

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/ECW/2009/Technical Paper.1
30 July 2009
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)

**SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION OF PALESTINIAN
WOMEN 2006-2009**

Note: The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of ESCWA.

Two dots (..) indicate that data are not available.
Parentheses () indicate negative numbers, unless otherwise stated.
Details and percentages do not necessarily add up to totals, because of rounding.

09-0279

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Executive summary	v
<i>Chapter</i>	
I. POLITICAL FRAMEWORK	1
A. The situation since 2006: A vulnerable society under attack	1
B. 2007-2009: The situation on the ground.....	2
C. The war in Gaza.....	3
II. POPULATION	4
A. Population size, age structure and distribution.....	4
B. Household size.....	4
C. Fertility rates.....	5
III. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS	5
IV. THE LABOUR FORCE	6
A. Workforce participation.....	6
B. Unemployment	8
C. The gender wage gap.....	9
V. POVERTY AND ASSISTANCE	9
A. Effects of poverty	9
B. Social services and social welfare	11
C. Food insecurity	12
D. Education.....	13
E. Health	13
F. Water insecurity.....	14
VI. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION	15
VII. LEGAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS	17

LIST OF TABLES

1. Casualties of the war in Gaza.....	3
2. Annual per capita income, compared with 1999 data	5
3. Labour force participation rate and unemployment rate of persons aged 15 years and above in Palestine by locality, region and sex, 2008.....	8
4. Poverty rates by region, 2004 and 2007	9
5. Selected PA budgetary expenditure, 2005	11

LIST OF BOXES

1. Palestinian casualties.....	2
2. The effect of increasing poverty in Palestine	10
3. Deterioration in health, 2005-2008	14

LIST OF FIGURES

I. Labour force participation by sex, 2007.....	6
II. Gender distribution of professional jobs	7
III. Gender distribution in governmental decision-making positions.....	16
IV. Gender distribution in decision-making positions in NGOs	17
Recommendations	18
<i>Bibliography</i>	20

Executive summary

This study reviews the economic and social status of Palestinian women, focusing on the achievement of women's rights and political, social and economic development in Palestine.

The first part reviews the changes that have taken place since 2006, when an earlier study was published by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).¹ The situation of the population in Palestine is determined by a complex set of internal and external factors. The population faces a number of direct consequences as a result of the occupation, including physical and emotional stress at the personal level, and limited economic development and political participation at the society level. During the period under review, there was a sharp increase in conflict-related fatalities, the consequences of which will be examined later in this paper. The ongoing situation of occupation and conflict has resulted in a continued and increasing dependency of the population on external assistance for the most basic of needs. The division of the West Bank and Gaza and the increasingly conditioned funding by donors have combined to place even greater stress on the Palestinian population as a whole, and its women specifically.

The second part of the study addresses demographic trends. In contrast to other ESCWA member countries, fertility rates in Palestine remain high and have declined only slightly in recent years. Children and young people continue to represent a major segment of the overall population, which poses additional challenges for development.

In an analysis of the participation of women in the labour force and the economy, the study finds that participation levels remain low compared with other countries, both within the region and globally. Furthermore, it identifies disparity between women in the West Bank, who have higher levels of participation, and those in Gaza, who are more severely affected by the gender gap. Palestinian women are mainly employed in the service sector and education, and the Palestinian Authority (PA)² remains their most important employer.

The extent of the increasing gap between the West Bank and Gaza is particularly evident when analysing data on poverty: while poverty rates in the West Bank decreased in 2007, they increased in Gaza, where half the population was living below the poverty line, and food aid and the provision of aid assistance by international donors played an increasingly essential role for survival.

However, the study also reveals a number of positive developments for women in the education and health sectors. Data show that while the overall quality of education available to women in Palestine is variable, access to and participation in education by women is rising. Indeed, a majority of students at local universities and university colleges are now women, although they remain underrepresented on the teaching bodies of such institutions. The health sector also faces a number of challenges and while child mortality has decreased in the West Bank, it has increased in Gaza, and health-care provision leaves considerable room for improvement.

Political participation by women is also examined in detail and the results are encouraging: there has been a significant increase since 2006, with more women obtaining positions as parliamentarians, prosecutors and judges, thus providing increased female influence in a variety of decision-making areas.

The study concludes with a set of recommendations for decision makers, encompassing a broad range of legal and institutional reforms within a framework of a proposed economic and social policy that is gender-aware, inclusive, conducive to participation, comprehensively applied and to the benefit of all social groups.

¹ Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). 2007. *Social and Economic Situation of Palestinian Women 2003-2006*. New York and Geneva: United Nations.

² Established under the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (also known as the Oslo Accords), initially as the Palestinian National Authority and later as the Palestinian Authority. It is responsible for the administration of the territory under its control.

I. THE POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

A. THE SITUATION SINCE 2006: A VULNERABLE SOCIETY UNDER ATTACK

The 2006 parliamentary elections in Palestine, held on 25 January, brought a new wave of economic and social pressure to bear on an already beleaguered population. In addition to the pre-existing strain caused by the occupation, the international community increased pressure by imposing conditions on aid and development assistance, sparking an economic crisis. Armed conflict caused by escalating tensions between the main Palestinian factions and military operations in Gaza by Israel further exacerbated the situation. However, following the agreed ceasefire on 26 November, by the end of 2006 there had been a clear decrease in Palestinian-Israeli violence in Gaza, although conflict between Palestinian factions had intensified.

Tensions between the main Palestinian factions escalated to armed confrontation in December 2006 and continued throughout 2007, with only a few brief ceasefires. As a result of internal violence and conflict³ during 2007, 490 Palestinians were killed (36 in the West Bank and 454 in Gaza) and a total of 2,726 were injured (25 in the West Bank and 2,519 in Gaza).⁴ Following the intense intra-Palestinian violence in Gaza that threatened to degenerate into civil war, Saudi Arabia invited Palestinian leaders to Mecca, where an agreement was reached and signed on 8 February 2007 to end factional violence and form a national unity Government. This agreement, and the subsequent formation of a Government, calmed the situation, although the new Government faced a number of daunting tasks, including a fiscal crisis, the restoration of law and order, and a cessation of rocket fire into Israel. Factional internal fighting resumed during May and June 2007, particularly in Gaza. As a result, Hamas was able to occupy a number of public institutions and security services buildings in Gaza on 17 June 2007. The President of the PA dismissed the national unity Government and appointed a caretaker technocratic Government in the West Bank, and both the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the PA declared the Government in Gaza illegitimate. At the same time, the Palestinian President declared a state of emergency in the West Bank and launched a security plan to stabilize the area. The plan was subsequently implemented in Nablus, Jenin and Hebron. The international community offered its support to the newly formed Government and resumed contact with and financial assistance to the PA. Israel also began the transfer of withheld Palestinian clearance revenues and resumed regular monthly transfers. Nevertheless, by the middle of 2007, the PA still faced a serious financial crisis, with a budget deficit of more than US\$700 million and a US\$1.3 billion debt on which it was in arrears.

On 27 November 2007, the United States of America convened a conference in Annapolis, attended by some 40 countries, including member States of the European Union, Arab countries and the Russian Federation. While commitments were made by the parties present, no significant achievements have been made on the ground since then.

The International Donors' Conference for the Palestinian State was organized in Paris on 17 December 2007. The PA presented the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP) 2008-2010, containing a three-year fiscal framework, on the basis of which donors committed substantial budget and development support. A total of US\$7.7 billion was pledged (US\$3.4 billion by the European Union) for Palestinian recurrent expenditure, institution-building and economic recovery over the three-year period. Since that commitment, a slight improvement in living conditions has been seen in the West Bank, although those in Gaza have continued to deteriorate.

³ According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), indirect violence and conflict includes casualties caused by factional violence or family feuding, internal demonstrations linked to the conflict/occupation and shooting of alleged collaborators with Israel. (United Nations OCHA-oPt, 2008, Protection of Civilians summary data tables: reports to the end of October 2008).

⁴ OCHA, 2008.

B. 2007-2009: THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND

At the time of writing (early 2009), the West Bank remained under the control of the Israeli army, with the PA exerting limited authority in certain areas. However, the PA continued to bear responsibility for the socio-economic development of the West Bank and Gaza. During 2007-2008, expropriation of land, house demolition and settlement building continued. Some 580 road blocks were in force in the West Bank, dividing the area into more than 240 separate sub-areas, and many roads were reserved for the exclusive use of the army and Israeli settlers. Jerusalem was entirely separated from the rest of the West Bank, and a large proportion of its population was living outside the city or in enclaves surrounded by the Barrier.

In early 2009, the building of the Barrier had already affected 46 per cent of land in the West Bank and over 675,000 Palestinians in 149 population centres. At least 15 communities (with over 44,000 inhabitants) live in enclaves surrounded by the Barrier. All border-crossings were under Israeli control and Palestinians were not permitted to utilize the airport in Rafah or the seaport in Gaza. Even since the physical Israeli withdrawal from Gaza on 12 September 2005, Israel has continued to influence the situation in Gaza in a variety of ways, including the imposition of a full closure on the area.⁵

Box 1. Palestinian casualties^{a/}

- As at 30 September 2008, 4,282 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli forces since the beginning of the second intifada in 2000, including 974 children;
- Since 1967, Israel has detained or imprisoned almost 700,000 Palestinians – one fifth of the Palestinian population living in the occupied areas;
- In mid-December 2008, there were 11,000 Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons, including 350 minors and 62 women;
- Between 28 September 2000 and 30 November 2008, 25,687 hectares of land were expropriated by Israel, a further 7,740 were razed;
- By the end of June 2008, 4,929 hectares of West Bank land had been expropriated for the construction of the Barrier;
- In 2008, travel by Palestinians was restricted on 293 kilometres of roads in the West Bank and prohibited on 137 kilometres;
- By July 2008, there had been 71 curfew incidents in the West Bank, resulting in limited mobility for Palestinians and restricting access to resources;
- Since 1987, Israeli forces have demolished or destroyed some 4,300 Palestinian homes and many other structures, rendering thousands of Palestinians homeless;
- According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), some 475,760 Israeli settlers were living on expropriated land in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) in 2007, although the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – occupied Palestinian territory (OCHA) estimates the number at 450,000. There are at least 120 official and 100 unauthorized settlements in the West Bank excluding Jerusalem;
- On 9 July 2004, the International Court of Justice ruled that the construction of the Barrier by Israel was contrary to international law. When completed, it will effectively have annexed 12 per cent of the land in the West Bank;
- Per capita water consumption in the West Bank is some 63 litres per day and in Gaza some 140 litres, while per capita consumption in Israel is three times higher. This is a direct result of the de facto control of water resources by Israel, regardless of the fact that the recharge and/or storage of most aquifers is based in the West Bank.

^{a/} Adapted from *Palestine Monitor*, 2009.

⁵ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2006. *Human Development Report 2006. Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis*. New York and Geneva: United Nations.

C. THE WAR IN GAZA

The situation outlined above has all too frequently led to confrontation and violence in Gaza. This was most recently witnessed in the war that started with the advent of 2009 and continued for over three weeks, killing 1,440 Palestinians, injuring 5,380 and creating a new reality on the ground: an increased sense of separation between the West Bank and Gaza; further political rift through the reinforcement of two competing political entities; and increasing challenges to the legitimacy of both the PA and the PLO. In contrast, Hamas appears to have gained greater legitimacy among Palestinian and Arab groups themselves, and even in the eyes of certain regional and national Governments.

The war in Gaza was especially hard on civilians: 431 of those who died (30 per cent) were children and 114 (8 per cent) were women. It should be noted that these figures do not include those who died as an indirect consequence of the war (due to lack of access to regular health care, for example). Of the injured, 1,872 (35 per cent) were children and 800 (15 per cent) were women.⁶ Of the 122 health-care facilities assessed by the World Health Organization (WHO),⁷ some 48 per cent were damaged: two health centres were destroyed, 15 hospitals and 41 primary health-care centres were partially destroyed or damaged and 29 ambulances partially damaged or destroyed.

A WHO report published in 2008 on the situation in Gaza also highlighted the deteriorating situation of the drinking water supply and sewage treatment, which restricts access to drinking water and, if unchecked, could lead to an environmental crisis. The report relates these results to the lack of adequate fuel for pumping stations, poor maintenance of pumping stations due to limited access to spare parts and stoppage of sewage treatment. Hence, as the report explains, “one third of the population suffers from lack of water supply in summer. In the Gaza Strip, more than a third of the population does not have a sanitary drainage system, and some 76,134 families, 12.2 per cent of the total, are still unable to obtain safe drinking water.”⁸

TABLE 1. CASUALTIES OF THE WAR IN GAZA

Palestinians killed	1 440
Children killed	431 (30 per cent of those killed)
Women killed	114 (8 per cent of those killed)
Palestinians injured	5 380
Children injured	1 872 (35 per cent of those injured)
Women injured	800 (15 per cent of those injured)
Health facilities damaged or destroyed	48 per cent of the 122 health-care centres assessed by WHO
Homes damaged or destroyed	14 000
Non-governmental organization (NGO) offices damaged or destroyed	31
Wells destroyed	10

Source: Data compiled by ESCWA, based on OCHA, 2009a.

The Palestinian power company estimates the value of the damage to the electricity network due to recent hostilities at over US\$10 million. Even before the conflict, its reserves of spare parts were close to depletion levels as a result of the 18-month blockade of Gaza. Power cuts, both scheduled and unscheduled, continue throughout Gaza.

⁶ OCHA. 2009a. *Field Update on Gaza from the Humanitarian Coordinator*. Jerusalem: OCHA.

⁷ World Health Organization (WHO). 2009. *Health Situation in Gaza, 4 February 2009*. Available at: http://www.who.int/hac/crises/international/wbgs/sitreps/gaza_4feb2009/en/index.html.

⁸ WHO. 2008. *Health Conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan*. Geneva: WHO (page 12).

The 2009 war only added to the difficulties that Gazans had already endured for two decades. The deterioration in living conditions has further hampered the prospects of the establishment of a viable Palestinian State. This calls for action by local, regional and international stakeholders to resolve the issues facing the region, in particular the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

II. POPULATION

A. POPULATION SIZE, AGE STRUCTURE AND DISTRIBUTION

Population statistics, demographic trends and household patterns all play an important role in highlighting the gender perspective of strategic socio-economic indicators, as they not only provide an overview of the gender gaps in Palestinian society, but also enable the projection of future population trends and the challenges that these may pose in view of the deteriorating political and economic situation.⁹

In 2007, the second census of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza was conducted, the results of which were published in 2008. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), preliminary results show that the total population of the West Bank and Gaza is 3,761,646, split between 2,345,107 (62.3 per cent) in the West Bank and 1,416,539 (37.7 per cent) in Gaza. The urban population accounts for 53.1 per cent, the rural population 31.0 per cent and those in refugee camps 15.9 per cent.

Palestinian society is marked by its youthful population. According to the PCBS 2007 census, 44.1 per cent of the population were under 15 years of age,¹⁰ compared with 47 per cent in 1997. This is particularly alarming in light of the high population growth rate, which reached 2.8 per cent in 2007, and the high fertility rate.

Although only 2.9 per cent of the population in Palestine are above 65 years of age, the economic dependency rate is still high reaching to 6.13. Of course, coupled with high unemployment rates and limited working opportunities, these figures would have a grave impact on the living conditions of the Palestinian family.¹¹ In the second half of 2007, the Palestinian population of working age was 2,226,000, some 55 per cent of the total population. The labour force, however, was 1,013,941, and those actually employed number 720,000.¹²

The Palestinian population includes a large number of registered refugees, comprising some 41 per cent of the population. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) estimates that, in December 2007, there were 1,664,449 refugees in the West Bank and Gaza (some 26 per cent of the population in the West Bank and some 65 per cent of the population in Gaza). Nevertheless, due to political tensions, increasing numbers of Palestinians have moved abroad in search of more stable living conditions. Emigrants include workers from the most productive sectors and recent public debate has focused on the outflow of well-prepared individuals, which will undermine future development.

⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, data in this section are taken from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), 2006a. *Demographic and Socioeconomic Status of the Palestinian People at the End of 2006*. Ramallah: Palestinian Authority; and PCBS, 2008a. Press Conference on the preliminary findings of the *Population, Housing Units and Establishment Census 2007*. Ramallah: Palestinian Authority.

¹⁰ PCBS, 2008b. *Women and Men in Palestine: Issues and Statistics (3rd issue)*. (Arabic only) Ramallah: Palestinian Authority (page 25).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² UNRWA, 2008. *Prolonged Crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Socio-economic Developments in 2007 (Report No.3)*. Gaza: UNRWA (page 26).

B. HOUSEHOLD SIZE

The average household size has declined from 6.4 in 1997 to 5.8 in 2007. It remains higher in Gaza (6.5) than in the West Bank (5.5), and while it has declined by 8.3 per cent in the West Bank since 1997, the corresponding fall in Gaza was only 5.8 per cent.¹³ Most households are structured around the nuclear family (80.7 per cent in the West Bank and 73 per cent in Gaza) rather than the extended family (15 per cent in the West Bank and 24.5 per cent in Gaza).¹⁴

Ninety per cent of Palestinian households are headed by a man and just 10 per cent by a woman. These figures apply almost equally in both the West Bank and Gaza.

C. FERTILITY RATES¹⁵

Fertility rates in Palestine remain among the highest in the world, although recent data indicate that they are declining. In 1997, the fertility rate was 6.04 births per woman (5.6 in the West Bank and 6.9 in Gaza), but by 2007, the rate had declined by almost 18 per cent to 4.6 in the West Bank and by nearly 23 per cent to 5.3 in Gaza. This decline is evidence of a significant change in social patterns, as it indicates that a longstanding trend is changing, suggesting that family planning awareness campaigns and services are starting to bear fruit.

III. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS¹⁶

The period since late 2000 has been characterized by macroeconomic compression, declining incomes and high rates of unemployment and poverty in Palestine. The Palestinian economy has deteriorated significantly and remains completely dependent on the Israeli labour market. It was greatly influenced by the changes in the policy of the donor community that took place following the legislative elections in January 2006, and the decline in external assistance has meant that in many cases public sector salaries could not be paid. Between 2005 and the end of 2006, Palestinian Government revenues are estimated to have declined by 71 per cent, while Government expenses decreased by 36 per cent during the same period. However, of arguably greater consequence is the underlying weakness of the private sector, as indicated by gross domestic product (GDP) data. The importance of strengthening the private sector is underscored by declining job opportunities in the Israeli labour market and the unsustainable character of public sector employment.

TABLE 2. ANNUAL PER CAPITA INCOME, COMPARED WITH 1999 DATA

Year	Percentage of 1999 annual per capita income (US\$1,609.7) ^{a/}
2000	92
2001	82
2002	73
2003	80
2004	82
2005	85
2006	79
2007	74
2008*	71.3

*Source: Compiled by ESCWA, based on PCBS, 2008a.

a/ PCBS. 2001. *Palestine in Figures*. Ramallah: Palestinian Authority.

¹³ Compiled by ESCWA, based on PCBS, 2008a. Data are subject to amendment once final figures have been published.

¹⁴ PCBS, 2008b (page 46).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

The crisis facing the PA in recent years has been severe. Total resources fell by almost 40 per cent, from US\$2.1 billion in 2005 to US\$1.3 billion in 2006, reflecting the suspension of direct assistance by many donors and the withholding of clearance revenues by Israel. Furthermore, commercial banks reduced their loans to the PA, due to the risk of litigation abroad. Meanwhile, the wage bill continued to expand and, by early 2007, exceeded the value of revenues, including those still withheld by Israel. By 2006, the overall fiscal deficit had reached almost US\$1 billion. As a result, the PA accumulated some US\$900 million in salary, non-salary, and pension fund arrears, and during 2006 and 2007, Government employees received on average only 50-60 per cent of their normal income.¹⁷ The decline in income and consumption was accompanied by a drop in private investment, and humanitarian assistance increased by 56 per cent.

Trade and employment were negatively affected by the increased closure of border crossings and international borders. In the first quarter of 2007, the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt was open for only 27 per cent of the officially scheduled opening hours, and the Karni crossing, which is the main commercial transit point between Gaza and Israel, was not open during all its scheduled opening times. Moreover, movement of workers through the Erez crossing into Israel has been completely halted since the 2006 elections.¹⁸

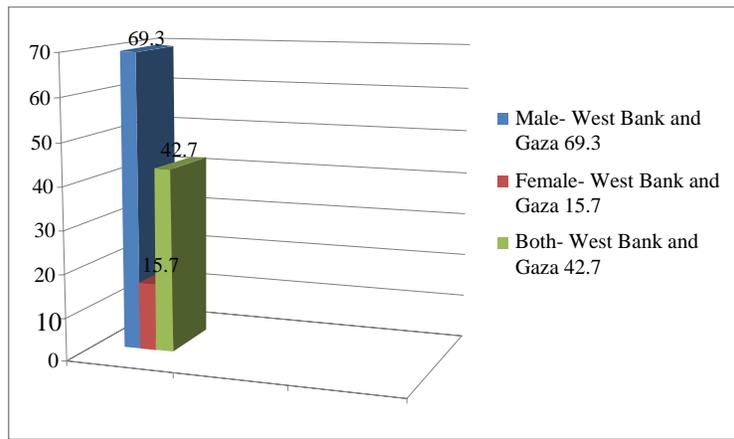
There has been no progress on the construction of a seaport or an airport, nor on the establishment of a link between the West Bank and Gaza. Despite promises to ease restrictions on movement in the West Bank, there has been no discernible improvement in movement for Palestinians; indeed, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the number of obstacles to movement in the West Bank has continued to rise.

IV. THE LABOUR FORCE

A. WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION¹⁹

According to a PCBS survey,²⁰ the labour force participation rate in Palestine rose from 38.1 per cent in 2002 to 41.9 per cent during the third quarter of 2007 (in the West Bank, the rate increased from 40.0 to 44.1 per cent and in Gaza, from 34.4 to 38.0 per cent during the same period).

Figure I. Labour force participation by sex, 2007



Source: Compiled by ESCWA, based on PCBS, 2008b.

¹⁷ PCBS, 2008a.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Unless otherwise specified, this section is based on PCBS, 2008b.

²⁰ PCBS, 2008b (page 98).

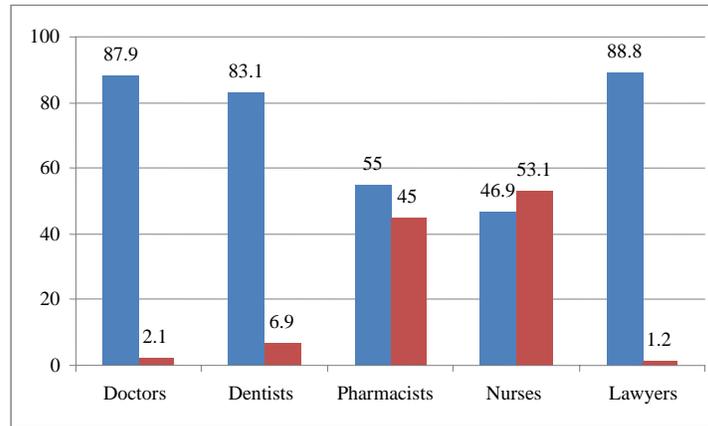
Between 1999 and the end of 2008, the participation rate for men fell from 70.7 to 67.3 per cent, while for women it increased from 12.3 to 15.0 per cent. The rates vary between the West Bank and Gaza: 68.3 per cent for men and 16.7 per cent for women in the West Bank, and 65.4 and 11.7 per cent, respectively, in Gaza.

There is a clear correlation between the participation of women in the labour force and education: in Palestine, only 11.1 per cent of illiterate women participate in the labour force, compared with 40 per cent of women with 13 years or more of education. However, education is not a significant factor in the participation of men in the workforce.²¹

According to the 2007 census, 67.7 per cent of men aged 15 years and above in Palestine participate in the labour force, while the corresponding figure for women is only 15.7 per cent. This is a direct reflection of the fact that 53.3 per cent of all economically inactive women reported that they do not work outside the home because of their work inside the home. By contrast, this was cited as a cause of economic inactivity by only 0.3 per cent of men.

In all professions, most workers are male. The gender gap is particularly notable in plant and machine operations, crafts, services and sales, skilled agricultural and fisheries work, legislative posts and management, which are dominated by men. In contrast, women comprise 53.1 per cent of nurses, 45 per cent of pharmacists, 16.9 per cent of dentists, 12.1 per cent of doctors and 11.2 per cent of lawyers, and are also well represented in clerical, technical and professional positions.

Figure II. Gender distribution of professional jobs



Source: Compiled by ESCWA, based on PCBS, 2008a.

Women also tend to be concentrated in the service sector (46.2 per cent, compared with 33.2 per cent of men) and agriculture (36 per cent, compared with 10.8 per cent of men), while the participation of women in occupations that are stereotyped as male professions is negligible: a mere 0.2 per cent of women work in the construction sector, compared with 13.5 per cent of men, and 0.4 per cent of women work in the transportation sector, compared with 6.9 per cent of men.²² According to PCBS statistics, in 2008, most working women were clustered in the private sector (76.3 per cent) or the public sector (22.7 per cent) and a mere 1 per cent worked in Israel or the settlements, compared with 65.2 per cent, 23.5 per cent and 11.3 per cent, respectively, for men.²³

²¹ PCBS, 2008b (page 100).

²² PCBS, 2008b (page 102).

²³ PCBS, 2008b (page 108).

B. UNEMPLOYMENT

The unemployment rate in Palestine increased from 23.5 per cent in 2005 to 27.9 per cent in 2008. The gap between the West Bank (19.8 per cent) and Gaza (44.8 per cent) is wide (25 per cent), although, if Jerusalem is excluded, unemployment in the West Bank increases to 22.4 per cent. Rates for men (29.1 per cent) are higher than those for women (22.5 per cent). The unemployment gender gap in the West Bank is considerable (21.0 per cent for men and 14.9 per cent for women), compared with 45.1 and 42.9 per cent, respectively, in Gaza.

Unemployment is also closely intertwined with a variety of socio-economic factors:

- The unemployment rate is higher among refugees (31.0 per cent) than non-refugees (25.8 per cent);
- In both the West Bank and Gaza, unemployment rates are higher in rural areas: 23.6 per cent in rural West Bank and 53.1 per cent in rural Gaza, compared with 18.1 per cent in urban West Bank and 47.4 per cent in urban Gaza. Table 3 shows the unemployment rates among Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza;
- In Gaza, 59.2 per cent of unmarried women and 62.6 per cent of unmarried men are unemployed, compared with 22.8 per cent and 27.8 per cent, respectively, in the West Bank;
- Unemployment is also closely related to age, with youth disproportionately affected. The unemployment rate is 43 per cent for those aged 15-19, 41.1 per cent for those aged 20-24 and 30.1 per cent for those aged 25-29, yet the rate for all other age groups is less than 22 per cent;
- The highest unemployment rate of all age and gender groups is that of women aged 20-24 (46.1 per cent, compared with 39.7 per cent for their male counterparts). Women in the age group 25-29 also have a higher unemployment rate than men (31.6 per cent, compared with 29.7 per cent for men of the same age).

Education does not always provide an escape route from unemployment for women, as 30.5 per cent of women with 13 years or more of education are unemployed, a higher percentage than women educated at a lower level. Conversely, male unemployment patterns follow the opposite trend, with the lowest rate (18.6 per cent) seen among men with 13 years of education or more.

TABLE 3. LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE AND UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
OF PERSONS AGED 15 YEARS AND ABOVE IN PALESTINE BY
LOCALITY, REGION AND SEX, 2008
(percentage)

Locality and region	Labour force participation		Unemployment	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
West Bank				
West Bank, urban	68.1	16.9	18.1	16.2
West Bank, rural	68.7	19.1	22.3	16.5
Gaza				
Gaza, urban	65.9	10.3	41.9	42.5
Gaza, rural	62.8	14.7	50.1	31.3

Source: Adapted from PCBS. 2009a. *Labour Force Survey Annual Report: 2008*. Ramallah: Palestinian Authority (page 74).

C. THE GENDER WAGE GAP

The 2008 PCBS Labour Force Survey found that wages were in general significantly higher in the West Bank (on average 85.5 New Israeli Shekels (NIS)) than in Gaza (on average 60.9 NIS). Furthermore,

women in Palestine continue to earn less than their male counterparts, with an average daily wage of 60.7 NIS, compared with 81.3 NIS for men. The gap in Gaza is smaller than in the West Bank, at 61.3 NIS for women and 60.7 NIS for men. One of the reasons for the smaller gap in Gaza is that wages there are, in general, much lower, since workers are no longer permitted to enter Israel, where they would have the opportunity to earn higher wages. In addition, many men are employed in the construction industry, where wages tend to be relatively higher, while women are generally employed in the agricultural and service sectors, where wages are typically lower.²⁴ Conversely, Palestinian women represent only 9 per cent of business owners, although they represent 82.7 per cent of unpaid family labour, compared with just 17.3 per cent of men.

V. POVERTY AND ASSISTANCE

A. EFFECTS OF POVERTY

In 2006, the human development index (HDI) for Palestine, which is a measure of the level of economic and social development of a country, was classified by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as ‘average’ (HDI=0.761).²⁵ Given the situation in the country since then, however, it will undoubtedly have fallen when next assessed. In order to tackle the challenges facing Palestine, significant humanitarian assistance is necessary to keep the population from falling further into poverty, and on the political level, policies should be adopted to remove market and political constraints, and encourage technology as a means of fostering development.

Recent PCBS data, published in 2009 and entitled *Palestine in Figures: 2008*, show a decline in poverty rates in the West Bank and an increase in Gaza in 2007. Table 4 provides a comparison between 2004 and 2007. It should be noted that one of the principal reasons for the sharp increase in poverty in Gaza was the collapse of the private sector and the consequent increase in unemployment.

TABLE 4. POVERTY RATES BY REGION, 2004 AND 2007

Year/region		Poverty rates ratio			
		Poverty	Poverty gap	Poverty severity	Deep poverty
2004	Palestine	25.6	6.6	3.9	16.4
	West Bank	19.8	4.8	2.6	11.6
	Gaza	37.2	10.4	6.3	26.0
2007	Palestine	34.5	23.8	9.6	6.0
	West Bank	23.6	13.9	5.8	3.2
	Gaza	55.7	43.0	17.6	11.3

Source: Adapted from PCBS. 2009b. *Palestine in Figures: 2008*. Ramallah: Palestinian Authority.

These findings confirm the estimates of international organizations. The World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations have expressed concern that, as a result of the sharp increase in poverty, in 2007, only 41 per cent of the need for food aid could be met. Consequently, 93.5 per cent of the Palestinian population had to reduce their spending on food, 98 per cent cutting back on meat and 86 per cent on dairy products,²⁶ which is of concern for the nutritional status of the

²⁴ PCBS, 2009a.

²⁵ UNDP, 2006.

²⁶ World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2007. *Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA): West Bank and Gaza Strip*. Rome: WFP and FAO.

population in general and that of women in particular. Given that women require a higher intake of iron and calcium than men (even more so when pregnant or breastfeeding), a reduced intake of foods rich in such nutrients may lead to serious health problems, including anaemia and malnutrition. Child health is also likely to be compromised, with increased levels of infections and disease, yet the financial situation of many families means that they are unable to obtain medical help unless it is provided free of charge. Increasing poverty rates in Gaza in particular will thus have long-lasting effects on the health and well-being of the population, making the achievement of social and economic development goals even more challenging.

Refugee groups are disproportionately affected by poverty, accounting for half the individuals and households categorized as living in extreme poverty since 2000. Thus, while humanitarian aid has helped some poor households, the assistance provided has been insufficient to solve the problem entirely. The Joint Rapid Food Security Survey in the Occupied Palestinian Territory highlights the impact of poverty on households in the West Bank and Gaza. Some of the key findings of this assessment are shown in Box 2.

Box 2. The effect of increasing poverty in Palestine

A 2008 joint report by the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)* highlighted a number of effects of poverty on the population in Palestine. These included the following:

- One third of Palestinians reported a decrease in income during the previous year, those categorized as poor being most severely affected reporting a fall of some 40 per cent.
- Thirty-seven per cent of breadwinners in Gaza and 27 per cent in the West Bank were unemployed, with a consequently high dependency ratio (8.6 dependants per employed person in Gaza and 5.6 in the West Bank).
- Wage employment constituted the primary source of income, followed by self-employment and transfers from friends and family. In Gaza, the principal secondary source of income was emergency assistance.
- As a result of the prohibition of exports and the lack of availability of such essential items as fertilizer and pesticides, the agricultural sector in Gaza was close to collapse. 70 per cent of spring crops were not irrigated due to a lack of fuel for the irrigation pumps. Israeli incursions had caused significant damage to farmland, crops and greenhouses.
- Ninety-seven per cent of households reported having been affected by food price rises in the previous three months and, looking ahead, two thirds of the population believed that they would only be financially secure for a maximum of six months.
- Fifty-nine per cent of households were resorting to a variety of negative coping strategies, including selling disposable assets and relying on credit to buy food. However, this route was only available to those with a reliable income. In addition, uncertain retail conditions meant that less informal credit was available and traders were only extending credit for essential items.
- Most Palestinians had stopped paying utility bills: 31 per cent were still relying on that strategy, although almost half of households had already exhausted that possibility.
- Palestinians were eating less: since January 2008, 75 per cent had reduced the quantity and 89 per cent the quality of food purchased, many parents had reduced their intake to allow their children to eat more and almost all those surveyed had reduced their consumption of meat, fresh fruit and vegetables. Given the high prevalence of anaemia and other micronutrient deficiencies in the population, a further reduction in food quality and quantity will inevitably have long-term health consequences, especially for children.
- Food aid and other humanitarian assistance played a major role in preventing even more people falling into poverty and food insecurity, although with a marked difference between Gaza and the West Bank: in the former, 60 per cent of households cited emergency assistance as a secondary source of income, while in the latter, the corresponding figure was just 1.6 per cent.
- Most assisted households received assistance with food (almost 90 per cent), health care (59 per cent) and finance/employment (51 per cent). Seventy-six per cent of households in Gaza and 23 per cent in the West Bank had received some type of assistance (in cash or in kind) in the previous three months, with higher levels of coverage for refugees, particularly the poorest.

Box 2 (continued)

- Some 52 per cent of households surveyed reported that assistance had assumed greater importance for them in the previous three months.
- Inadequate funding, coupled with high cereal and fuel prices had led WFP to review the types of activity it offered, reducing its ration size and cutting back on its overall caseload; the situation had also prevented UNRWA from meeting its food aid targets.
- The increase in the number of families relying on assistance had rendered current coverage by the principal providers insufficient; expansion in both breadth and depth of support was urgently required.

* WFP, FAO and UNRWA, 2008. *Rapid Socio-economic and Food Security Assessment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip*.

Moreover, there is a clear interconnection between gender inequality and poverty. A substantial gender gap exists at all levels of Palestinian society and has widened in recent years in the face of rising levels of unemployment and poverty fuelled by the current economic and financial crisis. According to PCBS,²⁷ in 2006, 8 per cent of Palestinian households are headed by women, and despite the fact that this group is one of the highest recipients of public assistance, female-headed households comprise 9 per cent of the poor. Some 73 per cent of female-headed households suffer from deep poverty and are unable to meet minimum requirements for food, clothing and housing, compared with 63 per cent of male-headed households.

B. SOCIAL SERVICES AND SOCIAL WELFARE

Basic social services are primarily provided to the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza by the United Nations through UNRWA, which covers some 1.5 million Palestinian refugees, and by the PA which covers a further 2.5 million. Through the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), the PA has two major social services programmes, namely the Income Support Programme and the Public Works Programme. Additional social services are provided by an estimated 500 local and international NGOs, and through informal assistance from family members.

Access to such basic social services as education, health care, water, sanitation and housing has suffered in both quality and quantity in the period under review, resulting in a marked deterioration in living conditions, and the situation has been further aggravated by the recent global financial crisis.

TABLE 5. SELECTED PA BUDGETARY EXPENDITURE, 2005

	Millions of US\$	Millions of NIS	Percentage of GDP
Total wages	1 001	4 493	22.4
Net lending	344	1 545	7.7
Education	274	1 229	6.1
Health	153	688	3.4
Transfers	375	1 681	8.4
Social safety net	176	791	3.9

Source: PA, 2005. *Budget.Gaza*.

The formal social safety net in the West Bank and Gaza is modest, reaching only some 30 per cent of the poor population in 2007. Indeed, throughout the last decade, it has required significant strengthening. The

²⁷ PCBS, 2008b.

assistance provided with a view to lifting families out of poverty was also inadequate: while an estimated 57,000 households received social assistance in 2007, almost 40 per cent of the beneficiaries continued to live below the poverty line. The 2008 FAO report referred to in box 2 found that 19 per cent of households were being assisted by MoSA, of whom 57 per cent were food insecure, despite receiving assistance, 15 per cent vulnerable, 13 per cent marginally secure and just 15 per cent food secure. Data from MoSA confirm that women comprise the majority of recipients (60.5 per cent).²⁸

In the short and medium term, there are ways to improve the social safety net that require only a modest investment of time and resources. First, basic steps could be taken to reduce leakage from formal safety net programmes to the non-poor by determining from which specific welfare programmes the non-poor benefit and then seeking ways to reduce such programmes. Second, reducing leakage to the non-poor and increasing coverage for the poor could be improved by devolving the implementation of certain aspects of MoSA poverty alleviation programmes to the local level. Third, the allocation of resources could be improved by ensuring that areas or localities with higher levels of poverty receive proportionately greater assistance.

C. FOOD INSECURITY

Approximately half of all Palestinian households currently depend on food aid, which is provided by the international community. The situation is worst in Gaza, where an estimated 80 per cent of households depended on food aid in 2007, a situation that was exacerbated in the wake of the Gaza war in early 2009, with an estimated 88 per cent of households depending on external food assistance.²⁹

Data from the WFP/FAO report show that more than one third of the Palestinian population were food insecure. The situation was particularly severe in Gaza, where 80 per cent of the population relied on United Nations food aid and 88 per cent lived below the official poverty line of US\$2.20 per day. Food imports in Gaza fell by 8 per cent between March 2007 and the end of the year, with a sharp decrease in imported wheat flour in particular of 26 per cent. Since February 2006, new population groups had become food insecure and those already food insecure had become even more so. Moreover, even those employed in theoretically stable jobs within the public sector were affected, as the temporary suspension of salary payments by the PA placed its employees and their families under severe pressure. WFP and FAO sources found that in 2007, 19.63 per cent of the population were marginally food secure, 11.64 per cent were vulnerable and 34.29 per cent were food insecure.³⁰ According to PCBS, 66.8 per cent of households had been obliged to reduce expenditure in 2006, an increase of 19 per cent on the previous year.³¹ Disaggregated by location, the figures were 58.2 per cent in the West Bank (12.6 per cent higher than in 2005) and 83.7 per cent in Gaza (a 31.5 per cent increase). According to the WFP and FAO, the consumption of food and cereals, dairy products and eggs fell by some 10 per cent during the same period, while the consumption of fish and seafood fell by over 32 per cent.³²

A report issued by OCHA in April 2009 highlighted the fact that the increased restrictions on access of goods and people to and from Gaza had led to a fall in economic activity and an increase in transport costs. It also noted that some 34 per cent of the population had no secure source of food, while a further 12 per cent were at risk of becoming food insecure. OCHA data also indicated that the tightening of the access regime

²⁸ WFP, FAO and UNRWA, 2008. *Rapid Socio-economic and Food Security Assessment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip*. New York and Geneva: United Nations.

²⁹ WFP and FAO, 2007.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ PCBS, 2006b. *Impact of the Israeli Measures on the Economic Conditions of Palestinian Households*.

³² WFP and FAO, 2007.

had led to a 71 per cent decrease in the volume of goods entering Gaza between May and October 2007: on average, 253 trucks entered each day in May, compared with only 74 per day during October. As a result, an increasing number of food items were unavailable or in short supply in Gaza, including fresh and frozen meat, dairy products and certain fresh fruit, while the price of others had continued to rise.³³

D. EDUCATION

Since 2006, there have been a number of achievements in the educational sector in Palestine, although the overall picture remains mixed. The number of schools and pupils has increased, but in 2008, 578 of the 2,415 schools in the country were operating more than one shift. In 2008, the illiteracy rate declined to 6.1 per cent, but illiteracy was still significantly more common among women (9.5 per cent) than men (2.3 per cent). Drop-out rates are higher for boys at primary level (1.3 per cent, compared with 0.5 per cent for girls), but higher for girls at secondary level (3.8 per cent, compared with 3.0 per cent for boys). The higher rate in secondary schools may be connected to the tradition of early marriage, which remains widespread in the country.

The ongoing situation of conflict in Palestine continues to pose significant challenges for education. Data from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education indicate that between September 2000 and July 2008, 738 pupils were detained, 4,852 injured and 658 killed, while 219 teachers and other school personnel were detained, 68 injured and 45 killed. During the same period, the total cost of the physical damage to school buildings was more than US\$2.2 million, to which must be added the value of the educational material destroyed. Dramatic as these figures are, however, they cannot measure the psychological effects of tension and armed conflict, which are both wide-ranging and ongoing, on children, parents and teachers.

Data show that men account for 54.8 per cent of adults who have completed two years or more of higher education, while women account for 45.2 per cent. Almost 54 per cent of students at local universities, 57 per cent at university colleges and 37 per cent at community colleges are women. In 2007, women accounted for over 58 per cent of all graduates from local universities, yet women represent only 16.6 per cent of academic staff at universities. Twenty per cent of men have attained a secondary school certificate, compared with 20.4 per cent of women, while figures for first degrees are 9.6 and 6.1 per cent respectively.³⁴

E. HEALTH

According to the 2008 WHO report *Health Conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan*, the health system in Palestine faces serious challenges, primarily the occupation status, but also “high levels of poverty, unemployment and insufficient financial support; demographical changes including high rates of fertility and population growth, and epidemiological changes such as the substantial increase in prevalence of chronic diseases”,³⁵ all of which influence its ability to address the health rights of citizens in general and those of women in particular from a holistic perspective.

³³ OCHA, 2009a.

³⁴ PCBS, 2008a.

³⁵ WHO, 2008 (page 4).

Box 3. Deterioration in health, 2005-2008

- Vaccination coverage fell to an average of less than 90 per cent, ranging from 72 per cent for the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine to 94 per cent for the oral poliomyelitis vaccine. Tetanus vaccination coverage for pregnant women fell from 25 to 16 per cent.
- Attendance at health facilities decreased by 15.1 per cent for primary care centres and 20.6 per cent for general medical clinics.
- Attendance rate for pregnant women at maternal and child health-care clinics decreased from 4.8 to 3.7 visits per pregnant woman.
- Use of community-based mental health clinics decreased by 16.6 per cent, while registration of mental patients decreased by 44 per cent.

Sources: WHO, 2009; and WHO, 2008, p. 17.

Given the ongoing situation of conflict and crisis, such specialized services as rehabilitation, psychological counselling and health awareness training play a particularly important role, and NGOs are the primary providers in this field. The results of a survey carried out for the WHO Country Cooperation Strategy show that 100 per cent of those surveyed reported feeling stressed, 92 per cent felt no hope for the future, 84 per cent expressed feelings of constant anger because of circumstances beyond their control and 52 per cent had considered ending their lives.³⁶

WHO data shows that in 2004, of a total of 630 primary health centres in Palestine, 62 per cent were provided by the Ministry of Health (MoH), nine per cent by UNRWA and 29 per cent by local NGOs.³⁷ Yet the capacity of the health sector in Gaza has been seriously affected by conflict and political developments. By the end of 2007, stocks of 92 medical items had run out and 134 medical devices, including 22 dialysis machines, had become unusable as a result of the non-availability of spare parts for maintenance and repair. Seriously ill patients and those needing anything more than basic operations were obliged to leave Gaza in order to receive medical assistance elsewhere, yet the number of Palestinians permitted to leave for medical treatment is declining (300-400 patients per month prior to 2006, but only a maximum of 100 patients per month during 2007) as a result of the policy of ongoing border crossing closures by Israeli and Egyptian authorities.³⁸

F. WATER INSECURITY

A lack of safe drinking water also has an impact on the health of the population. In 2006-2007, water consumption in Palestine continued to decline, falling from 68 litres per capita per day in September 2006 to 56 litres in April 2007 in the West Bank and from 81 to 51 litres in Gaza. This decrease was not linked to prices, as the price of water remained stable throughout that period, but is a direct reflection of the fact that Israel controls 82 per cent of the water in the West Bank and uses some 90 per cent of the total supply. Furthermore, only 5-10 per cent of available water in Gaza is clean enough to drink.³⁹

³⁶ WHO. 2006. *Country Cooperation Strategy for WHO and the Occupied Palestinian Territory 2006-2008*.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Popular Committee Against Siege in Palestine, 2007. Available at: <http://www.tlaxcala.es/imp.asp?lg=en&reference=4455>.

³⁹ OCHA, 2009b.

VI. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Women have always played an important role in Palestinian politics, challenging the gender stereotypes that predominate in many other countries in the ESCWA region. Yet the women's movement has failed to achieve high visibility and, like a number of other political movements, has suffered from repression by the Israeli authorities and been hampered by a lack of support from the PA. The PA has extended its support only to certain groups to participate in the political process, while clamping down on wider efforts towards a democratic mobilization of civil society, including the women's movement. Combined with the difficulties of moving from an informal to a formal political life as part of the transition to statehood, this has contributed to a more general political crisis, which in turn has led to a further decline in mass political activity. In the process, the Palestinian women's movement has lost its visibility and its voice. Nevertheless, there is a deep-felt awareness among Palestinian women that they are living through a critical period that will determine whether or not they will take their rightful place on the political map.

With support from allies, women's movements (including governmental and non-governmental organizations) have made several achievements at the national level including the incorporation of a quota system in the 2005 election law, which granted women some 10-12 per cent representation in the Palestinian Legislative Council.

The requirement for Local Municipality Councils Elections Law number 10 for the year 2005 and its amendments as stipulated in Law number 12 for the year 2005 also ensured women representation through article 17 (1), which stipulates that in elections of municipality councils that include a maximum number of 13 seats, every list of candidates should have at least one woman in every five names. The law also regulates the formation of the committees organizing and supervising the election process, but does not require a female quota on the committees. Thus, at the local municipality level, the PA appears to have responded to the demands of the women's movement in ensuring that the quota is guaranteed by legislation.

Whether female political representation should be specified by quota and whether such a quota actually empowers women is a controversial issue. Certain critics view quotas as limiting and discriminatory, while others argue that specifying a quota for women could in fact limit female representation to the number of seats specified, while legitimizing the majority share of seats for men. The Palestinian women's movement, however, believes that a quota not only empowers women, but is essential at present in order to guarantee female political representation; it has therefore put pressure on Parliament by campaigning for a quota to be enshrined in legislation. However, it is essential that the quota be applied with a clear view to achieving female political representation, rather than to guarantee the share of seats available to men, as a number of observers suspected was the case in the recent municipal elections.

In the formal political body of the PLO, the participation of women is limited. At the end of 1996, women constituted merely 7.5 per cent of the members of the Palestinian National Council and 4 per cent of the Central Committee. The first woman was only elected to the Executive Committee of the PLO in 2004 (along with 18 men).⁴⁰ Of the 132 representatives elected to the National Legislative Council in 2006, 17 were women (10 in the West Bank and 7 in Gaza), constituting 12.8 per cent of the total.⁴¹ At 41.93 per cent, female participation in the election process was also high in comparison with other countries in the region.

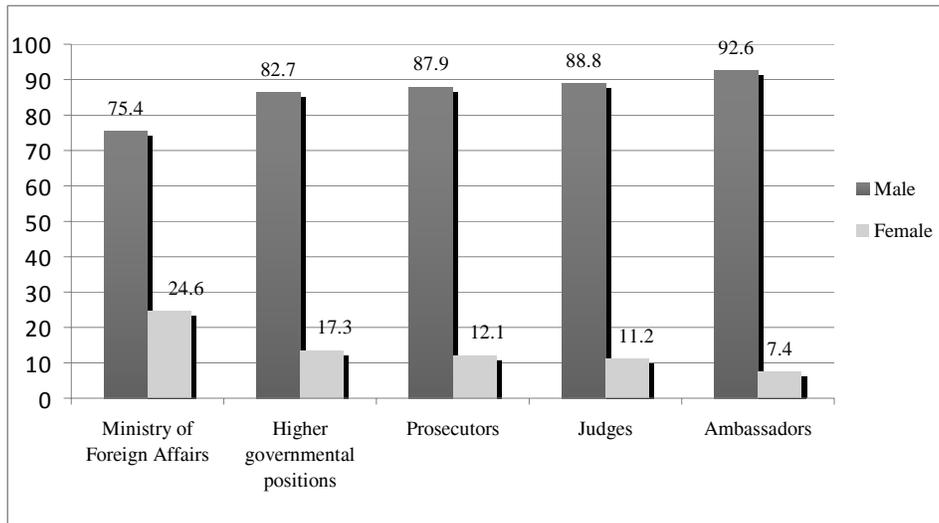
⁴⁰ Human Rights and Democracy Media Centre. 2004. *Political Participation for Palestinian Women*. (Arabic only) Available at: www.shams-pal.org.

⁴¹ PCBS, 2008b.

According to PCBS statistical data on the second intifada, gathered in 2006,⁴² 278 women had been killed by Israeli forces since the beginning of the intifada (5.9 per cent of those killed), many killed while travelling to work or school, or as innocent bystanders caught in cross-fire. The lives of Palestinian women have been affected socially, financially and psychologically by the political situation and the ravages of the ongoing conflict.

Formal female political representation in the Palestinian Authority has been gradually increasing. In 2009, of the 22 governmental ministers, five were women (23 per cent), occupying posts at the ministries of Women’s Affairs, Tourism, Education and Higher Education, Culture, and Social Affairs. Women are also represented at decision-making level within the institutions of the PA, occupying some 17.3 per cent of such positions in the public sector (excluding the education sector) and representing 5.4 per cent of ambassadors.⁴³

Figure III. Gender distribution in governmental decision-making positions



Source: Compiled by ESCWA, based on PCBS, 2008a.

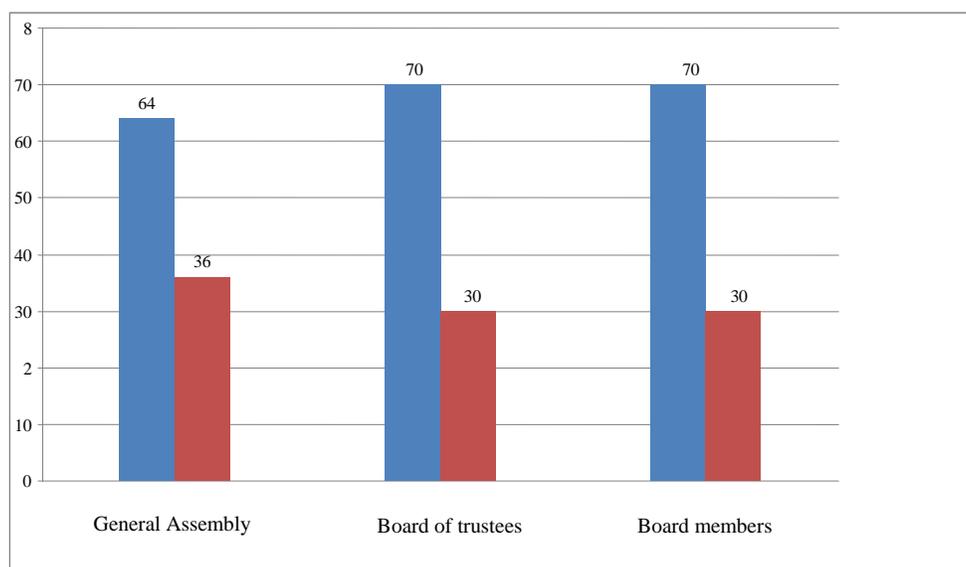
In 1996, the PA established a gender planning unit within the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation as a forerunner to the establishment of gender units in all ministries and the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), with a view to introducing a gender perspective into all governmental institutions and empowering women to participate at all levels of the decision-making process. The aim of these units was to ensure that all decisions, regulations, plans and programmes at the national level considered the needs of both men and women, and guaranteed the full participation of women in the State-building process. In 2003, in a clear recognition of the importance of its work, the original Gender Planning Unit became the Ministry of Women’s Affairs.

However, political conditions in recent years have prevented the Ministry from fulfilling its remit and since the victory of Hamas in the 2006 elections, the Ministry of Women's Affairs has not been publicly active. The Government has said that it is in the process of evaluating the strategy of the Ministry in order to develop new programmes that will be more responsive to the needs of poor women. In the interim period, the work of the Ministry continues behind the scenes, with a view to finalizing the projects started under the Fatah Government.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ PCBS, 2008b.

Figure IV. Gender distribution in decision-making positions in NGOs



Source: Compiled by ESCWA, based on PCBS, 2008a.

VII. LEGAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Basic Law of Palestine guarantees the rights of citizens and affirms the commitment to ensuring basic freedoms and fundamental human rights for all. Yet all gender references in the law are masculine and it does not explicitly state that any reference to citizens or to Palestinians should be taken to include both men and women. Some argue that while it does not do so explicitly, it does in fact do so implicitly, since the use of the masculine form is conventional in Arabic. In theory, therefore, both the Basic Law and the draft constitution give Palestinians, men and women alike, the right to education, employment, political participation and all other citizens' rights without discrimination. However, while the Basic Law provides the constitutional framework for citizens' rights, restrictions imposed on the PA by the Oslo Accords have played a role in delaying its enactment. These restrictions, in addition to the conflict regarding the final status of the occupied territories and Palestinian refugees, have to date prevented the PA from passing a citizenship law.

Furthermore, the status of the PA does not allow Palestine to be a member in any international convention (including, for example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women). As a result, health legislation has not been drafted in accordance with international conventions. However, Public Health Law number 20 (2004)⁴⁴ contains a chapter on the health of women and children, which identifies female and child health as a key element in the development strategy of the PA. The law states that the provision of prenatal and post-natal care is an integral part of the services provided by the Ministry of Health. The law also restricts abortion to situations in which there is proven risk to the pregnant woman.

As is the case in other Arab countries, even when the legislative framework provides equal status for both men and women, social practices are not always in line with the law. One of the most prominent examples of this is access to inheritance. Under the law, women are entitled to inherit from their fathers,

⁴⁴ Published 2005 (Arabic only). Available at the Ministry of Health for PA website at: www.moh.gov.ps.

mothers and other relatives. However, on many occasions social practices exert pressure on women to waive their rights, especially to property, to their brothers.⁴⁵

Domestic violence, in particular violence against children, is addressed in article 29 of the Basic Law of 2003, which states that children have the right to comprehensive protection and welfare, including protection from harmful and cruel treatment, and the right not to be subjected to beatings or other cruel treatment by their relatives.⁴⁶ Notwithstanding calls from civil society for more rigorous measures to combat violence against women, existing criminal law, which is based on Jordanian and Egyptian criminal law, fails to address the situation adequately or punish perpetrators of domestic violence. Similarly, existing policies and the absence of an institutional framework to assist and support victims of violence has further aggravated the situation.⁴⁷

According to PCBS statistics, prevalence of psychological, physical and sexual violence in Palestine can be seen among married and unmarried (over 18) women to reach, in 2005, among married women 61.7 per cent, 23.3 per cent and 10.9 per cent, respectively, and for unmarried women (over 18) 52.7 and 25 per cent for psychological and physical violence, while information on sexual violence among unmarried women was not available.⁴⁸

In addition to codified legislation, the practice of customary law in the Arab region is widely perceived as disempowering women. In Palestine, all conflicts regarding matters that are culturally sensitive, including rape, honour killings, sexual violence and domestic abuse, are dealt with by customary law. For example, recent studies on various forms of violence against women have highlighted so-called “honour crimes” in Palestinian society.⁴⁹ Between 25 November 2008 and 25 November 2009, nine Palestinian women were killed by relatives under the banner of honour crimes (three in the West Bank and six in Gaza).⁵⁰ Another study found that of 600 women randomly interviewed in Gaza during 2008, 28.3 per cent indicated that there had been at least one incidence of early marriage in their families to release families from economic and financial pressures resulting from the siege.

The personal status law in Palestine that regulates marriage, divorce, inheritance, custody of children and other related issues is based on Islamic sharia law for Muslim Palestinians, while Christians come under the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts. Civil courts have no jurisdiction over matters of personal status.

⁴⁵ Freedom House. 2002. *Palestine (Palestinian Authority and Israeli-Occupied Territories)*. Available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=180>.

⁴⁶ The Palestinian Basic Law (2003). Available at: www.palestinianbasiclaw.org.

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch. 2006. *A Question of Security: Violence Against Palestinian Women and Girls*. New York: Human Rights Watch.

⁴⁸ PCBS, 2008b (page 136).

⁴⁹ Honour crime or honour killing is the murder of a woman by male relatives for a number of reasons, including but not limited to, the suspicion of extra-marital affairs (not necessary sexual), the unwillingness to proceed with an arranged marriage, or because the woman has been raped. (Definition provided by Palestine Monitor, 2007.)

⁵⁰ Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR). 2009. *Press Release on the Anniversary of the International Day for Elimination of Violence against Women: the Suffering of Palestinian Women Continues in the West Bank and Doubles in the Gaza Strip*. Accessed at: <http://www.pchrgaza.ps/files/PressR/English/2009/120-2009.html>.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations represent a consensus from a number of sources, including discussions with women's groups, the proceedings of the July 2009 conference of the General Union of Palestinian Women and a number of recent reports and publications, both local and international:

1. An economic and social policy that is gender-aware, inclusive, conducive to participation, comprehensively applied and to the benefit of all social groups should be developed and implemented.
2. Measures should be taken to increase awareness of the relationship between gender equality and development in order to integrate a gender perspective into the programmes of all ministries and institutions.
3. The capacity and profile of ministerial gender units should be increased.
4. Political groups should ensure fair and equal participation by women at all levels of their party structure.
5. The quota system should be fully applied in all areas of politics, with particular emphasis on elections, in order to attain a target of a minimum of 30 per cent female representation.
6. Government budgets should be further sensitized to social and economic policies that integrate a gender concept and cater for the needs of female-headed households and the poor.
7. Qualitative and quantitative participation of women in the judicial system and the courts should be increased.
8. The Criminal Law and penalties for violence against women should be thoroughly reviewed and, where necessary, legislation amended with a view to eliminating such crimes.
9. The Government and the PLC should take a clear stand on honour crimes by criminalizing such acts.
10. A modern family law that guarantees the rights of women in matters of marriage, divorce and child custody should be developed and implemented.
11. The citizenship law should be amended to allow women to pass citizenship to their children.
12. As part of an increased emphasis on the importance of education for girls, the minimum age for marriage should be raised to 18 years for both girls and boys.
13. School textbooks should be thoroughly and regularly reviewed to ensure that the images presented of women and gender equality are both positive and consistent.
14. Steps should be taken to facilitate the availability of credit to women, with a particular focus on training and building their capacity in business and economic development.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). 2007. *Social and Economic Situation of Palestinian Women 2003-2006*. New York and Geneva: United Nations.
- Freedom House. 2002. *Palestine (Palestinian Authority and Israeli-Occupied Territories)*. Available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=180>.
- Human Rights and Democracy Media Centre. 2004. *Political Participation for Palestinian Women*. (Arabic only). Available at: www.shams-pal.org.
- Human Rights Watch. 2006. *A Question of Security: Violence Against Palestinian Women and Girls*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Johnson, P. and Kuttab, E. 2001. Where Have All the Women (and Men) Gone? Reflections on Gender and the Second Palestinian Intifada. *Feminist Review*. Vol. 69 (1): 21-43.
- Kuttab, E. 2006. New Challenges for the Palestinian Women's Movement. *This Week in Palestine*. Issue 95.
- Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)-oPt. 2008. Protection of Civilians, summary data tables. Reports to the end of October 2008.
- OCHA. 2009a. *Field Update on Gaza from the Humanitarian Coordinator*. Jerusalem: OCHA.
- OCHA. 2009b. *The Humanitarian Monitor: April 2009*. Jerusalem: OCHA.
- Palestine Monitor Factsheet*. 2008. Updated on 18 December 2008 and available at: <http://www.palestine-monitor.org/spip/spip.php?>
- Palestinian Authority (PA). 2005. *Budget. Gaza*. Ramallah: PA.
- Palestinian Basic Law (2003). Available at: www.palestinianbasiclaw.org.
- Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). 2009a. *The Labour Force in the Palestinian Territory*. Press release. Ramallah: Palestinian Authority.
- PCBS. 2001. *Palestine in Figures*. Ramallah: Palestinian Authority.
- PCBS. 2006a. *Demographic and Socioeconomic Status of the Palestinian People at the End of 2006*. Ramallah: Palestinian Authority.
- PCBS. 2006b. *Impact of the Israeli Measures on the Economic Conditions of Palestinian Households*. Ramallah: Palestinian Authority.
- PCBS. 2008a. Press Conference on the preliminary findings of the *Population, Housing Units and Establishment Census 2007*. Ramallah: Palestinian Authority.
- PCBS. 2008b. *Women and Men in Palestine: Issues and Statistics (3rd issue)*. (Arabic only) Ramallah: Palestinian Authority.
- PCBS. 2009a. *Labour Force Survey Annual Report: 2008*. Ramallah: Palestinian Authority.
- PCBS. 2009b. *Palestine in Figures: 2008*. Ramallah: Palestinian Authority.

- Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR). 2009. *Press Release on the Anniversary of the International Day for Elimination of Violence against Women: the Suffering of Palestinian Women Continues in the West Bank and Doubles in the Gaza Strip*. Accessed at: <http://www.pchrgaza.ps/files/PressR/English/2009/120-2009.html>.
- United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs. 2008. *World Fertility Patterns*. New York and Geneva: United Nations.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2006. *Human Development Report 2006. Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis*. New York and Geneva: United Nations.
- United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). 2008. *Prolonged Crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Socio-economic Developments in 2007 (Report No.3). Gaza*. Gaza: UNRWA.
- World Bank. *Country Brief: Middle East & North Africa region–West Bank and Gaza*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- World Food Programme (WFP) and United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). 2007. *Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA): West Bank and Gaza Strip*. Rome: WFP and FAO.
- WFP, FAO and UNRWA. 2008. *Rapid Socio-economic and Food Security Assessment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip*. New York and Geneva: United Nations.
- World Health Organization (WHO). 2006. *Country Cooperation Strategy for WHO and the Occupied Palestinian Territory 2006-2008*. Geneva: WHO.
- WHO. 2008. *Health Conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan*. Geneva: WHO.
- WHO. 2009. *Health Situation in Gaza, 4 February 2009*. Available at: http://www.who.int/hac/crises/international/wbgs/sitreps/gaza_4feb2009/en/index.html.