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SEARCH
FOR COMMON
GROUND

CONFLICT SNAPSHOT

December 2020

Palestine

Introduction

For **Palestinians**, the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict began in 1948, following the Nakabeh, the mass exodus of Palestinian refugees and annexation of Territories beyond the Green Line, and the ongoing borders dispute, among other issues. Palestine now stands in political fragmentation, with the region split into the West Bank and Gaza, which have their own governmental and political standing. Moreover, there is a large number of Palestinians living in Jerusalem (which is annexed from the West Bank) and in the Territories beyond the Green Line. The Palestinian population is estimated at a little over 5 million, with around 3 million people in the West Bank and 2 million in Gaza.¹ The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is marked by prevailing challenges, including the presence of Israeli military, scarce resources and the lack of control over them, geographical fragmentation in the West Bank, the on-going siege in Gaza, and lack of control of borders.

Data collection and analysis

Data for this first conflict snapshot report for Palestine was gathered from 27 October through 4 November 2020. The respondents were from the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and Territories beyond the Green Line, with a strong over-representation of respondents from the West Bank. This report was prepared by an independent consultant and the Search for Common Ground (Search) Palestine team, with support from Search's COVID-19 Response Programming Team and Institutional Learning Team. For more information on the data collection methodology and tools used by Search for Common Ground for this research, [click here](#).



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1. Estimated Population in Palestine Mid-Year by Governorate, 1997-2021, [Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics](#).


Update: COVID-19 Measures and Impact on Conflict

Amid a deteriorating political situation and a highly fragile economy in Palestine, the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly harsh, especially on Palestinians living below the poverty line. By October 2020, the total number of infected individuals reached 68,500 in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza, with 61,138 of patients recovering, and a total of 580 deaths.² Since March 2020, different cities and regions in the West Bank, Gaza, Jerusalem, and territories beyond the Green Line have experienced multiple lockdowns and periods of varying COVID-19 governmental restrictions. These disruptions have had severe effects on schools, businesses, and other sectors, further complicated by varying levels and forms of support from their respective governing bodies, UN agencies, and humanitarian organisations.

The COVID-19 crisis has had a major impact on health care, employment, and the economy in Palestine.

Many micro to small enterprises have closed, unemployment has risen as businesses have had to let go employees, and the Palestinian GDP decreased by around 4% in 2020.³ Furthermore, the Israeli occupation affected Palestinians within the context of the pandemic, as Israeli forces demolished the only COVID-19 quarantine center in Hebron,⁴ closed testing centers in East Jerusalem⁵ and other regions, and denied infected Palestinian detainees proper health care and case management.

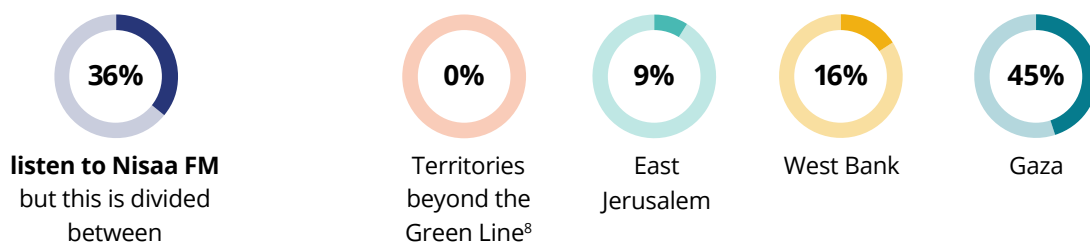
The COVID-19 crisis not only impacted the degree and form of harassment that Palestinians face due to the occupation, it also exacerbated many issues that Palestinians already face. First, there was an **increase in violence against women (VAW)**,⁶ as the lockdown meant that victims of domestic violence spend more time with their abusers. Many service centers for survivors of VAW also stopped taking new cases or were temporarily shut down. Second, the movement restrictions imposed by Israel on imports, exports, and inner country movement has increased **shortages of needed goods, equipment, and especially, medical supplies**.⁷ Moreover, the decrease in GDP, and the forecast of more closures and lockdowns as COVID-19 cases increase throughout winter, will most likely lead to an **increase of the number of Palestinians living in poverty**, which has implications on economic, social, and political levels. Finally, **COVID-19 and subsequent lockdowns have affected education for children and youth**, as many of them are now attending online schools or universities and losing integral parts of their education, which they obtain primarily through interpersonal interactions. The increased use of social media and lack of interaction and activity outside has also impacted their physical, mental, and social wellbeing. The implications of this can only be monitored over time, as the long-term impact of educational difficulties, depression, and other effects have yet to be fully assessed.

	West Bank and Gaza	East Jerusalem and Territories beyond the Green Line
	Schools open	Under 5th grade open
	Teleworking not mandatory	Teleworking mandatory
	Borders open	Borders/airports open to citizens/residents only
	All services are open	Only essential services are open
	Mask wearing mandatory in busy places	Mask wearing is mandatory

COVID-19's Impact on Social Cohesion & Trust

Half of respondents trust COVID-19 information shared on Search's media partner but information sharing remains low

Search is partnering with [Nisaa FM](#) for this project, which is a radio station dedicated to promoting women's rights. In terms of audience coverage, we found that it varies a lot between the different geographic zones: on average,



2. [Governmental online Portal](#), November 5th 2020.

3. UNCTAD, [COVID-19 devastates Palestine's shattered economy](#), September 2020.

4. Aljazeera, ["UN: COVID-19 efforts hampered amid Israeli-Palestinian breakdown"](#), July 2020.

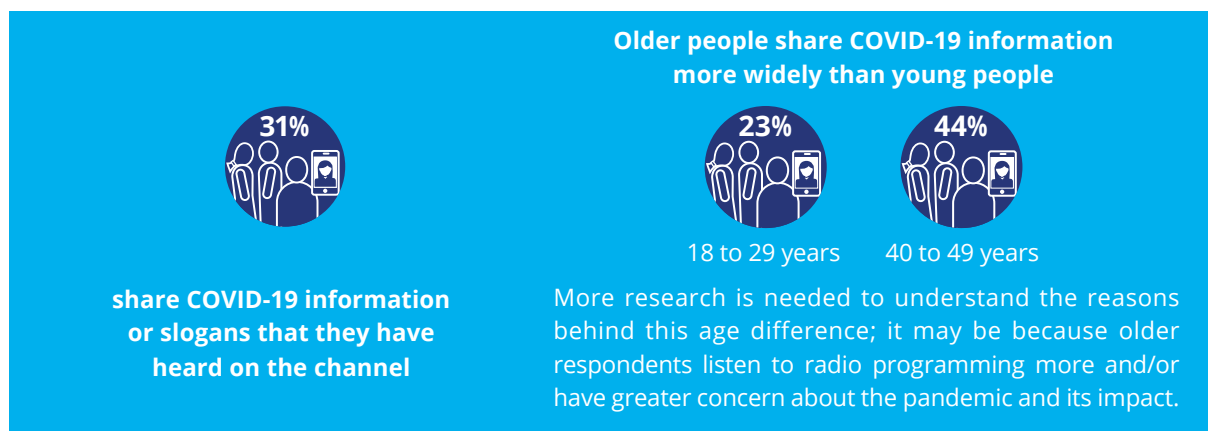
5. Middle East Monitor, ["Israel closes coronavirus testing centre in occupied East Jerusalem"](#), April 2020.

6. UN Women, [RAPID ASSESSMENT ON COVID-19 AND DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES ACROSS PALESTINE, 2020](#).

7. International Development Studies, [The pandemic under siege: A view from the Gaza Strip](#), 2020.

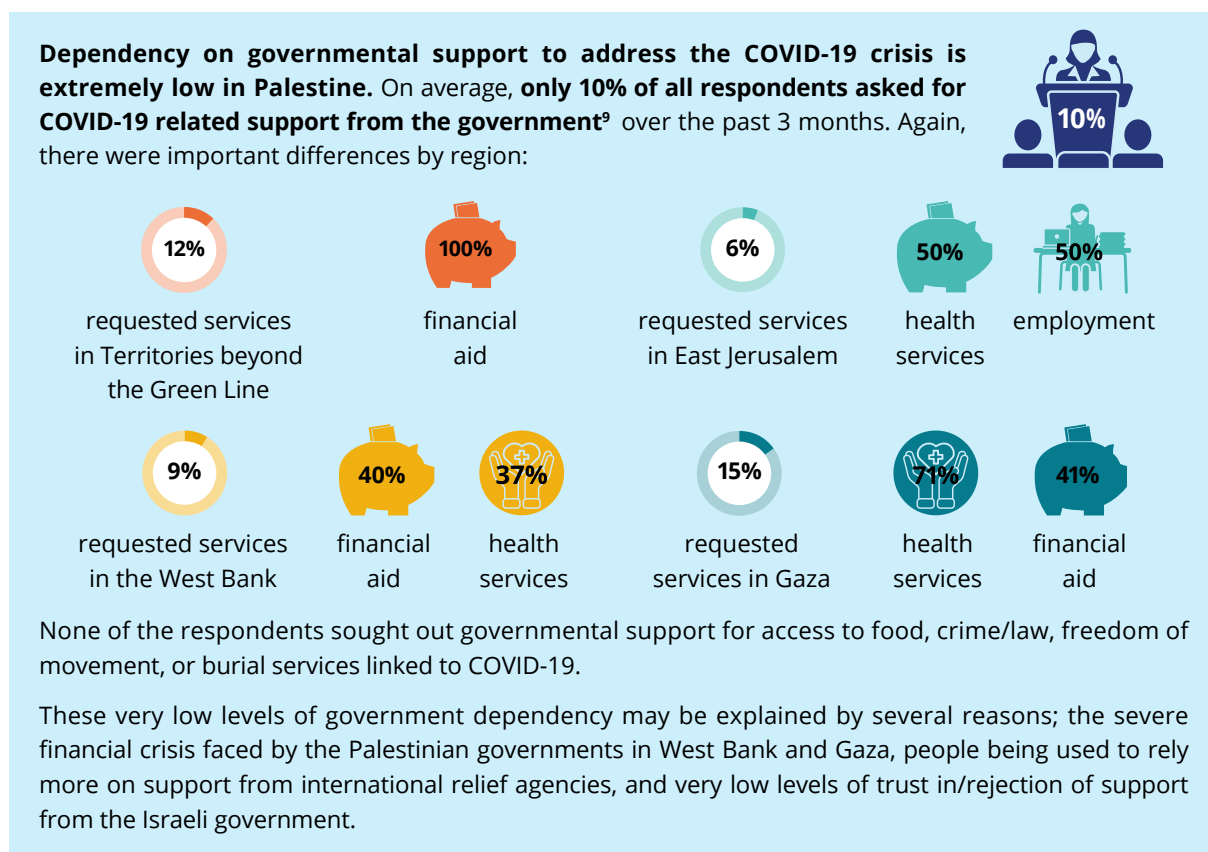
8. Nisaa FM does not broadcast in the Territories beyond the Green Line, so the subsequent questions about media trust and sharing of information were not asked to respondents in this area.

Out of those who listen to Nisaa FM:



Vertical cohesion and the legitimacy of institutions are frailing, with important regional differences to be monitored.

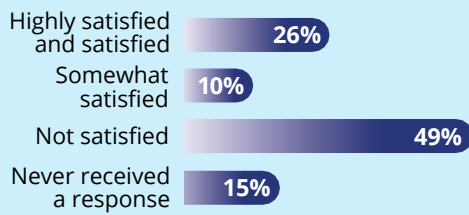
Analysis shows low levels of satisfaction with provided services and low trust in authorities.



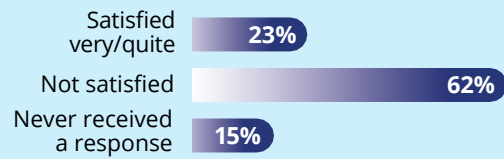
9. The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, the Palestinian Government in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli Government in East Jerusalem and for Palestinians living in Israel.

The governmental response to citizens' requests should be properly assessed, as a large percentage of respondents are not satisfied and increasing dissatisfaction with the government's response to COVID-19 may be an indicator of future tensions, conflict, and/or protests.

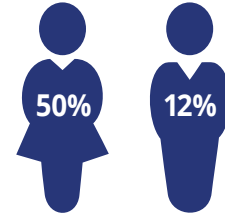
Satisfaction with COVID-19 services



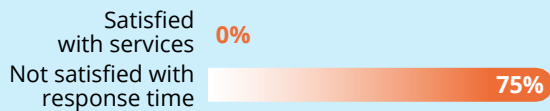
Satisfaction with how long it took



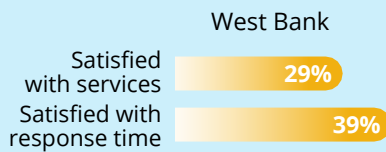
Women are much more satisfied with COVID-19 services than men. Men have been more affected by the economic situation, likely due to increased unemployment and movement restrictions (unable to go to work and even go out of their homes). Hence, men may be more dissatisfied with the lack of support to compensate for financial losses.



The lowest levels of satisfaction was in Territories beyond the Green Line



East Jerusalem had the highest level of satisfaction



These varying levels of satisfaction highlight that the geo-political zones substantially affect Palestinians' experiences with the services provided by their different governing bodies. It is also linked to the type of services requested and the ability of each governing body to adequately meet needs around those particular services.

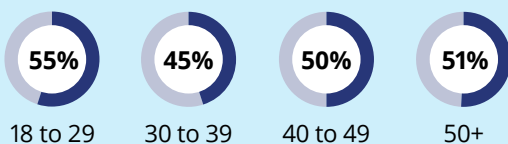
Respondents' Trust in Government

Half of all respondents agree (strongly agree or agree) that the government is doing its best to consider the needs of everyone equally when making decisions about COVID-19 services



Age differences:

Interestingly, young people have the most trust in government



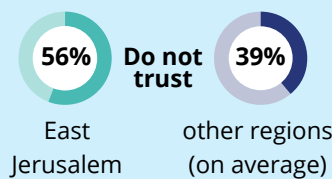
Trust in COVID-19 responders

Overall respondents trust that people working on COVID-19 have their best interest in mind when they are doing their work.



Respondents' Trust in Government (contd)

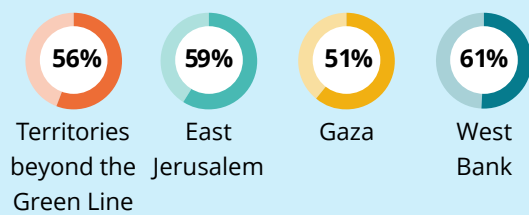
Regional differences:



In Jerusalem, respondents **distrust the government** the most. This is most likely reflective of their dissatisfaction with the lack of services that the Israeli government provides to Palestinians.

Trust in COVID-19 responders (contd)

Gazans have the least trust in people working on COVID-19.



which is probably linked to the prevailing context of lack of health services, food, basic supplies, and other critical needs in Gaza due to the blockade. Moreover, this could also be due to the fact that the West Bank, Jerusalem, Territories beyond the Green Line, and Gaza Strip all had COVID-19 outbreaks at the same time. However, authorities in the Gaza Strip did not impose a complete lockdown initially. Therefore, when lockdown measures were taken in Gaza, it devastated the population socially and economically.

Horizontal cohesion is impacted negatively by the COVID-19 crisis, as Palestinians have even less opportunities to interact

General trends about collaboration and interaction across groups send important signals for conflict. However, when examining horizontal cohesion, the most important trends to pay attention to are the outliers: who values this type of collaboration, who does not, and what influences willingness to collaborate across different dividing lines.



The majority of respondents agree (strongly agree or agree) that there is **value in collaborating with someone from another region**¹⁰ to address a crisis like COVID-19.



strongly disagree or disagree,

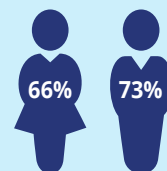


have neutral reactions.

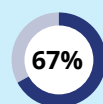


More men than women see value in collaboration to address COVID-19.

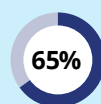
This may be linked to **cultural and social norms**, as it is not favorable for women in Palestine to collaborate with people who are not from their immediate family. Women are also more likely to experience cyberviolence or cyberbullying, which may make them more reluctant to engage in online collaboration.



Older generations are more supportive of collaboration to address a crisis like COVID-19 than young people. This could be due to **COVID-19 affecting older generations differently** than younger generations, but more research is needed to better understand these trends.



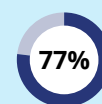
18 to 29



30 to 39



40 to 49



50+

Gaza Strip respondents are the most supportive of collaboration to address COVID-19 among all regions. One possible explanation may be that respondents from the Gaza Strip more direly need this type of collaboration and outside support to address the COVID-19 pandemic, given **their humanitarian needs and their vulnerability** because of the Israeli blockade.



Territories beyond the Green Line



East Jerusalem



Gaza



West Bank

10. The question about valuing collaboration with someone from another region refers to individuals/groups from the West Bank, Jerusalem, Gaza and the Territories beyond the Green Line. For the latter this can be understood as referring to Palestinians living in Israel or to Israelis.

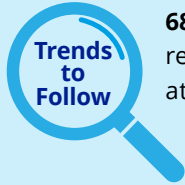


recorded that they interacted¹¹ with individuals from other regions, either remotely or in-person, in the past three months



More than half of respondents have had no interaction with individuals from other regions

This is the lowest level of interaction across all the countries we researched and is something we will monitor over the next months, to see how the COVID-19 crisis will further impact already very low opportunities for interaction among respondents from different regions.



68% of women did not interact with individuals outside of their region (remotely or in-person), compared to 51% of men. This is likely attributed to cultural norms that prohibit women in many local communities from interacting with those (especially men) outside of their immediate family.



Gaza and East Jerusalem reported the highest levels of interaction, followed by Territories beyond the Green Line and the West Bank. Interestingly, regions that are more closed off, such as Gaza, which is under Israeli siege, and Jerusalem, which is somewhat separated from the West Bank and Territories beyond the Green Line, are both more prone to interaction with individuals from other regions.



38%
Territories beyond the Green Line



66%
East Jerusalem



69%
Gaza



36%
West Bank

Next Steps For COVID-19 Response Efforts

Enhancing Accessibility and Credibility of Messaging on COVID-19 Response

- A tailored communication approach, taking into consideration access and other communication needs, should be in place to maximize reach and resonance of COVID-19 messaging and information. For instance, Facebook should be a primary outlet for content in order to reach people from the Territories beyond the Green Line and Jerusalem. Posts and content should cover a diversity of topics, ranging from COVID-19 factual updates, service availability and estimated timelines to receive services, and other key topics based on emerging needs. Furthermore, collaboration with credible news outlets such as Palestine TV and Maan TV can further elevate reach and resonance of COVID-19 messaging and information, particularly to reach Territories beyond the Green Line and Jerusalem, which report lower listenership of Search's current radio partner.

Ensuring increased acceptance of the COVID-19 response by communities

- Partnering with trusted actors can improve the legitimacy and trust of overall COVID-19 response efforts. For instance, given that the level of trust in COVID-19 responders is higher than the trust in government, COVID-19 response efforts that are carried out by these actors, even in partnership with government, will most likely have higher interactions and credibility to the people.

Strengthening social cohesion during pandemic times

- Higher levels of interaction between regions provide an entry-point for social cohesion building and more effective COVID-19 response. Given that respondents from Gaza and Jerusalem have higher levels of social interaction with individuals from other regions, there is an opportunity to foster approaches for crisis response based on collaboration across divides. Additionally, this approach can also support social cohesion and relationship building over time as well as promote wider solidarity during times of crisis. On the other hand, creating new (in-person or remote) opportunities for increased social interaction and cohesion in the West Bank and Territories beyond the Green Line, where interaction with other regions is lower, remains equally important. However, this should be carried out in conflict-sensitive ways, in order to generate buy-in and acceptance of increased interaction.

11. The question was asked on a daily, weekly, monthly, or on a quarterly basis.