08/2021). Many clans were divided over the years and lost contact with their leaders which triggered the dissolution of their traditional leadership and decision-making mechanisms (UN 09/2013). Consequently, they are fragmented as a community, compared to the rest of Palestine, and have decreasing ability to deploy community coping mechanisms and social safety nets. More in-depth information on demolitions and the impact on Bedouin communities is available in ACAPS' [Impact of demolition policies in the West Bank](#).



LGBTQI+

There is limited information regarding the needs and coping strategies of LGBTQI+ people in Palestine. However, the significance of tradition and religion among Palestinian communities, prevailing negative societal attitudes towards sexual diversity, and criminalisation of same-sex sexual activity in Gaza, suggest that people who may identify differently are likely to be excluded from social structures, resulting in increased challenges of accessing social safety nets and employing community-based coping strategies (UNHRC 03/03/2021; HaDin 12/20219; Amnesty 2020).

Coping and response capacity

The mitigation of the social impacts of recurrent episodes of violence in Palestine occurs at different levels: at the individual and the community level, through state services, local and national non-governmental organisations, and through international organisations. This section provides a brief overview. For a further discussion of response and adaptations in Gaza, please see ACAPS' report on [economic vulnerability in Gaza](#).

Coping strategies

Palestinians have developed a variety of ways to cope as individuals and as a community with the protracted crisis, numerous restrictions, and constant threat of violence. Among the main strategies are social support, the will to persevere and to survive, political resistance, and finding support in religious faith as a source of resilience and meaning (Hammad & Tribe 31/03/2020 a). Palestinians' commitment to perceive their individual suffering as part of a greater national narrative has also fostered multigenerational solidarity, social support, and psychological strength (Afana et al., 06/2018). Engaging in voluntary work and community solidarity is another source of coping that fosters meaningfulness within daily life (Hammad & Tribe 31/03/2020 b; University of Eastern Finland 07/01/2015). In the aftermath of the escalation last May, in Gaza, people came together and cleared debris, repaired structures, and supported community members in need (KII 24/09/21).

However, as discussed previously, mental health issues and economic struggle have also contributed to the use of negative strategies such as gender-based violence, dropping out of school, early marriage and child exploitation (UN Women 23/06/2021). Studies have also shown the use of drugs to cope with the economic situation, living conditions, and trauma (UNODC 11/2017; Al-Afifi et al. 30/08/2019).

Welfare services and social safety nets

The social protection system in Palestine is under the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) and is supported by the World Bank and the European Union. It was already under strain to cope with increasing vulnerability and severely food insecure households in 2020 (ILO accessed 27/09/2021). Pre COVID-19, the National Cash Transfer Programme (NCTP) from the MoSD was only reaching 40% of the extreme poor Palestinians out of an estimated 1.5 million poor and 1.6 million food insecure. The amount of the benefit was reported as no longer appropriate to address the worsening poverty dynamics (ILO accessed 27/09/2021).

In Gaza, the split of the Palestinian civil service has reduced the capacity of local institutions to deliver services, increasing the hardship of the population (OCHA 23/07/2017; Al Shabaka 14/03/2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has further increased the demand for social services (ILO 05/2021). June and November 2020, the PA did not accept the tax revenue that Israel collects on its behalf, to protest Israel's annexation plans for parts of the West Bank (Reuters 17/11/2020). This resulted in additional pressure on the PA's resources and ability to provide social protection to people impacted by the pandemic (ILO 05/2021; Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021).

Limited humanitarian response capacity

Considering the humanitarian situation, the impact of the escalation in May, and the high level of social and protection needs, humanitarian organisations have had to respond with increased programs and service provision. However, the response is limited by several legal, political, and funding constraints.

In Gaza, international and local NGOs are limited in their ability to engage and coordinate with Hamas, which is designated as a terrorist organisation by many donor countries and institutions. The "no-contact" policy with Hamas enacted as an anti-terrorism legislation in many donor countries restricts the operational space for humanitarian organisations (OCHA 23/06/2017; OCHA and NRC 25/07/2013). For example, this affects the ability to support government-run schools (OCHA and NRC 25/07/2013). The degree of coordination with Hamas differs from one organisation to another (KII 15/09/2021).

Coordination with Israeli authorities creates additional challenges. Due to security measures imposed by Israel, access of humanitarian personnel to and from Gaza is unsteady, and the entry of humanitarian goods must always be negotiated (KIIs 18/08/2021 and 15/09/2021). There have also been cases of humanitarian workers being accused of using humanitarian aid to help fund Hamas war efforts (The Guardian 19/08/2021).

INFORMATION GAPS

- Precise information about the impact of the escalation in May on remittances.
- Up-to-date information about people with disabilities.
- Information about the impact of the May escalation on SGBV.
- The impact of the May escalation on the political space and political participation.
- To what extent community- or family-based coping mechanisms have been used following the escalation in May, and to what extent they have alleviated the impact on households.
- Coping mechanisms when a whole community is impacted, disrupting community-based coping mechanisms.
- LGBTQI+ individuals and their access to coping mechanisms.