

Situation Overview

COVID-19 (C19) lockdown measures and restrictions in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) remain in place, with the Palestinian Authority (PA) effectively extending the state of emergency for another month, until 5 June 2020. As of 8 May, a total of 547 Palestinians are confirmed to have C19, 354 in the West Bank, 172 in East Jerusalem and 20 in the Gaza Strip.

In Gaza, a mandatory 21-day quarantine in official sites run by the authorities remains in place for everyone returning to the Strip including medical patients. At the time of this sitrep, about 1,000 people were in 13 quarantine centres. The only new arrivals into Gaza are a small number of medical patients from Erez each week. Rafah crossing has remained closed since mid-April. Reportedly there are Palestinians are waiting to return through Rafah crossing once it opens.

In the West Bank, reportedly about 250 people are in quarantine centres, and 12,800 in home quarantine. A total 11 collection and diagnosis centres, 25 quarantine centres and 11 treatment centres are operating. Services in East Jerusalem remain limited with only two hospitals receiving positive cases. Since 3 May 2020. Palestinian workers in the West Bank are permitted to return to Israel for work, however, once crossing they must remain in Israel for the time being.



Figure 1 Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center (JLAC) in Wad el Siq providing information on legal and health matters and delivering essentials for the community. Photo ©: JLAC

Operational constraints

Movement restrictions continue and remain one of the biggest challenges to the protection response. Partners have developed virtual ways to reach people to ensure continuity and comprehensive protection services to address existing as well as emerging issues. That said, partners are still working to overcome challenges, such as the fact that many individuals have inadequate technology or internet access to online services. MHPSS counsellors report some shortages of electronic devices to facilitate sessions. Some partners also report that increasing need has begun to stretch services and supplies, including MHPSS and personal protective equipment for staff carrying out distributions and home visits.

The situation in East Jerusalem remains of concern. A particular risk is Palestinians without a regularized status in the city and 160,000 Palestinian residents living beyond the Wall. These groups have challenges accessing public health measures and responses to C19. Partners report increasing demand for GBV and child protection services but significant challenges reaching people. There is also no clear or consistent approach to psychosocial support for Palestinians in East Jerusalem and local efforts to address these needs have been hampered by access and jurisdiction rules.

Protection concerns



Mental health and psychosocial services (MHPSS): partners report continued deterioration in mental health and psychosocial wellbeing and increasing need for counselling support for families and children to cope with anxiety, stress and fear. In addition, is the mental health and wellbeing of frontline workers and care-givers the longer the pandemic continues.



Gender-based violence (GBV): service demand continues to increase. Most concerning is the increasing reports of high risk cases including suicides and attempted suicide linked to domestic violence. A welcome move is an inter-Ministerial procedure for the safe referral and care of GBV survivors during C19 including for health care, testing, social services and quarantines that include essential protective measures. Areas creating pressure and risks are delayed legal proceedings in Sharia courts, divorce, custody proceedings and disruptions to family mediation processes are reportedly pressure points.



Child protection (CP): partners report violence, beating and neglect of children linked to family tension and socio-economic pressure. One cluster partner reported a 24 percent increase in calls from children in the past week, compared to the first three weeks in April. Risks of recidivism for children released from juvenile institutions and protection concerns for those sent to families with a history of violence.



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. 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 and there is an inherent risks of compounding stress and psychosocial deterioration of responders and staff the longer the pandemic goes on.



Persons with disabilities (PwD): continue to face many challenges including disruptions to rehabilitation services and delays obtaining non-urgent medical care. An area of growing concern is the absence of referral between services especially for psychosocial support, counselling and case management.



For vulnerable groups, notably PwD and those in Area C particularly Bedouin and herder communities, 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:

- Continued arrests of Palestinians in East Jerusalem and in Area C for carrying out PA/Fatah-led or supported C19 prevention and response. Most are released on the same day.
- Ongoing vulnerability of farmers and their livelihoods in the seam zone following cancellation of all two-year seam zone permits by Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) and the introduction of monthly permits including for INGO field workers. Reports of delayed permit renewals persist.
- Ongoing settler violence across the West Bank with significant spikes in damage to property including trees.
- Continued demolitions across the West Bank during C19. A moratorium has provided limited reprieve for inhabited buildings, however, important structures such as WASH and health points have been demolished.

Protection Cluster Response

- Protection Cluster adjusted its C19 response plan priorities based on new and emerging needs identified by partners focusing on vulnerable individuals and households and people with disabilities.
- CP, GBV and MHPSS partners continued to expand phone and online activities to ensure continuity of critical protection services and referral pathways, with increasing focus on reaching people with disability and supporting families with chronically ill family members and the elderly. Emergency MHPSS was also provided to people affected by settler violence and demolitions.
- CP/MHPSS partners reached 492 children with remote PSS, counselling and psychotherapy, as well as structured group activities and life skills education. 152 children received individual case management support, including 19 children with disabilities.
- Structured PSS services were also provided to caregivers, including in quarantine centers. Awareness raising and materials on C19 and available services reached more than one thousand people via various platforms.
- Awareness raising on national TV about GBV calling for action to prevent and protect women and girls from violence and provide protection for survivors of GBV.
- Medicines and care for women with breast cancer in their homes, to prevent the need for travel and exposure to C19.
- GBV partners continued to expand helplines, remote counselling, and case management support in response to increasing calls from women, men and adolescents. In response to increasing incidents of attempted suicide partners provided emergency counselling and case management and referrals to hospitals.
- With government-run shelters in Gaza closed, GBV partners provided remote family mediation or called on community leaders to help with urgent interventions.
- Protection cluster provided guidance on incorporating key protection standards and practices into quarantines in Gaza.
- Hygiene kits and PPE were delivered to highly vulnerable women and households in the oPt and in vulnerable areas of West Bank close to settlement expansions and the Wall.
- Legal partners have continued to work on joint efforts and appeals to: expand the demolition moratorium to protect important uninhabited, improve family and legal access for people and children in Israeli prisons, and address urgent issues for women caused by the suspension of Sharia courts (such as child custody, alimony).
- Human rights organization in Gaza conducted 16 legal interventions with the authorities in response to complaints from those in quarantine, including issues with accommodation and lack of assistance and access to services within the quarantine facilities.
- UNMAS monitored increased risk of children out of school encountering ERW/mines and provided emergency remote messaging for risk education.