

## Situation Overview

COVID-19 (C19) lockdown measures and restrictions in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) remain in place, with the Palestinian Authority (PA) prolonging the state of emergency until 4 May 2020. As of 28 April, a total of 495 Palestinians are confirmed to have C19, 325 in the West Bank, 153 in East Jerusalem and 17 in the Gaza Strip.

In Gaza, Rafah crossing was opened exceptionally from 13 to 16 April and through which a total of 1,632 people entered Gaza. This crossing is not expected to open again until 5 May 2020. In April, an online registration system was established to help identify returnees. Since then more than 4,000 Palestinians outside Gaza have registered to return.

At the time of publication, the PA reports that there are 10,318 people in home quarantine across the oPt. In the West Bank, currently 15,000 people are in 16 formal and 14 informal quarantine sites or home quarantine and medical facilities. Two formal quarantine sites have been opened in East Jerusalem. While the Palestinian workers in Israel (Israeli Civil Administration estimate 15,000-20,000) were permitted to stay in Israel, many are returning to the West Bank.



MDM-F / COVID 19 - Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Session / Al Mughayyir Village – Ramallah / April 2020

Photo: MDM-France- Mission Palestine

## Operational constraints

Movement restrictions remain one of the biggest challenges to the delivery of protection response. Protection cluster partners are adapting their activities to continue to reach people using remote means. The lack of international protective presence in the West Bank, especially for vulnerable communities, remains a concern and constraint.

The situation in East Jerusalem remains problematic. Those at particular risk include Palestinians without a regularized status in the city as well as the 160,000 Palestinian residents living beyond the Wall. Several partners in East Jerusalem report increasing demand for GBV and child protection services but significant challenges reaching people.

Protection partners report a lack of non-food items, including dignity kits and hygiene kits for people in all quarantine sites, and there is growing concern over restricted access to services while people are in quarantine.

## Protection concerns



**Mental health and psychosocial services (MHPSS):** Cluster partners report continued deterioration in mental health and psychosocial wellbeing across the oPt. Although remote support is available, experts indicate that it does not have the same level of effectiveness as face-to-face support. It is also hampered by electricity cuts and limited internet connectivity in remote areas. In addition a new concern in the coping and mental health of frontline workers has risen, as the pandemic continues.



**Gender-based violence (GBV):** Service providers report a continuing demand for GBV services. New trend are reports of an increasing number of calls from young men and adolescent boys to call lines, complaining of abuse by parents and siblings.



Ongoing **child protection (CP):** risks with school and childcare disruptions and a chronic lack of safe places and recreational areas for children.



Increasing levels of food insecurity and loss of income and livelihoods from C19 impacts.



In **quarantine sites** across the oPt there are challenges obtaining accurate and timely reporting and information from authorities on needs and priorities in quarantine sites and on needs and risk mitigation when people are released. There is limited follow-up of those released, to monitor whether they face stigma or safety issues upon returning home. It remains a concern and ongoing challenge to ensure that all staff working in the sites have adequate protection skills and knowledge. Finally, there are inherent risks of compounding stress and psychosocial deterioration of frontline responders the longer the pandemic goes on.



**Persons with disabilities (PwD)** face increasing challenges as the crisis continued; including postponed elective surgeries and suspended rehabilitation services. Rapidly opened quarantine sites raise real concerns about accessibility, reasonable accommodation and access to health services for PwD.



For vulnerable groups, notably PwD, a lack of **access to information** remains a concern.

Existing protection **concerns related to the occupying power** continue and in some instances are exacerbated by the C19 pandemic. During this period these include:

- Arrests of Palestinians in East Jerusalem and in Area C for involvement in PA/Fatah-led or supported C19 prevention and response. All have been released on various conditions.
- Increased vulnerability of farmers and their livelihoods in the seam zone following cancellation of all two-year seam zone permits by Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) last month. The new application process for the land owners who have seasonal products involves renewing permits every month, however, there are now reports of some delays in renewal processes. The change also affects INGO field workers and creates new restrictions on movement.

## Protection Cluster Response

- Protection Cluster members continued to reconfigure service delivery, notably through remote provision (phone, social media etc). Awareness raising and mental health support is conducted virtually.
- Radio and TV are being used extensively to disseminate protection-related information to communities, such as how to cope with the impact of the lockdown on mental and psychological health, what to do while at home, how to stop circles of rumours, how to boost morale etc.

- 85% of the people in Gaza quarantine facilities were reached by phone to understand their needs and any protection risks.
- Capacity building of frontline staff working in Gaza quarantine sites. Training includes prevention, detection and referral of GBV, CP and MHPSS cases.
- Supporting women at risk, survivors of GBV and youth, with weekly online MHPSS group support sessions.
- Online training sessions for psychosocial counsellors and service providers in West Bank and Gaza. A training manual was developed for remote counselling of frontline workers.
- Online stress management and self-care through expressive arts sessions to professional psychosocial counsellors.
- Families and parents are supported in various ways, for example, targeted videos on how to provide support to your child during challenging times have been produced and shared online.
- Psychosocial support games have been developed and disseminated for refugee students in West Banks currently unable to attend UNRWA schools. The aim is to reach 45,000 students across the region.
- Protection Cluster members focus on vulnerable communities and those hardest to reach. For example, partners reached Bedouin communities in northern West Bank governorates with C-19 awareness raising and prevention, hygiene supplies such as alcohol based hand-sanitizer and soap, as well as information about MHPSS, GBV, child protection and UXOs.

## Protection Cluster resources

- [Protection note](#) outlining the protection and human rights standards applicable for quarantine sites.
- Emergency GBV [service directory](#).
- Google Drive with Gender and GBV material for the COVID-19 response (available [here](#)).