

UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

By YASMIN NOUR



مركز العودة الفلسطيني
PALESTINIAN RETURN CENTRE

The ***Palestinian Return Centre*** is an independent consultancy focusing on the historical, political and legal aspects of the Palestinian Refugees. The organization offers expert advice to various actors and agencies on the question of Palestinian Refugees within the context of the Nakba - the catastrophe following the forced displacement of Palestinians in 1948 - and serves as an information repository on other related aspects of the Palestine question and the Arab-Israeli conflict. It specializes in the research, analysis, and monitor of issues pertaining to the dispersed Palestinians and their internationally recognized legal right to return.

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Abbreviations

AQU	Al-Quds University
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
COP	Conference of the Parties
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHG	Green House Gas
IDF	Israeli Defence Force
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MoH	Ministry of Health
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
oPt	occupied Palestinian territories
PA	Palestinian Authority
PRCS	Palestine Red Crescent Society
PRJ	Palestinian Refugees in Jordan
PRL	Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon
PRS	Palestinian Refugees in Syria
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
WHO	World Health Organisation

Executive Summary

This report presents an informative account of the Palestinian people in relation to the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This set of 17 goals and 169 targets is the globally agreed blueprint of the development agenda for the next fifteen years. The Palestinian issue is as old as the UN itself, with the Nakba, or “Catastrophe”, of 1948 creating the world’s longest standing refugee crisis. Subsequent wars, aggression and ongoing military occupation have left the Palestinian population unable to achieve their full development ability. With a global population of 11 million people and over 5.1 million of these registered refugees, crucial steps must be taken to consider how the SDGs will apply to the biggest displaced, and longest occupied, population on earth.

By analysing the situation of the Palestinian people in relation to the SDGs, this reports aims to inform and guide progression and achievement of the Goals. The Goals have been explored in accordance with three thematic elements of economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability. The themes are inextricably linked to one another and no theme would be sustainably accomplished without the fellow two. The report explores each theme by looking at Palestinians and Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

Economic growth among the Palestinian population is fragile. Within the West Bank and Gaza, GDP has reached a low of -0.4%, pushing the Palestinian economy into recession.¹ Unemployment in Gaza is declining but still worryingly high at 42 per cent. The slow pace of reconstruction and continued limits to resources has left Gaza’s economy on the brink of collapse.² UNRWA estimates that almost 80 per cent of Gaza’s population is currently aid dependent.³ In 2013, infant mortality in the oPt was 15.8 per 1,000 live births. In Gaza, infant mortality rates have risen after a continued decrease, reflecting the long term effects of the blockade.⁴

95 per cent of electricity in the West bank is imported from Israel, creating a huge dependency and loss of resources. Israeli policies limit development of independent energy systems or utilisation of natural gas fields off the Gaza Strip shores. Gaza has its own power generation station, but still remains considerably damaged from the military incursions of 2014 and earlier Israeli bombings starting from 2006. Limits to freedom of movement and access to opportunity have also exacerbated inequality in education, gender, poverty, climate change, and water access.

Previously home to 480,000 to 600,000 (UNRWA statistics estimate the number of 560,000, while previous Syrian official statistics estimates are 600,000) Palestinian refugees, the conflict in Syria has greatly affected Palestinian refugees. Syria's GDP is estimated to have contracted by an average of 15.4 per cent and the Syrian economy has plummeted.⁵ Those who have fled to neighbouring countries are not afforded the same rights as Syrian refugees, and are in a declining economic situation, with the Syrian pound depreciating by 80 per cent since the start of the conflict. Food prices have also skyrocketed, with a kilogram of rice nearing US\$ 100 in some areas.⁶

In most parts of Syria, electricity is only available for 2-4 hours a day. The lack of reliable electricity supply has affected essential humanitarian services, such as hospitals, schools, and sewage treatment. Given its location, Syria is disproportionately affected by climate change effects. Rainfall is predicted to decrease by 11 per cent, while temperature is increasing, causing widespread drought.⁷

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are not well integrated into Lebanese society, with restrictions on civil rights. Only 37 per cent of the working age is employed, and 60 per cent of these occupy low status employment. High levels of poverty and lack of opportunity have resulted in high school dropout rates of 39 per cent for over 10 year olds.⁸ The influx of Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) has further exacerbated existing problems for the Palestinian population in Lebanon. An estimated 42,000 PRS have entered Lebanon leading to overcrowding of camps that are already overcapacity. An estimated 89 per cent of these PRS live in poverty.⁹ UNRWA serves the majority of the Palestinian refugee community healthcare, but is severely understaffed, with an average doctor giving 103 medical consultations every day.¹⁰

Lebanon suffers from similar issues of increasing temperatures and low precipitation. The surge in population has also led to an estimated 5 per cent increase in road traffic and air pollution, whilst the domestic water and power demand has increased by 12 and 10 per cent, respectively.

With over 2 million registered Palestine refugees, Jordan is host to the biggest population of Palestinian refugees. Most Palestinians are well integrated, with the exception of "ex-Gazans" who are not entitled to citizenship and other rights. Non-citizen Palestine Refugees Jordan (PRJ) are more than three times as likely to be amongst the very poorest, living on less than US\$ 1.25 a day.¹¹ Since the influx of 1.265 million Syrian refugees, the unemployment rate has increased from 14.5 per cent to 22.1 per cent.¹² Jordan imports 96 per cent of its oil and gas, making the country completely vulnerable to the global energy market. Water resources are scarce, rainfall is irregular, and groundwater is rapidly depleting due to overexploitation. Jordan is ranked among the poorest countries in the world in terms of water availability, with only 147 cubic metres per person per year in 2010.

It is clear that much needs to be done in the way of addressing the SDGs for the development of the Palestinian people in occupied Palestine or their host countries. However, it is clear that sustainable development and military occupation are mutually exclusive concepts. The reality of the occupation

makes it necessary to take into account the inadequacy of many development indicators when applied to the Palestinian situation. Indicators within the SDGs are not valid with regard to this circumstance, and consequently, another kind of development measurement must be considered.

The UN SDGs have provided a comprehensive list of important factors, however accountability and realism are lacking within the goals. The SDG document lacks a focus on countries embroiled in conflict and militarization. By scarcely mentioning refugees or internally displaced people, it neglects over half of the Palestinian population. The SDGs do not specify who is responsible for the burden of the refugees, and they are likely to be left behind, as can already be seen occurring.

UNRWA suffers from a severe lack of funding, unable to sustain the burden of the ever-growing population and continued conflict. Lack of a political solution is the main strain on UNRWA, and a lack of accountability from the SDGs leaves UNRWA as the only body to attempt to achieve the goals, which is impractical.

In conclusion, short- and long-term recommendations are suggested in order to make accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals feasible within the Palestinian circumstance. Recommendations include; taking steps to immediately mitigate the hardship of the Palestinian population by ensuring UNRWA obtains stable funding; an immediate and permanent end to the blockade of Gaza; the right to return of the Palestinian refugees, in accordance with UN resolution 194; and for the oPt to become a 'party' member of the UNFCCC.

Fundamentally, the international community must recognise its responsibility in ending the occupation as a challenge to global development. The responsibility of the international community in enabling Palestine to achieve the SDGs lies in providing political support to establish and recognise an independent Palestinian state, and exert pressure on Israel to end its occupation and remove the obstacles imposed on the Palestinian economy, society and environment.

Background and Context

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This set of 17 goals, with 169 targets forms the globally agreed blueprint for the development agenda of 2015 to 2030. The newly instated set of global goals were created to follow the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as the world's targets for addressing extreme poverty in all its forms for the first 15 years of this century.

The MDGs were aimed at developing the most economically deprived countries. By creating a set of easy, quantifiable, and time-bound goals, a sense of greater global awareness in which accountability of development could be scrutinised, was created. With the extreme poverty rate dropping from 47 per cent to 14 per cent, and primary education net enrolment increased 8 per cent, the MDGs certainly had successes.¹³ However, achievement of the goals was highly variable across countries and much is still to be done to achieve a developed world. This is where the SDGs come in.

The SDGs are universal for all governments and countries to achieve, with reviews being monitored by a High-Level Political forum under the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. The Goals, not simply focused on development, but on sustainability, encompass and interlink the three dimensions of economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability. The multi-dimensional nature of these goals presents the natural challenge given with sustainable development - achieving these three dimensions in coordination with one another.

Prior to the onset of the MDGs and during their reign, the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) and the Palestinian people in the Diaspora have faced countless obstacles to development. Within the Palestinian territories, freedom of movement is restricted as a result of the eight-metre high separation wall encircling both the West Bank and Gaza. Appropriation of land and lack of international recognition further contribute and exacerbate present developmental challenges. The Gaza strip faces further challenges, with the affliction of three wars in just six years, and limited access to restoration and recovery as a result of the ongoing blockade imposed since 2007.

The plight of the Palestinian people is the longest standing obstacle to development. The Palestinian refugee crisis started with the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, which the Palestinians to this day refer to as the Nakba, or the Catastrophe. Over 750,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced and 418 towns and villages were destroyed. Subsequent wars and continued house demolitions have created four generations of Palestinian refugees that reside around the world, predominantly in the oPt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. The

majority of the Palestinian population remain in exile to this day. With over 5.1 million registered refugees with UNRWA, and an estimated 2.1 million unregistered, Palestinians are largest refugee population in the world with at least half of the 11 million global population considered refugees.¹⁴¹⁵

Analysing the situation of the Palestinian people in relation to the goals is important to ensure progress, if and where possible. The Palestinian context is as old as the UN itself, so setting these goals must involve important scrutiny, aiming to address issues in all contexts, as well as be accessible and achievable. Conclusions will be drawn upon at the end, to suggest how achieving the SDGs could be better applied to Palestinians, and how the SDGs fail in the context of the Palestinian situation.



Methodology

This report will analyse the key issues related to sustainable development among the Palestinian population. The issues of most relevance within the constraints of reporting have been documented. Although a comprehensive account of the issues has been presented, this is not an exhaustive account.

The report is an analysis of Palestinians and Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. In the absence of systematic monitoring and reporting of refugees, it is difficult to portray accurate accounts and statistics for all refugees in each respective country. Statistics on the Palestinian refugees within, and who have fled from, Syria are particularly challenging given the current climate. With challenges to data gathering considered, the available literature has been used to give a reasoned account of current circumstances. This report aims to be informative, and help shape the development agenda in relation to the Palestinian people.

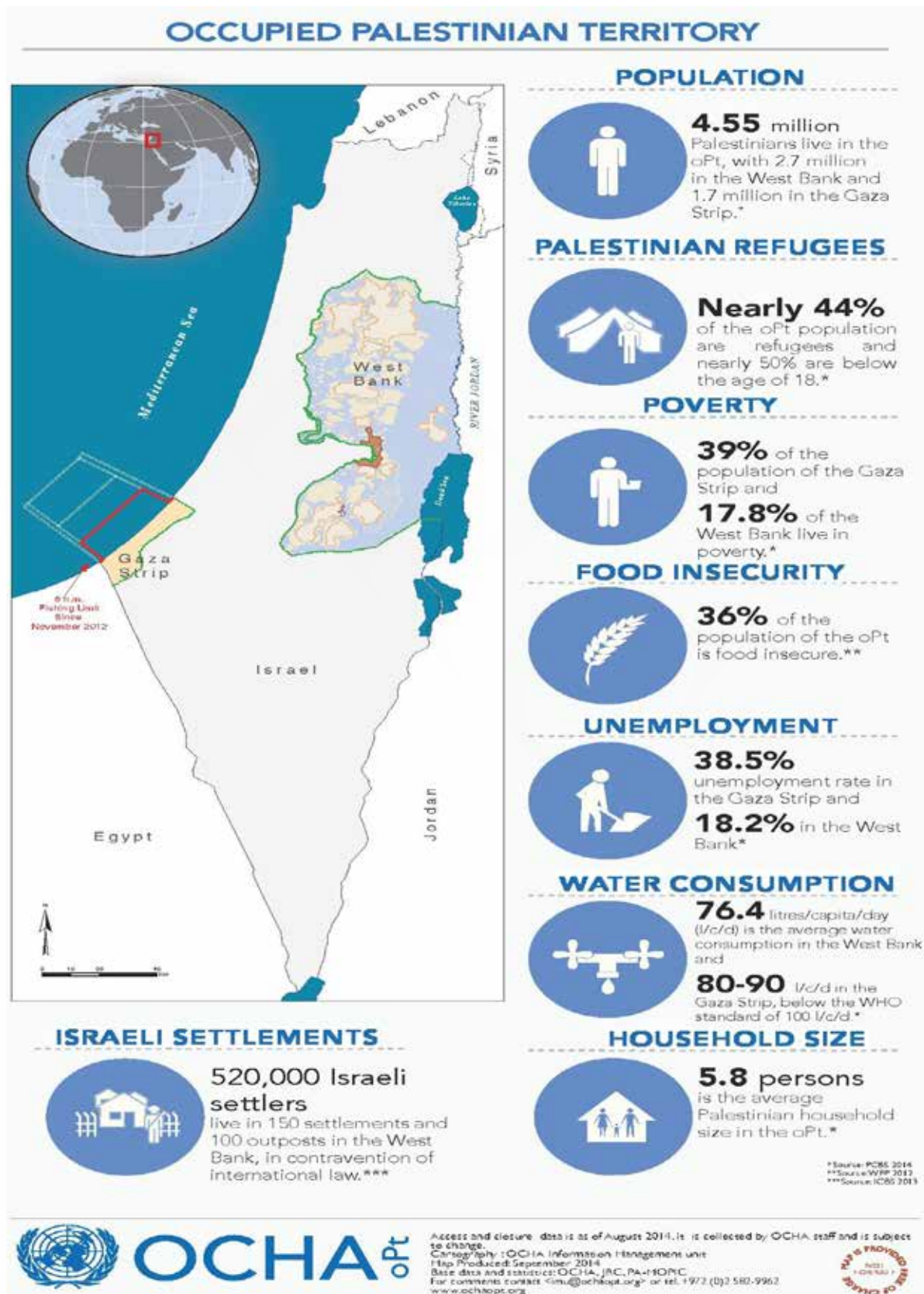
Information has been gathered by desk research with data collected from organisations such as UNDP, OCHA, UNRWA, Amnesty International, UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank. The issues in this report have been addressed in accordance to the key thematic elements pertaining to economic, social and environmental development. It is important to consider that none of these dimensions exist independently from one another. The themes, and goals, are inextricably linked to one other, personifying the complex nature of sustainable development. The three themes encompass several goals, with some goals falling under more than one theme.

The social aspects of development dominate the development agenda. With SDG 1 to “end poverty in all forms everywhere”, top of the agenda, it is still seen to be the greatest global challenge facing the world today. Links across the goals are most apparent with the case of poverty. Poverty in its all its dimensions is multi-faceted and features in the remaining SDGs, including SDG 2 (end hunger); SDG 3 (healthy lives); SDG 4 (education); and SDG 5 (gender equality). Also included within the social dimension are SDG 10 to reduce inequality within and among countries and SDG 11 to make cities and settlements safe and sustainable.

Economic growth is outlined in SDG 8 aiming to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”, with SDG 9 “build resilient infrastructure and promote inclusive industrialisation” also explored under the umbrella of economic development.

Five of the 17 goals place a particular focus on environmental sustainability. Within this report, the three goals (6, 7 and 13) concerning water, energy and climate change, will be explored in depth. This third thematic element is crucial, and a new focus previously missing from the development agenda. Climate change

has significant geopolitical impacts around the world, contributing to poverty, environmental degradation, and the further weakening of fragile governments. Climate change will contribute to food and water scarcity, will increase the spread of disease, and may spur or exacerbate mass migration. Following the COP21 Paris Summit, climate matters are top of the development agenda.



Overview of Palestinians Sustainable Development Issues

1. Key Economic Development Issues

Throughout this section, the SDGs affecting economic development issues will be explored in relation to Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. The goals are all inextricably linked, and are therefore not exclusive to any section. The following format has been chosen for clarity and is not absolute.

The SDGs covered in this section include SDG 8, the promotion of sustainable economic growth, and full and productive employment; and SDG 9 to develop industry, innovation and resilient infrastructure. The sub-targets of SDG 8 include to sustain economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum. SDG 8 also includes the aim to achieve full and productive employment and decent work, including substantially reducing the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.

The targets of Goal 9 include to develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and trans-border infrastructure to support economic development and well-being, and to promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation.

1.1 Palestinian Refugees in West Bank and Gaza

Economic Growth & Employment



Economic growth in the oPt is restricted as a direct result of limits to movement and trade restrictions imposed by the occupying state of Israel. In 2014 GDP reached a low of -0.4%, pushing the Palestinian economy into recession.¹⁶ GDP growth in the West Bank and Gaza is unstable and unpredictable being highly determined by political events and international donor support. The efficacy of donor support is often said to be undermined by the occupation. Repeated humanitarian interventions divert donor aid from development to relief. UNCTAD states that no amount of aid would be sufficient to lead an economy to sustainable development under conditions of frequent military strikes, destruction of infrastructure and isolation from global markets.¹⁷ Isolation from global markets force the oPt into huge dependence on unbalanced trade with Israel.

The occupation creates restrictions to economic growth by applying bias throughout trade, agriculture and infrastructure. Human Rights Watch notes an example of this in the operating conditions of quarries within the West Bank. No new permits have been issued to Palestinian businesses for quarrying since 1994. Palestinian quarries in the West Bank produce a quarter of the amount of stone that Israeli-administered West Bank quarries produce. The World Bank estimates that Israel's virtual ban on Palestinian permits for quarries costs the Palestinian economy a minimum of US\$ 241 million per year.¹⁸

Economic growth in Gaza is among the worst in the world. The ongoing blockade and three military attacks in six years have left the 1.8 million people of Gaza, with a crippled economic outlook. Since the 2007 blockade, exports from Gaza have been almost completely banned. Imports, humanitarian goods, and cash transfers have also been severely restricted. In 2014, a fresh military operation meant that Gaza's GDP dropped by 15 per cent. The World Bank estimates that the 50 day interruption of productive activities reduced Gaza's GDP by US\$ 460 million. This operation had a more severe impact on socioeconomic conditions compared to the previous two military operations in 2008-09 and 2012. The slow pace of reconstruction and continued limits to resources has left Gaza's economy on the brink of collapse.¹⁹

In 2014, unemployment rates in Gaza were among the highest in the world. At its peak, unemployment was at 47 percent in Gaza and 18 per cent in the West Bank.²⁰ Young female refugees in Gaza suffer most severely, with 8 out of 10 out of work. The ramifications of this high unemployment on the economy will be long-lasting, as prolonged spells of employment lead to deskilled populations and render education obsolete.²¹ A 2015 World Bank report shows that as the

reconstruction process slowly begins, and private firms rebuild their capacity, unemployment in Gaza and the West Bank is declining, but still remains at a high rate (42 per cent in Gaza, 16 per cent in West Bank).²²

Agriculture



Agriculture contributes significantly to Palestinian income, exports, food security and job creation. However, the sector operates well below its potential. Its relative contribution to GDP and exports is declining, and the size of agricultural output is on a discernible downward trend.

Over 60 per cent of land in the West Bank is considered Area C, where Israel retains exclusive control over law enforcement, planning and construction. It is estimated that 300,000 Palestinians live in here in 530 residential areas. Restrictions on cultivation of natural resources mean this area lacks its potential to contribute to the economy. There are over 560,000 settlers across the West Bank including East Jerusalem. In Area C alone there are over 300,000 Israeli settlers in 135 settlements and 100 outposts, all in contravention of international law.^{23 24} Despite illegality, settler populations have continued to grow, as Israeli's are given incentives, such as tax breaks and reduced electricity rates, to live there.

In certain areas of the West Bank, particularly in the Jordan valley, settlements rely on agriculture, and much land is cultivated outside of the limits of the settlement. Cultivating this land threatens the viability of the area for local Palestinian communities and farmers, especially when combined with the closed military zones along the eastern strip of the West Bank. Five Palestinian communities in the Jordan Valley are located within Israeli declared closed military zones. Palestinian farmers caught grazing their livestock on lands traditionally used by these villages face risk of their animals being seized, identification cards confiscated, fines and arrests.²⁵ The conflict over resources has led to violence between settlers and Palestinians. Settler violence against productive assets in this area is continual. In 2014, 9,333 productive trees were destroyed or vandalised. In January 2015 alone, 5,600 trees across the West Bank were uprooted or vandalised.²⁶

The Dead Sea is one example of a vast economic asset that remains unutilised by the oPt. It is abound with valuable minerals, primarily potash and bromine, of which Israel and Jordan derive some US\$ 4.2 billion in annual sales of these products. Demand for both of these products is strong, with 73 per cent of global bromine output coming from the Dead Sea alone. This is a cheap and easy resource to cultivate; however, Palestinians are prevented from reaping the benefits of this market. Estimates suggest that the Palestinian economy could derive up to US\$ 918 million per annum if they were allowed access to harvest these products – almost equivalent to the size of the entire Palestinian manufacturing sector.²⁷

The Gazan economy is also largely dependent on agriculture, however, due to closures and land razing, this sector has been greatly affected. The UNDP

reports that demolition of greenhouses and agricultural infrastructure, razing of land and widespread damage to crops has resulted in total losses reaching over US\$ 93 million.²⁸

Infrastructure



40 per cent of the West Bank is now occupied by Israeli infrastructure. This includes settlements, outposts, military bases and closed military areas. Israeli military bases and firing zones cover over one fifth of the West Bank, limiting access of this land by Palestinians unless they have prior permission from the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) or settlement regional councils. Settlements are located near or around these areas and act as a physical division between settler population and the local Palestinian communities.

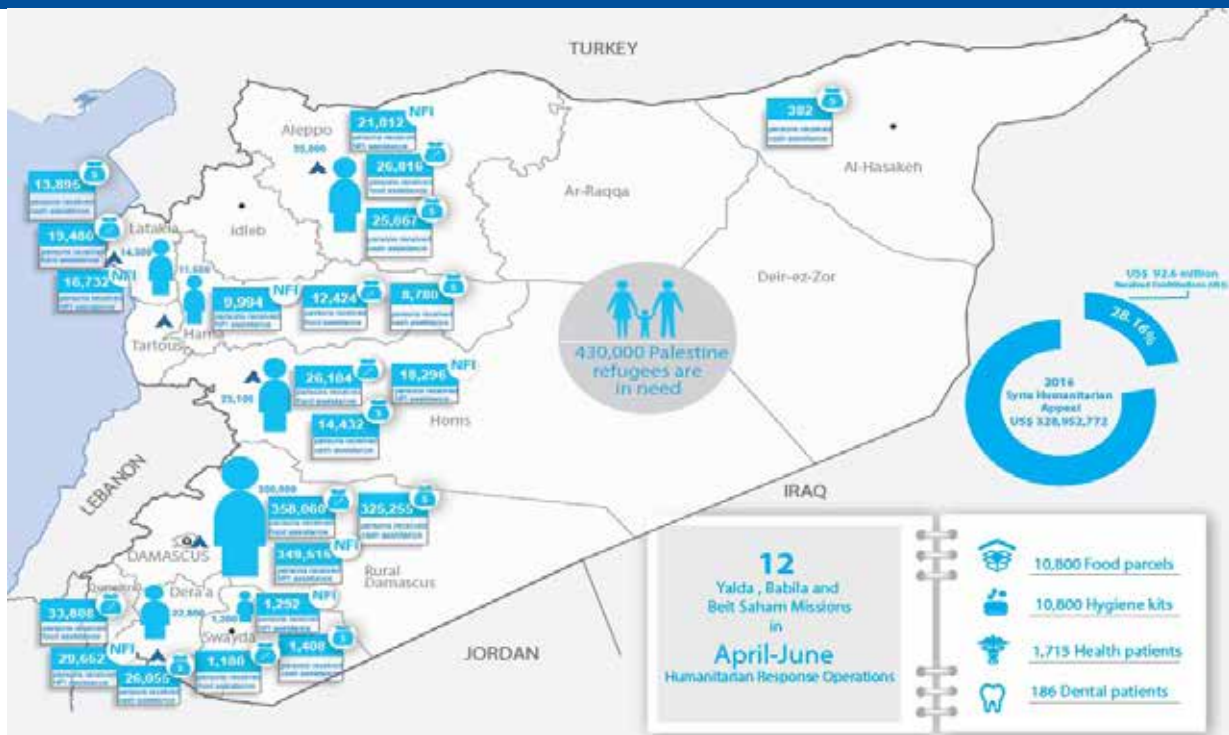
Only one per cent of Area C has been allocated for Palestinian development. In 2013, 565 Palestinian owned structures in Area C were demolished due to lack of Israeli-issued permits, resulting in the displacement of 805 people, of which almost half were children. In 2015, 521 structures were demolished displacing a further 663 people. Many Palestinians cite settlement expansion as a reason for demolitions, although this is denied by the Israeli authorities.^{29 30}

Settlements are linked to one another, and to Israel, by an extensive road network of 1,661km of roads. Palestinians are either prevented or restricted from using this network by approximately 85 checkpoints, 460 roadblocks and a permit system for Palestinian registration plates. This has restricted access to trade, movement, jobs, hospitals, school and universities. The World Bank notes that these restrictions have not only increased transaction costs, but also created inefficiency for businesses and therefore stifled the growth and investment which is necessary for economic revival.³¹

The World Bank estimates that Israeli restrictions on movement, land, and resources in Area C cost the Palestinian economy around US\$ 3.4 billion a year. The additional revenues would generate US\$ 800 million in government tax receipts, equal to half the Palestinian Authority's debt.

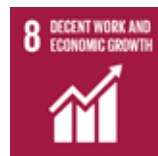
The 2014 offensive has left Gaza's infrastructure in dire need of help. During this period, Israeli forces either partially or fully destroyed at least 31,974 housing structures, many of which hosted multiple housing units. Civilian and public infrastructure, including health, sanitation, water, education, and electricity facilities, were frequently targeted.³² UNRWA reported that 9,117 homes in Gaza were totally demolished, with a similar number resulting in severe or major damage. A further 123,000 also suffered minor damage.³³

Reconstruction of Gaza's infrastructure has been slow and inefficient. Just 15 per cent of Gazan families displaced during the war have been able to return to reconstructed homes. Only five per cent of the houses that were partially destroyed have been rebuilt. According to Oxfam International, at the current rate of reconstruction and without lifting the blockade, it could take more than one-hundred years to rebuild Gaza's housing, education, and health infrastructure.^{34 35 36}



1.2 Palestinian Refugees in Syria (PRS)

Economic Growth & Employment



Compared to other countries, registered PRS were treated relatively well in Syria prior to the start of the conflict in 2011. PRS enjoyed almost the same rights as Syrian nationals with the exception of citizenship and the right to vote. In 2011, Syria played host to over 560,000 registered Palestinian refugees in 12 camps. The war has displaced 280,000 PRS inside Syria and 80,000 in neighbouring countries, including 42,500 in Lebanon and 16,000 in Jordan. Palestinian refugee camps within Syria have repeatedly been subject to attack; today five camps remain inaccessible and the remaining camps face a rapidly deteriorating situation, including lack of resources.³⁷

PRS were generally well integrated into Syria, and so when discussing economic and living conditions, the conditions of both Syrians and PRS are seen as all encompassing. The impact of the conflict on the Syrian economy is hard to quantify, and statistical analysis cannot fully convey the devastation that has been wrought. Nevertheless, Syria's GDP is estimated to have contracted by an average of 15.4 per cent. The Syrian economy has plummeted, with the Syrian pound depreciating by 80 per cent since the start of the conflict, and inflation averaging 51 per cent between 2012 -2015.³⁸ Total economic loss since the start of the conflict until the end of 2014 is estimated at US\$ 202.6 billion.³⁹

The biggest losses in output have been in the energy and manufacturing sectors. State-controlled oil production has plummeted from 387,000 barrels a day to less than 10,000. This has deprived the government of one of their main economic revenues.⁴⁰

Unemployment has increased from 14.9 per cent in 2011 to 57.7 per cent at the end of 2014, leaving 3.72 million people unemployed, and over 12 million people without a main source of income. A war economy has emerged, where rebel groups have established autonomous economic spheres, and in which the role of international aid in sustaining the population has assumed increased importance.⁴¹ The expansion of the economy of violence is leading to an increase in Syrian youth joining various networks to engage in conflict-related enterprises and illegal activities. This shows the limited options available for Palestinian refugees to achieve economic security in Syria.⁴²

Agriculture



Agriculture assumes a bigger role in national output in relative terms (to manufacturing or energy), but food production has fallen sharply as a result of the conflict. The majority of farmers remain constrained by difficulties in reaching their lands due to insecurity and safety, which also affects marketing of their products. Military operations have destroyed large parts of irrigation systems, trees, storehouses, livestock, and agricultural tools and materials. Many farmers are unable to repair their damaged assets, or afford the increasing costs of fertilisers and energy. Some farmers have been able to adapt by continuing to produce and sell; others are producing to simply meet household requirements, but for the majority, agriculture has become more difficult and uncertain. The agriculture sector is also still continually affected by drought.⁴³

Contraction in agriculture production has required the government to resort to increasing food imports of basic foods such as, wheat, sugar and flour. Increased food scarcity has inflated food prices, and led to widespread malnutrition.⁴⁴

Infrastructure

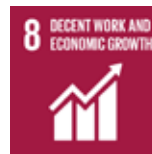


Hard hit areas have witnessed complete or partial destruction of basic infrastructure, which has left many services inoperable. In 2014, UNOSAT documented over 30,000 destroyed or damaged buildings. Residential buildings, including refugee camps, were noted as the primary damaged type, with school, hospital, markets, mosques and power stations all highly affected. UNOSAT noted that the damage inside Yarmouk camp was heavy in specific areas. Damage from bombing and shelling has reduced multiple buildings in Yarmouk to rubble, with extreme damage along its primary road to Damascus, limiting movement.⁴⁵

Since 2014, further extreme damage has been caused to the infrastructure of Syria, which has highly affected PRS. Detailed damage assessments are not taking place as a result of difficulty and staff shortages to conduct complex technical assessments. A programme by UNRWA on Infrastructure and Camp Improvement has been stopped as a result of the ongoing conflict.⁴⁶

1.3 Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon (PRL)

Economic Growth & Employment



Lebanon is a small country with a population just over 4.5 million people. Of these over 452,000 are registered Palestinian refugees living in 12 official camps or in gatherings within the camps vicinity.⁴⁷ UNRWA statistics show that two thirds of this population are living below the poverty line, with poverty rates higher in camps than in gatherings.⁴⁸

GDP growth in Lebanon stood at 2 per cent in 2015, however figures for Lebanon are not necessarily reflective of the Palestinian population as refugees are not well integrated to Lebanese society.⁴⁹ Only 37 per cent of the working age is employed (only 13 per cent of women, compared to 65 per cent of men), and those in employment are often in jobs of low status and precarious employment. The



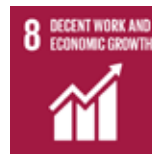
type of employment and jobs that refugees are engaged with are important predictors of poverty, and PRL are often denied the right to work in many professions. The low employment status of PRL imposes a negative burden on livelihoods. 60 per cent of the employed refugee population occupies elementary and low skilled occupations; these categories also have the highest number of poor and extremely poor individuals.⁵⁰ The International Labour Organisation found the majority of PRL in employment worked informally with less than 3.3 per cent having official employment contracts and less than 2 per cent holding a work permit.⁵¹

The Syrian conflict has led to an influx of PRS into Lebanon, and has further contributed to the plight of the Palestinian refugees. Prior to Lebanon closing its borders to PRS in May 2014, it was estimated that 53,070 PRS resided in Lebanon. Since August 2015 the number of PRS in Lebanon dropped to 42,284, namely due to emigration from Lebanon to Europe and other countries. The already overcrowded camps and gatherings have seen an influx of people, exacerbating the dire living conditions of the existing PRL. Over half of the PRS in Lebanon reside in the 12 UNWRA camps, whilst the remaining 45.2 per cent live in the surrounding gatherings.⁵²

In 2013, 90 per cent of PRS families in Lebanon lacked an income, and unemployment is widespread among the population. PRS are forced to rely on UNRWA and other refugees to sustain them. Amnesty International reported instances of child labour as a means of survival due to exhaustion of financial resources.⁵³

1.4 Palestinian Refugees in Jordan (PRJ)

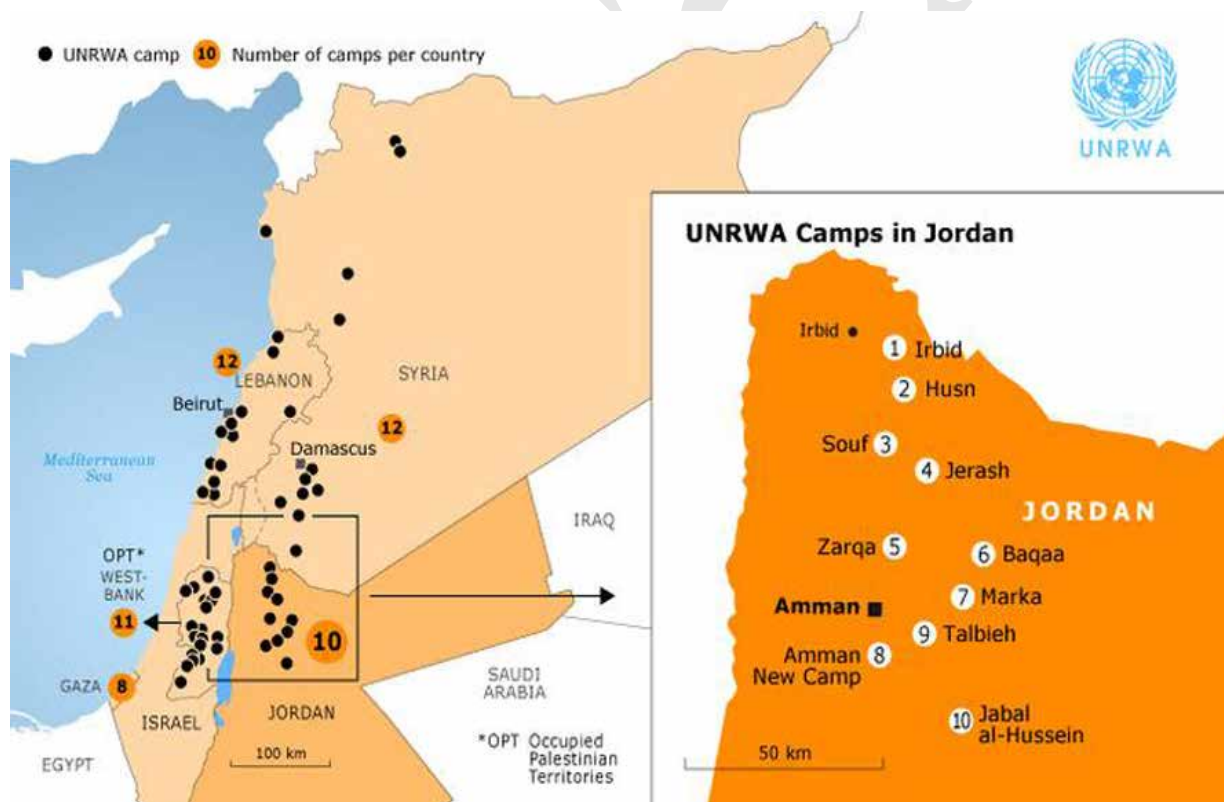
Economic Growth & Employment



Jordan is host to the biggest Palestinian refugee population in the world. There are more than 2 million registered Palestine refugees, accommodated across ten UNRWA camps, three unofficial camps, and alongside other Jordanians in cities, towns and villages. Palestinians are concentrated in northern and central Jordan, in the Amman, Zarqa and Irbid Governorates. It is important to note that there is great diversity and disparities among the refugee population in Jordan, whilst some live among the Jordanians and enjoy improved education, health and living conditions, those in the camps are still significantly disadvantaged.

The Syrian crisis has caused an influx of refugees. As of January 2016, the UNHCR has registered over 635,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan, raising the population by at least 10 per cent since 2010.⁵⁴ This influx has led to increased rents, price increases and strains on public services and has stressed Jordan's economic infrastructures.⁵⁵ However, since 2013, Jordan has refused entry to any further PRS.⁵⁶

Jordan's economy is among the smallest in the Middle East and is largely dependent on trade and service related activity. Jordan's economy saw 2.5 per cent GDP growth in 2015, with 2.8 per cent inflation in 2014.⁵⁷ There are some signs of Syrian refugees entering into jobs of Jordanian citizens and PRJ. A general sign of this can be seen as the unemployment rate has



increased from 14.5 per cent to 22.1 per cent between 2011 and 2014. There was a particular increase in the youngest age group (15-24 years), from 19 to 35 per cent unemployment, indicating that it has become more difficult for the youth in Jordan to enter the labour market.⁵⁸

Generally, young women's economic participation is low, and this is reflective of PRJ women as well. The labour force participation rate (actively engaged in labour market or looking for work) among women aged 15-24 is only nine per cent, while for men of this age it is 41 per cent. The youth unemployment rate is 46 per cent, which is double the rate of males of males.⁵⁹

Many PRJ have full Jordanian citizenship and are entitled to all public services, those who do not (mostly "ex-Gazans" who were displaced from Gaza for either the first or second time as a result of the 1967 war and subsequent hostilities) face harsher challenges. Without a national ID number, ex-Gazans have limited or no access to certain services, including the Jordanian National aid Fund, university scholarships, government health insurance and professions such as dentistry and legal practice. Those without Jordanian citizenship also do not have access to public sector employment, which accounts for 37 per cent of employment in Jordan.⁶⁰

Jerash Camp, otherwise known as "Gaza Camp", is home to 24,000 ex-Gazans who live in an area of 0.75 square kilometres. Unemployment in Jerash camp is higher when compared to those in other camps. 15 per cent of females and 16 per cent of males are unemployed. Restrictions to the labour market are cited as one reason for this. Local farmers that own the agricultural fields, hire refugees from Jerash as labourers, who obtain food and income this way.⁶¹

2. Key Social Development Issues

The SDGs covered in the following section include SDG 1, 2, 3, 5, 10 and 11. The research around each of these aims echoes their entwined nature, and is this is reflected in the subsequent section. As a result of research limitations, certain areas have been conjoined or omitted where necessary.

Goal 1 aims to eradicate extreme poverty for all people, as measured by people living on less than \$1.25 a day, as well as ensure everyone have equal rights to economic resources, basic services and control over land. The latter point reflects the notion that poverty is inextricably linked to various other goals covered in this report, thus where the data is not available, poverty has not been explored in isolation.

The aim of Goal 2 is to end hunger and achieve food security, including ending malnutrition and doubling agricultural productivity. SDG 3 is related to improving global health by reducing maternal mortality rates and ending preventable deaths of new-borns. Ensuring equitable education is addressed in Goal 4, in an aim to ensure all girls and boys are in free, quality primary and secondary education, with the access to tertiary education. Under this goal also comes the upgrading of education facilities to provide safe, non-violent learning environment for all.

Goal 5 is to achieve gender equality by ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls and ensure their full and effective participation in decision making in political, economic and public life. Goal 10 aims to reduce inequality within countries, economically and socially, including empowering political inclusion. This includes increasing equal access to opportunity and eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices. The aim to reduce inequality also applies across countries, including the target to improve regulation of global financial markets, ensure responsible migration and encourage development assistance where it is of greatest need. Finally, Goal 11 aims to ensure access to adequate and affordable housing as well as, sustainable transport systems.

2.1 West Bank and Gaza

Poverty & Food Security



The West Bank is home to nearly 750,000 refugees; around a quarter live in 19 camps, with most others in West Bank towns and villages. Over half a million Palestine refugees in Gaza live in eight recognised refugee camps, which have one of the highest population densities in the world. The 2014 Gaza War left a further half a million people displaced, 22,000 homes destroyed, and 100,000 people homeless. Extensive damage to infrastructure including healthcare, education, water and sanitation further undermined access to basic services.⁶²

The regional divergence of poverty in the oPt is significant. In 2014, poverty in Gaza was 39 per cent, almost 2.5 times higher than in the West Bank at 16 percent. UNRWA estimates that almost 80 per cent of Gaza's population is currently aid dependent.⁶³ Poverty in the Gaza Strip is divergent as the ongoing blockade does not allow the required aid and resources needed. Prior to the 2014 onslaught, food security in the oPt was already unstable and conditions have deteriorated. The World Food Programme shows that food insecurity in oPt averages at 33 per cent, meaning that 1.6 million people are classed as food insecure. In the West Bank 19 per cent of local people face food insecurity, whilst this number increases dramatically to 57 per cent in Gaza.⁶⁴ The majority of the population is forced to depend on food distribution from UNRWA. In 2000, 72,000 refugees relied solely on UNRWA food distribution; by May 2015 this figure increased to 868,000 which represent half of the population of Gaza and 65 per cent of registered refugees there.

Education



Education is vital for economic and social development, with better education correlated to higher employability rates and better life opportunities. With enrolment rates at 94% in 2013/14, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have good levels of education compared to their neighbouring Arab states. The Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) was established in 1994 as a result of the Oslo Accords, allowing Palestinian's charge of their education system. Since this time, education enrolment and services have improved, but occupying forces still provide a barrier to education.⁶⁵

Students are regularly late and miss days due to delays at checkpoints, arrests and clashes with military. Al-Khalil (Hebron) is the largest city in the West Bank, with the city split into areas H1 (under Palestinian Authority) and H2 (under Israeli control). Hebron has 17 permanent checkpoints; many children pass through at least one checkpoint on their school journey, with body and bag searches frequently occurring. Students often take longer commutes to school in order to avoid dangerous areas or difficult checkpoints. Long waits and difficult access are supplemented by frequent tear gas exposure and sometimes physical injury.

Organisations such as Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) and the Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT) monitor Hebron's checkpoints and accompany student's on their walks to school, in order to ensure their safety.⁶⁶ In ten days the CPT documented over 143 teargas canisters fired as children walked to school, as well as five stun grenades. In the same two weeks, two boys (aged 11 and 12) were ambushed and arrested by Israeli forces⁶⁷.

In recent months, unlawful killings of students on route to school have increased. Amnesty International condemned one such case of Hadeel Hashlamoun, a first year student at Hebron University who was killed by the

IDF at a checkpoint in Hebron, when she presented no danger to the soldiers in question.⁶⁸ The diminished mobility of students as a result of violence and control and intimidation techniques has created a barrier to education and ongoing psychological stress, which can affect school attainment.

Higher education facilities are also targets of the occupation. University students from Jerusalem, often have to pass through checkpoints to get to university in the West Bank. This causes delays and students are also subject to harassment. Professors and teachers are also not immune to arrest or harassment.

Al-Quds University, with over 13,000 students enrolled, has campuses in Jerusalem and the West Bank. The main AQU campus based in Abu Dis is enclosed by the separation wall.⁶⁹ Flying checkpoints are common, where students face harassment and possible arrest. Administrative detention is common practice for students here – arrested before final exams so cannot graduate. AQU's location means that it is subject to regular teargas and rubber bullet attacks. Statistics from October 2015 showed that AQU had suffered direct attacks by the IDF injuring 175 people with rubber bullets, 513 suffered tear gas inhalation and one person injured with live ammunition. The attacks also left wide spread damage causing significant financial losses for the university.⁷⁰

Although a large number of the students that attend AQU are Arab-Israeli citizens, with the right to work in Israel; their degrees are not acknowledged, as Israel refuses to officially recognise AQU as a university. Despite the lack of Arab speaking doctors, teachers and lawyers in Israel, this stubbornness continues, and limits employment opportunities following education. After a five year battle, in 2015, a Jerusalem Court ruled that students who studied medicine at AQU would now be allowed to take their physician licensing exams in Israel, enabling them to work there.^{71 72}

Half of Gaza's population is under the age of 18.⁷³ Gaza has both government-run schools and 252 UNWRA schools. Due to lack of resources 94% of UNRWA schools operate on a double-shift basis, hosting two schools of students in a day. This shift work means that student's school days are cut short and they may only receive four hours of schooling a day, with up to 60 pupils per class at any one time.⁷⁴ Access to higher education options is also limited. In 14 years, Israel only permitted three students from Gaza to study in the West Bank, limiting students from Gaza the opportunity to receive higher education.⁷⁵

Furthermore, schools lack essential equipment and resources, and are unable to offer opportunities for further development and academic exchanges. The 2014 offensive made education in Gaza progressively more difficult. Over the 51 days of attacks, approximately a third of all schools (228) were damaged, including 83 UNRWA schools. 26 schools were entirely destroyed.⁷⁶ Higher education facilities were also affected, with many of the 28 facilities damaged, leaving the 95,000 students they serve affected.⁷⁷ Further to this, 250 students and 15 teachers killed, and 856 students and 19 teachers were injured.⁷⁸



In 2013, infant mortality in the oPt was 15.8 per 1,000 live births. For a comparison, in Israel this figure was 3.5 per 1,000 live births. In Gaza, infant mortality rates had been on a steady decline since 1960, but in recent years, it has risen again to 22.4 per 1,000 live births. This sort of increase is generally unprecedented, and rarely experienced. Exact causes cannot be determined, but experts suggest that the long term effects of the blockade are starting to be seen in health trends.^{79 80}

Travel restrictions in the West Bank, especially to East Jerusalem, affect the delivery of health services. Medical services do not reach Area C sufficiently, while Israel does not provide services to Palestinians. The MoH has no authority to build health posts within Area C. Palestinians rely on hospitals in East Jerusalem for routine, emergency and high specialist treatment. On average, 3,000 patients are referred by the MoH to East Jerusalem hospitals annually. West Bank ID holders must have a letter of referral and documentation from the referring hospital in East Jerusalem before they can apply for a permit to cross the separation wall. This is a complicated and long process that can take many weeks to complete. The need to obtain permits, difficulties travelling and general unpredictability of access for patients has led to a 50 per cent drop in-patient admissions to hospitals.⁸¹

Approximately 70 per cent of medical staff working in six non-governmental hospitals in Jerusalem are West Bank residents. Permits for health staff are granted on short but variable timeframes and renewal is occasionally and temporarily denied without reason. Permits are generally only valid until 7pm, and even those with permits face long lines at checkpoints, which cause delays in patient care, including surgery schedules.⁸² Limited opportunities for professionals in Gaza to attend outside training and become familiar with new technologies and medical techniques acts as a barrier to healthcare development in the Gaza strip.⁸³

Insufficient funds have led to a chronic shortage of pharmaceuticals and supplies. In November 2015, the MoH reported that 18 per cent of essential medicine in the West Bank was at zero stock. In Gaza that figure soared to 33 per cent at zero stock. This figure was higher for psychiatric, cancer and paediatric medicines (38 to 44 per cent). 41 per cent of medical disposals were also at zero.⁸⁴

October 2015 saw a new wave in violence across the oPt. The ministry of Health in Ramallah reported 129 Palestinian civilians killed (including 26 children and six women), in the period from October 1 to December 21. 15,078 individuals were also injured in the same timeframe. In this same period WHO reported limits to patient access, with 29 cement barricades installed around eight East Jerusalem neighbourhoods, affecting the movement of 15,000 residents, including access to hospitals and clinics. East Jerusalem hospitals reported severe traffic jams that created delays for medical staff and patients, and disrupted the operations

in six hospitals.⁸⁵ UNRWA reported that in eight days of October, Israeli forces made 45 incursions into refugee camps. A 13 year old was killed and 180 were injured (including 20 children), 50 by live ammunition.⁸⁶

The use of ammunition and tear gas in or near health facilities poses a risk of injury to patients and health personnel, and also intimidates people from accessing health facilities. In Gaza, one incident reported that tear gas canisters were shot inside an ambulance and near a paramedic, injuring four people and damaging one ambulance.⁸⁷ The Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) reported a high number of incidents affecting their ability to operate emergency services. Figures as of December 2015 showed 146 paramedic personnel were injured, 91 ambulances were damaged and 91 ambulances reported being significantly delayed by security forces from reaching their destinations.⁸⁸

The effects of conflict on healthcare are well-established.⁸⁹ In Gaza, the 2014 war caused mass destruction to an already fragmented health care sector. 17 hospitals and 56 primary healthcare centres were damaged in some way. 45 ambulances, 1 hospital and 5 primary health care facilities were completely destroyed, resulting in increased patient load at remaining health care facilities within the catchment areas.⁹⁰ 23 health workers were killed (16 while on duty), and 83 injured, primarily while carrying out emergency services.⁹¹

El-Wafa Rehabilitation Hospital in Gaza, the only facility treating long term injuries and disabilities, was specifically targeted and entirely destroyed. Economic losses from the war on the health sector are estimated at over US\$ 380 million.⁹²

The effects of the siege on healthcare are clear, as it hampers healthcare provision due to the constant uncertainty of availability of essential funds, supplies and services. Data shows that these difficulties encountered by medical staff impede daily work and any attempts for a strong, systemised health care infrastructure.⁹³

Gender



Women in the oPt currently face two major obstacles to their rights; those created from within their own culture, and those created by the occupation and war. The status of Palestine as a non-independent state means it is not eligible to ratify UN conventions, however, in 2009 President Mahmoud Abbas signed the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).⁹⁴ Issues with the legal framework across the oPt make access to law difficult, especially for women. The laws in oPt have multiple sources including Jordanian law, Egyptian law, British mandate law, Israeli law and Sharia law. Women are represented in the political and legal system but they are few in number.⁹⁵

Laws that regulate matters such as inheritance, marriage, divorce, and child custody are based on Jordanian law in the West Bank, and Egyptian law in Gaza.

The existing legal frameworks contain laws that are outdated and discriminate against women, particularly in matters of divorce and child custody. For example, women can only request divorce under specific circumstances, whereas a man can divorce his wife for any reason. A woman can seek a divorce without evidence, but then gives up any financial rights, must return her dowry and can only do so if her husband concedes.⁹⁶

Domestic abuse is a significant problem and violence against women has increased over time. 30 per cent of ever-married women in the West Bank, and 51 per cent in Gaza have been subject to a form of violence in the household. With 49 per cent in the West Bank and 76 per cent in Gaza declaring psychological abuse; and 10 per cent and 15 per cent (West bank and Gaza respectively) reporting sexual abuse. Furthermore, 65 per cent of women who were exposed to violence by their husbands declared preferring to stay silent.⁹⁷

The informal justice system continues to deal with matters traditionally considered private issues, including “honour” crimes and domestic violence. In 2013, 28 women were killed in the name of “honour”, with the number of cases likely underreported.^{98 99 100} The Palestinian Government is taking steps to respond violence against women and has amended articles of the Penal Code by removing provisions for leniency with regard to murder in the name of family “honour”.¹⁰¹

Israel’s occupation directly deters women in the oPt from fully participating in public and political life as it physically divides the Palestinian population in different ways. Limits to movement presented by the separation wall and checkpoints have left women experiencing separation from family, education, employment and healthcare.¹⁰² Women and girls are regularly sexually and psychologically harassed at checkpoints. This not only causes psychological trauma, but creates fear of movement and further limits access to services.¹⁰³ Many young women are forced to leave school at 16 because of the daily harassment they encounter.¹⁰⁴

Despite challenges, net school enrolment and literacy rates tend to be equal for both sexes, with female enrolment higher in secondary education and the Women’s groups such as the Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) and Women’s Affairs Technical Committee are highly active in advocating for equal rights across the oPt, but the reality of the current occupation have led some women’s rights groups to focus more on national unity, peace and security, than on equal rights.^{105 106 107 108}

It is widely acknowledged that Israel's settlement expansion violates international humanitarian law, which prohibits the occupying power from transferring its civilian population into the territories it occupies. The majority of Area C is allocated to the benefit of Israeli settlements. Palestinians are prevented from upgrading or building homes, schools, health clinics, wells, blocked from accessing roads and lands, failed to provide electricity, sewage and water. These restrictions are not upheld for the Jewish population. Area C holds opportunities for development and expansion of communities and infrastructure. It is vital for the development of the West Bank economy because of its resource to mineral mining, water resource, agriculture and tourism. The maintenance of inter-community infrastructure, including roads and electricity grids, requires working in Area C. Discriminate policy in this particular area has ramifications on economic, social and environmental development.^{109 110}

Demolitions of structures, including homes, water systems and agricultural facilities are only conducted on Palestinian structures. Demolitions are undertaken because structures are built without permit, however, more than 94 per cent of all Palestinian permit applications are rejected by the Government of Israel.¹¹¹ Land in Area A and B costs 150 per cent more than comparable land in Area C because of the restrictions on Palestinian development in Area C. This lack of land has directly resulted in lower outputs, higher unemployment and has decreased the competitiveness of Palestinian products.¹¹²

Israel poses differential treatment in law, regulations and administrative practice. Two separate legal systems are operated; Israeli military law and Israeli civilian law. The determining factor of which law applies is based on nationality and ethnicity. Palestinians are subject to military law, which is argued to deny basic and fundamental rights, whilst Israeli settlers are subject to civilian law.¹¹³ Under military law, children as young as twelve can be arrested and detained; under civilian law, this age is 15. In November 2015 alone, it was reported that 116 children aged 12-15 were currently in Israeli detention.¹¹⁴ UNICEF reported that children were subject to multiple violations throughout the detention process, including not being notified of their legal rights, and coercion into signing confessions in Hebrew during interrogation.¹¹⁵

Palestinians who reside in the oPt that are married to Palestinian citizens (or permanent residents) of Israel, are not allowed to obtain Israeli citizenship or residency, resulting in families living separate from each other. This ban on family unification is disproportionate to the alleged security reasons cited as its justification.¹¹⁶

The land, sea and air blockade of Gaza constitutes the severest challenge to equal opportunity imposed in the oPt. The migration and mobility of residents in Gaza is completely limited. Movement restrictions in place since the 1990s, were intensified in 2007, and have resulted in a fragmented economic and social structure. Exit permits are issued to a small minority, primarily patients, business people, and staff of international organisations. Restrictions to freedom of movement create inequality in education, employment and access to services.¹¹⁷

2.2 Palestinian Refugees in Syria

Poverty & Food Security



Poverty affects four out of five of those in Syria. UNRWA estimates that 95 percent of the 480,000 PRS remain in continuous need of humanitarian aid. Increasing prices and a declining economic situation means that those who are displaced are unable to afford rocketing rent prices, and share houses between families have become common place.^{118 119}

Hunger and food shortage is widespread and UNRWA has become a key source of food for PRS. Yarmouk camp is the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Syria, and previously home to 148,500 PRS, although repeated attacks have left the population at 18,000.^{120 121} An imposed siege on Yarmouk camp has been imposed since 2013 and Daesh now control almost 70 per cent of the camp, which has led to further clashes and violence. Both Syrian Government forces and Daesh fighters restrict humanitarian access to reach the camp. Food aid to Yarmouk has been provided by UNRWA since October 2014, however, UNRWA's efforts are restricted and they have only been able to distribute 32,503 food packages over 131 days. This is the equivalent of only 400 calories per person per day, leaving residents vulnerable to death by starvation.¹²²

Yarmouk's shops have run out of stock, and what little food is available in the region has soared in price. Some residents are no longer able to afford a kilogram of rice, which can cost up to US\$ 100.¹²³ Residents have been forced to rummage for leaves and weeds in order to survive, but doing so runs the risk of fire from snipers guarding the area.¹²⁴ Malnutrition and illness has spread as a result of food shortage, with the elderly, young and pregnant women at highest risk.¹²⁵

Khan Al-Sheikh, the second largest camp, is not much different. The escalation of military confrontations has resulted in road closures between the camp and most of its neighbouring regions. This closure has affected food supplies into the camp, and those who try and enter with food from outside, often have it confiscated.

Education



Prior to the conflict, PRS would receive education in government or UNRWA schools, with near to 100 per cent enrolment rate; most children were receiving an education of some nature. Education across Syria has been severely affected with over half of school-age children no longer attending school from 2014, and with almost half of all children having lost three years of schooling in total.¹²⁶ In 2012, the MoEHE excluded PRS from its public schools, and school buildings have become targets of the conflict, with over 4,000 attacks made on schools since 2011.¹²⁷

Before the outbreak of the conflict, 118 UNRWA schools in Syria were operating on double shift basis to provide 67,300 students with primary and secondary education. The new school year in 2015 saw 99 schools open, of which 44 are UNRWA facilities and 55 hosted in schools provided by the ministry of education, in December 2015, 45,380 students were enrolled into these schools.¹²⁸ UNRWA currently offers short- and long-term vocational training courses in 25 subjects. The seventh round of courses started in December 2016, with 1,364 trainees enrolled, of which 843 are female.¹²⁹

Children continue to suffer as a result of the conflict. More than 50 per cent of those displaced internally or externally are children. Many have witnessed conflict first hand and have endured the destruction of their homes and the loss of a loved one. Incidents of sexual violence towards children have been widely reported in Syria and the surrounding host countries. Exposure to this environment results in high levels of psychosocial distress.¹³⁰ Parents indicate observations of withdrawal nightmares, bedwetting and reckless behaviour. Psychological problems can cause long term problems and act as a barrier to education. Psychosocial support services, in the form of counsellors and teachers, are now essential in order to address these barriers and minimise the long-term impact. UNRWA and other humanitarian agencies, such as UNICEF and Save the Children, are increasing the level of psychosocial support provided to children across Syria, and neighbouring host countries, although the scale of the problem may not be fully documented, and education facilities need more support in this area.^{131 132 133}

Health



The threat to PRS lives is severe. In January 2016 alone, it was documented that 21 PRS were killed, making the number of people killed over the last five years of conflict 3,117.¹³⁴ Life expectancy in Syria has plummeted from 75.9 to 55.7 since the conflict began.¹³⁵

Prior to the conflict, nearly 80 per cent of PRS were accessing UNRWA health services.¹³⁶ Now the Syrian public health service has faced such a level of destruction, WHO figures report less than one health care centre per 10,000 people. UNRWA has become the sole healthcare provider for virtually all PRS, adding further strain to the already stretched service. Of UNRWA's original 23 health centres, 15 remain open, with 11 health points also running.^{137 138} Energy and fuel shortages have put further strain on health services, as they are forced to cut their activities and reduce transport.¹³⁹

Medical supplies are low across Syria. In Daraa camp, there is no hospital or medical centre in addition to a severe shortage of supplies. A lack of access to ambulances due to sniper threats has resulted in a deteriorating health condition among those injured inside the camp.¹⁴⁰

Deterioration of water, sanitation and sewage, teamed with lack of food and repeated displacement are exacerbating health issues. Water shortages have led people to rely on dirty water from well and other unregulated sources.

This has exposed people to many water borne diseases, such as diarrhoea and cholera. UNWRA noted a spike in cases of typhoid across the region. As a result of eating weeds and plants in desperation, new illnesses are becoming more prevalent, and malnutrition is rife.

The siege on Yarmouk has had a widespread effect on health care facilities and health workers in the region. The effect of this on the local people is escalating. Medical workers have been attacked and arrested. The Palestine Hospital, operated by the PRCs was shelled in April 2015, and remains open though it has limited resources. Prior to the siege, the hospital carried out around 600 surgical operations a month, but now no surgeons remain and any urgent surgery that is needed is carried out by nurses who are unqualified.¹⁴¹ Power cuts in Yarmouk and across Syria affect the functioning of hospitals already in difficulty.¹⁴²

The effects of the conflict on PRS mental wellbeing are severe. Four years of conflict and concern are compounded by the stressors of displacement, violence, poverty, lack of basic services, isolation, grief, and uncertainty about the future. The most prevalent clinical problems among Syrians are emotional disorders such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and anxiety disorders. Instances of psychotic disorders are also likely to increase under such conditions. The International Medical Corps who have provided care to 6,000 Syrian's across five countries in the region, of which 700 had psychotic disorders.¹⁴³

Inequality



Under the 1951 Refugee Convention, a special refugee regime is made for Palestinian refugees, which has worked to exclude them from UNHCR's mandate. This has allowed for a "protection gap" to grow between UNHCR and UNRWA. "Stateless" PRS are currently suffering the consequences of this protection gap heavily, with PRS feeling Syria to surrounding countries and not being afforded the same humanitarian protection as Syrian refugees, as they cannot gain access to UNHCR services. UNRWA's mandate does not extend beyond the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, and even within these countries, so PRS are unprotected outside of these regions. Even within these countries, UNRWA is struggling to cope with the burden of financial pressures. This has forced some PRS to falsely claim they are Syrian in order to gain access to services.^{144 145}



Women face a multitude of challenges within war setting. The Action Group for Palestinians of Syria (AGPS) estimates 446 Palestinian women killed due to the war, and 75 arrested or unaccounted for. AGPS suggest the figures are likely to increase, but data collection remains challenging.¹⁴⁶

Sexual violence, including rape, is the most extensive form of violence faced by women and girls in Syria since the conflict began.¹⁴⁷ PRS women are also targets of kidnapping, and women face increasing restrictions to movement as fear of sexual assault and rape intensifies. This further limits their access to basic services, including reproductive healthcare.¹⁴⁸

Human Rights Watch have found that extremist groups are also imposing strict and discriminatory rules on women and girls that have no basis in Syrian law. Such things include the enforcement of hijabs and abayas, and prohibiting jeans and make up. Women refusing are threatened with punishment, and often restricted from accessing education and public transportation.¹⁴⁹

Early marriage was common practice among PRS prior to the conflict, but is now increasing among the population as it is seen as a way to protect young girls or ease financial burden on families, as girls are married in return for a dowry. Scarce resources and economic pressures means marriages are often conducted in haste without formal registration, leaving girls unprotected in the event of divorce.¹⁵⁰ Four out of five of those refugees to have fled Syria are female. For female PRS, their previous non-citizen status in Syria affects their ability to claim rights as refugees to a new country. Palestinians inability to access UNHCR cover further exacerbates the difficulties in processing asylum applications. The PRS women who have fled Syria to countries outside of UNRWA's mandate are subject to further hardship as they lack economic and social support that is offered to Syrian refugees under UNHCR.

2.3 Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

Poverty & Food Security



Two thirds of the PRL population are considered poor. Poverty rates are higher in camps than in gatherings, with nearly three quarters of camp residents poor, and slightly more than half of gathering residents poor. The occurrence of extreme poverty is four times higher in PRL when compared to the Lebanese population. Poverty is higher among children and adolescents, and all households that have a disabled head of household (9 per cent of the PRL population) are classified as extremely poor.¹⁵¹

58 per cent of PRL are vulnerable to food insecurity, 28 per cent moderately food insecure and 15 per cent suffer severe food insecurity. Nutritious and sufficient food is lacking, with more than half of PRL consuming fruit less than once a day and other foods such as meats and dairy being less consumed. Approximately one third of the population is not meeting their micronutrient

requirements, which can lead to malnutrition and numerous health risks, especially among adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons. 68 per cent consume high calorie sweetened drinks frequently, which can lead to further health problems.¹⁵²

Amnesty International reports that in 2015, 89 per cent of PRS in Lebanon were living in poverty and a further 9 per cent in extreme poverty.¹⁵³ Due to the plummeting value of the Syrian Pound, and the high cost of living in Lebanon, PRS are finding themselves in difficult financial situations. PRS are not given the right to employment in Lebanon, unlike Syrians, which further exacerbates the PRS economic situation.

Food is too expensive for the majority of PRS in Lebanon, and so many face food shortages. On average, an overwhelming 91 per cent of PRS families reported lack of food or money to buy food. Almost all families receive food aid from international organisations and host families. Food shortage coping strategies reported include reducing the number of meals a day, spending full days without meals and restricting consumption by adults for young children to eat.¹⁵⁴

UNRWA has provided PRS with cash assistance for food since 2014. Eligible PRS receive up to US\$ 30 per person for a three month period. The first four months of 2015 saw UNRWA support over 43,000 PRS with food assistance.¹⁵⁵

Housing



Despite a soaring increase in population since 1949 (from 100,000 to the current 452,000), the land area allocated to the twelve camps has remained relatively unchanged. This has resulted in chronic overcrowding with some households of ten sharing one room. This lack of space means that many camps extend structures upwards to create space. Such extensions tend to be constructed below minimum international safety levels and are vulnerable to structural failure.¹⁵⁶ Overcrowding also leads to many major health risks, from respiratory problems to mental health disorders. Open space is lacking, so youth play in dark alleyways amid open sewers, drainage ditches and damaged buildings, which increase risk of injury and illness.¹⁵⁷

The majority of PRS in UNRWA camps live in independent house or apartments, and a small proportion live in tents or warehouses. The mean monthly rent for a shelter is US\$ 257. Despite high rent prices, many experience crowded conditions with lack of access to electricity or gas.¹⁵⁸ Gatherings do not benefit from UNRWA basic urban services as these are only provided within the twelve official camps, and although the gatherings fall under 25 municipalities, they also do not provide basic urban services, due to lack of financial resources. As a result, PRL living in gatherings are considered to be the most vulnerable.

In addition to the 11,000 original PRL, a further 30,000 PRS have found refuge in these camps, exerting unprecedented pressure on the living environment and

resources available.¹⁵⁹ In 2012, the UNDP implemented a project in order to improve the living conditions in these gatherings. The last assessment of the programme showed that over 20,000 people benefited from this programme.¹⁶⁰

Education



Palestinians cannot access the public school system in Lebanon due to Governmental restrictions, and many refugees cannot afford the high tuition fees of private schools. UNRWA runs 68 schools, accommodating 38,173 pupils.¹⁶¹ Secondary UNRWA education is also provided to children because of the restricted access operated by the Lebanese Government.

Refugees with a better education are more likely to be employed. Two thirds of those PRL with a vocational or university degree are employed, compared to less than 40% of those who attended middle school or lower. Employment rates for women are also higher, as half of women with university degrees are in employment with many of these gaining high-status employment.¹⁶²

The number of PRL in education has decreased over the years, in comparison to the increasing number of refugees. This decrease has happened despite an effort from UNRWA to build new schools and work hard to eliminate double shift school days. Most UNRWA schools still lack resources and quality teaching, which is linked to dissolution of schooling and the benefits that it can bring. This dissolution along with a deteriorating socioeconomic status of the PRL has led to this lack of enrolment, as well as high drop-out rates.¹⁶³

School drop out for Palestinian children over 10 years old is 39%, ten times higher than for Lebanese children. High poverty rates often encourage students to drop out of school and get paid work in order to help support their families. A lack of motivation is also adopted when there are perceived limited opportunities to progress to further education. As PRL are still considered foreigners, despite a stay of over 67 years, their access to higher education is limited and they lack funding resources for private institutions. Dropout rates are also associated with the lack of employability opportunities. This problem stems further when considering that pupils must be taught the Lebanese curriculum, but are not given the same opportunities in Lebanese society as Lebanese citizens, creating a sense of social exclusion.¹⁶⁴

It may also be noted that females are more likely to quote early marriage as a reason for dropping out, compared to males or their counterparts in the oPt.¹⁶⁵ It is reasonable to say that no single reason plays a factor in why students dropout.

57.6 per cent of 6-18 year old PRS children in Lebanon are enrolled in school, but only 6 per cent aged 15-18 are in school. 74 per cent of PRS families have at least one child not attending school.¹⁶⁶ More than half of children who not enrolled cite war and emigration as the main reason. Economic reasons also present obstacles to education. School failure and low attachment (17.4%) is also highly

prevalent.¹⁶⁷ Curriculum differences present a limit to integration and therefore low attachment. In Syria, Math and Science courses are taught in Arabic, but in Lebanon, courses are taught in English or French. UNRWA has been trying to meet demands by providing special classes in Arabic and English. Psychosocial programmes are also being implemented in UNRWA schools.

Health



Years of conflict and poor environmental conditions has left PRL with a multitude of health issues. A third of PRL are estimated to have a chronic illness and a quarter experienced acute illnesses within a six month assessment period. Acute illness poses a particular risk for those who tread the poverty line, as this can lead to extra expenses and periods out of work. 95 per cent are without insurance, and most in precarious employment, so unlikely to receive indemnities or sick leave, thus an acute illness may easily push a PRL family into poverty.¹⁶⁸

Legal restrictions mean access to healthcare for PRL is limited to the private sector, with high fees, or provided by international organisations. UNRWA is the most frequently used healthcare provider. It operates 28 primary care facilities and 357 health staff. These facilities tend to be underfunded, with a low ration of doctors to patients. On average a doctors give 103 medical consultations every day.¹⁶⁹

Not all medical services are provided in every camp, so PRL may need to travel for specific care services. For example, there is only one dialysis centre, located in Saida, so patients must travel across Lebanon three times a week to receive this vital, non-UNRWA funded, treatment. Lack of funds means hospital care is beyond reach for refugees, and UNRWA only offers partial coverage in its contracted hospitals. Patients often seek financial help from family, individuals to local charities to cover hospital expenses.¹⁷⁰

PRL have lived through many stressful events; displacement, the Lebanese Civil War, military incursions and political tensions. These daily stressors and persistent conflict can result in high levels of mental health issues. 36 per cent of older age groups reported experiences of depression, anxiety or distress. This was significantly higher than young age groups (8%). This could be as a result of prolonged and extended exposure to such experiences.¹⁷¹

UNRWA and the PRCS have been further overwhelmed by the dramatic increase of PRS patients, with little increase in their organisational or financial resources. Families often refrain from seeking healthcare because they cannot afford it.¹⁷² Almost half of PRS families have at least one member suffering from a chronic condition. As expected, prevalence of chronic conditions increases with increasing age, with the most prevalent conditions being diabetes and high blood pressure. One in ten has at least one member with a physical or psychological disability, and almost three per cent have at least one working age member in need of support in daily activities.¹⁷³

Inequality



Despite a long standing presence in Lebanon, PRL remain excluded from key social, political and economic rights in the country. They are unable to own property and barred from practicing in more than 30 professions. Work permits are expensive and they are also ineligible for the states social services, including health care and education. The Lebanese army controls access to refugee camps, thus restricting mobility and trade with neighbouring communities.

In May 2014, the Lebanese government imposed restrictions to deny entry to additional PRS. This also resulted in the uncertain legal status of PRS already in Lebanon. The General Security Office (GSO) announced that PRS with expired visas could regularise their status free of charge for three months, but UNRWA found their work inconsistent and PRS did not approach them from fear of deportation or arrest. UNRWA has identified very few successful renewals of PRS residences since 2014.¹⁷⁴ Stateless Palestinians from outside Lebanon are not given the same rights as foreigners holding citizenship from other countries.

Gender



Lebanon ratified CEDAW in 1997 as an international instrument that is required to apply to refugees and none refugees alike; however female PRL still face disproportionate trouble within Lebanon. Men predominantly retain control over household income and tend to decide how money is spent. Widowed women are often excluded from receiving cash aid as there is no male 'head' of household to register with humanitarian agencies, and cultural norms prevent them from going alone. Non-cash aid is usually distributed to women through a voucher system, which both conforms, and perpetuates traditional gender roles.

Just over half of PRS fleeing to Lebanon are female. An Amnesty International study examining the treatment of PRS women in Lebanon found that public sexual harassment was common place, regardless of a women's marital status, although unmarried or widowed women were often targeted. Many PRS also cited harassment in the workplace when trying to get employment, and all PRS women in the report noted feeling unsafe in Lebanon.¹⁷⁵ Fear of safety among PRS restricts freedom of movement.¹⁷⁶

The restrictions to PRS eligibility to work in Lebanon disproportionately affect women. 90 per cent of PRS are unemployed. Of those employed, only 10 per cent are women. CEDAW has expressed concern over Lebanon's restrictions on PRS women and recommended it amend its labour laws to ensure Palestinian refugee women have access to the labour market.¹⁷⁷

2.4 Palestinian Refugees in Jordan

Poverty



PRJ's annual income is substantially lower and poverty significantly higher, inside than outside camps. Non-citizen PRJ are much more likely to be poor, and also more than three times as likely to be amongst the very poorest and most destitute, living on less than US\$ 1.25 a day.¹⁷⁸ Jerash Camp has the highest poverty rate among Palestine refugee camps in Jordan, with 53 per cent reporting income below the national poverty line.¹⁷⁹ Most of the smaller camps tend to have a lower poverty rate than larger camps. Jerash camp has the highest concentration of extremely poor people by far.

The Government of Jordan has taken steps to mitigate some of the consequences of poverty by subsidising healthcare and supporting sewerage projects. However, figures show that the root causes of their vulnerability, such as restrictions on employment and education, remain unaddressed.¹⁸⁰

Housing



Housing space and quality, as well as outdoor living environment, is much better for those outside of the camps, than inside. A large proportion of PRJ outside the camps live in apartments, or own their dwellings. The vast majority have a separate kitchen, bathroom and toilet. They have access to piped water and tend to be more spacious. Within the camps, there has been a moderate shift towards apartment living, but overcrowding is still a problem, as rooms and outdoor space is less spacious and of poorer quality than outside the camps. Water and power cuts are a more regularly cited problem. Corrugated metal and temporary building materials are used for roofs inside the camps, and many households report major cracks in their dwelling walls. Seven per cent of those outside the camps consider their dwellings of such poor quality, that they should be demolished and rebuilt, whereas this figure rose three fold for those inside the camps.¹⁸¹

Living conditions in Jerash have improved over time, but three out of four shelters remain unsuitable as accommodation due to structural problems. Camp dwellings tend to be made from temporary materials and so poorly ventilated, exposed to humidity and insufficiently insulated. Roofs are often made from corrugated zinc and asbestos sheets, which can lead to increased risk of health problems, including cancer. 24 per cent of households in Jerash are classified as "over-crowded", with three or more people per room.

Those living in refugee camps generally use basic education provided by UNRWA, which serves over 118,500 students at 174 schools. Those who attend UNRWA schools for preparatory education, then continue in secondary in government schools.

UNRWA's education programmes have been successful over the years, with high numbers of students completing all levels of schooling, with particular improvements among female students, who now outperform male counterparts at all levels. However, disparities exist between in camp and non-camp refugees. These disparities have grown in most recent years. More than twice as many males under 35 complete post-secondary education outside camps, compared to inside.¹⁸²

For those living within camps, higher education is often determined by personal financial resources. The state, UNRWA, and other sources are often relied upon for higher education fees. Assistance from the state is governed by many factors, including being a member of a certain clan. For example, a scholarship for higher education offered by the Royal Court is only granted to children of heads of clans, ministers or other 'influential' people, who in principle do not need it. This in turn leaves refugees with little opportunity to secure funding and cannot continue their education.¹⁸³ UNRWA's higher education provides opportunities for approximately 3,500 students, and sees a small number of university scholarships, but this is not enough to cater for the many Palestinian refugees who cannot access university because of high fees and limited places.

There is a highly acknowledged need to tailor higher education to the demands of the labour market, by increasing the proportion of students who choose vocational and technical qualifications. Statistics show that graduates from UNRWA's vocational colleges have much higher employment rates compared to the national average. Given the large refugee population, UNRWA's efforts alone cannot sustain this effort.¹⁸⁴

UNRWA schools operate on a double shift basis, which leads to disrupted family schedules, deprives students of extra-curricular activity and exacerbates already overused facilities. UNICEF estimates suggest a whole year of schooling is lost over ten years due to double shifting. School infrastructure is also a problem. UNRWA runs a proportion of its schools in rented premises, which were not originally designed to be schools. For this reason, they often lack adequate classroom space, proper lighting, ventilation and libraries or playgrounds.¹⁸⁵

Camp children who use UNRWA schools are more likely to drop out than non-camp children. Factors associated with the camps may affect willingness to stay in school. High dropout rates in older students may be as a result of being lured into the labour force. At the secondary level, surveys have shown that many students and parents do not consider secondary education worthwhile,

and so drop out when it is no longer compulsory. Low income, dissatisfaction with the school environment and low academic performance are all been cited as reasons for dropout. 26 per cent of females cited reasons of marriage as the main reason for dropping out. Many school-age children are forcibly taken out of school in order to enter the labour market and provide extra income for the household.¹⁸⁶

Health



The Jordanian health sector has seen big improvements in the past decades, both in terms of facilities and quality. Government hospitals are the main provider of services to PRJ, but UNRWA also remains an important resource for the poorest, and those unable to access government services, particularly those in the camps. 40 per cent of those in camps, and 12 per cent non-camp residents relied on UNRWA's primary health care facilities, with UNRWA serving more than 1.1 million PRJ.

There is some differentiation in which UNRWA services are offered to which category of refugees. For example, people displaced from the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 that are not registered with UNRWA but reside in refugee camps, are eligible for primary healthcare but not cost support for secondary and tertiary healthcare and assistive devices.

Infant and child mortality rates across Jordan have declined over the past decade, as maternal and child healthcare improves, along with better vaccination programmes. These rates are comparable for the refugee population. Mortality rates for the PRJ in the camps are similar to those outside of the camps, which may be attributed to UNRWA's efforts to improve. Life expectancy at birth for both sexes has increased by 2 years over the period of 2000-2012.¹⁸⁷

However, non-communicable diseases are growing. Nearly half of Jordanian deaths are attributed to cardiovascular diseases and cancer. Smoking, physical inactivity, obesity and unhealthy foods contribute to these challenges of public health. PRJ aged 30 and above living inside camps are more likely to suffer chronic health problems compared to those outside the camps. It is likely that the variation is a result of the difference in living conditions inside and outside the camps.¹⁸⁸

Major reforms have been rolled out across UNRWA health centres, aiming to deliver beneficiary-centred service where the whole family is seen by the same medical team. Patient feedback has shown that this has improved the quality of treatment and reduced the number of hospitalisations and antibiotic prescriptions.¹⁸⁹ UNRWA also provides financial help for assistive devices, such as hearing aids, leg braces, crutches and glasses. Under an agreement with the MoH UNRWA can refer patients to public hospitals and subsidise the cost for inpatient care. They will also subsidise the cost of hospital deliveries at public hospitals for high-risk pregnancy cases.

The majority of Palestinian refugees are Jordanian nationals with a Jordanian national ID number. 96 per cent of those living outside the camps hold citizenship, compared to 85 per cent of those within the camps. The vast majority of those without citizenship hold temporary Jordanian passports. Palestinians living in Jordan since 1948 are predominantly full Jordanian citizens, with full civic rights. Those arriving after 1988 have only been allowed temporary passports, following Jordan's severance of ties with the West Bank. Ex-Gazan's with no national ID numbers receive the least liberties, with limited or no access to public services.

In 2012, Jordan began denying entry to Palestinians fleeing Syria, and in 2013 they officially adopted a no-entry policy to all Palestinians from Syria. All unregistered PRS are denied access to education and healthcare, and are not allowed to work. PRS are also unable to establish refugee camps, forcing them to seek expensive private sector housing. PRS have been banned from already established camps, like Za'tari, and some have even been forcibly deported back to Syria. The Syrian Needs Analysis Project (SNAP), a non-governmental monitoring group, noted that over 100 Palestinians had been deported back to Syria from 2013 to 2014.¹⁹⁰

Jordanian authorities have even denied entry to PRS with expired Jordanian documents, and in some cases, arbitrarily stripped them of their Jordanian citizenship and forcibly returned them to Syria. Despite this, as of 2014, over 14,000 PRS sought support from UNRWA in Jordan.¹⁹¹ Unlike Syrians, Palestinians cannot legally live in Syrian refugee camps and must rent apartment in Jordanian towns and cities, and work illegally in order to afford high rent prices. The irregular status of PRS in Jordan creates difficulties in civil process, such as birth registrations and access to services.

Many PRS in Jordan reside in urban settings, as they are barred entry from most Syrian refugee camps. They are forced to pay inflated rent prices, causing overcrowding and increased chance of poverty. Approximately 200 PRS are held in "Cyber City", which is a government facility in the North of Jordan. 200 Syrian refugees also are held here, most of which are married, acquainted to, or are single parents of Palestinian children. Cyber City is a closed holding centre, which seals them off from any access to their rights or civil liberties. The entire compound is fenced off and entry and exit is prohibited through two police checkpoints, which limits freedom of movement limits the flow of international aid. Residents are allowed to leave every two or three weeks to visit their family members in Jordan for a maximum period of 48 hours – other than that they are only allowed to leave if they wish to return to Syria.^{192 193}



Specific data on Palestinian women in Jordan is limited, but it can be assumed that the rule of Jordanian law is applied. Jordanian laws are predominantly based on the French civil code and Islamic Sharia law. Jordan ratified CEDAW in 1992, but maintains reservations to certain articles maintaining their incompatibility with Sharia law.¹⁹⁴

Women who file for divorce must provide a valid reason, while a man does not. There is a possibility for a woman to divorce her husband without the burden of evidence, but she may then forfeit her right to any financial support. In the event of divorce, the mother can be granted custody, but the father always remains the legal guardian of children.¹⁹⁵

The minimum age of marriage is 18 for both boys and girls. However, child marriage still occurs in Jordan, among women in the poorest quintile, 17 per cent were married before the age of 18. Stricter sentences are now in place for “honour killings”, and it is common practice to treat them in same way as other violent crimes. A special tribunal was set up by the Ministry of Justice in 2009 in order to hear such cases.¹⁹⁶

PRJ women in camps may be particularly vulnerable to domestic violence. Socioeconomic conditions, family traditions and personal beliefs may foster women’s vulnerability.¹⁹⁷ Several reasons are cited by Palestinian refugee women for domestic violence. Psychological stress caused by poverty, unemployment, and large families to support were the main reasons. Women also attributed violence to customs and traditions, and gender roles that are manifested in the patriarchal nature of the community. Focus group discussions showed that older PRJ women were more resigned to domestic violence, but the younger, more educated women were more critical.¹⁹⁸

3. Key Environmental Development Issues

Acknowledging the effect that environmental issues has on development has been a much over due process. The research on how environmental factors effect development is limited but growing slowly. Five of the 17 goals place a particular focus on environmental sustainability. Two goals in particular are explored throughout this report, Goals 6, 7 and 13. Goal 6 aims to achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water, with reduced pollution and increased water efficiency. Universal access to sanitation and hygiene is also a target of Goal 6. SDG 7 aims to ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy, including an effort to improve energy efficiency globally. Also, aim to expand infrastructure and upgrade technology for supplying sustainable energy. Goal 13 refers more generally to take action against climate change and its impacts.

3.1 West Bank and Gaza

Energy



The West Bank and Gaza face many challenges from the perspective of the energy sector. Firstly, they have no developed resources of commercial energy, and thus almost entirely dependent on imports (predominantly from Israel). Secondly, the fragmentation into two distinct geographical zones means the two areas face different energy prospects. The West Bank is land locked, and lacks its own primary energy source. Gaza has its own generation station that can provide some primary energy resources, although it was heavily damaged in the 2014 military incursion. Thirdly, Israeli policies limit the ability of the PA to operate and develop its energy systems. Both the West Bank and Gaza face frequent energy cuts that undermine the economic activities of the private sector and affected homes, hospitals, schools and water treatment plants.¹⁹⁹

The Oslo Accords set limits on the Palestinian production and importation of energy, so the energy sector is highly dependent on energy imports from Israel. The Israel Electric Corporation (IEC) supplies 88 per cent of electricity consumption in the oPt (95 per cent in the West Bank; 63 per cent in Gaza). In 2013, the oPt imported US\$ 660 million of electricity from Israel. This dependency creates a loss of resources for Palestine. When Palestinian electricity distributors (municipalities or councils) fail to pay IEC, Israel deducts from the PA's clearance revenue. Such deductions are conducted without the consent or verification of the PA, and occur in a unilateral, unpredictable manner.²⁰⁰

The IEC issues monthly invoices to distributors, to be paid within 11 days. Distributors do not receive invoices in a timely or regular manner, and lack access to local meters located in the West Bank and Gaza, so they are unable to compile relevant information and collect the cost of consumption form end users. However, delayed payment of fees to the IEC leads to 10 per cent annual late fees; these late penalties and interest rates are excessive and far exceed market interest rates.²⁰¹

The electricity and energy crisis is exacerbated by the occupation, which does not allow Palestinians to use the offshore natural gas fields that were discovered on the Mediterranean coast in the 1990s. Two high-quality gas fields were discovered (one entirely in the Gaza waters; one on the border with Israel), which could provide much needed natural gas to the entire oPt.²⁰²

Water



Although the region faces a general low supply of water, the current supply of water in the West Bank region is available, with several productive aquifers, ample rainfall and natural water resources such as the Jordan River. However, Palestinians in the West Bank face ongoing shortages of water due to 80 per cent of Palestinian water resource being controlled by Israel. Several policies and practices undertaken by Israel ensure the limitation of water resource.²⁰³

The 520,000 Israeli settlers use approximately six times the amount of water that the 2.6 million Palestinians in the West Bank use.²⁰⁴ The majority of settlements are strategically located close to water resources, which Palestinians are restricted from accessing.²⁰⁵ Over 70 per cent of communities located in Area C of the West Bank are not connected to the water network and rely on tank water at increased cost. Water consumption within these communities is as low as 20 litres per capita per day, one fifth of WHO's recommendation.²⁰⁶ The average water rate for Palestinians not located in Area C is estimated at 60 litres per capita per day, still well below the WHO recommended amount.

Under the Oslo Accords, a Joint Water Committee was established to manage the West Bank's shared water resources, but the committee has granted near exclusive veto power to Israeli's over water infrastructure development in the West Bank.²⁰⁷

In Gaza, water shortage remains a serious issue. Prior to the assault in 2014, investment in water infrastructure was greatly in need. Further destruction from the war has left severe damage to an already fractured infrastructure. The Palestinian Water Authority estimated that the long-term repair of the damage and decay will require US\$ 620 million.²⁰⁸

Approximately 95 per cent of Gaza's water supply contains dangerously high levels of nitrate and chlorine, and is not fit for human consumption as it poses many health risks, especially to infants.²⁰⁹ The blockade restricts the entry of materials needed to upgrade Gaza's water and wastewater infrastructure. Fuel shortages and electricity cuts affect water distribution as pumps discontinue working, whilst water wells stop working due to a lack of parts.²¹⁰ Water consumption is estimated at 50 litres per capita per day, and only 60 per cent of the population is connected to sewage, with treatment plants falling well below capacity needs.²¹¹

Gaza's sole source of freshwater comes from a coastal aquifer, but consistent water shortages halved to over abstraction. Annual abstraction from the aquifer has been exceeded recharge rates by over 100 million cubic metres, almost

twice the sustainable rate. Consequently, ground water levels have declined and sea water from the Mediterranean has infiltrated into the water supply. Lack of sanitation infrastructure means untreated wastewater is dumped into the Mediterranean, which consequently finds its way into the aquifer. An alternative water supply must be found in order to reduce the current rate of groundwater abstraction which would allow the aquifer to replenish itself. The blockade limits this option for alternative.²¹²

Olives and olive oil production have enormous economic potential in the oPt. Around half of all cultivated land is devoted to olive production, with virtually all relying on rainfall as their only source of water. Irrigation is a proven way to achieve greater consistency in yield from one year to next. The control of water supplies by Israel has undermined the irrigation possibilities for olive harvest, which are abundantly used by Israeli farmers to cultivate their land.²¹³

Climate Change



In order to achieve sustainable development, it is necessary to tackle climate variability and change as an inevitable challenge with long term implications for human and ecological systems. A warming climatic system is expected to impact the availability of basic necessities such as fresh water, food security and energy. Efforts to tackle climate change will inform and shape the sustainable development agenda.

Whilst climate change may not be the most pressing issue for a state under occupation, faced with violence, poverty and economic crippling, the climate risks in the oPt are significant and will compound the current hazards posed by the Israeli occupation. Climate change goes beyond the biophysical framings of climate impacts and ecosystem vulnerability, and properly extends to the socio-economic and political conditions that affect how communities cope with the impacts of climate-related hazards.

The oPt and the entire Middle East region is particularly vulnerable to climate change, as one of the most water-scarce and dry regions, with a high dependency on climate-sensitive agriculture and large share of its population and economic activity in flood prone urban coastal areas. The potential consequences of climate change could cause gradual desertification and increasing scarcity of resources. The oPt faces two significant environmental challenges in the next century; decreases in precipitation and significant warming. Freshwater resources are predicted to become scarce as climate change causes decreases in annual precipitation. The water asymmetries that exist between Israel and oPt will be exacerbated, and it is predicted the collapse in available water resources could become a further source of conflict in the region.²¹⁴ Droughts have noticeably increased in recent decades over the oPt, particularly in the southern and eastern slopes. This increases the vulnerability of rural people who utilise land resource to sustain a livelihood.

With the population of Gaza expected to increase to 2.1 million in five years, water, electricity, infrastructural and environmental crises in Gaza will only deepen unless the blockade is lifted to allow importation of equipment and spare parts needed for building infrastructure.²¹⁵ Short-term coping mechanisms to the blockade, such as using raw sewage for agricultural irrigation, block the development of longer-term adaptive strategies to climate change. Climatic data for the Gaza strip is scarce as military incursions have damaged the regions meteorological stations. However, from what is available, a clear increase in mean temperature can be seen. Gaza also experiences warmer annual temperatures compared to the West Bank.²¹⁶

The state of Palestine has been invited to upgrade its status in the UNFCCC from 'observer' to 'party' following the UN recognition of its statehood in 2012. This is a step in enabling the oPt to take some control of their climate future, with greater access to funding and a more vocal opinion at future global climate talks. UNRWA is also working in partnerships to build standalone schools in Gaza which rely only on renewable and free locally available resources, such as solar, rainwater and ground energy. Climate initiative such as this will help promote energy efficiency and reduce CO2 emissions despite the occupation.²¹⁷

A body of evidence suggests that major changes involving the atmosphere and climate have an impact on the biosphere and human environment. Increased concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHG), especially carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere have already substantially warmed the planet, causing more severe, prolonged heat waves, temp variability, air pollution, droughts and heavy precipitation and floods. Rising temperatures will increase microorganisms' growth, leading to increases in water and food-borne diseases. Climate change also presents a threat to respiratory health, by aggravating diseases, and increasing exposure to risk factors of respiratory diseases. The main diseases of concern are asthma and rhino sinusitis.²¹⁸

3.2 Palestinian Refugees from Syria

Energy



Syria's electricity infrastructure, including power plants, substations and transmission lines, have been severely damaged and caused interruption to power supply and dysfunctional operations. By 2013, 30 of Syria's power stations were inactive and at least 40 per cent of the country's high voltage lines had been attacked. A number of power plants including Jandar, Banias and Al-Zara suffer from serious shortages of spare parts, which are necessary in order to avoid plants shutting down. Effective electricity generation capacity has fallen by 70 per cent since 2011.²¹⁹

PRS across Syria are facing a constant shortage of power. The lack of a reliable electricity supply has affected essential humanitarian services, such as the water supply, hospitals, schools, and sewage treatment. The power shortage

has also played a role in the economic decline as many businesses have closed. In most parts of Syria, electricity is only available for 2-4 hours a day, if at all.²²⁰ In Yarmouk, complete power cuts have ensued for more than 985 days as residents are forced to live on generators.²²¹

Diesel has been difficult to obtain since June 2015, and prices have increased by up to 500 per cent. Fuel shortages have put health services at risk, as centres are forced to cut their activities, as well as severely delaying the transference of what little aid is able to get through.²²²

Water



Water is a key issue in Syria, and a lack of a clean supply has affected many PRS. UNICEF estimates that up to 5 million people in Syria are impacted by water shortages.²²³ Water prices have also sky-rocketed by up to 3000%, making it hard for those who do have access to afford water. A number of factors underlie the recurrent water supply cut offs, the most prominent of these include a deliberate shut down of supply and electricity, damage to power generation plants, sub-optimal maintenance and failure of existing system to meet the increased demand from large influx of displaced people.²²⁴ Water shortages are exacerbated further, as since 1967 Israel has occupied Syria's Golan Heights, which has the resources to cover 30 per cent of Damascus' annual water needs.²²⁵ Continuing water cuts lasting up to 475 days have affected approximately 20,000 Yarmouk residents and are forced them to rely almost entirely on wells, where the water source is contaminated causing illness.²²⁶

The deliberate targeting of water supply networks is regular occurrence in the conflict. Attacks have destroyed waste water treatment and sewage facilities, which has led to the contamination of drinking water. People in some areas have been warned to boil drinking water, but in a climate of limited fuel, even this is a luxury. It is estimated that clean drinking water is less than one third of pre-crisis levels. This has led to an overall increase in disease.²²⁷

Climate Change



The mean annual temperature in Syria has increased by 0.8° Celsius since the 1950s, and expected to rise by a further 2° by 2050. At the same time, rainfall is predicted to decrease by 11 per cent by 2050.²²⁸ Syria has not been a major contributor to GHG emissions, but is one of the most affected by climate change effects. Syria ratified the UNFCCC in 1995, and signed the Kyoto Protocol in 2005.²²⁹ Increased environmental stress due to excessive water use, pollution, deforestation, overgrazing and soil erosion are likely to negatively impact on the country's agricultural production.

PRS have already faced the effects of climate change in Syria. The war in Syria is a result of a complex interrelation of factors, including socio-political factors, economic deterioration and climate change. From, 2006 to 2011, Syria experienced a multiyear drought that contributed to agricultural failure, economic dislocations and population displacement. The drought exacerbated existing water and agricultural insecurity and caused mass agricultural failures and livestock mortality. It also caused the migration and internal displacement of 1.5 million people from rural farming areas to the peripheral urban centres. It has been commented that the agricultural failures, water shortages and increasing unemployment throughout this period played an important part in the deterioration of social structures, the economy and spurred violence.²³⁰ It is evident that the war in Syria has disproportionately affected PRS, and the effects of war are further exacerbated as climate change impacts the availability of basic needs, such as fresh water, within the region.

3.3 Palestinian Refugees from Lebanon

Energy



Lebanon relies heavily on imported petroleum to meet its energy needs. The energy sector is responsible for 54 per cent of Lebanon's GHG emissions. The energy sector is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. An increase in temperature across the country would require an annual increase in electricity consumption for cooling purposes by 9 per cent to 28 per cent. The higher cooling demand in summer along with natural population growth, consumption rates and oil prices would increase the burden on power production, and only further expand the gap between supply and demand.²³¹

Renewable energy currently plays a marginal role in the energy balance of Lebanon, with less than 10 per cent of the electricity power. Hydro power is the unique renewable source used in electricity generation, but Lebanon also has the potential to benefit from other resources.²³²

Water



Unsustainable water management practices, water pollution, poor governance and increase in demand are key obstacles facing Lebanon's water sector.²³³ PRL are majorly affected by Lebanon's water problems. Refugee families are forced to buy water for consumption and cooking, as local water is salty and polluted. The public irrigated water system, which is mainly used for agricultural production is poorly managed and is rapidly deteriorating due to old infrastructure. Several illegal irrigation systems have developed, resulting in overexploitation of groundwater.²³⁴

Despite water shortages, the majority of PRS (81%) reported having access to sufficient water for washing and toilet purposes. One out of ten families

reported that they share a bathroom with 15 people or more. As the majority of families rely on bottled water for drinking and cooking, PRS often lack the funds to purchase it. A third of families reported not having access to sufficient water for basic livelihood like drinking and cooking²³⁵. Sewerage systems are under great strain from the insurgence of people and require urgent upgrades to deal with demand. Worsening environmental health conditions such as this may lead to increased incidence of disease and ill health.²³⁶

Climate Change



Lebanon is already facing challenges of climate change and ratified the UNFCCC in 1994 in an aim to spread climate awareness and reduce GHG emissions.²³⁷ Mean annual temperature has increased 0.7 degrees Celsius from 1951 to 2000. Mean rainfall has decreased 11 mm per month, per century since 1950.²³⁸ Temperatures are expected to increase by 1° Celsius on the coast and 2 degrees in the mainland by 2040. Rainfall is projected to decrease 10-20 per cent in the same time. Lebanon has a diverse natural environment including coastal, agricultural and mountainous areas with unique ecosystems that are sensitive to climate change.²³⁹

Temperature increases are expected to cause up to 5,200 additional deaths annually by 2030. Projected changes in rainfall will put pressure on national water security and produce knock on effects in agriculture, where 70 per cent of the available water is used for irrigation. Given the projected decrease in precipitation, there is an immediate need to increase water resources, and optimise current resources through rehabilitation of existing networks.²⁴⁰

Lebanon experiences 1 to 2 cases of flooding annually, caused by irregularities in rainfall patterns, which is likely to rise with climate change. Heavy rains measure up to 100mm per hour during storm events and have significant impacts on the population and economy. The storms damage agricultural lands and often set off landslides that deposit tons of solid waste and other pollution into the Mediterranean Sea.²⁴¹ These climatic effects will have consequential effects on PRL, by exacerbating existing issues of poverty, food scarcity and lack of sound infrastructure.

The increase in Syrian population to Lebanon has added to their climate output. The surge in population has led to an estimated 5 per cent increase in road traffic and air pollution. The domestic water and power demand increased by 12 and 10 per cent respectively. Note that Lebanon's purchasing of electricity from Syria went down by 88 per cent in the same period, and the demand is being met through private generators, which in turn leads to higher carbon emissions.²⁴² Air pollution is shown to have significant health risks, of which PRL would be highly affected.²⁴³

3.4 Palestinians Refugees from Jordan



Energy

More than 97 per cent of households are connected to the public energy grid. The stability of services has improved considerably since the 1990s. Experiencing occasional interruptions is down from 18 per cent to seven per cent outside the camps, and from 27 to six per cent inside the camps in 2011/12.

Jordan is a country with limited energy resources, relying heavily on imports from neighbouring Arab countries to meet growing demands. Energy demand is expected to rise by at least 50 per cent over the next twenty years. Jordan imports 96 per cent of its oil and gas, accounting for almost 20 per cent of the GDP, which makes the country completely vulnerable to the global energy market.²⁴⁴

Water



14 per cent of outside-camp households, and eight per cent of inside-camp, do not have a toilet connected to a sewage network. The majority of these are connected to a septic tank or percolation pit, however this is not always the case. Jerash camp lacks an underground sewage network. Grey water, contaminated with sewage leaks run alongside open collection ditches and around the camp. Children play in the streets close to the pools, which results in inflated incidence of diarrhoea and hepatitis.²⁴⁵ New projects are being implemented in an effort to improve the water situation on Jerash camp.²⁴⁶

One in twenty refugee households lacks piped water. Water is not pumped through pipes continuously, but reaches homes at intervals varying by area, so people have water storage tanks in order to buffer intermittent delivery. The tanks can also be used to supplement the piped water with water from alternative sources, such as underground wells. Only 86 per cent of those within the camps are satisfied with the adequacy of their storage capacity, making them more vulnerable to water shortage.²⁴⁷

Water resources in Jordan are scarce, rainfall is irregular and groundwater is rapidly depleting due to overexploitation. Jordan is ranked among the poorest countries in the world in terms of water availability, with only 147 cubic metres per person per year in 2010. Renewable water resources are less than 130 cubic metres per person per year, and current total uses exceed the renewable supply. The difference comes from non-renewable and fossil groundwater extraction and the use of reclaimed water. If the supply remains at this constant rate, per capita domestic consumption is projected to fall to 90 cubic metres per person per year, by 2025, well below the water poverty line of 500 cubic metres a year, putting Jordan in the category of having an absolute water shortage that could constrain economic growth and endanger public health.²⁴⁸ The lack of water and the secondary effects of these changes are considered a threat multiplier that is likely to increase existing vulnerability to current climatic and non-climatic stresses.



Jordan is described as a semi-arid to arid region, with scarce water resources compared to other countries in the Middle East. Water resources in Jordan depend mainly on precipitation within the country. The mean annual temperature has increased 0.89 degrees since 1900.²⁴⁹ This continuing increase in temperature will cause a change to precipitation patterns, and decrease surface water availability and increase scarcity.²⁵⁰

Water shortage is perhaps one of the most important effects of climate change in Jordan. One of the adaptation measures to cope with water shortage is to reuse treated wastewater in irrigation of trees and vegetables – this increases the opportunity for transmission of several pathogens that could cause outbreaks like Typhoid and Hepatitis A if the water is not treated well.

Poor people in rural areas of Jordan are expected to face the most severe consequences of climate change through disruption of livelihood options that depend on natural resource management. The expected impact of climate change threatens livelihoods and keeps vulnerable people insecure. Poor families and households are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.²⁵¹

GHG emissions are mostly driven by the energy sector, accounting for 74 per cent of the emissions. The waster sector (13%) and manufacturing (8%) are also contributors. Jordan's contribution to GHG is 0.01 per cent of global emissions. The correlation between economic growth, population growth and Green House gas emissions are of particular importance with regard to climate change. In order to limit the negative effects of global warming, one must decouple economic growth from GHG emissions, and therefore, economic development and energy consumption.²⁵²

Although Jordan is making advances in socio-economic development, its accomplishments are being compromised by water scarcity and climate change and bringing additional threats to health, food security, productivity and human security. Jordan was the first country in the Middle East to develop a National Climate Change Policy in 2013, in order to strengthen its capacity to respond to climate challenges, in parallel with the challenges of sustainable development and human well-being. However, by its own omission, its institutional response to climate change is fragmented, with responsibility lying with different ministries and a lack of coordination.²⁵³

Challenges, Conclusions & Recommendations

The data collated presents a clear example of how Palestinian people across the Middle East are in severe need of, yet highly prevented from access to, development in accordance with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Palestinian populations across the region are living in poverty, with a lack of access to health, water, infrastructure and education. Economic growth in the oPt and across Jordan, Syria and Lebanon is scarce, with Palestinians being the hardest hit with lack of access to employability and opportunity. The Syrian crisis has further exacerbated problems in the region, with Palestinian refugees from Syria facing the harshest conditions within Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. Developmental challenges are also exacerbated by the effects of climate change, with higher temperatures and lower precipitation affecting agriculture, water supplies, and food security.

The complex nature of the Palestinian situation is clearly exemplified when addressed in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals. The multifaceted nature of addressing sustainable development in a population riddled with displacement, conflict and occupation, is intricate. Some key issues arise when addressing the SDGs in the face of the Palestinian context; these are explored in the current chapter.

War and Peace

A key critique of the SDGs has continually been the lack of focus on countries embroiled in conflict and militarization. Notions of peace and inclusivity are touched upon in SDG 16 (peace, justice and governance), however, civilians in conflict, and seeking refuge specifically, are not addressed in any depth. SDG 16 is likely the most aspirational, sometimes even described as “removed from reality”,²⁵⁴ but its relevance and application is urgently needed to address the current issues of violence and state security, especially within the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The current and ongoing issue of excessive force used by the IDF and settlers are issues pertaining to this goal that should, and could be, addressed by Israeli authorities. In fact, as an occupying power, it is their legal obligation to do so.

Limiting illicit arms flows and promoting the rule of international law would also be beneficial in aiming to reduce Israel’s attacks on the oPt, but implementation and regulation of this is problematic, with Israel having not even ratified the Arms Trade Treaty, and the international community supporting the problem. The UK provided £52 million in the way of arms for Israel in the last year and the EU over 1 billion.²⁵⁵ It is clear that without peace and security, sustainable development is unachievable. However, due to the simplicity of this goal together with states’ unlikely complicity, it is not likely to aid the Palestinian people.

The SDGs assume that states are a willing agent of change, and will be responsible custodians for the sustainable development agenda, including ratifying goal 16. The implausible nature of this is particularly true within Syria,

where Government corruption is vast.²⁵⁶ In today's globalised and complex world, with vast flows of people, capital, weapons, and technology across borders, focusing exclusively on goals to be achieved by individual countries does not take into account powerful political and economic connections and interests of other states.

Accountability

The plight of Palestinian refugees has been a long standing, and unaddressed, issue providing a clear barrier to achieving sustainable development. The SDGs do not specify whether the intended use of the goals by governments should apply for non-citizens as well as citizens. Ultimately, the SDGs are a set of voluntary agreements, not treaties, and so governments are accountable for their own citizens, with the UN Statistical Commission measuring the indicators. This leaves issue of Palestinian refugees in limbo.

The SDG document scarcely mentions refugees or internally displaced people, thus overlooking some of the most disenfranchised populations of the world, including three quarters of the total Palestinian population. With no one claiming responsibility, and the SDGs not specifying who is responsible for the burden of refugees, those who are not citizens, are likely to be forgotten. As seen in Lebanon, and to some extent Jordan and Syria, the denial of access to basic services, employability, citizenship, and years of isolation, are prime example of how these host governments are not prepared to invest resources in achievement of the goals for these populations, despite their obvious presence and potential value to society.

Funding

Public finance, international aid, and tax reforms in the private sector, are said to be the driving factor in funding the SDGs. However, at a major conference on financing in Addis Ababa, failed to address income shortfalls, and it is feared that there will simply not be enough cash assistance to meet the aspirational nature of the goals. This is especially true in the Palestinian context. The main body responsible for providing aid for the Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, suffers from a severe lack of funding, that it is not enough to sustain the burden of the ever-growing population. A lack of a political solution is the main strain on UNRWA, and a lack of accountability from the SDGs leaves UNRWA as the only body to attempt to achieve the goals, which is not feasible. Continued over exertion of resources, as a result of the continuing assaults on Gaza and the Syrian crisis resulted in a predicted shortfall of US\$ 81 million for the beginning of 2016.²⁵⁷ Fundamental issues with funding must be taken into account, but ultimately, the issue should be how to reduce people's need of UNRWA, not how the increase of demand can be met.

Development Under Occupation

The prolonged Israeli military occupation has severely limited the prospects of Palestinian development. An occupying power naturally impacts social, economic and environmental life and the SDGs are not flexible enough for this. Sustainable development and military occupation are mutually exclusive concepts.

The direct effects of the occupation on development are clear. However, it also indirectly affects development. For example, women's groups advocating for equal rights are highly active across the oPt, but the reality of the current occupation have led some women's rights groups to focus more on national unity, peace and security, than on equal rights. Tackling climate effects is also difficult, with most natural resources in the oPt under the control of Israel, and with little stakeholder involvement in decision making processes. The unstable political climate makes planning and harnessing resources difficult.

The reality of the occupation makes it necessary to take into account the inadequacy of many development indicators when applied to the Palestinian situation. Indicators within the SDGs are not valid with regard to this circumstance, and consequently, another kind of development measurement must be considered. Independent Palestinian development requires political will, and cannot be developed under Israel's occupation. It requires strong politicians to demand the dismantling of the occupation infrastructure, including the separation wall, settlements, settler-only roads, checkpoints, and house demolitions. International resolutions acknowledging the illegality of Israel's policies and its attempts to change the demographics of the oPt must be enforced. Until this time, sustainable development will remain fictional.

Israel cannot remain silent of the issue of the Palestinian refugee problem. The expulsion of Palestinians since 1948 remains a key issue of the occupation and security within the entire region today. The international community must also take responsibility for this longstanding unresolved issue. UN Resolution 194 adopted in 1948 states that "refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date". The notion of the right to return is written over again in international law, including in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 13); The International Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (Article 5d); and The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (article 12:4).

To conclude, the UN SDGs have provided a comprehensive list of factors that must be addressed in regards to the Palestinian people, however accountability and realism are lacking within the goals. Much in the light of political agreement and international accountability must be achieved before sustainable development can progress. The ongoing situation in Syria has only exacerbated the issues for the Palestinian refugees and intensified chronic underfunding. It is evident that without an end to the occupation, the legal right of the refugees to return and access to environmental development under the SDGs will not be achieved for the Palestinian people by 2030.

Recommendations

- Take steps to immediately mitigate the hardship of the Palestinian refugee population, by ensuring UNRWA obtains stable funding to cope with its vast mandate.
- Host countries of refugees to open access to basic services, such as health and education, with extra resources and care, especially in the instance of PRS fleeing persecution. The international community must help by allocating funds and developmental support to host countries.
- An end to the illegal occupation, including an end to, and removal of, illegal settlements in the West Bank, which is fundamental to any sustainable development process on the ground.
- An immediate and permanent end to the blockade of Gaza Rehabilitation, including access to international aid, must ensue immediately in order to prevent widespread, permanent and irreversible damage to the land and people.
- A permanent end to the plight of the Palestinian refugees, by enforcing the right to return, in accordance with international law and UN resolution 194.
- The international community must recognise its responsibility in ending the occupation as a challenge to global development. The responsibility of the international community in enabling Palestine to achieve the SDGs lies in providing political support to establish and recognise an independent Palestinian state, and exert pressure on Israel to end its occupation and remove the obstacles imposed on the Palestinian economy and society.
- Issues relating to women's equality and empowerment must be addressed by the PA and host countries. Laws and practice must be brought wholly in line with CEDAW recommendations, and extra provisions must be made by UNHCR and UNRWA to ensure female PRS are protected from the effects of war.
- The oPt to become a 'party' member of the UNFCCC, and for the territories to be able to access and harness their natural resources in terms of energy and water.

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