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## Commission on the Status of Women

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: gender mainstreaming, situations and programmatic matters**

## Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report, submitted in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution [2018/10](#), highlights the situation of Palestinian women for the period from 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2018 and provides an overview of the assistance provided by the entities of the United Nations system with regard to education and training; health; economic empowerment and livelihoods; the rule of law and violence against women; power and decision-making; and institutional development. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

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\* [E/CN.6/2019/1](#).



## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [2018/10](#) on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the Economic and Social Council expressed deep concern about the grave situation of Palestinian women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, resulting from the severe impact of the ongoing Israeli occupation and all of its manifestations. The Council requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation, assist Palestinian women by all available means, including those laid out by the Secretary-General in his previous report on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women ([E/CN.6/2018/6](#)), and submit to the Commission on the Status of Women, at its sixty-third session, a report on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report covers the period from 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2018 and provides a review of the situation of Palestinian women on the basis of information received from the United Nations entities that provide assistance to Palestinian women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, unless otherwise indicated. Those entities include the following: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and its Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Volunteers, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). It also reflects information provided by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The report builds on previous annual reports on the topic (see [A/73/13](#), [A/73/35](#), [A/73/84-E/2018/72](#), [A/73/87-E/2018/69](#) and [A/73/346-S/2018/597](#)).

## II. Situation of Palestinian women

3. The reporting period was characterized by a rise in political tensions, violence and a continued deterioration in the humanitarian, socioeconomic and security situation in and around the Gaza Strip, including in the context of the protests held under the label “the Great March of Return”.<sup>1</sup> Despite diplomatic efforts for intra-Palestinian reconciliation, the continued divisions between the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority and Hamas authorities in Gaza compounded the impact of closures, deepening the economic hardships in Gaza and obstructing key infrastructure projects on water and electricity.<sup>2</sup> In parallel, settlement expansion, the destruction of homes, infrastructure and livelihoods and strict movement and access restrictions continued in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. All of those developments negatively affected the situation of Palestinian women in terms

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, “Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee”, 27 September 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. See also Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Briefing to the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, 20 September 2018. Available from <https://unsc.unmissions.org/security-council-briefings-0>.

of their safety and security, livelihood, access to education, health care and other services, employment and political participation.

4. Since 30 March 2018, Palestinians in Gaza have held weekly mass protests along the perimeter fence under the label “the Great March of Return”. By the end of September 2018, 161 Palestinians had been killed along the fence and over 22,409 Palestinians (20,456 men and boys and 1,953 women and girls) had been injured, including by tear gas inhalation.<sup>3</sup> One Israeli soldier was killed and another injured, and 37 Israeli civilians were injured by projectiles launched from the Strip.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, tensions remained in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Frequent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces resulted in 24 Palestinian deaths and 8,921 injuries, including by tear gas inhalation, with 274 women and 172 girls among those affected,<sup>5</sup> and acts of violence between and vandalism by Israeli and Palestinian civilians. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded a total of 236 violent incidents involving Israeli settlers that resulted in three Palestinian fatalities and 100 Palestinian injuries, with 11 women and 7 girls among those affected, as well as damage to Palestinian property. Six Israeli civilians and three members of Israeli security forces were killed in shooting or stabbing attacks by Palestinians.

5. Funding cuts to UNRWA, which affected UNRWA emergency services and programmes in particular, raised concerns about the ability of the United Nations to respond effectively to the deteriorating humanitarian situation, including its impacts on women and girls.<sup>6</sup> Some of those cuts were made up in part by other donors.<sup>7</sup> Several political developments also cast a shadow on the financial situation of the Palestinian Authority, at a time when external budget support has been on the decline. On 23 March 2018, the President of the United States signed into law the Taylor Force Act, which prohibits the provision of nearly all economic assistance to the West Bank and Gaza that would directly benefit the Palestinian Authority. In July 2018, the Israeli Knesset passed a similar law withholding tax revenues that Israel collects for the Palestinian Authority, in an amount equivalent to the total sum of those Palestinian Authority payments. These and other funding cuts constrained the operations of several organizations, including United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, which had an overall negative impact on Palestinian women and men.

6. In Gaza, the deteriorating humanitarian and socioeconomic situation, compounded by financial constraints, a worsened electricity and fuel crisis and related power cuts, has further restricted access to basic services, including services to survivors of gender-based violence. It has also placed higher demands on and intensified the unpaid care and domestic work carried out by women. Some hospitals were expected to close in order to preserve energy for the central hospitals, which would have a particular impact on pregnant women, adolescents, older persons, those with chronic illnesses and survivors of gender-based violence.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Data provided by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat.

<sup>4</sup> Mladenov, Briefing to the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, 20 September 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Data provided by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

<sup>6</sup> Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Briefing to the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, 25 January 2018.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), “Ministerial meeting on UNRWA raises remarkable US\$122 million”, press release, 28 September 2018.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), “Gender alert: needs of women and girls in humanitarian action in the Occupied Palestinian Territory”, 2018.

7. In the West Bank, ongoing settlement activities, demolitions, strict movement and access restrictions and limitations on planning and development continue to prevent entire communities, in particular in Area C, East Jerusalem and the H2 area of Hebron, from accessing essential services and have led to a heightened risk of displacement for many Palestinians.<sup>9</sup> According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 376 Palestinian structures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, were demolished by Israeli authorities, displacing at least 471 people (90 households). UNRWA records indicate that 78 of the displaced individuals were Palestine refugee women and girls, including 36 girls under the age of 18, and 4 of the displaced households were headed by women. The situation of Bedouin communities such as Khan al-Ahmar is of particular concern, as they face the risk of impending demolition of structures and relocation.<sup>10</sup> When displaced, Palestinian women find themselves further constrained in their access to public spaces and livelihood opportunities, against a backdrop of increasing personal and family food insecurity and vulnerability. They also suffer an increase in domestic violence and often resort to negative coping mechanisms such as early marriage.

8. Circumstances in Area C are especially hard for women and girls, in the face of geographic isolation, poverty and conservative traditions and the absence of basic infrastructure and services. Few economic opportunities exist.<sup>11</sup> Restrictions on mobility are especially perilous for pregnant women. Women are at a high risk of suffering from psychosocial disorders such as anxiety and depression, compounded by a sense of failure to protect their children from violence. They are also at risk of violence in their homes or while tending to farmland or collecting water. Girls in the area have limited access to education and often drop out of school, which can lead to early marriage, early pregnancy and sexual abuse. In addition, women are often at risk of gender-based violence, exacerbated by the stresses and frustrations experienced by men. Few communities in Area C, especially Bedouin communities, have access to services such as police, health centres or shelters.<sup>12</sup>

9. Stereotypical attitudes relating to gender roles remain common in the State of Palestine. Men are largely viewed as heads of households, main providers and protectors of their families, while women are seen as responsible for care and domestic work relating to their often large and extended families with high numbers of children. The constant deterioration of the economic situation, combined with land confiscations and movement restrictions and exacerbated by intra-Palestinian political divisions, leaves many men unable to fulfil their traditional roles and women compensating for the absence of services and income.<sup>13</sup> Despite the increasing participation of women in higher education and the labour market, the division of work within the household continues to fall sharply along gender-specific expectations. However, there are signs of more equitable views, including in relation

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “2018–2020 Humanitarian response strategy: January–December 2018 humanitarian response plan – Occupied Palestinian Territory”, December 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Briefing to the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, 18 October 2018.

<sup>11</sup> UN-Women, “Gender alert”.

<sup>12</sup> Nader Said-Foqahaa, *Caught Up between a Rock and a Hard Place: Occupation, Patriarchy and Gender Relations – A Case Study of Palestinian Women in Areas C and H2* (UN-Women and Arab World for Research and Development, forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> UN-Women, “Gender alert”.

to the right to work, political participation and the sharing of care and domestic work, in particular among the younger age groups.<sup>14</sup>

10. A thorough analysis and understanding of the gender-specific aspects of the situation across the Occupied Palestinian Territory is essential for establishing effective responses to the multifaceted security and development challenges and extensive humanitarian needs. As further detailed below, the impact of the crisis on the everyday lives and the future of women, young women and girls is immense, and compounded by prevailing discrimination in law and in practice. The physical and longer-term emotional and societal impacts of all forms of violence remain of deep concern.

### III. Assistance to Palestinian women

11. This section further outlines the situation of Palestinian women and efforts by the United Nations to respond to and deliver assistance amid complex humanitarian challenges. It contains updated information on the assistance provided by the United Nations system, in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, donors and civil society, to address the specific needs and priorities of women, young women and girls. The volatile context and the increasingly constrained funding environment continue to pose operational challenges for the delivery of assistance and have an impact on the sustainability of the progress achieved.

12. Current priorities for the provision of United Nations support to the Palestinian people are outlined in a set of key documents, including the United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2018–2022 for the State of Palestine, which is aligned with the Palestinian National Policy Agenda (2017–2022), the Cross-Sectoral National Gender Strategy 2017–2022, the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women 2011–2019, the National Action Plan for the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security (2017–2019) and the 2018–2020 Humanitarian Response Strategy.

#### A. Education and training

13. Several challenges to children's access to education persist in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. These challenges often affect girls differently, for both security and sociocultural reasons. At age 5, about 1 in 10 children are excluded from education. A higher percentage of 5-year-old girls (11.9 per cent) are out of school, as compared with boys (8.8 per cent). Compulsory education in the State of Palestine begins the following year, at age 6, but the levels of exclusion from education increase rapidly as children progress through the compulsory grades. This trend is especially alarming for boys. For example, the estimated out-of-school rate for boys increases from 1.4 per cent at age 10 to 5.9 per cent at age 13, then jumps to a staggering 22.0 per cent at age 15. The rates of exclusion for girls start lower and increase less rapidly, with 0.4 per cent of girls out of school at age 10, 2.9 per cent at age 13 and 5.4 per cent at age 15.<sup>15</sup> This challenging situation is exacerbated by the electricity crisis, which restricts students' study time both at school and at home and increases dropout rates. In the West Bank, girls in Area C in particular have limited access to

<sup>14</sup> Shereen El Feki, Gary Barker and Brian Heilman, eds., *Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa (Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine)* (Cairo and Washington, D.C., UN-Women and Promundo-US, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *State of Palestine: Country Report on Out-of-School Children* (2018).

education, owing to poor infrastructure, closures, permit restrictions and curfews, restricted mobility and the fact that they are required to help with household chores. They also often drop out of school, which can lead to early marriage, early pregnancy and sexual abuse. In the H2 area of Hebron, the impacts of economic hardship are especially hard on girls, who are the first to drop out of school.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, girls are often pulled out of school as a protective measure against harassment, violence and intimidation on their way to school in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.<sup>17</sup> In a recent study, ESCWA highlights the low levels of educational attainment and literacy for Palestinian women with disabilities.<sup>18</sup>

14. UNICEF continued to facilitate safe access for 6,600 Palestinian schoolchildren (3,500 girls) and 400 teachers (300 women) on their way to and from school in high-risk locations, through protective presence and accompaniment past checkpoints and near Israeli settlements in the West Bank. UNDP built additional classrooms and sports facilities for six schools in marginalized communities in the West Bank, providing 1,075 female students with a better learning environment and creating more than 22 jobs for teachers in administrative positions. UNDP also supported improved learning for approximately 12,000 female students in East Jerusalem by enhancing physical infrastructure and supplying information and communication technology equipment and tools. In the Gaza Strip, UNDP completed the rehabilitation and reconstruction of 50 educational institutions, benefiting 50,686 female students and teachers (99,114 overall) and creating 1,284 job opportunities for women.

15. In the Gaza Strip, UNRWA provided basic education for 131,554 first- to ninth-grade students (48.4 per cent of whom were girls) and access to mental health support for students and their families to prevent students from dropping out. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, UNRWA schools enrolled 48,192 students (59 per cent of whom were girls). UNESCO promoted inclusive and child-friendly education through training for 33 school principals in the West Bank and 14 school supervisors and counsellors in Gaza, with a focus on establishing gender sensitivity in classrooms.

16. At the higher education level, enrolment by young women in colleges and universities continued to grow. In 2017, 53 per cent of all young women of higher-education age were enrolled in colleges and universities, compared with 32 per cent of young men in the corresponding age group.<sup>19</sup> Under the UNDP-supported Al Fakhoora Dynamic Futures Programme, 50 out of 100 full four-year scholarships to enable access to academic programmes were awarded to young women from underprivileged backgrounds.

17. UNRWA offered technical and vocational training, including to 640 female refugees in Gaza, where they made up 35 per cent of trainees, and 617 female refugees in the West Bank, where they made up 84 per cent of trainees. UNDP provided support to a vocational training centre and a nursing school in the East Jerusalem district to prepare students to enter the labour market. UNICEF helped over 10,000 disadvantaged adolescent girls to develop critical life skills through civic engagement and entrepreneurial programmes so they could continue their academic path, support their communities and enter the labour market.

<sup>16</sup> Nader Said-Foqahaa, *Caught Up between a Rock and a Hard Place*.

<sup>17</sup> United Nations country team, Occupied Palestinian Territory, *Common Country Analysis 2016: Leave No One Behind – A Perspective on Vulnerability and Structural Disadvantage in Palestine* (2016).

<sup>18</sup> Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, *Disability in the Arab Region 2018* (E/ESCWA/SDD/2018/1).

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics database, available at <http://data.uis.unesco.org> (accessed in November 2018).

18. In partnership with Sharek Youth Forum, UN-Women promoted gender equality through mobile theatre in 10 boys' schools in Ramallah. Additional interventions included awareness-raising and social skills training for girls, women, boys and men in Jerusalem and Nablus and awareness-raising and civic education initiatives in 20 schools in Gaza. UNESCO carried out a radio and video spot campaign to promote diversity, gender equality, peace and development through sports media coverage. In addition, a theatre performance and an art exhibition were organized in partnership with Theatre Day Productions in Gaza in order to celebrate International Women's Day 2018 with women and men from rural areas, university students, members of youth organizations and representatives of women's organizations and international organizations.

## B. Health

19. Health services facilities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory face chronic shortages of medical supplies, affecting the availability and quality of health services for Palestinian women. In Gaza, the health system is on the verge of collapse as a result of the 10-year closures, the deepening intra-Palestinian political divide, the deteriorating energy supply, the inconsistent payment of public sector medical personnel and the growing shortages in medicines and disposables.<sup>20</sup> The ongoing crisis has led to high psychological stress levels. Despite the fact that psychosocial and mental health service providers are active in Gaza, social norms play a key role in hindering service uptake, especially for adolescent girls, as service users face a high degree of stigma and service use is often perceived to constrain marriageability. In the West Bank, restrictions on mobility as a result of the restrictive permit regime, poor infrastructure and threats by soldiers and settlers make the situation especially perilous for pregnant women who require prenatal, neonatal and other maternal care from hospitals.<sup>21</sup> In addition, facilities outside East Jerusalem completely lack certain treatment and diagnostic options, such as radiotherapy and nuclear imaging technology. That means, for example, that cancer patients, including women with breast cancer, are dependent on referrals to East Jerusalem or Israel and therefore require security permits from Israeli authorities to receive services.

20. United Nations entities continued efforts to improve access to and the quality of health-care services. UNDP began the second phase of upgrades to the chemotherapy department at the Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem, where direct support is provided to women with cancer. In the West Bank, UNDP provided two hospitals in the north and south with new structures, facilities and equipment and contributed to the construction of a new health clinic and medical laboratory that will benefit more than 1,660 people from the village of Tirah and the surrounding areas. UNFPA provided the Ministry of Health clinics in the West Bank with four advanced electrographic ultrasound machines to enhance breast cancer screening and detection. UNFPA also supported a mobile clinic for the early detection of breast cancer, enabling the clinic to provide mammogram screenings to 858 women in the northern West Bank, and provided subsidies for mammogram services to 180 women in Gaza.

21. In Gaza, UNDP constructed a service building for the visually impaired, benefiting 400 children (208 of whom were girls). Three hospitals and one primary health-care centre received photovoltaic renewable energy systems in order to provide sustainable operations. WHO procured and delivered equipment to the central stores

<sup>20</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "2018–2020 Humanitarian response strategy"; and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Humanitarian bulletin: Occupied Palestinian Territory", April 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Nader Said-Foqahaa, *Caught Up between a Rock and a Hard Place*.

in Gaza, including 20 postnatal beds, 50 delivery kits, 5 ultrasound machines, 20 delivery beds and 50 bag valve masks.

22. During the reporting period, UNRWA provided 3.3 million medical consultations, 1.94 million (58 per cent) of which were to women and girls in Gaza and 1 million to women in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Between 31 March and 8 July 2018, UNRWA health centres received 2,588 requests for medical treatment (94 per cent involving men and boys and 6 per cent involving women and girls) resulting from violence associated with the demonstrations held under the label “the Great March of Return”. The UNRWA Community Mental Health Programme tended to patients and to family members of those killed and injured who required psychosocial and mental health support.

23. UNRWA provided substantial reproductive health care during the reporting period. A total of 31,358 Palestine refugee women were newly enrolled in preconception care services; 39,596 women in the Gaza Strip received post-partum care within six weeks of delivery; and 77,809 individuals received family planning services. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, UNRWA enrolled 13,559 women in antenatal care and provided 12,746 women with postnatal care services and 22,525 women with family planning services.

24. UNICEF provided postnatal home visiting services by skilled midwives or nurses to mothers and newborns within two days of birth following high-risk pregnancies, targeting hard-to-reach locations and vulnerable communities. Since October 2017, some 5,584 high-risk lactating mothers and newborns benefited from these targeted postnatal home visiting services; 16.9 per cent of those visits involved mothers under 18 years of age. UNICEF also supported capacity-building for 20 female staff members, community workers and volunteers in assessing child development and providing early intervention services for children with developmental delays and disabilities.

25. UN-Women supported the Palestinian Family Planning and Protection Association in providing services relating to sexually transmitted infections and reproductive tract infections, benefiting 292 people (245 of whom were women). A four-day training course was conducted to increase the capacities of 20 service providers with regard to HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and gender-based violence, and a three-day intervention was carried out with a total of 169 women (28 per cent of whom were under the age of 25) to sensitize women at high risk for sexually transmitted infections and to increase awareness about voluntary counselling, voluntary testing and sexual violence in Hebron and Bethlehem. UN-Women organized a two-day exchange visit between HIV-positive “champions” from Moldova and Palestinian health sector actors, service providers, youth volunteers and civil society representatives.

26. Through the Palestinian National Institute of Public Health, WHO continued the implementation of a maternal and child health electronic registry and a customized interactive checklist that facilitates data collection and utilization. By July 2018, 182 out of 427 maternal and child health clinics in the West Bank and Gaza had used the registry, helping to flag high-risk pregnancies and guide care providers in their clinical management. Through the Institute, WHO helped to improve mammogram protocols by expanding the risk factors assessed during breast cancer screening and supported the Ministry of Health in adopting and technically updating its protocols.



### C. Economic empowerment and livelihoods

27. Economic security is a challenge for Palestinian women. Their limited share of economic opportunities and agricultural holdings and the restrictions on their mobility constrain their ability to contribute to household resources and food security. A gap remains between educational attainment by women<sup>22</sup> and their participation in the labour force. In 2017, the rate of labour-force participation by women stood at only 19.0 per cent, compared with 71.2 per cent for men. In a worrying trend, the unemployment rate for women across the Occupied Palestinian Territory hit a record high of 47.1 per cent in 2017, an increase of 12 per cent over the past five years. By comparison, the unemployment rate for men was 22.2 per cent.<sup>23</sup> In a recent report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people: developments in the economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (TD/B/65(2)/3), it was indicated that women with higher education (13 years of schooling or more) accounted for the largest share of those unemployed. In 2016, half of women with higher education were unemployed, compared with 19.1 per cent among their male counterparts.<sup>24</sup> Owing to limited employment opportunities, women remain overrepresented in unskilled or informal labour fields, putting them at risk of exploitation and unsafe working conditions.

28. UN-Women and ILO continued to promote equal access to decent work opportunities and the protection of women's labour rights through a "one-stop shop" programme in Ramallah that provides a comprehensive hub of services aimed at improving access to economic opportunities for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises run by Palestinian women. UN-Women and ILO also worked on enhancing equitable legislation, gender-sensitive policies and active labour market programmes. As a result of this cooperation, an awareness-raising campaign was carried out on women's right to decent work opportunities, a position paper was published on reviewing the labour law from a gender perspective and an assessment was conducted of the existing complaint mechanism of the General Directorate for Labour Inspection and Administration of the Ministry of Labour, which included recommendations for strengthening the mechanism with regard to gender-responsive data collection, analysis and reporting.

29. UNDP supported the economic empowerment of women in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, through vocational training for 69 women, job placements for 131 women and business development services for 135 women. In Gaza, UNDP helped 98 young women to become entrepreneurs by facilitating access to financial and business development services. In the West Bank and Gaza, UNDP created 2,576 temporary workdays and 31 permanent jobs for women. It also helped 30 businesswomen and female workers in Gaza to become involved in efforts to revitalize the industrial sector.

30. The United Nations Volunteers programme secured 39 opportunities for national Volunteers, which benefited 26 young women and 13 young men. The Volunteers are assigned to different United Nations agencies and support various functions, including engineers, education officers and community development officers.

31. Throughout the West Bank, FAO contributed to a variety of livelihood activities, such as the construction of a livestock market in Hebron, which created a space for

<sup>22</sup> Data from UNESCO show that 39.6 per cent of women aged 25 years or more had completed at least a secondary-level education in 2016. See UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.

<sup>23</sup> Data refer to labour-force participation and unemployment rates for women and men aged 15 years or more. See International Labour Organization (ILO), "Statistics and databases", available at [www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases](http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases) (accessed in November 2018).

<sup>24</sup> ILO, Regional Office for Arab States, *The Occupied Palestinian Territory: An Employment Diagnostic Study* (Beirut, 2018).

women herders to sell their processed food products and animals. Some 200 women herders benefited from training on farm management, dairy processing, marketing, hygiene and safety; 30 women received training on food processing and food safety; 23 women farmers received training on vegetable garden and animal production units; and 14 women farmers benefited from in-kind support to diversify the varieties of the crops they cultivate. In addition, 24 women farmers benefited from the rehabilitation and construction of water harvesting cisterns. In the Gaza Strip, FAO provided 11 female beekeepers with treatments for varroosis, which affects honey bees and honey production, an important supplementary livelihood option for women.

32. In the West Bank, UNRWA provided life skills coaching sessions and business development services to 508 economically vulnerable women, of which 8 subsequently received grants to develop their own enterprises and 58 took vocational training courses. A total of 3,929 loans were granted to female clients, and 64 women received microcredit to establish income-generating projects. Entrepreneurial skills training and microcredit was also provided to women in the Gaza Strip. The Agency's social safety net programme assisted 2,510 female-headed households in the West Bank and 21,341 female-headed households in the Gaza Strip.

33. UN-Habitat, in partnership with civil society, established a safe and inclusive public space for the Palestinian community in the Wadi al-Jawz neighbourhood in East Jerusalem, benefiting around 17,000 residents. Safe public spaces meet the needs and aspirations of women in the neighbourhood and their children.

34. Economic insecurity is directly linked to continued high rates of food insecurity and malnutrition. As at November 2017, 40 per cent of households in the Gaza Strip and 13 per cent in the West Bank were estimated to be suffering from moderate to severe food insecurity. Female-headed households were found to be disproportionately affected, and pregnant and lactating women were especially vulnerable.<sup>25</sup> In order to increase food consumption and dietary diversity and raise nutritional awareness, WFP distributed food and vouchers to 354,970 beneficiaries, half of whom were women, and provided nutritional awareness sessions to food-insecure women and men in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the majority of whom were women.

#### **D. Rule of law and violence against women**

35. Discrimination in law and in practice, a high prevalence of gender-based violence and a lack of access to justice and related services remain the reality for Palestinian women. High rates of violence against women are of particular concern among vulnerable communities in the West Bank and Gaza, such as the internally displaced, women in refugee camps and in Bedouin communities, within certain groups, such as women with disabilities and adolescents, and among those with limited access to multisectoral services.<sup>26</sup> As previously reported (E/CN.6/2018/6, para. 37), social acceptance of violence against women and underreporting due to stigma continue to be of concern.<sup>27</sup> The fragmentation of the legal system and the existence of laws that continue to allow for violations of women's human rights, including in matters of marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance, remain barriers to women's empowerment.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Occupied Palestinian Territory* (2017).

<sup>26</sup> UN-Women, "Gender alert".

<sup>27</sup> See also El Feki, Barker and Heilman, eds., *Understanding Masculinities*.

36. OHCHR and UN-Women trained members of the legislative harmonization committee on reviewing Palestinian law for compatibility with international human rights treaties to which the State of Palestine has acceded. In a positive development, a decree was issued in March 2018 abolishing the application of some articles of the Jordanian Penal Code that had provided for mitigating circumstances as exceptions to the prosecution of and/or judicial sentencing for offenses, including crimes committed in the name of honour and sexual violence offences when a perpetrator marries a victim.

37. UNDP, UNICEF and UN-Women supported the Attorney General's Office and the High Judicial Council in providing specialized services for cases relating to violence against women. A baseline study was conducted in partnership with the High Judicial Council to identify the needs of and gaps in the judiciary system and inform future interventions. Gender-responsive standard operating procedures were developed for specialized public prosecutions and endorsed by the Attorney General. Service providers within the justice and security system, including sharia court judges, were offered capacity-building training and awareness sessions on women's human rights, gender equality and ways to end gender-based violence. UNODC continued to provide support to the Palestinian criminal justice system to improve access to justice for women and girls who are survivors of violence. Seven forensic doctors trained by UNODC examined 89 cases involving victims of gender-based violence and produced forensic reports that constituted substantial evidence for the investigations by the Attorney General's Office into crimes relating to violence against women and girls. The doctors underwent additional training through individual work placements at the St. Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre in Manchester, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

38. UNFPA supported the training of 233 health service providers on detection, documentation, response and referrals for cases involving gender-based violence. The Gender-Based Violence Sub-Cluster developed a directory mapping all services provided relating to gender-based violence and trained humanitarian specialists in the Gaza Strip and Hebron on how to conduct an initial detection and referral for cases of gender-based violence. In Hebron and East Jerusalem, UNICEF trained 100 school counsellors on gender-based violence referrals. In Gaza, 293 counsellors and 9,427 teachers were trained on the detection of gender-based violence and the referral of children with specific protection needs, including needs relating to gender-based violence.

39. A total of 19,403 survivors of gender-based violence received at least one type of service supported by UNFPA and its partners, and 457 outreach awareness sessions on protection from and the prevention of gender-based violence reached 7,995 beneficiaries. The Occupied Palestinian Territory Humanitarian Fund provided support to 34,178 vulnerable women and 7,025 girls, in particular survivors of gender-based violence, and helped women with disabilities to gain access to enhanced support and protection services in the Gaza Strip.

40. Access to quality services, including psychosocial counselling and referrals, was enhanced through a number of initiatives. UNFPA established two new safe spaces for women and girls in the Old City of Jerusalem and the Bureij camp in Gaza. UNFPA also equipped six primary health-care clinics and one hospital in the West Bank with furniture and medical tools for detecting cases of gender-based violence and treating survivors and supported the establishment of seven community protection networks across the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

41. UN-Women provided multisectoral services to 2,406 women and 474 men in Gaza. This included case management support for 288 women who are survivors of gender-based violence, awareness-raising on the incidence of gender-based violence

and information on associated services to 1,746 women and 474 men, support for health and reproductive health services to 320 women and referrals for 52 women. Moreover, 1,480 adolescents (1,050 girls and 430 boys) in Gaza were provided with psychosocial support, reproductive health services and grants for adolescent-led initiatives. UN-Women provided legal and psychosocial support to 160 women in conflict with the law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including at least 90 Bedouin women.

42. UNRWA addressed the risks of gender-based violence through community outreach interventions to Palestine refugees, awareness-raising activities and community protection mechanisms. Awareness-raising sessions delivered through the Agency's Relief and Social Services Programme reached 7,213 women and 2,796 men in the Gaza Strip.

43. UN-Women implemented the regional "Because I am a Man" campaign, which challenges gender stereotypes surrounding household roles and responsibilities, fatherhood and violence against women, among other issues, and raises awareness of the positive roles men can play in achieving gender equality. As part of the campaign, UN-Women implemented community events with university students and displayed billboards in Ramallah, Nablus and Bethlehem, featuring images of men advocating gender equality in their daily lives. In addition, UN-Women supported a media and advocacy campaign on ending violence against women run by Al-Muntada, a coalition of non-governmental organizations committed to ending violence against women, which promoted a gender-responsive family protection bill. UNICEF worked with 1,000 adolescent boys and 1,000 girls in the West Bank to develop their knowledge on and skills in dealing with gender-based violence and bullying in schools. In Gaza, 3,256 adolescents (50 per cent of whom were girls) were provided with training on gender-based violence, the prevention of bullying and life skills to enable them to combat violence and advocate positive change in their communities.

## E. Power and decision-making

44. While the contribution of Palestinian women to political life is widely acknowledged, women continued to be underrepresented in decision-making bodies and processes at various levels of public life. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, there are significant gender disparities in favour of men in the public sector. The proportion of women in political leadership and decision-making positions is only 11.7 per cent, with women representing only 12 per cent of directors general and 16 per cent of deputy ministers.<sup>28</sup> Women have also been largely excluded from formal dialogue efforts to end the intra-Palestinian political division. For instance, no women participated in the talks that led to the signing of the agreement between Fatah and Hamas in Cairo in October 2017. No women are represented on the technical committees that were subsequently established to work out the details of the reconciliation arrangements.<sup>29</sup> To address some of those challenges, the Palestinian Authority adopted a national action plan to promote the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), in which it recognized the significant role of women and girls in the peace and security agenda and their agency in responding to the impacts of the conflict on their lives.

45. To support the empowerment of young Palestine refugee women and their participation in leadership and decision-making, UNRWA provided 495 women

<sup>28</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "International Women's Day 2017", press release, 7 March 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Willemijn van Lelyveld and Wafaa Al Kafarna, "Women's participation in the reconciliation process: perspectives from Gaza", *This Week in Palestine*, Issue No. 239 (March 2018).

graduates from different fields with training on leadership and management skills, project cycle management and business orientation and facilitated work placements for 274 women graduates in the Gaza Strip. UNRWA also supported training on advocacy and lobbying skills on gender equality and women's human rights, targeting 350 women and a number of community-based organizations. Subsequently, 115 women and girls organized advocacy campaigns on combating gender-based violence in the Gaza Strip. UNESCO provided 40 young Gazan women with an orientation session on Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on youth and peace and security to help to integrate the theme into the plans and programmes of youth-led organizations.

46. In the West Bank, UNRWA provided 673 Palestine refugee women with training and activities within the framework of the United Nations women and peace and security agenda. Training for female employees of women's programme centres in camps were aimed at increasing the number of women engaged in the centres' activities and developing mechanisms to ensure the inclusion of women's voices in decision-making forums. UNRWA and local partner organizations conducted a leadership training programme for 63 young women, focused on social innovation, public speaking and volunteerism. Supported by UNDP, 54 young women attended a winter leadership camp on civic leadership, which has led to the design and implementation of 12 community initiatives.

47. WFP set up guidelines to ensure that 50 per cent of its local food committee participants were women, and UN-Habitat reported that more than one third of the representatives on community representative committees were women, giving them an important role in shaping the building of their communities in the coming years.

## F. Institutional development

48. At its seventieth session, held in July 2018, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women considered the initial report of the State of Palestine on its implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (see [CEDAW/C/PSE/1](#)). This was the first report presented by the State of Palestine before one of the treaty bodies. UN-Women provided support to the Non-Governmental Women's Coalition for the Implementation of the Convention, led by the General Union of Palestinian Women, in preparing the first-ever shadow report on the initial report of the State of Palestine. In preparation for the constructive dialogue, UN-Women organized a workshop with four ministries and five civil society organizations, in collaboration with the organization Musawah,<sup>30</sup> to further strengthen their capacity to implement the Convention, in particular article 16. OHCHR produced a radio spot that was broadcast three times a day for five days prior to the meeting, in order to raise awareness and thereby enable civil society and interested individuals to watch the constructive dialogue, which was held in Geneva, through a live broadcast.

49. In its concluding observations on the initial report of the State of Palestine ([CEDAW/C/PSE/CO/1](#)), the Committee recommended that the State of Palestine fully incorporate the provisions of the Convention into its national law and ensure its implementation across the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Committee also recommended, inter alia, that the Palestinian Authority take concrete steps to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention, publish the Convention in the Official Gazette and train members of the judiciary, including judges of sharia courts, legal

<sup>30</sup> See [www.musawah.org](http://www.musawah.org).

professionals and law enforcement officers, on the Convention, on the Committee's jurisprudence under the Optional Protocol and on its general recommendations.

50. The Ministry of Women's Affairs, with technical support from UN-Women, finalized a plan of action to advance the implementation of the Cross-Sectoral National Gender Strategy 2017–2022. UN-Women supported the Ministry in aligning and localizing Sustainable Development Goal indicators with the Strategy and the Palestinian National Policy Agenda (2017–2022). UN-Women also helped to enhance the capacity of the national gender-responsive budget technical team, through a workshop for senior staff of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, providing tools and approaches to promote accountability with regard to women's rights and public transparency.

51. UNICEF continued its efforts to increase the capacity of the Ministry of Social Development, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and other institutions to undertake quality research and prepare analyses on child rights, gender equality, evidence-based social policies and social protection reforms. UN-Women initiated a partnership with the Bureau for the regular generation of data and information on gender equality for advocacy and policy development, including support for the publication of a situational analysis of trends and statistics on women and men in the State of Palestine across different sectors.<sup>31</sup>

52. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UN-Women began the implementation of a new joint action plan for 2018–2020 for gender-responsive humanitarian action in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Under the framework of the plan, gender focal points and cluster coordinators were trained on the new Gender with Age Marker of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.<sup>32</sup>

#### IV. Conclusions and recommendations

**53. The continued lack of a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to negatively affect the daily lives of Palestinian women and men. This is compounded by the continued impact of the military occupation, including more than 10 years of closures on Gaza, political divisions and repeated cycles of violence. Recent escalating political tensions and violence have resulted in increased stress on women and girls, as societal protection mechanisms have suffered damage and coping mechanisms are being exhausted. Women's rights and priorities within the peace and security framework remain unaddressed. During the reporting period, the United Nations has continued to provide tailored and holistic assistance to Palestinian women and girls across a broad range of areas, including in bridging the development-humanitarian divide and in leveraging the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.**

**54. All stakeholders should, however, increase their efforts, in a holistic manner, to improve the economic empowerment of women and their access to economic and productive resources. The Palestinian Authority should address existing gaps in labour laws and regulations with respect to women's right to work and their rights at work and expand decent work opportunities for women.**

**55. Stakeholders should also expand initiatives to address and transform discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes, including through changes**

<sup>31</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Women and Men in Palestine: Issues and Statistics, 2017* (Ramallah, State of Palestine, 2017). Available at [www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2343.pdf](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2343.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> See <https://iascgenderwithagemarker.com/en/home>.

to school curricula, education and public media campaigns and alliances with male gender equality advocates.

56. Governmental and non-governmental actors must expand efforts throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory to improve women's access to justice and support services. Steps to enhance the capacity of institutions and personnel to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against women and girls, including by addressing the particular needs of adolescent girls and women with disabilities, are especially necessary in that regard.

57. Stronger efforts by the Palestinian Authority and other duty-bearers are also needed to bridge the gap between policy commitments on gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and the enjoyment of their human rights and the translation of those commitments into law and practice. The Palestinian Authority should, in particular, make use of the concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women as a road map for action. Key frameworks, such as the Cross-Sectoral National Gender Strategy, must be adequately resourced and accompanied by structural and institutional changes at the social, political and economic levels to ensure their full implementation. The national action plan on Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) should be fully implemented, including through the allocation of adequate human, technical and financial resources and enhanced cooperation with civil society organizations, as well as with the international community and relevant United Nations agencies.

58. Efforts by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and other actors to collect and use quantitative and qualitative data and analyses on the situation of Palestinian women should continue and should inform all policymaking, planning and programming initiatives in the State of Palestine, including by guiding the peace process and reconciliation and humanitarian efforts.

59. Efforts by UNRWA to maintain services have been made more difficult in view of its funding crisis. Enhanced efforts by donors to ensure continued and sustained support are needed to improve access to maternal and child health care, safe reproductive health-care services and services for survivors of gender-based violence.

60. Gender equality and the empowerment of women are essential to the realization of peace in the Middle East. The United Nations will continue to work towards the realization of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions, an end to the occupation that began in 1967 and the establishment of a sovereign, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian State, existing side by side in peace with a secure Israel. It is only by realizing the vision of two States living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition, with Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and Palestine, and all final status issues resolved permanently through negotiations, that the legitimate aspirations of both peoples will be achieved.