



Education Under Crisis

Challenges in Higher Education: Global/Local Perspectives

- **Restrictions** on mobility of goods and people and **deteriorating** political and economic situation;
- Limited access to financial resources and **shifting funding priorities**;
- Increased **competition** from **local** and **regional HEIs** for good students and competent faculty and staff;
- **Massification** of higher education in response to rising demand;
- Emphasis on the **public value** of higher education and its relevance;
- Labor market **requirements** for graduates' skillset driven by evolving knowledge economy;
- **Changing HE landscape**: governance and structure

The **Palestinian** Higher Education System

- The **Palestinian** higher education system has **one of the highest per capita rates** of university graduates in the Arab world.
- There are **13 universities, 9 university colleges, 11 community colleges, and 1 open university** in the West Bank. **6 universities, 6 university colleges, 7 community colleges in Gaza.**
- In 2023, newly enrolled students in undergraduate and graduate studies reached over **36,000 students** in West Bank. No Clear figures about Gaza
- During the same year, **32,263 students graduated** from Palestinian higher education institutions. Palestinian undergraduate students selected a wide range of specializations, but the highest demand was for Business Administration and Law, Information and Communication Technology, and Arts and Humanities.
- **Unemployment** Figures (2023): WB: **18.3%** Gaza Strip: **45.8%**

The **Palestinian** Higher Education System

- **Insufficient funding** is an on-going major concern and it is having a serious negative impact on the quality and relevance of higher education in Palestine. Between **60-80%** of the operating budget of universities is covered by tuition fees, and since there is no regularity and consistency in the payment of tuition fees, budgets of universities suffer yearly deficits (**accumulated deficit**)
- The **MOEHE does not have** financial autonomy. Therefore, its strategies and policies are determined by the funding available. Unfortunately, the government policies and strategies are **donor driven**, as Palestine is suffering from a serious skill-deterioration. Therefore, MOEHE's influence and control on HEIs is limited.
- For example, if a university collected around 80% of its costs from the students' fees, the government is supposed to cover the remaining 20% to make up the deficit. In reality, a large number of students of HEIs in Palestine do not pay their tuitions fees and the government does not give universities sufficient financial support. This led to a situation where **all universities in Palestine are suffering from financial deficits**.

Education and the **International Law**

- The **right to education** is **enshrined** in international law, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Geneva Conventions.

However, Palestinian students have faced **significant** challenges in accessing quality and safe education for decades. These challenges include **violence** targeting of teachers and students, Israeli **military operations** and **raids** in and around schools, **settler violence**, **destruction** of educational **facilities**, movement **restrictions**, and **bureaucratic impediments**.

Impact of **Movement Restrictions** on Access to Education

- There are **790 checkpoints**, barriers and gates (OCHA) that are cutting access to hundreds of villages and communities in the WB.
- In affected areas, it is impossible for students and/or teachers to reach their schools, especially in **Hebron city**, south Hebron and several areas of the **Jordan valley**. In the WB, these restrictions **increase travel time** by **several hours daily**.
- The increase in travel time also means an **increase in costs**. For teachers who have been **irregularly - and only partially** - paid since **Oct 2023**, this has been a significant issue **preventing** them from ensuring full time **face-to-face** education.
- Checkpoints are also increasing **risks of violence for students**, their caregivers and teachers from Israeli forces or from settlers.
- **Children with disabilities** in the WB face **significant additional** movement restrictions that **hinder** their access to education.

VISA Restrictions for Educators and Medics in Palestine

- Israel **controls all border** entry points into Palestine and thus determines the legal status of the international citizens who live and work in the Occupied Territories.
- Many **struggle** to secure entry and/or long-term visas and must navigate opaque bureaucratic processes for renewal against a constant threat of **possible denial and deportation**. Some visas for longer term residents are renewed for very **short periods** (e.g., two weeks) and often impose **strict** conditions on **mobilities** (e.g., no travel to Jerusalem)
- Other visas are caught in **prolonged** bureaucratic procedures that **delay and stop activities** in different sectors, including higher education at Palestinian institutions. these bureaucratic procedures function as a deterrent such that entry into Palestine is not even attempted for the expectation of visa denial.
- Where internationals are denied/deported or avoid attempting entry, work activities do not take place: technical, educational and intellectual exchanges are **lost**; journalistic and legal documentation of human rights are **impeded**; and Palestinian sectors are **deprived** of engagement with international flows of labor, ideas and capital.

Growing **Poverty** and School **Dropout**

- According to PBS, **GDP** of the WB in 2024 **dropped by 25%** compared to Q1 of 2023.
- According to International Labor Organization (ILO), **one-third** of total employment had been lost in the WB.
- According to ILO, **87% of households** in the WB reported a decrease in income (The cancellation of all work permits; **cuts in the salaries** of **140,000** civil servants).
- According to ILO, **29% of Palestinians** reduced their **expenditure on education**.
- Many families **unable** to cover the increased **transportation costs** that the movement restrictions are creating.
- According to a survey conducted by ILO, **7% of the families** surveyed were sending their **children** to **work** due to the economic crisis.
- It is most likely that this will **increase school dropout**.

Increased **Risks** to PA Education System

- Since Oct. 7th, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has been facing a severe financial crisis that threatens to breakdown its education system. In 2023, the PA had a **financial gap of \$682 million (3.9% of GDP)**, expected to rise to **\$1.2 billion in 2024** because:
 - Government of Israel has systematically **delayed** and **reduced** in the **transfer of clearance revenues**, which make up **60%** of the PA's income.
 - **Reduced tax collection** due to the severe **economic crisis**
- This crisis has significantly impacted education, reducing **face-to-face** schooling to **two days a week** since February 2024. Additionally, the dire financial situation will lead to further **cuts** in **education** spending, affecting the **quality of education** and student resources.

Reduced Donor/Humanitarian Funding for Education

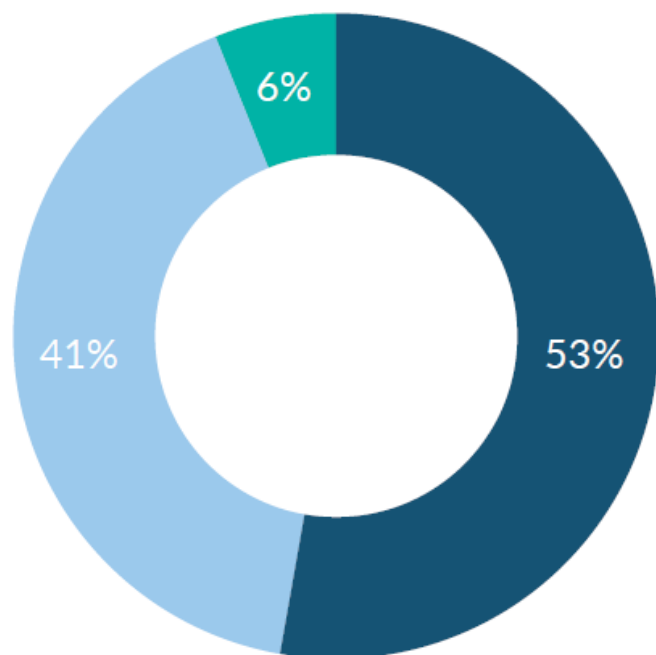
- UNRWA schools ensure the education of more than **45,000 students** in the **West Bank**. The organization is facing significant financial challenges in 2024 with a funding gap of around **\$180 Million** for the last quarter of the year.
- Israel is pushing the adoption of a **series of new laws and actions against UNRWA** that are threatening to **prevent** it from implementing any kind of programming in **East Jerusalem** and the West Bank. This would drastically **reduce access to education** for **tens of thousands of children**, especially in **refugee camps** and in **Area C of the West Bank**.
- Israel, through the introduction of bureaucratic impediments, accusations of lack of neutrality, and prosecutions of many organizations and their staff members.
- Funding to support humanitarian and development programs in the oPt have **significantly reduced** over recent years. According to UNTAC, in 2022 the Palestinian Authority received just **\$250 million in donor budget** support and **\$300 million for development projects**. This is a steep decline from a total **\$2 billion** in 2008.

Learning Losses

- UNRWA between the 7th of October and March 2024, according to data from the Ministry of Education, **only 53%** of learning was ensured **face-to-face**, while **41% of it was online** or delivered through a **hybrid approach**. Schools were **closed 6% of school days**.
- Even when schools are not closed, the fear of **violence, movement restrictions**, and mental health concerns have led many students to **skip school**, leading to more **learning loss**.
- The shift to e-learning, necessitated by closures, movement restrictions and the fiscal crisis of the Palestinian Authority, presents serious challenges that further widen the educational gap and hinder students academic progress in the West Bank.
- Children and young people with **disabilities** in the West Bank **encounter substantial obstacles** in accessing and succeeding in education. Within the education system, these challenges include **inaccessible infrastructure**, non-adapted materials and technology, unsuitable curricula, insufficient teacher training for diverse learning needs, safety concerns, and segregation.

Education Under Stress: **Statistics** (WB)

distribution of learning time
(October 2023 to March 2024 - MoE)



■ Face-to-face education
■ Online or hybrid
■ School closed

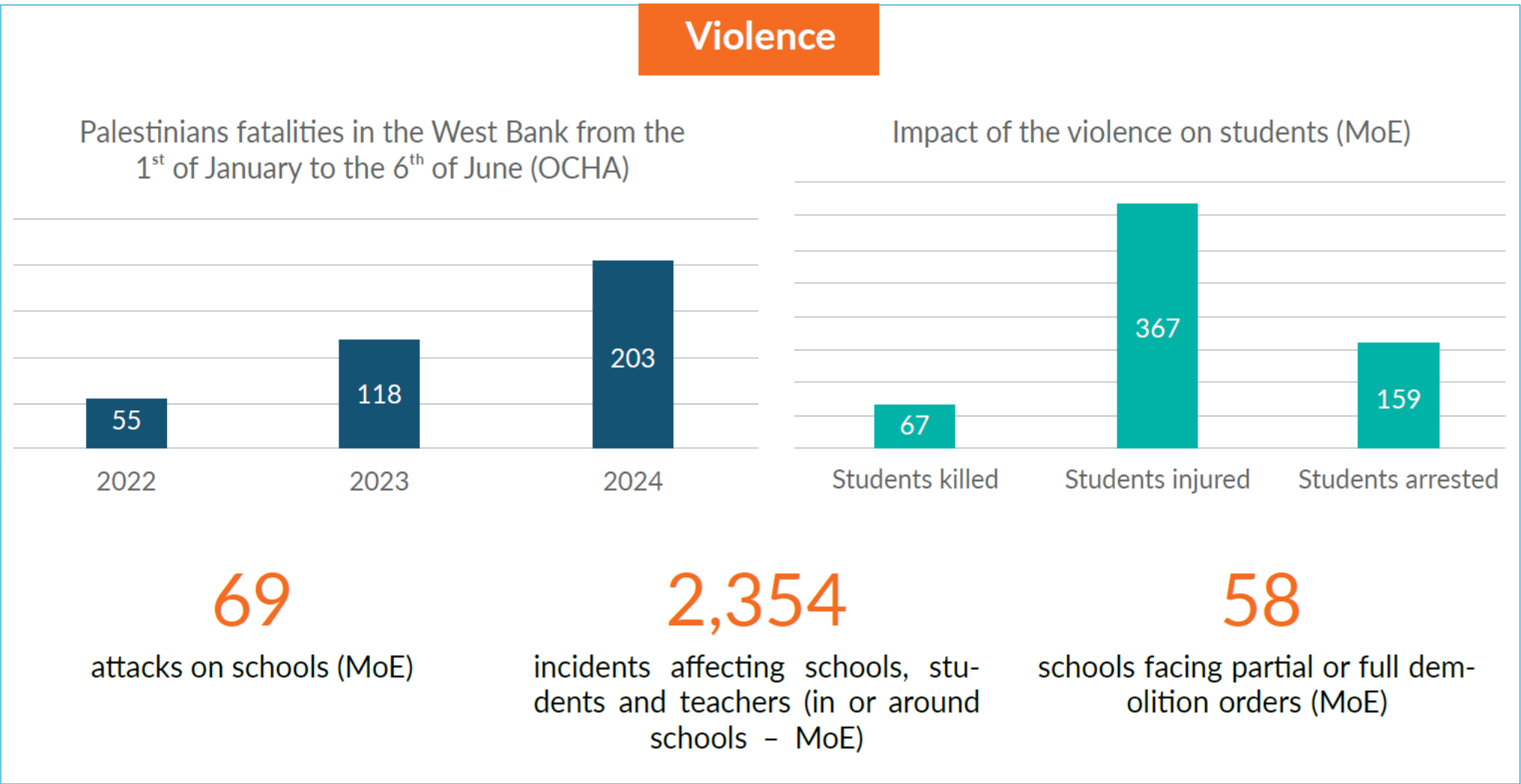
Between 8% and 20%

of all schools in the West Bank temporarily closed since the 7th of October due to violence and/or restrictions on movements (MoE)

2 days a week

Number of days of face-to-face education in schools in the West Bank from January 2024 to June 2024 (vs. 3 days for online education)

Education Under Stress: **Statistics** (WB)



Source: OPt Education Cluster

“Educide” and “Scholasticide” in Gaza

- The **17-year blockade** and resulting de-development have imposed various structural limitations on the higher education sector in Gaza.
- Palestinian higher education **institutions** (HEIs) in Gaza have been **directly targeted** by Israel during the war, resulting in the prolonged **destruction** of **11 out of Gaza’s 19** Higher Education Institutions (HEI).
- The **destruction** included **4 out of 6 major universities** in Gaza and **killed** more than **450 academic** and administrative university **staff**.
- Over the course of the war, approximately **78,000** Gaza university **students** have been **deprived** of continuing their education.
- The targeting of higher education has been **deliberate and systematic**; **94 professors** (including University **Presidents**) were **targeted** and **killed** by Israeli occupation, while well-known universities such as Al-Azhar and Al-Islamiah were the focus of **devastation**.
- **Spatial cleansing** involves the **deliberate** destruction and targeting of **physical spaces** tied to higher education. This means that university buildings, laboratories, and other essential facilities are **intentionally demolished**, effectively **disrupting** and **dismantling** the higher education sector.

“Educide” and “Scholasticide” in Gaza

- At least **60 %** of educational facilities, including **13 public libraries**, have been **damaged** or **destroyed**. Another **195 heritage sites**, **227 mosques** and **three churches** have also been damaged or destroyed, including the **Central Archives of Gaza**, containing **150 years of history**.
- Without **safe** schools, **women** and **girls** face additional **risks**, including **gender-based violence**. More than **one million Palestinian children** in Gaza are now in need of **mental health** and psychosocial support and will suffer the **trauma** of this war throughout their lives.

“Educide” in Gaza

- BZU’s Initiative “Rebuilding Hope” <https://www.birzeit.edu/en/rebuilding-hope>
- Levels of Intervention:
 1. **Infrastructure** and Institutional Synergy
 2. Higher Education in Coordination with Universities in Gaza
 3. **Transformative Research**



Palestinian **Students** in **Israeli Universities**

- Since the beginning of the War on 7 October 2023, dozens of Israeli universities and colleges initiated disciplinary actions mainly and overwhelmingly **against Palestinian students**, both **citizens of Israel** and **residents of East Jerusalem**, based on their social media posts.
- Even **publications** expressing **solidarity** with Gaza residents, including **prayers** for their well-being or photos of **destruction** in the strip, sometimes **served** as the basis for **complaints**. Similarly, Quranic verses, prayers, and other religious texts were labelled as support for terrorism regardless of their religious and social context.
- Any publication that **did not align** with the **Israeli narrative** of the Hamas attack on October 7th and the events leading up to it posed **a risk to its publishers** in disciplinary proceedings. For instance, articles criticizing the actions of the Israeli military or casting doubt on the accuracy of some descriptions of the events in the Gaza envelope were often the basis for some complaints, even if the source was Israeli media in Hebrew. Effectively, the use of **terms** like "**ethnic cleansing**," "**massacre**," or "**genocide**" to describe the events in Gaza **was banned**.

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QUESTIONS ?