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. 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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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. 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. Furthermore, the Israeli occupation affected Palestinians within the context of the pandemic, as Israeli forces demolished the only COVID-19 quarantine center in Hebron, closed testing centers in East Jerusalem 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), 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. 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.

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,

- Territories beyond the Green Line: 36%
- East Jerusalem: 0%
- West Bank: 9%
- Gaza: 16%

2. Governmental online Portal, November 5th 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.
This might be because data collection in the Gaza Strip was conducted during the middle of the outbreak and lockdown, meaning people had more motivation or interest to share information about COVID-19, whereas other regions had already been through the first phase of lockdown by the time data collection was carried out.

Nearly half of respondents in Gaza share information about COVID-19 heard on Nisaa FM, compared to 26% in the West Bank, and 20% in Jerusalem.

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Out of those who listen to Nisaa FM:

- **Trust (mostly or very much) the information the station shares about COVID-19 through its radio and social media pages:**
  - East Jerusalem: 60%
  - West Bank: 53%
  - Gaza: 52%

- **Older people share COVID-19 information more widely than young people**
  - 18 to 29 years: 31%
  - 40 to 49 years: 44%

- **Share COVID-19 information or slogans that they have heard on the channel**
  - West Bank: 48%
  - Gaza: 40%
  - East Jerusalem: 31%

- **Nearly half of respondents in Gaza share information about COVID-19 heard on Nisaa FM, compared to 26% in the West Bank, and 20% in Jerusalem.**

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.

Dependency on governmental support to address the COVID-19 crisis is extremely low in Palestine. On average, only 10% of all respondents asked for COVID-19 related support from the government9 over the past 3 months. Again, there were important differences by region:

- **Requested services in Territories beyond the Green Line:**
  - Financial aid: 12%
  - Health services: 6%
  - Employment: 50%

- **Requested services in the West Bank:**
  - Financial aid: 40%
  - Health services: 37%
  - Employment: 41%

- **Requested services in East Jerusalem:**
  - Financial aid: 100%
  - Health services: 50%
  - Employment: 50%

- **Requested services in Gaza:**
  - Financial aid: 9%
  - Health services: 15%
  - Employment: 21%

None of the respondents sought out governmental support for access to food, crime/law, freedom of movement, or burial services linked to COVID-19.

These very low levels of government dependency may be explained by several reasons; the severe financial crisis faced by the Palestinian governments in West Bank and Gaza, people being used to rely more on support from international relief agencies, and very low levels of trust in/rejection of support from the Israeli government.

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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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfied with services</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly satisfied and satisfied</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat satisfied</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not satisfied</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never received a response</td>
<td>15%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Satisfaction with how long it took

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfied very/quite</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied with services</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not satisfied</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never received a response</td>
<td>15%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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

- ** Territories beyond the Green Line: **
  - Satisfied with services: 0%
  - Not satisfied with response time: 75%

### East Jerusalem had the highest level of satisfaction

- ** East Jerusalem: **
  - Satisfied with services: 50%
  - Satisfied with response time: 50%

### West Bank

- Satisfied with services: 29%
- Satisfied with response time: 39%

### Gaza

- Satisfied with services: 20%
- Satisfied with response time: 40%

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51%</td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41%</td>
<td>Do not trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Age differences:** Interestingly, young people have the most trust in government.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Trust</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 to 29</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 39</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>40 to 49</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>51%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 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.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Trust</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>31%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9%</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of respondents agree (strongly agree or agree) that there is value in collaborating with someone from another region\(^\text{10}\) to address a crisis like COVID-19.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.
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.

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.

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.

Trends to Follow
69%
42%

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

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

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.