

Fact sheet

The reality of persons with disabilities in the Gaza Strip during Corona pandemic

Introduction

This fact sheet shows the extent of the impact of the Corona pandemic and the emergency status on persons with disabilities and their rights in the Gaza Strip. The pandemic has affected the world in general, and Palestine in particular, given the deteriorating humanitarian and human rights situation as a result of the Israeli closure and blockade. The sheet shows the general status of the development of the rights of persons with disabilities in Palestine, with focus on the Gaza Strip and the attempts of the local community and local and international institutions to enhance their rights, especially during times of emergency. It also shows the direct and indirect effects that persons with disabilities bear their burden in the society, especially in light of the current state of emergency. The paper reviews the status of persons with disabilities in the Gaza Strip during the period between March 7, 2020, the day on which the state of emergency was declared in Palestine until mid-September 2020. The paper also provides direct recommendations for rapid intervention based on the facts presented.

This paper was developed in a participatory approach that included institutions members in the Disability Working Group, rehabilitation service providers and support institutions in the Gaza Strip. The approach also included direct group and individual meetings with people with disabilities and institutions.

The purpose of the paper and to whom it is addressed

This paper aims to shed the light on people with disabilities challenges and make recommendations to eliminate it, and to disseminate information to concerned people including those with disabilities on the situation of people with disabilities during the Corona pandemic, in order to have positive change in the situation.

Primarily, the paper is directed towards the duty bearer in the governmental system, and civil and international institutions operating in Palestine, especially in the Gaza Strip in particular, to ensure the protection of people with disabilities rights during emergencies, and to set a roadmap to incorporate the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the various decisions and information related to the pandemic, and equality with non-disabled peers in services and rights.

The reality of disability in Palestine during the Corona pandemic

According to the 2017 statistics from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)¹ released in July 2020, the number of persons with disabilities was **255,228**, constitute **5.8%** of the total population in Palestine; **127,266** in the West Bank **5.1%** and **127,962** in the Gaza Strip **6.8%**.

The disability rate among males was **6.3%** and **5.4%** among females, and mobility difficulties are the most common type of difficulties, which reaching **32.2%** with a prevalence of **2.9%** among the population.

In this context, persons with disabilities in Palestine, particularly in the Gaza Strip, face a number of challenges in acquiring basic human rights, obtaining basic services such as health, safe access to services and information, and poor access for persons with disabilities in the public and the governmental services centres.

¹ The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Women and Men in Palestine Issues and Statistics, 2020.
<http://pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2528.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0dHAK33PgfruAgOgAkX60ecSHPWAGMosMOotG-SXNNKEgz-AaRQGUwDPw>

Legal and human rights status of persons with disabilities

The Palestinian amended Basic Law of 2003 and the Palestinian Law No. 4 of 1999 for Disabled Persons' Rights guaranteed the protection of the rights of the disabled person, the enjoyment of a free and decent life, and the right to obtain various services, similar to other citizens with the same rights and duties according to the limits of their capabilities. It also obliged all parties to adapt their facilities to ensure the ease and independence of movement, and the safe use of public places.

In addition, the State of Palestine joined the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the beginning of April 2014, affirming set of rights in accordance with the international standards that guarantee the right to access health services, education and other rights, and to "*to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity*"².

Corona pandemic and people with disabilities

According to the Ministry of Health data until 24 September, the total number of positive cases (Covid-19) reached 2613, of which 1746 are active cases. According to the Ministry of Social Development data, the number of quarantined persons in the Gaza Strip reached 1649 of whom 34% were women, 24% were children, and the number of quarantined persons with disabilities was 10, including 4 women and 6 men. In the Gaza Strip, there are 15 quarantine centers, most of which do not provide the necessary facilities for persons with disabilities.

After the President declared the state of emergency in Palestine, most of the services provided closely (face to face) for persons with disabilities stopped.

Persons with disabilities and their institutions were excluded from participating in the emergency plan to confront the Corona pandemic in Palestine. In addition, the conditions and needs of persons with disabilities were not taken into consideration in decisions and implementation procedures, and persons with disabilities were left behind in a flagrant violation of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Examples:

- Environmental facilities were absent from all press conferences related to the state of emergency, as well as the absence of publications for guidance, directives, warnings and prophylactic measure, even punitive ones.
- Environmental facilities (informational and physical) mean:
 - Direct translation into Palestinian sign language for deaf and people with hearing impairment,
 - Electronic recordings and enlarged written versions written in Braille for persons with vision impairment and the blind (with visual impairment).
 - Spoken and written directions in a simplified, sequential, and gradual way for people with understanding and perception difficulties (intellectual disabilities)

This reality has become more complex and challenging in Gaza, as a result of the deterioration of the humanitarian and political situation over the past 13 years, including the impact of the Palestinian division and the Israeli blockade on Gaza, and the suffocating financial and in-kind hardship experienced by civil institutions and rehabilitation institutions in particular, which put them on the verge of collapse and stopped Services provided to its audience.

² Article 1 of the Convention Rights of persons with disabilities.

<https://www.ohchr.org/AR/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/ConventionRightsPersonsWithDisabilities.aspx>

The emergence of Corona pandemic in the world and in Palestine has increased the difficulties facing persons with disabilities particularly in the Gaza Strip, which in turn made their conditions more complicated. On the other hand, there was a complete absence of data on injured persons with disabilities or their contacts, or the number of persons with disabilities in quarantine centers, whether in schools, hotels, isolation centers, or home isolation. The absence of this information contributed to hindering access to services for persons with disabilities and not benefiting from them. Furthermore, there was an absence of the institutional role and the rehabilitation sector while working on designing and implementing the emergency plan during the pandemic, which resulted in the absence of adequate services for persons with disabilities in the various isolation centers referred to above. The absence of awareness issued by official and non-official bodies related to harmonization of information (numbers and advice that was directed to the general public) to persons with disabilities, which in turn contributed to the absence of persons with disabilities from the scene and isolation of the surrounding community.

Recommendations

- Adopting the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as a national reference in light of the delay in the issuance of the amended people with disabilities law.
- Adaptation and harmonization of isolation / quarantine centers to ensure a decent life for persons with disabilities in independence and self-reliance, including the provision of the necessary aids.
- Ensure that service providers have the know-how, skills and competence to provide high-quality services to people with disabilities in the quarantine centers.
- Allocating part of the Dignity Fund " Waqfet Ezz", which was established through the Palestinian Authority by the private sector for persons with disabilities and to cover the services affected by this pandemic, and to ensure that financial and in-kind resources reach people with disabilities and their families to enable them to live a decent life.
- Ensure that persons with disabilities are included in the planning, development and implementation stages of the pandemic emergency plans.
- Ensure that all issued formal and informal information and services during the pandemic or facing other emergency crises are accessible and accommodated for all persons with disabilities.
- Assist and support rehabilitation institutions that have been affected by the pandemic, to enable them to return and extend their services for people with disabilities.
- Inclusion of representatives of persons with disabilities, instructions and directives required during the crisis.
- Calling upon the international community and the UN and international institutions operating in Palestine to assume their responsibilities and roles in commitment and implementation of the provisions of persons with disabilities conventions and their protection and ensuring that they are not left behind.
- Approving the emergency plan submitted to the Ministry of Social Development by the rehabilitation sector in PNGO network.
- Mapping of the services provided for persons with disabilities by the various associations, institutions and ministries, which is easily accessible and takes into account all types of disabilities.
- Assigning a toll-free telephone line to report any needs and/or complaints related to services and needs of people with disabilities.

The Disability Working Group (DWG) was established on May 2018 in coordination between OCHA, PNGO, and NSR responding to the large-scale emergency situation and the need to have a platform in order to implement coordination mechanism between all clusters and ensure that needs of people with disabilities are taken into consideration while implementing humanitarian response in Gaza.

The DWG aims to support in life-saving efforts, promote and protect the well-being of the affected people with disabilities, besides minimizing disability, especially during a potential large-scale complex emergency, as well as to promote and ensure better health for all people with disability in line with the WHO global disability perspective.

DWG Members:

Action Against Hunger	National Society for Rehabilitation
Agency for Technical Corporation & Development	Nusierat Rehabilitation and Social Training Association (NRSTA)
Aisha Association for Woman & Child Protection	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Al-Wefaq Society for Relief and Development	Palestine Aviner for Childhood Foundation
Artificial Limbs and Polio Center	Palestine Red Crescent Society
Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children	Palestinian Medical Relief Society
Baitona for Community Development	Palestinian NGOs Network
Balsam for Society Rehabilitation	Protection Cluster
Disability Representative Body Network	Right to Live Society
EducAid	Save the Children
Education Cluster	Shelter Cluster
El Wafaa Charitable Society	Society of Physically Handicapped People
Food Security Cluster	Stars of Hope Society
GIZ	UN WOMEN
Health Cluster	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
Humanity & Inclusion	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
International Committee of the Red Cross	WASH Cluster
Islamic University	
Mabarret Palestine Society	
Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP)	
National Center for Community Rehabilitation	