

Non-contributory social protection through a child and equity lens in Palestine¹

International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG)

The State of Palestine (SOP) is situated in the Near East Region and has a fragmented territory, divided into two main areas: the Gaza strip, on the Mediterranean coast, and the West Bank, on the border with Jordan. The SOP has a total population of 4.5 million people, of whom 2.2 million (49 per cent) are under the age of 18 and 700,000 (15 per cent) are younger than 5. The SOP has the highest fertility rates in the MENA region: 4.11 births per woman, and had a Human Development Index of 0.684 in 2015, compared to an average of 0.704 in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. In 2011, 25.8 per cent of the Palestinian population was reported to live under the national poverty line, an income of ILS2,293 (USD637) per month for an average household. The situation in Gaza is particularly worrisome, with a poverty rate of 39 per cent, compared to 16 per cent in the West Bank in 2015.

Children are disproportionately affected by poverty; almost 40 per cent of children in Gaza were estimated to live below the national poverty line in 2010. They often have limited access to health care services and education, and may be subject to child labour and abuse. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF, 66 per cent of children under the age of 3 are deprived of proper nutrition, and 63 per cent of those aged 5–14 lack access to education.

The conflict-ridden environment in which the SOP is embedded contributes to deteriorating living conditions, leading to high numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons. The impact of mobility and trade restrictions have substantially affected the Palestinian economy and labour market, with youth unemployment reaching 58 per cent in Gaza in 2017. These limitations have also negatively affected access to consumer goods, and food insecurity remains a vital issue, as 27 per cent of all Palestinian households and 47 per cent of households in Gaza are considered food-insecure.

Social assistance is crucial for the subsistence of the country's most vulnerable population. The Socio-Economic and Food Security Survey 2014 showed that 40 per cent of all Palestinian households receive some form of social assistance, with a considerable difference between Gaza (84.2 per cent) and the West Bank (16.5 per cent).

Social protection in the SOP is administered by a range of governmental and non-governmental institutions. Within the government, the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) is the main implementing actor. It recently launched the Social Development Sector Strategy (2017–2022), which aims to mitigate monetary poverty, food insecurity and non-monetary dimensions of poverty in alignment with the National Policy Agenda (2017–2022).

The largest social protection initiative is the Palestinian National Cash Transfer Programme (PNCTP). It is managed by the MoSD, and beneficiaries are selected based on a proxy means test (PMT) formula. Close to 115,000 poor households are supported with quarterly payments at an annual programme cost of USD110 million. Beneficiaries are also entitled to other schemes, such

as health insurance, school fee waivers and cash grants for emergency needs. The programme reached an estimated 287,794 children in 2013.

A Food Assistance Programme is run by the MoSD in partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP), providing in-kind transfers and electronic vouchers to 503,221 food-insecure households in 2016. The same PMT formula used for the PNCTP is used to select beneficiaries. In addition, the Protection, Care and Rehabilitation of Marginalised and Vulnerable Groups programme offers in-kind transfers and vocational services to people with disabilities, orphans, female victims of violence and elderly people. In 2014, it provided assistance to 5,760 children under the age of 18.

Educational fee waivers are offered by the Ministry of Education for children of imprisoned parents, people living beyond the separation wall, disadvantaged students and beneficiaries of the PNCTP. The Deprived Families Economic Empowerment Programme (DEEP), supported by the United Nations Development Programme, offers microfinance, start-up grants and capacity development to households affected by illness, disability, poverty and unemployment. DEEP has supported 215,000 people, 60 per cent of whom are children.

An important non-governmental source of funding for social assistance are the *zakat* committees. Under the supervision of the Zakat Fund of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs,² the *zakat* committees grant in-kind and cash transfers to cover costs of education and health care for orphans or children who have lost their fathers. This benefited approximately 20,505 orphans per year across the West Bank between 2007 and 2011. They also offer financial assistance to poor and vulnerable families, one-time emergency cash and in-kind transfers, such as food, clothing and school supplies.

Social protection programmes are indispensable for a large proportion of the Palestinian population to meet their basic needs. The MoSD has increasingly striven to integrate the targeting tools of existing programmes. However, given the large number of children suffering from violence at household and community levels, it remains essential to ensure that there is stronger coordination between social assistance and social protection, and other social services for children at risk of violence, abuse and exploitation.

Notes:

1. This One Pager is taken from a comprehensive study developed in partnership between the IPC-IG and UNICEF MENARO. All data are thoroughly referenced in the full report:

Machado, A. C., C. Bilo, R. G. Osorio, and F.V. Soares. 2018. *Overview of Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region through a Child and Equity Lens*. Brasília and Amman: International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth and UNICEF Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa: <<https://goo.gl/QfmKwK>>.

2. *Zakat* in Gaza and East Jerusalem falls under a different system. Information provided here refers to the West Bank only.