



## EDUCATION

The status of education in Palestine shows a mixed picture. Although the population is one of the most literate in the world, the education system is in disrepair and failing, due largely to effects of the Israeli occupation: insufficient school infrastructure, lack of adequately trained teachers, and a lack of access to schooling in marginalized areas. Since 1948, education has served as a central means to empowerment within the Palestinian community.<sup>1</sup> As recognized by the UN and enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, education is a fundamental human right and everyone is entitled to social and international order in which this right can be fully realized. The Israeli occupation and its associated practices and policies have undermined the Palestinians' capacity to fulfil this right in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The latest statistics show that 96.3% of the population of Palestine is literate.<sup>2</sup> This rate is even higher than that of the UNDP 2014 HDI "high human development" category average. Women have made great strides in literacy over the past two decades, with the rate jumping from 78.6% in 1995 to the current 94.1%. Amongst males, 98.4% are literate. Literacy rates are highest in the Gaza Strip, with a literate population of 96.8%, compared to 96% in the West Bank.

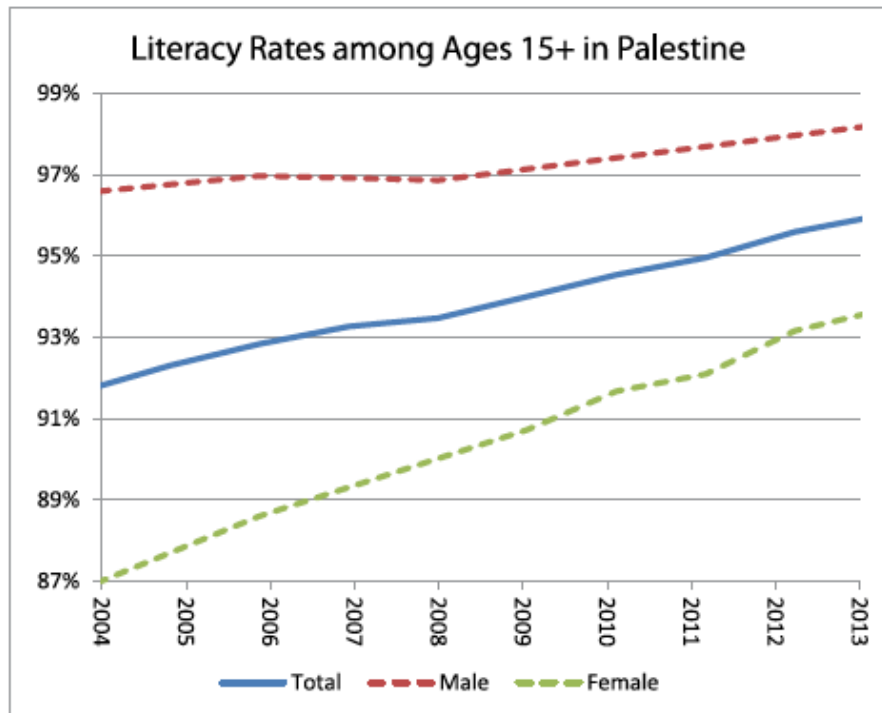
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<sup>1</sup> Save the Children Alliance (2001) 'Palestine: The education of children at risk', presented to the 57th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, March 2001.

<sup>2</sup> PCBS (2014) 'Literacy Rate of Persons (15 Years and Over) in Palestine by Age Groups and Sex, 1995, 1997, 2000-2013', available at <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/Rainbow/Documents/Education-1994-2013-11E1.htm>

Indeed, the illiteracy rate in Palestine is one of the lowest in the world.<sup>3</sup> Illiteracy amongst individuals over the age of 15, as of the end of 2013, was 3.7%. This was down from 13.9% in 1997. Illiteracy is highest in rural areas (4.5%), compared to urban areas (3.6%) and refugee camps (3.2%). The rate is highly genderized, however, with 5.9% of women considered illiterate compared to only 1.6% of men. Palestine has made progress in the education of women, with the rate falling substantially from 20.3% in 1997 to less than 6% at present.

**Figure 1: Literacy rates in Palestine, 2013**



Source: PCBS

School enrolment amongst Palestinians is generally high.<sup>4</sup> At the end of 2013, a total of 1,151,702 students were enrolled; 1,009,639 at basic level (grades 1-10) and 142,063 at secondary level (grades 11-12). There are comparable proportions of males and females enrolled in basic education, though more males attend secondary school. The American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA) found that 38% of children in the West Bank and Gaza are enrolled in preschool, compared to 25% for children in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and 50% for the world as a whole.<sup>5</sup> As of 2013, 9.4% of individuals aged 15

<sup>3</sup> PCBS (2014) 'Illiteracy Rates in Palestine reduced from 13.9% in 1997 to 3.7% in 2013', Press Release, 8 Sept. 2014, available at [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_En\\_IntLitDy2014E.pdf](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_IntLitDy2014E.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> World Bank and Bisan Center for Research and Development (2006) 'The Role and Performance of Palestinian NGOs: In Health, Education and Agriculture', Dec. 2006, available at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWESTBANKGAZA/Resources/294264-1166525851073/NGOreportDec06.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> ANERA (2014) 'Early Childhood Development in the West Bank and Gaza', ANERA Reports on the ground in the Middle East Volume 5, Feb. 2014, available at [http://www.anera.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/ECD\\_Report\\_West\\_Bank\\_and\\_Gaza\\_WEBVIEW.pdf](http://www.anera.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/ECD_Report_West_Bank_and_Gaza_WEBVIEW.pdf).



years and above had not completed any stage of education, while 12.1% had completed a bachelor degree or a higher university education.<sup>6</sup>

Across all of Palestine, there has been a major reduction in dropout rates overall since the mid-1990s, but an increase, however, in recent years.<sup>7</sup> The highest dropout rates are seen at the secondary school level. The dropout rate for males enrolled in secondary school is 2.4%, compared to 2.5% for females. In basic education, more males than females dropout (0.9% compared to 0.5%). Dropout rates overall are lower in the Gaza Strip, which may be attributed to the larger role of NGOs and other CSOs in providing education services.

A major barrier to the provision of quality education is the state of school infrastructure in Palestine. In 2013, there were 2,784 schools in the country – 1,842 basic and 942 secondary. There were 2,094 schools in the West Bank and 690 schools in the Gaza Strip.<sup>8</sup> A study by ANERA on early-childhood education found that only four preschools are public, and 1,132 are run by non-profit organisations such as UNRWA.<sup>9</sup> This highlights the critical role of civil society in education, discussed further in Chapter 4.

In Jerusalem, education falls under the jurisdiction of the Israeli Ministry of Education and the Municipality's Jerusalem Education Administration (JEA). Schools serving Palestinians in East Jerusalem receive disproportionately low budget allocations and suffer from more classroom overcrowding compared to other schools in Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> A study by ACRI suggested that a shortage of more than 2000 classrooms in East Jerusalem is the main cause of the low public school attendance rate of only 53%. The report also found that only 6% of children in East Jerusalem between the ages of three and four years attend public preschools, due primarily to the shortage of approximately 400 classrooms.

A September 2014 press release by the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) highlighted the impact of the conflict on school infrastructure: more than 180 of the 690 schools in the Gaza Strip had been damaged to the point of needing extensive construction and repair as a result of the Israeli attack on the Strip during the summer of 2014.<sup>11</sup> This meant school was delayed for over 475,000 school children in the Gaza Strip, and the quality of learning environment impacted long-term. Similarly, a June 2012 ILO report on the situation of workers in Palestine called for "urgent action to address the education

<sup>6</sup> PCBS (2014) 'On the Eve of International Population Day', Press Release, 10 July 2014, available at [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_En\\_IntPopD2014E.pdf](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_IntPopD2014E.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> PCBS (2012) 'Palestinian Children - Issues and Statistics Annual Report, 2012', Apr. 2012, available at [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/\\_PCBS/Downloads/book1863.pdf](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_PCBS/Downloads/book1863.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> PCBS (2014) 'Number of Schools and Kindergartens by Region and Stage, 1994/1995-2013/2014', available at [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/\\_Rainbow/Documents/Education-1994-2013-03E.htm](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_Rainbow/Documents/Education-1994-2013-03E.htm).

<sup>9</sup> ANERA (2014) 'Early Childhood Development in the West Bank and Gaza', ANERA Reports on the ground in the Middle East Volume 5, Feb. 2014, available at [http://www.nera.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/ECD\\_Report\\_West\\_Bank\\_and\\_Gaza\\_WEBVIEW.pdf](http://www.nera.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/ECD_Report_West_Bank_and_Gaza_WEBVIEW.pdf)

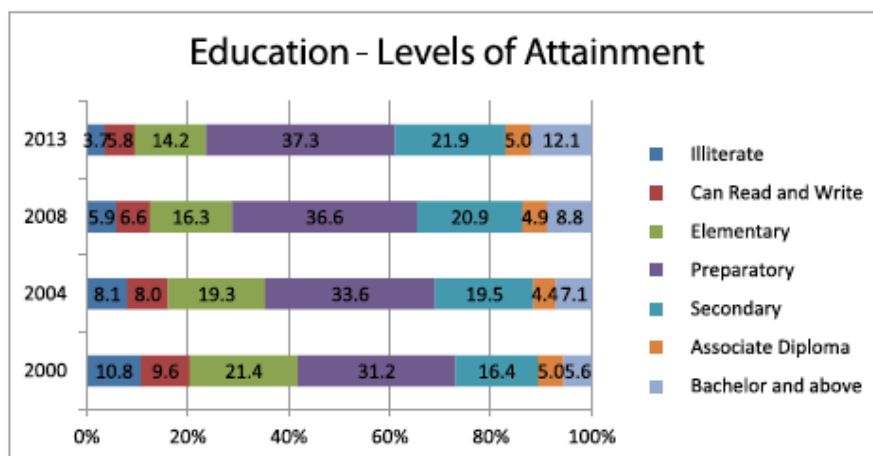
<sup>10</sup> ACRI (2013) 'Situation Report: The State of Human Rights in Israel and the OPT 2013', available at <http://www.acri.org.il/en/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/SituationReportEng2013.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> PCBS (2014) 'Illiteracy Rates in Palestine reduced from 13.9% in 1997 to 3.7% in 2013', Press Release, 8 Sept. 2014, available at [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_En\\_IntLitDy2014E.pdf](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_IntLitDy2014E.pdf).

crisis in East Jerusalem, to cease the demolition of schools in the West Bank, and to stop the erosion of skills in Gaza.”<sup>12</sup>

Higher education in Palestine reveals a more promising picture. Despite economic hardship, households continue to prioritize investing in higher education for their members.<sup>13</sup> From 1993 to 2011, the enrolment rate of students in higher education increased by 940%.<sup>14</sup> A higher proportion of females are enrolling each year.<sup>15</sup> The gender gap is narrowing and overall enrolment rates are increasing, suggesting a positive trend in higher education. There are a total of 53 accredited post-secondary education institutions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (34 in the West Bank, 18 in Gaza, and 1 open university). These include traditional universities (9 in the West Bank and 5 in Gaza), university colleges (12 in the West Bank and 6 in Gaza), and community colleges (20 in the West Bank and 7 in Gaza).<sup>16</sup> Over 300 fields of study are offered through these institutions, and over half of enrolled students are female. Higher degrees such as PhDs and Masters are less common in refugee camps and rural areas.

**Figure 2: Levels of educational attainment in Palestine, 2013**



*Source: PCBS*

Major barriers exist, however, for high school graduates who would like to pursue higher education. Palestinian graduates living in East Jerusalem, for example, find it “extremely difficult” to gain admission to Israeli universities.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, graduates of Palestinian higher

<sup>12</sup> ILO (2012) ‘The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories’, Report of the Director-General (Appendix), Conference Paper, June 2012, available at [http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/101stSession/reports/reports-submitted/WCMS\\_181071/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/101stSession/reports/reports-submitted/WCMS_181071/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>13</sup> Laura E. Mitchell (2009) ‘Making Ends Meet: Gender and Household Coping Strategies in the West Bank’, Fafu-report 2009:48, available at [http://www.fafu.no/media/com\\_netsukii/20138.pdf](http://www.fafu.no/media/com_netsukii/20138.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> MOEHE (2011) ‘Palestinian Higher Education Statistics 2010/2011’, available at <http://www.mohe.gov.ps/Uploads/admin/Matweyeh2011.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> A. Koni, K. Zainal, & P. M. Ibrahim, (2012) ‘An Overview of the Palestinian Higher Education’, *International Journal of Asian Social Science* 2, no. 12, pp. 2322-2329.

<sup>16</sup> MOEHE (2013) ‘Statistical Yearbook 2012/2013’, available at <http://www.mohe.pna.ps/List/Daleel/Daleel2012-2013.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> ACRI (2013) ‘Situation Report: The State of Human Rights in Israel and the OPT 2013’, available at <http://www.acri.org.il/en/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/SituationReportEng2013.pdf>.

learning institutions such as Al-Quds University, have “great difficulty” receiving formal recognition of their degrees inside Israel. Restrictive Israeli-imposed policies also impact higher education students, especially through preventing Gaza secondary school graduates from studying at post-secondary institutions in the West Bank.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Gisha: Legal Center for Freedom of Movement (2006) 'Limitations on Access to Higher Education For Palestinian Students', Position Paper Submitted to the Knesset Committee for Education, Culture and Sport, Dec. 2006, available at [http://www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/publications\\_english/Publications\\_and\\_Reports\\_English/Position\\_Paper\\_Dec\\_06.pdf](http://www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/publications_english/Publications_and_Reports_English/Position_Paper_Dec_06.pdf).