



**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
COUNCIL**

Distr.  
LIMITED  
E/ESCWA/C.7/2024/7  
16 October 2024  
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

Committee on Women  
Twelfth session  
Muscat, 8 December 2024

Item 9 of the provisional agenda

**Socioeconomic situation of Palestinian women and girls**

**Summary**

The present document reviews the complex situation of Palestinian women and girls in the occupied Palestinian territory from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2024, and describes how Palestinian women and girls continue to suffer from the adverse effects of occupation, political violence, and human rights violations. It highlights the gendered impacts of Israeli policies, including increasing settlement activity; threatened evictions and house demolitions, particularly in East Jerusalem and Area C of the West Bank; and the consequences of the 17-year Israeli blockade and siege of the Gaza Strip that has only intensified in the aftermath of 7 October 2023 and subsequent war.

The present document concludes with a set of recommendations that address the need to improve the situation of women and girls in the occupied Palestinian territory, and end the current war on Gaza. A holistic, intersectional and gender-sensitive humanitarian response is required post-conflict, which contributes to promoting sustainable development. The Committee on Women is invited to review the contents of the present document, and recommend approaches to support Palestinian women and girls going forward.

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## Introduction

1. The present document reviews the complex socioeconomic situation of Palestinian women and girls in the occupied Palestinian territory from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2024, and describes how Palestinian women and girls continue to suffer from the adverse effects of occupation, political violence, and human rights violations.<sup>1</sup> It highlights the gendered impacts of Israeli policies, including increasing settlement activity; threatened evictions and house demolitions, particularly in East Jerusalem and Area C of the West Bank; and the consequences of the 17-year Israeli blockade and siege of the Gaza Strip that has only intensified in the aftermath of 7 October 2023 and subsequent war.
2. Even before 7 October 2023, Gaza was in a protracted humanitarian crisis owing to the cumulative impacts of the siege and successive military offensives, which has been compounded by the ongoing internal Palestinian political divide. Despite several measures implemented by the Government of Palestine over the reporting period, violence against women and girls continues and women's political and economic participation remains curtailed. Progress in aligning national legislation and policies with international frameworks has been slow, in part due to the fragmentation of the occupied Palestinian territory and an inability to convene the Palestinian Legislative Council.
3. The present document reviews the socioeconomic situation of Palestinian women and girls over a specific period (1 July 2022 to 30 June 2024). However, it also acknowledges the ongoing war on Gaza and its catastrophic human toll beyond the reporting period. Therefore, while the subsequent sections provide casualty and injury numbers, among other data, for the reporting period, box 1 provides casualty and injury data as of 7 October 2024.

### Box 1. Impact of the events of 7 October 2023 one year on

One year into the war on Gaza, the Office for the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) reported the following:

“The ensuing military attack by Israel on Gaza has killed approximately 42,000 Palestinians in Gaza, including 17,000 children injured more than 97,000, many with lifelong injuries, as of 6 October 2024, and displaced nearly 2 million. The majority of those killed are children and women, while an estimated 10,000 Palestinian bodies remain under the rubble with no possibility to retrieve and identify them to bring solace to grieving families. In the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, nearly 700 have been killed including 176 children. Israeli Forces also killed 986 healthcare workers, humanitarian workers, among them 225 UNRWA staff, and 126 journalists, as well as destroyed hospitals, schools, and refugee camps, leaving no safe place in Gaza.”

*Source:* OHCHR, [7 October: United Nations experts call for end of violence and accountability after year of human loss and suffering and blatant disregard for international law](#), 2024.

## I. Context and overview

4. From 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2024, significant developments occurred in the occupied Palestinian territory, with war and occupation undermining the rights of Palestinian women and girls. The main development during the reporting period was the war on Gaza, which began on 7 October 2023 in response to

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<sup>1</sup> The present document draws on the forthcoming ESCWA biennial report on the situation of women and girls in the occupied Palestinian territory (July 2022 – June 2024), in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolutions [2003/42](#) and [2021/5](#) on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, and ESCWA resolution [330 \(XXX\)](#) that requests the secretariat to monitor, analyse and document the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation and Israeli violations of the rights of the Palestinian people and of international law. The present document also provides an overview of progress and setbacks in advancing the political, social, economic and human rights of Palestinian women and girls in the context of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the blockade of and war on Gaza.

attacks and hostage-taking inside Israel by armed Palestinian groups. The war has intensified the already severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza, resulting from a 17-year blockade and 57 years of occupation by Israel.

5. The humanitarian costs of the war on Gaza have eroded the modest gains made in human development and gender equality, leaving the future of millions of Palestinian women and girls uncertain. Before the onset of the war, the United Nations had estimated that, in 2023, approximately 2.1 million Palestinians across the West Bank and Gaza would require some form of humanitarian assistance, with 49.2 per cent being women.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, before 7 October 2023, about 80 per cent of Gaza's residents relied on humanitarian aid.<sup>3</sup> Since then, this number has neared 100 per cent.<sup>4</sup>

6. As the war reached its ninth month, the grave risks that all civilians in Gaza faced from Israeli military operations were particularly amplified for women and girls. It has therefore been designated as a "war on women" in a context where "no place is safe".<sup>5</sup> This is especially true for pregnant and lactating women, older persons, and those living with chronic health conditions, mental health issues, or disabilities. At least 3,000 women may have become widows or heads of households since the war began,<sup>6</sup> increasing their vulnerabilities. The acute security threats in Gaza have also severely impacted the situation of Palestinian women and girls in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where stricter movement restrictions and heightened insecurity, including military raids and arrests, have been observed.

### **A. Major political and security developments**

7. In the run-up to the 7 October 2023 war, the political and security situation in the occupied Palestinian territory was tense. The situation has severely escalated since 7 October 2023, when armed Palestinian groups entered Israel from Gaza, killing nearly 1,200 persons and taking around 250 hostages.<sup>7</sup> In response, Israel formally declared war on Gaza, unleashing an unprecedented assault on the enclave. Since then, Israeli authorities have sealed all crossings into Gaza, blocking the entry and exit of people and goods, including desperately needed humanitarian assistance.

8. Since the start of the war, Gaza has suffered increased destruction of homes and civilian infrastructure; poor access to shelter, health, food, water and sanitation; a lack of safe spaces; and rising death and injury rates. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the occupation has been further entrenched through increased settlement activity, continued land confiscation and seizure, access restrictions and other military measures, and Palestinian rights violations.

9. During the reporting period but prior to the start of the war on Gaza, 880 Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory were killed (including 15 women and 8 girls), while 18,707 were injured (including 417 women and 182 girls).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), [Humanitarian needs overview: occupied Palestinian territory](#), January 2023.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), [Occupied Palestinian territory emergency appeal](#), 2023.

<sup>4</sup> UNRWA, [Nearly 2 million people depend on assistance from UNRWA as war in Gaza enters 200 days and violence increases in the West Bank](#), 2024.

<sup>5</sup> UN-Women (2024). [Scarcity and fear: a gender analysis of the impact of the war in Gaza on vital services essential to women's and girls' health, safety, and dignity - water, sanitation and hygiene \(WASH\)](#), 2024.

<sup>6</sup> UN-Women (2024). [Gender alert: the gendered impact of the crisis in Gaza](#), 2024.

<sup>7</sup> [A/HRC/56/CRP.3](#).

<sup>8</sup> OCHA [data on casualties](#). These numbers do not include those impacted by the war on Gaza, which are discussed in the following section.

## 1. Security context in Gaza

10. The situation for women and girls in Gaza has deteriorated exponentially since 7 October 2023. Widespread destruction, and direct threats to life and security, have resulted in the displacement of nearly the entire population of 2.23 million people, many of whom have been displaced multiple times.

11. From 7 October 2023 to 30 June 2024, 38,243 Palestinians in Gaza were killed (including 10,569 women and 15,919 children), and 88,033 had been injured.<sup>9</sup> About 10,000 persons were estimated to be trapped under rubble,<sup>10</sup> and 4,700 women and children were reported missing.<sup>11</sup> As at 30 June 2024, more than 70,000 structures were destroyed and an estimated 1.7 million persons were displaced.<sup>12</sup>

12. During the reporting period, food insecurity was catastrophic, with an increasing risk of famine.<sup>13</sup> Research indicates that 84 per cent of women reported that their family ate half or less of the food they used to before 7 October 2023, with mothers and other adult women scavenging for food under rubble or in dumpsters, and eating last and least.<sup>14</sup> Female heads of households, older women, and women with disabilities faced greater insecurity when attempting to access food distribution sites.<sup>15</sup> Older persons with disabilities, women with disabilities, and children with disabilities have lost access to appropriate sanitation facilities, safe and accessible shelter and, crucially, food and water to survive<sup>16</sup> (box 2).

### Box 2. Situation of women and girls with disabilities in Gaza

“Women and girls in particular conditions of vulnerability, such as older women and women and girls with disabilities, are living in unimaginable circumstances. Older women are facing hardships due to chronic illnesses, reliance on care and limited mobility caused by aging. The impact on women and girls with disabilities has been devastating, as there has been a total breakdown of already limited care and support systems, accessible physical and informational infrastructure and access to assistive devices, medicines, and other needs. Any prospect they had of living independently and being heard has been shattered.”

“The Committee [on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities] is shocked by the account of a 14-year-old girl with cerebral palsy and refugee in Eastern Rafah, whose parents carried her during the family escape from the North to the South of Gaza and who had lost her assistive devices, including a wheelchair, amid military attacks. Being exhausted and exposed to the dangerous flee, the girl desperately cried out, ‘*Mama, it’s over. Leave me here, and you run away*’.”

Sources: OHCHR, [Occupied Palestinian territory and Israel: UN experts call for permanent ceasefire to protect rights and futures of women and girls](#), 2023; OHCHR, [Palestinians with disabilities subject to unbearable consequences of the ongoing hostilities and violence in the OPT](#), 2024.

13. Considering the disproportionate response of Israel and the resultant humanitarian disaster, United Nations independent experts and international law scholars have warned that acts committed during the current

<sup>9</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), [Israeli occupation aggression on Palestine since October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023](#), 10/11/2024.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, [10,000 people feared buried under the rubble in Gaza](#), 2024.

<sup>11</sup> PCBS, [Israeli occupation aggression on Palestine since October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023](#), 10/11/2024.

<sup>12</sup> OCHA, [Reported impact since 7 October 2023](#).

<sup>13</sup> IPC, [Famine Review Committee: Gaza Strip](#), June 2024.

<sup>14</sup> UN-Women, [Press release: 9,000 women have been killed in Gaza since early October](#), 2024.

<sup>15</sup> UN-Women, [Gender alert: the gendered impact of the crisis in Gaza](#), 2024.

<sup>16</sup> OHCHR, [Palestinians with disabilities subject to unbearable consequences of the ongoing hostilities and violence in the OPT](#), 2024.

war may amount to genocide.<sup>17</sup> In response to the death, destruction and increasing impunity, on 29 December 2023, South Africa instituted proceedings against Israel before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) concerning alleged violations by Israel in Gaza of its obligations pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide under *South Africa v. Israel*. ICJ found a plausible risk of “irreparable prejudice” to the rights of Palestinians in Gaza, a protected group under the Convention, and issued provisional measures on 26 January 2024. These measures were reaffirmed on 19 February 2024, and additional orders were issued on 24 May 2024.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, on 21 May 2024, the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court submitted an application for the issuance of arrest warrants against Israeli and Hamas officials for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the context of the war.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. Security context in the West Bank

14. The situation for women and girls in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has been seriously affected by the war on Gaza. Even before the war, 2023 was already proving to be one of the deadliest years in the West Bank since the Second Intifada.<sup>20</sup> Between 7 October 2023 and 3 June 2024, 508 Palestinians, including 124 children, were killed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, 200 of whom have been killed since the start of 2024 until the time of writing (these include 491 killed by Israeli forces, 10 by Israeli settlers, and 7 where it remains unknown whether the perpetrators were Israeli soldiers or settlers). In addition, over 5,150 Palestinians, including about 800 children, were injured in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, between 7 October 2023 and 3 June 2024, more than a third of whom by live ammunition.<sup>21</sup>

15. The deterioration of the situation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, increased the protection needs of single women, female heads of households, adolescent girls, women with disabilities, and older women. The continued destruction of public infrastructure, schools, hospitals and housing; movement and access restrictions; and the revocation of Israeli work permits significantly impacted the livelihoods of Palestinians in the West Bank and increased the vulnerabilities of female-headed households and single mothers.

## B. Impacts of the occupation

16. Until the outbreak of the current war on Gaza, the enclave endured a blockade since 2007 that not only prevented the movement of goods and services in and out of Gaza but also restricted the movement of Palestinians, including those seeking to travel for work or education opportunities, and those in need of medical treatment. In July 2023, the Palestinian Ministry of Health issued 9,698 referrals for health services delivered outside of the occupied Palestinian territory; referrals for female patients comprised 46 per cent. During the same period, 81 per cent of patient permits in Gaza were approved; however, only 49 per cent of companion permits were approved. In the West Bank, 75 per cent of patient permits were approved, and 73 per cent of companion permits were approved.<sup>22</sup>

17. During the reporting period, the pace of displacement and demolitions has accelerated in the West Bank, occurring not only in rural and Bedouin communities in Area C, but also increasingly in refugee camps and towns, particularly in and around Tulkarem and Jenin. In two years, Israel has forcibly displaced populations

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<sup>17</sup> [A/HRC/55/73](#).

<sup>18</sup> Provisional measures and details of the case are available at: <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/192/provisional-measures>.

<sup>19</sup> ICC, [Statement of ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC: Applications for arrest warrants in the situation in the State of Palestine](#), 2024.

<sup>20</sup> OHCHR, [Israel/Palestine: UN experts condemn renewed violence and Israeli killings of Palestinians in occupied West Bank](#), 2023.

<sup>21</sup> OCHA, [Humanitarian Situation Update #175 | West Bank](#), 2024.

<sup>22</sup> WHO, [Monthly Report](#), July 2023.

from six Palestinian Bedouin and herding communities in the West Bank, namely Ras a-Tin, ‘Ein Samia, al-Baq’ah, al-Qabun, Khirbet Simri, and Widady a-Tahta.<sup>23</sup>

18. During the first half of 2023, the Israeli Government approved building 12,349 new housing units within settlements in the occupied West Bank.<sup>24</sup> In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, 2,305 structures were demolished (198 were donor-funded structures) and 3,862 people were displaced (1,090 men, 1,047 women, 844 girls and 933 boys).<sup>25</sup> Home demolitions have a particularly adverse impact on women, as traditional gender norms often equate the home as a woman’s domain, where they are expected to care for the family’s practical and emotional needs.

19. Systematic arrest operations against Palestinians, including women human rights defenders, journalists and humanitarian workers, intensified during the reporting period. On 18 August 2022, Israeli forces raided and closed the offices of seven Palestinian civil society organizations in the West Bank, including the Union of Palestinian Women’s Committees.<sup>26</sup> According to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, the Israel Security Agency threatened over a dozen Union of Palestinian Women’s Committees staff members, and some of their children, and tried to coerce them to stop their activism through the use of threats with a clear gender dimension. One staff member reported that she had been targeted through her daughter, who had received several phone calls from the Agency, and another reported that Agency agents had threatened to interfere with her daughter’s college application.<sup>27</sup>

20. Settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank increased substantially in the first half of 2023, resulting in an average of three incidents per day, compared with two per day in 2022 and one per day in 2021.<sup>28</sup> Since the onset of the war on Gaza, these incidents have surged to an average of seven per day, marking the highest daily average of settler-related incidents affecting Palestinians since 2006, when the United Nations started recording such data.<sup>29</sup> Since 7 October 2023, 943 attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians have occurred, resulting in Israeli settlers killing 10 Palestinians, injuring an additional 231 others, destroying or damaging over 43,000 Palestinian trees and saplings, and damaging other Palestinian property in 748 incidents.<sup>30</sup>

21. The number of movement obstacles, including checkpoints, roadblocks, road gates and earth-mounds, deployed by Israeli forces to permanently or intermittently control, restrict and monitor Palestinian movement in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem and the H2 area of Hebron) increased from a high of 645 in early 2023<sup>31</sup> to at least 790 by mid-2024.<sup>32</sup> These restrictions impeded access to services and resources, disrupted family and social life, undermined Palestinians’ enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights, harmed livelihoods, and contributed to the fragmentation of the West Bank.

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<sup>23</sup> B’Tselem, [The pogroms are working - the transfer is already happening](#), 2024.

<sup>24</sup> Peace Now, [A record number of housing units were promoted in the West Bank in only six months](#), 2023.

<sup>25</sup> OCHA, [Breakdown of data on demolition and displacement in the West Bank](#), 2024.

<sup>26</sup> The other organizations included Addameer, al-Haq, Defense for Children International – Palestine, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, Bisan Center for Research and Development, and Health Work Committees.

<sup>27</sup> [A/HRC/53/22](#).

<sup>28</sup> OCHA, [Displacement of Palestinian herders amid increasing settler violence](#), 2023.

<sup>29</sup> ECHO, [Supporting Palestinian communities affected by settler violence in the West Bank](#), 2024.

<sup>30</sup> OCHA, [Humanitarian Situation Update #175 | West Bank](#), 2024.

<sup>31</sup> OCHA, [Movement and Access in the West Bank](#), August 2023.

<sup>32</sup> OCHA, [Humanitarian Situation Update #175 | West Bank](#), 2024.

### **C. Palestinian efforts to advance women's rights**

22. While the State of Palestine has acceded to and engaged with several key international frameworks, Israel, as the occupying Power, has responsibilities under international law for the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the women, peace and security agenda, among other international treaties and conventions, in the occupied Palestinian territory. However, while the occupation and the war are major impediments to the attainment of women's rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, the ratification and good faith implementation of international conventions also entails legal obligations on behalf of the Palestinian Government to promote and protect the rights of women and girls.

23. The State of Palestine acceded to CEDAW in April 2014 without any reservations or declarations, and to its Optional Protocol in April 2019. As a party to the Convention, the State of Palestine is responsible for ensuring that its legislation and policies are in line with international standards. However, the Government has yet to publish CEDAW and its Optional Protocol in the Official Gazette.

24. The fragmented legal context continues to pose a major obstacle to the alignment of national laws with CEDAW. However, there has been some progress on gender-sensitive legal reform in line with CEDAW. For example, regulation No. 28 of 2022 was approved by the Council of Ministers, and amends the former National Referral System for Battered Women. The new regulation augments access to support services for survivors of violence, but it still has legal and procedural gaps. The State of Palestine also passed federal decree law No. 24 of 2022 amending the Civil Service Law No. 4 of 1998, which grants three-day paternity leave with full pay for fathers. A decision by the Council of Ministers concerning gender sensitive budgets, based on the Council of Ministers' resolution No. 13/05/01MW/SF for 2009 on gender mainstreaming in the Government's budgeting process, enables the Ministry of Women's Affairs to monitor ministries' commitments to women's issues. Lastly, decrees No. 29, 30 and 31 of 2023 amended three criminal codes (Criminal Code No. 76 of 1936 in Gaza, Criminal Code No. 16 of 1960 in the West Bank, and the Revolutionary Penal Law of the Palestine Liberation Organization of 1979), by criminalizing discrimination based on gender in torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (for the purpose of implementing law by decree No. 25 of 2022 on the National Commission against Torture). Notably, the State of Palestine is still without significant legislation that criminalizes all forms of violence against women and girls, including domestic/family violence and sexual harassment.

25. The latest five-yearly review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+30), submitted by the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs, is entitled "Years of the pandemic and the genocide committed by the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian people: State measures to promote gender equality and women's empowerment for five years: May 2019–2024". Considering the continued Israeli aggression and the magnitude of death and destruction, the report acknowledges that planning for the next five years may be impossible. However, confronting the impacts of the war, providing relief to the people of Gaza, and rebuilding the enclave remain priorities.

26. More generally, additional priority areas for the State of Palestine include equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice; quality education, training and lifelong learning for women and girls; poverty eradication, agricultural productivity and food security; ending violence against women and girls; access to affordable and quality health care, including sexual and reproductive health care and reproductive rights, particularly maternal and child health in Gaza; political participation and representation; unpaid care and domestic work/reconciliation of work and family life; women's entrepreneurship; and promoting gender equality as part of environmental sustainability and climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies.

27. Under the leadership of the National Committee for the Implementation of Security Council resolution 1325, chaired by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the National Action Plan 2020–2024 on the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda was issued, following the conclusion of the first National Action



Plan (2017–2019) of the State of Palestine. The second National Action Plan mirrors the first in emphasizing the need to protect women and girls from the impacts of occupation, to hold Israel accountable, and to enhance women’s political participation.

28. The implementation of the National Action Plan and engagement with the women, peace and security agenda has not been substantial, as highlighted by the increasing violence and destruction of the war on Gaza and its impact in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Overall, the women, peace and security agenda has been critiqued for not being responsive to the Palestinian context, which is characterized by a belligerent occupation that is both prolonged and entrenched, and that has produced multi-generational displacement and trauma.

## II. Demographic and health profile

### A. Population statistics

29. The population of the occupied Palestinian territory is estimated at 5.48 million (2.7 million are female and 2.78 million are male), of which 3.25 million reside in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and 2.23 million are in Gaza.<sup>33</sup> The number of registered Palestinian refugees in January 2022 was about 2.5 million in the West Bank and Gaza, with about 66 per cent of the population of Gaza identifying as refugees.<sup>34</sup> The Palestinian population is young, with more than a third under the age of 14 (37.3 per cent).<sup>35</sup>

**Population age distribution (Percentage)**

|             | West Bank | Gaza Strip | State of Palestine |
|-------------|-----------|------------|--------------------|
| 0-14 years  | 35.2      | 40.4       | 37.3               |
| 15-29 years | 28.1      | 27.8       | 28                 |
| 60+ years   | 6.3       | 4.8        | 5.7                |

30. The average household size in the occupied Palestinian territory is five persons (4.7 in the West Bank, and 5.6 in Gaza),<sup>36</sup> and 11.5 per cent of households are female headed (12 per cent in the West Bank, and 11 per cent in Gaza).<sup>37</sup> From data gathered in 2021, the median age at first marriage is about 26 for males and 21 for females.<sup>38</sup>

31. Child marriage is on the decline but still prevalent in vulnerable and marginalized communities, particularly in Gaza, isolated communities in Area C, and in East Jerusalem. An estimated 12 per cent of marriages registered in 2021 were for girls under 18 years old (6 per cent in the West Bank, and 19 per cent in Gaza) and 0.4 per cent for boys under 18.<sup>39</sup>

32. The number of persons with disabilities in the occupied Palestinian territory is estimated at 117,000 persons, constituting 2.1 per cent of the population, with approximately 59,000 persons in the West Bank and 58,000 persons in Gaza.<sup>40</sup> These numbers are exponentially increasing owing to the war in Gaza, where the

<sup>33</sup> PCBS, [Conditions of the Palestinian Population on the Occasion of the World Population Day](#), 11/07/2023.

<sup>34</sup> PCBS, [The conditions of the Palestinian people through statistical figures and findings, on the eve of World Refugee Day](#), 20/06/2024.

<sup>35</sup> PCBS, [Indicators](#), 2023.

<sup>36</sup> PCBS, [Palestine in Figures 2022](#), 2023.

<sup>37</sup> PCBS, [Conditions of the Palestinian Population on the Occasion of the World Population Day](#), 11/07/2023.

<sup>38</sup> PCBS, [The Reality of the Palestinian Women on the Eve of the International Women's Day](#), 08/03/2023.

<sup>39</sup> PCBS, [The Palestinian Children's Situation on the Occasion of the Palestinian Child Day](#), 05/04/2023.

<sup>40</sup> PCBS, [Press release on the Occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities](#), 03/12/2023.

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities expressed concern that of 79,562 persons injured in Gaza as at May 2024, at least 5,000 were persons with disabilities, and that more than 1,000 children have acquired an impairment because of lost limbs.<sup>41</sup>

33. As at June 2024, a total of 9,300 Palestinian prisoners (including 74 female prisoners and 250 child prisoners) were in Israeli prisons, 3,410 of whom are designated as “administrative detainees.”<sup>42</sup> There is no clear estimate of the number of females who have been arrested or detained in Gaza since 7 October 2023.

## **B. Health indicators and trends**

34. During the reporting period, the accessibility and availability of health services and determinants of health for women and girls in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza continued to be shaped by the impacts of the occupation and blockade. Economic restrictions also continued to have a detrimental effect on the public financing of health care, with the Palestinian Authority facing a chronic fiscal crisis, exacerbated by periodic withholding of customs duties and other revenues by Israel.<sup>43</sup> Military assaults since 7 October 2023 have amplified these risks.

35. These assaults have also damaged the already fragile water and electricity infrastructure, and have led to the progressive destruction of the health sector in Gaza, increasing the risk of death, permanent disability and untreated injuries among women and girls, and a lack of treatment for those with chronic conditions. By mid-November 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that a “public health catastrophe” was developing in Gaza, with 26 of 35 hospitals no longer operational owing to the bombing and blockade.<sup>44</sup> The World Bank, in its interim report of March 2024, estimated that 84 per cent of the physical infrastructure in the health sector had been damaged, and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reported that about 700 health facilities and hospitals had been affected or damaged as at 29 April 2024.<sup>45</sup>

36. Despite only two maternity hospitals functioning as at April 2024, approximately 155,000 pregnant women and new mothers in Gaza struggle to access basic health care, with an estimated 180 deliveries occurring every day under dire conditions, and with 15 per cent facing complications, thus increasing maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality risks.<sup>46</sup> However, even maternity hospitals are prioritizing patients with life-threatening conditions over pregnancies.<sup>47</sup> As a result, more and more women are going through labour in overwhelmed health-care facilities, with some being subjected to caesarean sections without anaesthesia or having to deliver without any medical assistance in shelters, tents, homes or on the streets, often with untrained assistance.<sup>48</sup> There are reports of women self-inducing labour to avoid giving birth while on the move.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> OHCHR, [Palestinians with disabilities subject to unbearable consequences of the ongoing hostilities and violence in the OPT](#), 2024.

<sup>42</sup> Addameer, [Statistics](#).

<sup>43</sup> [A76/15](#).

<sup>44</sup> WHO, [oPt Emergency Situation Update](#), 2023.

<sup>45</sup> E/ESCWA/CL4.SIT/2024/TP.4.

<sup>46</sup> United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), [“Gaza is at breaking point”: Health workers and patients describe an unfolding catastrophe in Rafah](#), 2024; UNFPA, [UNFPA Palestine Situation Report](#), 2024.

<sup>47</sup> International Rescue Committee (IRC), [Pregnant women and mothers in Gaza are fighting to keep themselves and their babies alive amidst healthcare collapse, the IRC warns](#), 2024.

<sup>48</sup> International Planned Parenthood Federation, [With the forced closure of hospitals, midwives are a lifeline for pregnant women in Gaza](#), 2023.

<sup>49</sup> Save the Children, [Women self-inducing labour and facing life-threatening complications in pregnancy after nine months of Gaza conflict](#), 2024.

37. Survey data in Rafah, Gaza, show that over 6 out of 10 of interviewed women who were pregnant at the time of conducting the survey or have been pregnant since 7 October 2023 reported complications, including 95 per cent suffering from urinary tract infections, 80 per cent from anaemia, 30 per cent from pre-term labour, and 50 per cent from hypertensive disorders. In households with nursing mothers, 72 per cent reported challenges with breastfeeding and meeting the nutritional needs of babies.<sup>50</sup> It is estimated that 37 mothers die every day in Gaza.<sup>51</sup>

38. Since the first month of the war, women and girls in Gaza have reported a lack of access to critical sexual and reproductive health care, along with increased vulnerability to infections like urinary infections.<sup>52</sup> During the reporting period, women and girls continued to face these issues with little to no medical treatment available, especially in severely overcrowded shelters or tents that offer minimal privacy. Moreover, an estimated 690,000 women and girls who require menstrual hygiene supplies are unable to manage their menstrual cycles with dignity. Consequently, there are reports of some women taking contraceptive pills to avoid dealing with unhygienic menstrual situations.<sup>53</sup>

39. In the West Bank, health vulnerability for Palestinian women and girls has also been amplified. Access to health services for women and girls in the West Bank has long been undermined by administrative and geographical divisions, as well as building restrictions, particularly affecting Palestinians in East Jerusalem, Area C, H2 of Hebron, and the Seam Zone between the 1949 armistice line and the separation barrier. From 7 October 2023 to 30 May 2024, WHO recorded 447 health-care attacks in the West Bank, including assaults on health-care workers, hospitals, and ambulances, disruption of vital medical services, and deprivation of life-saving treatment.<sup>54</sup> Movement restrictions, which have been increased since 7 October 2023, have impeded the continuity of sexual and reproductive health services for over 73,000 pregnant women in the West Bank, of whom 8,100 were expected to give birth within a 30-day period.<sup>55</sup>

### C. Gender-based violence

40. Women and girls in the occupied Palestinian territory face heightened risks of gender-based violence owing to the manifold effects of Israeli policies and practices, combined with prevailing traditional patriarchal norms within Palestinian society. The most recent data on violence against women from 2019 indicated that 59.3 per cent of married or ever-married women were exposed to some type of violence by their husbands within the occupied Palestinian territory (52.3 per cent in the West Bank, and 70.4 per cent in Gaza). Regarding exposure to violence from others, 19.2 per cent of married or ever-married women were exposed to some type of violence (19.8 per cent in the West Bank, and 18.4 per cent in Gaza).<sup>56</sup> About 10 per cent of currently or ever-married women have been subjected to some form of cyberviolence, while 8 per cent have been exposed to violence through telecommunication.<sup>57</sup> According to a 2022 multi-sectoral needs assessment, 14.1 per cent of households in the West Bank and 14.2 per cent in Gaza reported girls being at risk of verbal harassment,

<sup>50</sup> UN-Women, [Intensified military operations will bring increased death and despair for Rafah's 700,000 women and girls](#), 2024.

<sup>51</sup> UN-Women, [Press release: 9,000 women have been killed in Gaza since early October](#), 2024.

<sup>52</sup> IPPF, [Women and girls sheltering for their lives in Gaza face dire lack of sexual and reproductive health supplies, disease outbreak](#), 2023.

<sup>53</sup> UNFPA, [UNFPA Palestine Situation Report](#), 2024.

<sup>54</sup> European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, [Palestine: statement on attacks on medical and civilian infrastructure in Gaza and the West Bank](#), 2024.

<sup>55</sup> UNFPA, [UNFPA Palestine Situation Report](#), 2024.

<sup>56</sup> PCBS, [Percentage of currently married or ever married women \(15–64 years\) in Palestine who were exposed \(at least once\) to one type of violence from others except for the husband during the past 12 months by background characteristics and type of violence](#), 2006.

<sup>57</sup> PCBS, [Conditions of the Palestinian Population on the Occasion of the World Population Day](#), 11/07/2023.

and 6.1 per cent in the West Bank and 6.5 per cent in Gaza reported girls being at risk of sexual harassment or sexual violence.<sup>58</sup> There is no official data on femicide; however, the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling documented 29 cases in 2022, and 14 femicide cases as at August 2023.<sup>59</sup>

41. Exposure to various forms of violence severely impacts the mental health of women and girls. Violence within Palestinian families, including various forms of gender-based violence, such as domestic violence, sexual abuse and early marriage, are key drivers of the rising need for mental-health and psychosocial-support services.<sup>60</sup> Mental health indicators, including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, are significantly worse for Palestinian households that report violence against women or children. More broadly, women and girls who experience overlapping vulnerabilities, including exposure to trauma, violence and conflict, and those from poorer households whose economic situation could also be related to conflict exposure, suffer from worse mental health outcomes.<sup>61</sup>

42. The massive forced displacement in Gaza and increasing insecurity have compounded pre-existing gender inequalities and multidimensional vulnerabilities, making the challenge of caretaking for the family exponentially more time-consuming, stressful and intensive for women and girls, leading to increased and unrealistic pressure and expectations placed on women to provide for the family, and resulting in them being blamed and subjected to verbal and physical intimate partner violence.<sup>62</sup> Displaced women and girls have minimal access to essential services, including clean water and latrines, critical health care, and protection against gender-based violence. Severe overcrowding in shelters, a lack of privacy, and scarcity of necessities significantly heighten the risk of gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse.<sup>63</sup>

43. Prior to 7 October 2023, 31 international and national organizations were providing gender-based violence prevention and response services for women and girls. Following the start of the war, the gender-based violence referral pathway collapsed, meaning that the provision of gender-based violence services and other protection measures became extremely difficult, if not impossible, in most locations within Gaza. Furthermore, internally displaced women reported a loss of protection owing to the increasing presence of Israeli Forces and separation from family support networks.<sup>64</sup> Gaza's only two women's shelters are now closed, and telecommunications and electricity blackouts have severely restricted remote gender-based violence services.<sup>65</sup>

44. United Nations rights experts have also called for a probe into the arbitrary detention of hundreds of Palestinian women and girls, and alleged violations such as sexual assaults.<sup>66</sup> Testimonies collected by human rights organizations confirm that detained women were subjected to blindfolding, beating and forced stripping.<sup>67</sup>

45. In the West Bank, gender-based violence services may be limited in areas such as Area C and H2 of Hebron, compounded by restrictions on freedom of movement, resulting in limited access to support and

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<sup>58</sup> WHO, [Gender and health in the occupied Palestinian territory](#), 2023.

<sup>59</sup> WCLAC, [NGO Follow-Up to the Parallel Report to the Initial Report of the State of Palestine Submitted to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), 2023.

<sup>60</sup> Protection Cluster, [Occupied Palestinian territory \(oPt\): Gaza](#), 2022.

<sup>61</sup> World Bank Group and others, [Mental Health in the West Bank and Gaza](#), 2022.

<sup>62</sup> CARE, [Rafah Governorate: deception, destruction & death in the "safe" zone – rapid gender analysis](#), 2024.

<sup>63</sup> Gender-based Violence AoR, [The Gaza Strip: gender-based violence](#), 2024.

<sup>64</sup> UNFPA, [The Gaza Strip: gender-based violence](#), 2024.

<sup>65</sup> UN-Women, ["Scared, exhausted, and expecting the worst" – Women in Gaza describe humanitarian crisis](#), 2024.

<sup>66</sup> United Nations, [Rights experts call for probe into alleged violations against Palestinian women and girls](#), 2024.

<sup>67</sup> Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, [They repeatedly forced me to strip naked](#), 2024.

justice mechanisms (box 3). Since the start of the war, women and girls have been targeted and attacked in their homes by settlers when men were absent.<sup>68</sup>

### **Box 3. Access to justice in the West Bank**

Since 7 October 2023, Israeli occupation forces have imposed a complete closure on the Old City of Hebron, severely disrupting life in the area. The closure has entirely restricted movement, allowing only residents of the Old City to enter and exit during specified hours. Following this decision, the Sharia Court has closed its doors to visitors and complainants, depriving many women of access to justice. Thousands of cases related to alimony and custody have piled up for months, depriving parents of seeing their children and causing numerous cases to stall, with no solution in sight.

*Source:* Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, [Monthly Bulletin](#), February 2024.

## **III. Education, employment and political representation and participation**

### **A. Education**

46. Overall, education attainment remained high for all Palestinians, particularly females. For the 2021–2022 academic year, the participation rate in formal education was 73 per cent (68 per cent for males, and 78 per cent for females). In 2022, 97 and 78 per cent of females completed lower and upper secondary education, respectively, compared with 90 and 53 per cent of males. Within higher education, 62 per cent of enrolled students were female. The overall literacy rate among individuals (15 years and above) was 97.8 per cent, with illiteracy rates at 1.1 per cent for males and 3.3 per cent for females.<sup>69</sup>

47. Despite these impressive numbers, since 7 October 2023, all schools in Gaza have been closed for its 625,000 students, and 87.7 per cent of all school buildings have been damaged or destroyed, including every university.<sup>70</sup> About 39,000 high-school students in Gaza were unable to sit the General Secondary Examinations in 2024.<sup>71</sup>

### **B. Employment**

48. A severe economic crisis has been triggered in the occupied Palestinian territory since 7 October 2023, which means that labour force participation has declined. Prior to the war, women's labour force participation had increased, reaching 19 per cent in 2022 compared with 17 per cent in 2021. However, men's participation was 71 per cent in 2022, compared with 69 per cent in 2021. The unemployment rate for women was 40 per cent compared with 20 per cent for men in 2022.<sup>72</sup> Projections show an increase in the annual unemployment rate in the occupied Palestinian territory to 47.1 per cent if the war continues until August 2024.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Protection Cluster, [Occupied Palestinian territory \(oPt\): West Bank](#), 2024.

<sup>69</sup> PCBS, [Conditions of the Palestinian Population on the Occasion of the World Population Day](#), 11/07/2023.

<sup>70</sup> UNICEF, [UNICEF State of Palestine Humanitarian Situation Report No. 23](#), 2024.

<sup>71</sup> OCHA, [Humanitarian Situation Update #181 | Gaza Strip](#), 2024.

<sup>72</sup> PCBS, [Conditions of the Palestinian Population on the Occasion of the World Population Day](#), 11/07/2023.

<sup>73</sup> International Labour Organization and PCBS, [Impact of the war in Gaza on the labour market and livelihoods in the occupied Palestinian territory: Bulletin No. 4](#), 2024.

### C. Political participation and representation

49. The most recent data on Palestinian women's political participation and representation is from the 2021–2022 local elections in the West Bank, where the percentage of women elected and appointed was 21 per cent. Overall, women constituted about 23 per cent of the Central Council, and 19 per cent of the Palestinian National Council.<sup>74</sup> During the 2021–2022 elections, women voter participation was around 50 per cent, compared with 66 per cent for men, while women led only 2 per cent of candidate lists.<sup>75</sup>

50. At the governmental level, in March 2024, a new Cabinet was installed with 4 of 23 female ministers heading the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Social Development, and the Ministry of State for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates. Of the 15 governors, only 1 is a woman. Moreover, 1 per cent of the heads of local councils are women, as are only 1 per cent of the board of directors of the chambers of commerce, industry and agriculture. Women comprise about 19 per cent of judges, and 18 per cent of prosecutors.<sup>76</sup>

51. Between 7 October 2023 and March 2024, around 240 women had been detained in the West Bank.<sup>77</sup> As of mid-May 2024, 78 female prisoners were in prison, either held under administrative detention or on charges of "incitement".<sup>78</sup> Administrative detentions – without charge or trial that can be renewed indefinitely – were already at a 20-year high before the current war.<sup>79</sup> There are testimonies indicating that detained women have faced severe abuse, including beatings, threats of rape and sexual assault, degrading strip searches, collective naked searches, verbal sexual harassment, the use of menstruation as a means of physical and psychological pressure, and violations of religious beliefs by forcibly removing the *hijab*.<sup>80</sup> These arrests are part of a broader pattern of intensified raids and detentions in the West Bank, which have included violent night-time incursions and destruction of property. Risks of settler violence and arbitrary arrest and detention by Israeli occupation forces threaten to confine women and girls to their homes and deprive them of their livelihoods.<sup>81</sup>

### IV. Conclusion and recommendations

52. The vulnerabilities and threats faced by women and girls in the occupied Palestinian territory cannot be separated from the overall deprivation and violation of rights and protracted humanitarian crises that affect all Palestinians. Consequently, as long as the Israeli occupation, policies and practices, including violence against Palestinians, continue, the enjoyment of rights by Palestinian women will remain unattainable. Consequently, first and foremost, there must be an immediate end to the war on Gaza, alongside a significant scale-up in humanitarian assistance and reconstruction that is holistic, intersectional and gender-sensitive, and includes the active participation of women and girls.

53. The following recommendations address two aspects of the situation of women and girls in the occupied Palestinian territory. The first set of recommendations focus on the situation in Gaza, and the steps necessary to ensure an end to dependency and the full engagement of the Palestinian people, including women and girls,

<sup>74</sup> PCBS, [The Reality of the Palestinian Women on the Eve of the International Women's Day](#), 08/03/2023.

<sup>75</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), [Women's representation in local government: new evidence from the West Bank](#), 2023.

<sup>76</sup> PCBS, [The Reality of the Palestinian Women on the Eve of the International Women's Day](#), 08/03/2023.

<sup>77</sup> Addameer, [On international Women's Day 2024: the deadliest year for Palestinian women](#), 2024.

<sup>78</sup> Addameer, [Statistics](#).

<sup>79</sup> B'Tselem, [Israel breaks 20-year record: 1,002 Palestinians held in administrative detention in March 2023](#), 2023.

<sup>80</sup> WCLAC, [Sexual Violence against Palestinian Women: Submission to the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict](#), 2024.

<sup>81</sup> OHCHR, [Occupied Palestinian territory and Israel: UN experts call for permanent ceasefire to protect rights and futures of women and girls](#), 2023.

in their recovery from occupation and conflict. The second set of recommendations focuses on efforts by the Palestinian Government and other Palestinian stakeholders to advance the rights and socioeconomic and political participation of Palestinian women and girls.

54. The first set of recommendations stem from ESCWA tenets and essential elements for sustainable recovery in Gaza.<sup>82</sup> They should not be viewed as an alternative to the removal of the single most obstructive factor facing the advancement of the rights and socioeconomic conditions of Palestinian women and girls: the Israeli occupation and the policies and practices employed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory. Israel, as the occupying Power, must be held accountable for its violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and for failing to uphold its obligations, including those towards all Palestinian women and girls.

55. As a first step, an immediate permanent ceasefire needs to be implemented, coupled with humanitarian aid entering Gaza without restriction. Such aid must also account for Gazans necessary health and nutrition needs. Concerning the ESCWA tenets, an intervention must ensure the following:

- Consolidate and support Palestinian ownership of all stages of recovery and development in the occupied Palestinian territory.
- Contextualize recovery and development to address the conditions resulting from the Israeli occupation, policies and practices.
- Employ an international law-based approach to recovery and development.
- Rethink Palestinian economic links internally and with the Arab region.

56. These tenets must be employed utilizing an intersectional lens that ensures full engagement with and consideration of Palestinian women and girls, including those with disabilities, widows, female-headed households, and older women. Women and girls are at the forefront of reconstruction efforts, their voices must be heard and their needs met. Only then can the devastating impact of occupation and successive conflicts be mitigated for the State of Palestine and its people.

57. The second set of recommendations are aimed at the Palestinian Government and other Palestinian stakeholders to ensure the rights and empowerment of all women and girls. With the full participation of women's rights organizations and other civil society organizations, the Government must expedite legislative reforms that guarantee justice and gender equality for women. In addition, with the support of the international community and local civil society, the Government must invest in the effective implementation of policies to tackle gender disparities, particularly in economic and political participation, and to improve women and girls' security and well-being. Such interventions should ensure the following:

- Enact legislative amendments and alignment with international commitments, most importantly the endorsement of the unified Palestinian penal code, the personal status law, and the family protection law.
- Consolidate women's participation in decision-making, conflict prevention and national reconciliation processes, in line with the women, peace and security agenda and other relevant international frameworks.
- Change negative attitudes and practices to reduce gender parities and promote the empowerment of women and girls throughout the State of Palestine.

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<sup>82</sup> E/ESCWA/31/9.