



# UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND

## STATE OF PALESTINE

### Newsletter

Fall 2019



### If Not Now, When?

**Our World,  
Our Rights,  
Our Choices**

### A revolution started in 1994, but is unfinished.

Twenty-five years ago, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo put people first in its pursuit to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights. People would look towards a better life by making safe and informed choices about reproduction.

Nevertheless, millions of women and girls have yet to see these promises fulfilled. Too many are still being left behind. So, we ask ourselves: If not now, when? If not us, who?

We want zero unmet need for family planning, zero maternal deaths, zero violence against women and girls, at a minimum.

It is time to speak up for what we know is right. A world where everyone has rights and choices, no exceptions.

This year, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is celebrating its 50th anniversary, which also coincides with the 25th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). This publication intends to address both occasions, covering some of UNFPA's important achievements and its main national and community partners in the Palestinian territory, where UNFPA has been active for about 33 years now. Let's take a quick look at some of these joint endeavors, at UNFPA support to national-level activities, as well as work at the community level, making change in the real life of Palestinian women, girls, boys and men.







# The promise to Palestine: An unfinished business

by Dr. Luay Shabaneh  
UNFPA's Director for  
the Arab region

25 years ago, the Palestinian Authority was established as a self-governing body in the autonomous areas, and prospects for independence and peace were looming. Around the same time, in 1994, the world was coming together in Cairo at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) to redefine how we see population and development matters. At the conclusion of the ICPD, 179 governments endorsed the ICPD Programme of Action which, for the first time, placed the emphasis on human lives rather than demographic targets as the basis of sustainable development. Individuals' ability to make reproductive choices freely and responsibly and their universal access to reproductive health and family planning were recognized as basic human rights. Gender equality and women empowerment were declared pre-conditions to development.

In Palestine, the challenges were enormous; Palestinians had to work harder towards state building while targeting the achievements of the promise of the ICPD.

1994 was a milestone for Palestine in many ways: With the creation of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), Palestinians, for the first time, were able to provide official statistics on their population, also serving policy makers, researchers, and development agencies with reliable data to analyze and plan much needed development programmes. During my tenure as the President of the PCBS from 2005 to 2009, the most challenging aspect of the work was to combine national objectives with global development agendas, a difficulty that still persists today. In fact,

Palestine's particularity lies in a complex mixture of modus operandi of state building, the quest for development, the enduring humanitarian crisis and the national struggle for liberation. This has not changed. I recall when we conducted the first population census in 1997, PCBS could not count Palestinians in East Jerusalem due to the occupation's policies, while the 2007 census struggled to handle operations under two different authorities in Gaza and the West Bank. UNFPA's intervention succeeded in facilitating the process and the second decennial census took place although data dissemination took many months after that due to different challenges. Delivering ICPD-related results was and is possible yet difficult in such a complex environment where a pre-state apparatus tries to subscribe to international standards.

Just like in 1994, Palestine is still a country "in the making." Adding to that is a worse situation on the ground with feelings of disillusionment and despair, more physical restrictions and the blockade on Gaza which effectively cut it off from the rest of the world.

Nevertheless, Palestine has made remarkable progress towards achieving the ICPD programme of action. UNFPA's programmes contributed to a significant decrease in maternal mortality from 74 per 100,000 in 1995 to 16.7 in 2018. UNFPA also played an instrumental role in integrating sexual and reproductive health into primary health care. Between 2010 and 2014, the percentage of women aged 20-49 who reported being married under the age of 18 decreased from 36% to 24%, and unmet family planning needs decreased from 15.6% to 10.9% during the same period.

But for Palestinian young women, the ICPD broader promises of human-centric development, dignity and empowerment remain elusive. Take the case of Ibtihal Mahmoud, a 24-year-old woman from Gaza who

told us: "In times of war, I often think: why would I get married and build a family just to lose them overnight?" Ultimately, what is needed to advance Palestinian development is to guarantee that people like Ibtihal have a meaningful future. The ICPD promise to ensure reproductive rights and choices for all is central to that quest.

Our key takeaway from 25 years of serving the ICPD agenda is that Palestinians have developed an extraordinary resilience despite all the odds.

The creation of a Ministry of Women Affairs to assume responsibility for leading the work on women's empowerment and the endorsement of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are all significant achievements. The Palestinian leadership partnership with the vibrant civil society take the credit for that.

**UNFPA** will continue to engage with several partners in combatting violence against women and a campaign is being put in place for that purpose. UNFPA is currently partnering with PCBS in updating a survey on Gender Based Violence (GBV) with a view to scaling up efforts and tackling the issue through a combination of training and capacity building programs.

We will not stop. We will continue working hard with our partners and climb the ladder together to support Palestinians until the ICPD promises of dignity, empowerment and opportunity is a reality for each and every Palestinian. Some milestones were met but the journey both to achieving the promise of ICPD and the promise made to the Palestinian people to enjoy their full rights remains an unfinished business.

# PCBS and UNFPA: Long Legacy of Multi-Level Cooperation

Interview with  
H.E. Dr.Ola Awad,President  
of the Palestinian Central  
Bureau of Statistics

H.E. Dr. Ola Awad, President of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics



**Q. On the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of UNFPA, how do you rate the partnership between PCBS and UNFPA overall?**

**A.** UNFPA has been a main partner for the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), since its establishment in 1993, in developing the statistical domain. Both parties cooperate at various levels: national, regional and international.

At the national level, cooperation focuses on issues of mutual interest, primarily conducting national censuses, in addition to implementing a number of specific surveys to inform policies and interventions in the government, private and civil society sectors.

At the regional level, UNFPA facilitates exchange of regional experiences and knowledge sharing, helping us to transfer some of our successful surveys to the Arab region, while also commissioning technical missions to assist us in such activities like measuring internal and external migration.

At the international level, UNFPA continuously

supports our participation in major international statistical forums, mainly the annual meetings of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and the UN High-Level Group for the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

**Q. What are the main achievements made through your partnership with UNFPA over the past years?**

**A.** So far, the PCBS implemented three population censuses in 1997, 2007 and 2017, providing an essential mainstay for the statistical system in Palestine. UNFPA has been a major partner and supporter in these efforts. The third census, implemented in 2017, adopted modern methods by using tablets in data collection and for the first time linking the data to geographic information systems (GIS). This allows us to link main demographic, social and economic characteristics electronically to geographic regions, enabling decision makers to develop area-specific interventions plans.

PCBS has also partnered with UNFPA in conducting specific surveys such as the 2011 and 2019 survey on violence in the Palestinians society, the youth survey and time use survey. Palestine was among the first to implement such surveys thanks to UNFPA support, and the Palestinian experience has been transferred to other national statistical bodies in the Arab region.

**Q. What about current and future cooperation aspects?**

**A.** Currently the second edition of the violence survey in the Palestinian society is underway. The results will be compared with the findings of the previous 2011 survey and will serve as a basis for in-depth analysis of certain aspects such as violence against women, children and old people, as well as the different forms of violence. Current areas of cooperation also include conducting analytical studies based on the findings of the 2017 census to assess demographic indicators related to young people, the elderly, disability, fertility rates, among others.

Palestine has accessed a number of international treaties, including the UN Convention on Eliminating All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The PCBS seeks to help decision makers and relevant bodies in assessing compliance with these treaties. The PCBS also seeks to support integrated work with all stakeholders to optimize the utilization of its statistical products in line with national priorities.

**Q. What challenges do you face in monitoring progress in the implementation of the ICPD Program of Action in Palestine?**

**A.** The PCBS is a member in the National Population Committee and has contributed to reviewing and updating the population estimates of the UNFPA-supported study *Palestine 2030*, based on findings of the 2017 census. There are several limitations restraining the work on population issues, most importantly the fact that the population registry is still controlled by the Israeli occupation authorities, hindering our efforts to upgrade the registry in response to our statistical needs.

We hope cooperation with UNFPA will help us enhance integrated work of the different stakeholders and promote optimal use of statistical data.



## Supporting Palestine in addressing Population and Development Issues

Throughout the 33 years of its presence in Palestine, UNFPA has played a significant role in promoting population issues and reproductive health and rights. The ICPD, held in Cairo in 1994, represented a milestone in this direction and its Programme of Action emphasized the importance of reproductive health and rights, women's empowerment and gender equality as cornerstones of population and development programmes.

In 2013, the League of Arab States hosted a meeting in Cairo to review the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and to commit to key actions and priorities to expeditiously achieve the goals and objectives of the ICPD. Four years later, in 2017, the Palestinian National Population Committee under the Office of the Prime Minister conducted a review of progress made so far in implementing the recommendations of this regional conference (Cairo Declaration). The review concluded that population and development issues are strongly present in major national planning documents, including the National Policy Agenda 2017-2022 and the different sectoral and cross-sectoral strategies. The State of Palestine has expressed firm commitment to these issues by ratifying and joining a number of international conventions related to women's rights, children's rights, disability rights, environment, climate change, among others.

The report also notes that varied progress has been made in addressing the recommendations of Cairo Declaration. It also describes measures taken to address poverty and food insecurity, enhance environmental sustainability and climate adaptation, promote women empowerment and gender equality and prevent gender-based and domestic violence, support youth development and participation, and promote sexual and reproductive health and rights.

On the other hand, progress on gender issues has been limited, particularly with regard to legislative change (family law) and community awareness. A significant gender gap remains in place in many aspects of society. Lastly, The review notes that the ongoing Israeli occupation and its control over Palestinian land, resources and borders represent a major obstacle to achieving ICPD goals and objectives.



## Youth Initiatives: Instilling Hope for a Better Future

Growing up in a setting of chronic conflict, young Palestinians face a wide array of life difficulties and lack proper opportunities for development and empowerment. By supporting community-based initiatives, UNFPA seeks to create positive change in the lives of individuals and families drawing on their own potential. Examples of UNFPA-supported initiatives, through its NGO partners, are presented here.



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By an initiative of the Union of Dentistry Students, young professionals volunteered to offer dental screening exams and oral health awareness to children and families in East Jerusalem and other communities. In addition to serving the communities and raising their awareness, this initiative helps dentistry students acquire a sense of community service and learn about common problems they will have to deal with after graduation. In the picture: Dr. Hidayat teaching a child how to maintain proper oral and dental care.



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Amira, a university student with visual impairment, took an initiative titled "Our Taxi," where public transport drivers are required to have their ID information printed in Braille. This initiative, praised and supported by the Ministry of Transport and other relevant formal bodies, enables passengers with visual impairments be aware of the details and information of the vehicle and driver, which they may need for any reason, such as when leaving any of their belongings behind. Amira perceives her initiative as an example of advocating the rights of persons with disabilities, where "young people with disabilities can express their views and demand their rights."





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Two years ago, Sharek Youth Forum, a UNFPA partner, invited two university students, Muayyad and Farah, to display their theatrical talents at a youth festival called “On the Stage.” Believing in their potential, Sharek encouraged both young artists to create their own theatrical group, “People Theater,” that has managed to present 40 interactive shows over a span of two years. The shows address youth-related issues such as gender-based violence, early marriage, unemployment, political participation and youth health. The scenarios are based on real-life stories.



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Barakat, a university graduate with a degree in journalism, is now directing a soap opera hosted by a local satellite channel. Volunteering with Sharek Youth Forum, he was trained on video-making. Sharek also supported his initiative to make a series of videos on Palestinian villages using a camera drone, in addition to producing several films documenting success stories of young people and youth projects implemented by Palestinian organizations.



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Ahmad is an example of a young activist with a vision for a better future for his society. He was part of several campaigns to promote local agricultural production, protect the health of workers in stone-cutting industry, among others. He has been working as a volunteer in several institutions and as a trainer on civic education, campaigning, conflict resolution and other skills. He was elected to the membership of the Youth Legislative Council and founded the first youth local council in his town, Jenin, North of West Bank. He also leads the Arab Youth Coalition in Jenin and serves in the boards of several community organizations. Ahmad also represented the State of Palestine in several international events. “Self-representation is the best way for young people to realize their rights and take part in decision-making,” says Ahmad.

## Recent Publications by UNFPA – State of Palestine

### Women and Girls with Disabilities: Needs of Survivors of Gender-Based Violence and Services Offered to Them, 2019

#### WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES:

NEEDS OF SURVIVORS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SERVICES OFFERED TO THEM



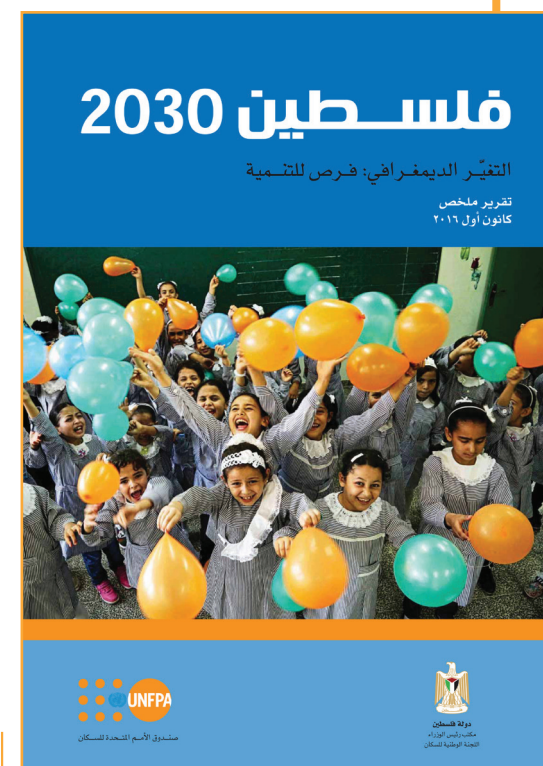
This study is based on a needs analysis and mapping of services offered to women and girls with disabilities aged 15 and older who are survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, particularly in view of the poor protection, care and social services available to women survivors of violence. The study addresses gaps and challenges in service delivery, stakeholders’ roles and responsibilities, stakeholder coordination, legislation and policies, capacity, prevention and response services, the referral process and accountability. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2TBltzx>





## Pathway to Survival – the Story of Breast Cancer in Palestine, 2018

Cancer is the second leading cause of mortality for Palestinians, standing at 14% of total deaths in 2016. Breast cancer affecting Palestinian women represents 15% of cancer cases. This study presents an analytical mapping of breast cancer care in Palestine, addressing current services, challenges and recommendations for improvement. In order to enhance pathways for survival, the study recommends developing a common breast cancer care strategy amongst all providers, enhancing breast awareness and screening programs, enhancing coordination and referral, enhancing knowledge about the epidemiology of breast cancer, and strengthening psychological support to women and their families. Available at: <https://bit.ly/33zlqc2>



## Palestine 2030 - Demographic Change: Opportunities for Development, 2017

Issued jointly by UNFPA and the Palestinian Prime Minister's Office, this landmark study lays out the context and milieu for population projections for 2030 and 2050, while identifying critical issues related to population growth and its significance in society and the economy. The population of Palestine would grow from 4.7 million in 2015 to 6.9 in 2030 and would double to 9.5 million in 2050. Changes in the population age structure open a window of opportunity for economic growth and development. Yet it will affect the availability of resources for development and the demand for public

services. This fact will require sound policies to invest in the growing young and working age population. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2puKS2s>



## Youth in Palestine: Policy and Program Recommendations to address demographic risks and opportunities, 2017

Youth (aged 15 - 29) comprise 30% of the total population in Palestine. Although the rapidly increasing youth population can cause extreme stress on already underdeveloped infrastructure, a large youth population can also be seen as «missed opportunity.» This report describes challenges youth face in Palestine and sets a number of policy and program recommendations that decision makers and civil society organizations can take to ensure a better life for youth. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2Hty6rK>



# "Women are the cornerstone of development"

Twenty years ago, the late President Yasser Arafat stressing the importance of the ICPD for the development of Palestine



In 1986, UNFPA started operating in Palestine on a project-by-project basis. In 1999, UNFPA office was established in the State of Palestine. That same year, and on the occasion of World Population Day, UNFPA published a special issue in al-Quds Newspaper where the late President Yasser Arafat commended the participation of Palestine in the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, and took pride in its agenda being reflected in national plans. ***"The principles of this conference were clearly reflected in our health and development plans, where the reproductive health, and maternal and child care were given significant attention in the Palestinian Health Plan"***, President Arafat said.

This year, we call on decision makers to renew their commitment to the full implementation of the ICPD Agenda at the Nairobi Summit.



United Nations Population Fund  
State of Palestine  
P.O. Box 67149, Jerusalem 91517  
Tel.: (972) 2 5817167  
Fax: (972) 2 5817382  
palestine.unfpa.org