The Palestine Strategic Report 2020 – 2021

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Chapter Two

Palestinian Demographic and Economic Indicators

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Palestinian Demographic and Economic Indicators

Introduction

Seventy-four years have passed since the *Nakbah* and the displacements of the 1948 war, and the Palestinian people, at home and abroad, are still patiently insisting on their right to their land and holy sites and continuing with their endeavors to liberate and return to their land.

This chapter attempts to present general statistics concerning the Palestinian people at home and abroad. However, this process faces real difficulties, due to the fact that about half of the Palestinian people are under occupation and siege in their historical land, while the other half are refugees and displaced in various parts of the world. Nevertheless, through academic methods, available information and data were used to reach the most accurate results possible.

The second part of this chapter presents a study of the economic situation in WB and GS, where a reasonable amount of information and data is available, particularly from the PA's official institutions.

First: Demographic Indicators

1. The Palestinian Population Worldwide

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) available figures indicate that the number of Palestinians worldwide reached 14 million in 2021 compared to 13.68 million in 2020, an increase of 2.3% (see table 1/2).

Based on 2021 estimates, Palestinians in historic Palestine are estimated at 6.965 million, constituting 49.8% of Palestinians worldwide. Palestinians in the 1967 occupied territories are estimated at 5.291 million and constitute 37.8% of Palestinians worldwide, while Palestinians in territories occupied in 1948 (Israel) are estimated at 1.674 million, constituting around 12% of Palestinians worldwide (see table 1/2).

Palestinians in the Diaspora were estimated at 7.037 million at the end of 2021, comprising 50.2% of Palestinians worldwide. According to data available to al-Zaytouna Centre researchers, the Palestinians in Jordan (most of whom are holders of Jordanian nationality) are estimated at 4.493 million, representing 32.1% of Palestinians worldwide (about 63.8% of Palestinian Diaspora). As for other Arab countries, the number of Palestinians is estimated at 1.795 million, 12.8% of Palestinians worldwide, mostly living in neighboring Arab countries: Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and the Gulf countries (see table 1/2).

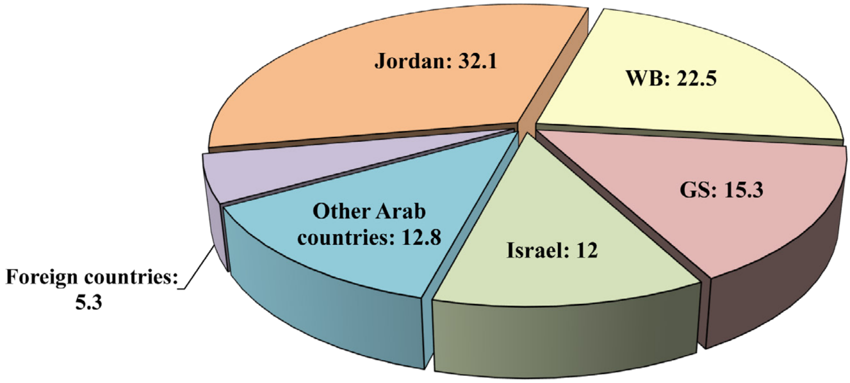
Table 1/2: Palestinian Population Worldwide Estimate by Place of Residence at the End of 2020 and 2021 (thousands)[1]

Place of residence		2020		2021	
		Population estimates	Percentage (%)	Population estimates	Percentage (%)
Palestinian territories occupied in 1967	WB	3,086.8	22.6	3,154.4	22.5
	GS	2,077.4	15.2	2,136.5	15.3
Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 (Israel)*		1,634.5	11.9	1,673.6	12
Palestinians in historic Palestine		**6,798.7**	**49.7**	**6,964.5**	**49.8**
Jordan**		4,388	32.1	4,493	32.1
Other Arab countries		1,757.2	12.8	1,794.6	12.8
Foreign countries		738.4	5.4	749.4	5.3
Palestinians in diaspora		**6,883.4**	**50.3**	**7,037**	**50.2**
Total		**13,682**	**100**	**14,001.6**	**100**

* For the Palestinian population in the 1948 occupied territories, the number excludes the Palestinians in the 1967 occupied territories including the Jerusalem governorate, Arab Syrians and Lebanese, non-Arab Christians and those classified as "Others." Israeli statistics publish figures different from PCBS figures, and show that the number of Arab Palestinians in the 1948 occupied territories reached about 1.995 million in 2021, and if we deduct the 370 thousand East Jerusalem citizens and the number of citizens in the Golan Heights which is around 25 thousand, the number becomes about 1.6 million.

**The number of Palestinians in Jordan is based on 2009 PCBS statistics reaching 3,240,473, and on the annual growth rates between 2009–2020, issued by the Jordanian Department of Statistics, Population and Housing, Demographic Statistics, ranging between 3.1% and 2.3%. http://dosweb.dos.gov.jo

Palestinian Population Worldwide Estimate by Place of Residence at the End of 2021 (%)



According to PCBS, the Palestinians in foreign countries are estimated at 749 thousand, 5.3% of Palestinians worldwide, most of them are living in the US, Latin America, Canada, United Kingdom (UK), and the rest of the European Union (EU).

It should be noted that these estimates are not updated, and may not be accurate. For if we consider the number of Palestinians who left Arab countries in the past three decades (countries surrounding Israel, the Gulf countries and Libya), and from Palestine itself to the rest of the countries, the previous estimates of Palestinians worldwide have many discrepancies. For example, some estimates consider the number of Palestinian in South America more than 600 thousand, of whom at least 300 thousand are in Chile; While the number of Palestinians in Europe is not less than 350–400 thousand, and the Palestinians of North America are about 300–350 thousand, and in the rest of the countries they are not less than 100 thousand. According to these estimates, the number of Palestinians worldwide (excluding Palestine and the Arab world) is about one million more than the estimates of the PCBS. Perhaps researchers and specialists have a difficult, but necessary, task to have more accurate estimates.

At the end of 2020, according to PCBS statistics, Palestinians worldwide reached 13.682 million, of whom 5.164 million were living in WB and GS, and around 1.635 million in the territories occupied in 1948 (Israel), compared to 6.883 million living abroad; 4.388 million in Jordan, 1.757 million in other Arab countries and 738 thousand in foreign countries (see table 1/2).

2. The Demographic Characteristics of the Palestinians

a. The WB and GS

At the end of 2021, the number of Palestinians in WB and GS was estimated at 5.29 million, of whom about 3.15 million lived in WB (59.6%) and 2.14 million (40.4%) in GS. This means that the annual growth rate reached 2.5%, given that the number of Palestinians in WB and GS was 5.16 million at the end of 2020.

As for population count by governorate for the year 2021, Hebron has the largest population (792,200 or 15% of the WB and GS population), followed by the Gaza Governorate with 722,350 or 13.7% of the WB and GS population, then the Jerusalem Governorate with a population of 476,949 or 9% of the WB and GS population. As for the Jericho and Rift Valley Governorate, it is the least populated with 1% of the WB and GS population. Table 2/2 shows the estimated population count in the WB and GS governorates based on PCBS estimates:

Table 2/2: Estimated Population Count in WB and GS by Governorate 2020–2021 (thousands)[2]

Governorate	2020		2021	
	Estimates	Percentage (%)	Estimates	Percentage (%)
WB	**3,086.8**	**59.8**	**3,154.4**	**59.6**
Jenin	335.5	6.5	342.4	6.5
Tubas and Northern Rift Valley	65.2	1.3	66.6	1.2
Tulkarem	197.1	3.8	200.6	3.8
Nablus	411.7	8	419.6	7.9
Qalqilya	120.4	2.3	123	2.3
Salfit	81.2	1.6	83.1	1.6
Ramallah and al-Bireh	351.5	6.8	358.9	6.8
Jericho and Rift Valley	52.8	1	53.8	1
Jerusalem	466.7	9	476.9	9
Bethlehem	232.3	4.5	237.3	4.5
Hebron	772.4	15	792.2	15
GS	**2,077.4**	**40.2**	**2,136.5**	**40.4**
North Gaza	410.2	7.9	423.7	8
Gaza	704.7	13.6	722.3	13.7
Dayr al-Balah	298.4	5.8	306.7	5.8
Khan Yunis	407.7	7.9	419.9	7.9
Rafah	256.4	5	263.9	5
Total (WB & GS)	**5,164.2**	**100**	**5,290.9**	**100**

The Palestinian community in WB and GS is young with more than a third of its individuals (38%) aged under 15, with a stark difference between WB and GS, reaching 35.8% in the former and 41.1% in the latter. Statistics indicate that the median age (the age dividing the population into two numerically equal groups, i.e., half of the population is below that age and half is older) in the WB and GS has increased throughout 2000–2021 from 16.4 years to 21 years. Comparing the data of the WB and GS separately over the same period shows that the median age in WB increased from 17.4 years in 2000 to 22.1 years in 2021, while in GS it increased from 14.9 years in 2000 to 19.3 in 2021.[3]

Although the median age is lower in GS than WB, it increased over 2000–2019 by 29.5% in GS compared to 27% in WB.[4]

As for the elderly (65 years and over), they constitute a small percentage of the total population, estimated at 3.3%, with 3.7% in WB and 2.8% in GS in 2021. Here again, it is noted that the Palestinian community in GS is younger than that in WB.[5]

In 2020, 21% of households were headed by an elderly person (60 years and over), 23% in WB and 17% in GS. Also, the average size of households headed by an elderly person was usually relatively small reaching 3.4 individuals (3.1 in WB and 4.3 in GS) compared with 5.5 individuals for households headed by a non-elderly person.[6]

As for the COVID-19 impact on elderly, about 78% of deaths are among the elderly (60 years and above), and the percentage of the elderly infected reached 6% of the total number in WB and GS, by the end of 25/9/2021.[7]

Educational status data for the year 2020 showed that 34% of the elderly (60 years and over) in WB and GS did not complete any educational stage (20% males and 47% females), while the elderly who completed diploma degrees and higher did not exceed 15%. Notably, 26% of the total population aged 18 years and above obtained diploma and higher (24% males and 28% females).[8]

As for the distribution of population by sex, the number of males at the end of 2021 in WB and GS reached 2.69 million compared to 2.6 million females with a sex ratio 103.4 males per 100 females. In the GS, the number of males reached 1.08 million males compared to 1.05 million females with a sex ratio of 102.7, while the number of males in the WB reached 1.61 million compared to 1.55 million females with a sex ratio of 103.8.[9]

Data shows that the dependency rate (number of dependent persons per 100 individuals of working age, 15–64 years) in WB and GS decreased from 100.6 in 2000 to 69.9 in 2021. Remarkably, there is a big difference in dependency rate for WB and GS, where it decreased in WB from 94.3 in 2000 to 64.9 in 2021, while in GS it decreased from 112.8 in 2000 to 77.8 in 2021.[10] Also, 2020 data shows that 11% of households are headed by females in WB and GS, with 12% in WB and 9% in GS.[11]

As for Life expectancy, it has increased in WB and GS, from 70.7 years in 2000 to 73.1 years in 2021 for males, and from 72.2 years in 2000 to 75.3 years in 2021 for females. In GS, life expectancy was 73.8 years (72.7 years for males and 74.9 years for females), while in WB, it reached 74.5 years (73.4 years for males and 75.7 years for females) in 2021. The higher life expectancy is mainly due to improved health care, and lower infant mortality rates (see table 3/2).

Available data indicates a decline in Crude Death Rate (CDR) in WB and GS, where it decreased from 4.5 deaths per thousand population in 2000 to 3.7 deaths per thousand population in 2021. A slight difference is noted regarding the CDR between the WB and GS, where in 2021 it reached 3.9 deaths per thousand population in WB compared to 3.4 deaths per thousand population in the GS (see table 3/2).

Natural population growth (the difference between birth and death rates) in the WB and GS decreased from 3.6% in 2000 to 2.4% in 2021. In GS, the natural population growth rate decreased to 2.8% compared to a 2.2% decrease in WB (see table 3/2).

There are indications that the fertility rate of Palestinian women has decreased, especially since last decade of the twentieth century, although it remains in the short and medium term higher than its Jewish counterpart. Based on the results of the Palestinian Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (PMICS) 2019–2020, the total fertility rate in the WB and GS has decreased, where there were 3.8 births per woman during 2017–2019 compared to 5.9 in 1999. Comparing WB with GS shows slight difference in fertility rate at the same period; where in GS there were 3.9 births per woman compared to 3.8 births during 2017–2019. This rate was higher in GS compared to WB in 1999, where it reached 5.8 births in GS compared to 4.1 births in WB.[12]

In 2020 reveals a decline in the average household size in WB and GS compared to 2010, where it decreased from 5.5 persons in 2010 to 5.1 in 2020. The average household size in WB declined from 5.2 persons in 2010 to 4.7 in 2020, and in GS from 6.4 persons to 5.7 at the same period (see table 3/2).

In addition to the decline in the average household size, a decrease is also observed in the Crude Birth Rate (CBR) in WB and GS, as it deteriorated from 40.9 births per thousand in 2000 to 29.5 in 2021. An obvious difference is noted regarding the CBR rate between WB and GS; in WB, it was estimated at 27.2 births per thousand compared to 32.9 in GS in 2021 (see table 3/2).

As for housing density (persons per room), in 2019, it was high in GS compared to WB, where it was 1.6 persons/room in GS compared to 1.3 in WB, while the total average housing density in GS and WB was 1.4 persons/room. The percentage of Palestinian households in which a family member owned a housing unit was approximately 87.7%, with 87.3% in WB and 88.4% in GS. [13]

Available data shows that 39.5% of households in WB and GS, in 2019, use safe drinking water, with 66.2% in WB and only 4.3% in GS.[14] This triggers concerns regarding the health of Palestinians, particularly in GS.

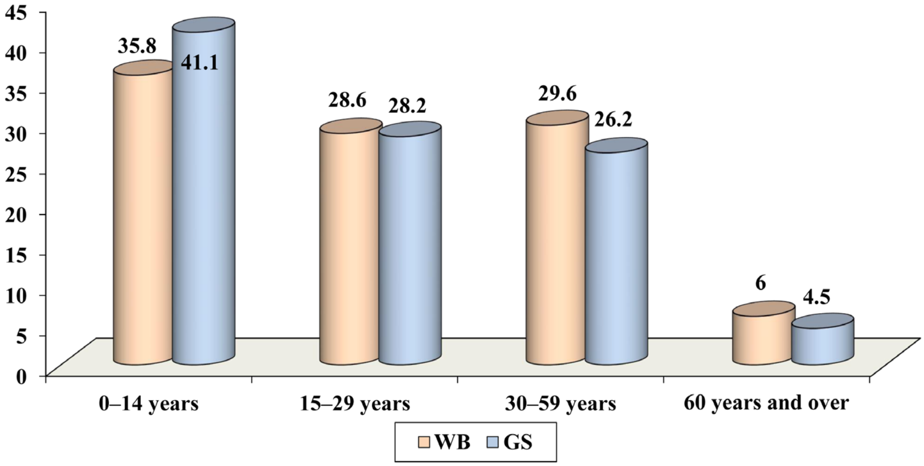
The registered marriages in 2020 indicate a decline in the number of marriage contracts compared to 2019, as they decreased from 44,320 in 2019 to 41,221 in 2020. The general marriage rate decreased to 8.1 marriages per thousand in 2020 (6.7 cases in WB and 10.1 cases in GS) compared to 10 marriages per thousand in 2017.[15]

As for the characteristics of the population related to education, the 2020 data revealed that 21.7% of the population (15 years and above) in WB and GS have completed high school. The illiteracy rate for individuals aged 15 years and over is 2.5%. This rate is among the lowest rates in the world, where illiteracy rates for individuals aged 15 years and above reached 19.7% in the countries of West Asia and North Africa, according to the data of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics in 2019. It is noted that the illiteracy rate has decreased among females and males, although the female illiteracy rate remained higher when compared with males, reaching 3.8% for females and 1.2% for males in 2020, compared to 20.3% for females and 7.8% for males in 1997. This represents a significant decline over 20 years, especially among females. As for the illiteracy rate among the Palestinians aged 15 and above, it was 2.8% in WB compared to 2% in GS in 2020. [16]

Table 3/2: Selected Demographic Indicators of Palestinians in WB and GS[17]

Indicator		WB	GS	WB & GS
Population density (persons/ km2) (mid 2021)		551	5,773	868
Population growth (2021)		2.2	2.8	2.4
Average family size (2020)		4.7	5.7	5.1
Life expectancy at birth (males) (years) (2021)		73.4	72.7	73.1
Life expectancy at birth (females) (years) (2021)		75.57	74.79	75.3
CBR (births per thousand population) (2021)		27.2	32.9	29.5
CDR (deaths per thousand population) (2021)		3.9	3.4	3.7
Infant mortality rate (deaths per thousand live births) (2015–2019)		11.7	12.7	12.1
Average number of rooms in the housing unit (2019)		3.6	3.6	3.6
Age structure (%) (mid 2021)	0–14 years	35.8	41.1	38
	15–29 years	28.6	28.2	28.4
	30–59 years	29.6	26.2	28.3
	60 years and over	6	4.5	5.3
Average housing density (persons/ room) (2019)		1.3	1.6	1.4

Age Structure in WB and GS mid 2021 (%)



b. The Palestinian Territories Occupied in 1948 (Israel)

PCBS has indicated that Palestinians living in Israel at the end of 2021 were estimated at 1.67 million compared to 1.63 million in 2020. Available data shows that they are a young community, where individuals aged under 15 represent 32% of males and 31% of females, while those aged 65 years and over amounted to 4.6% of males and 5.6% of females (see table 4/2).

Available estimates for 2020 indicate that the fertility rate for Palestinians residing in Israel was 2.8 births per woman, almost equal to the fertility of Jewish women, noting that the fertility of religious Jews women is 7 births. As for the average Palestinian household size, it was 4.4 persons. The CBR and CDR reached 21.9 births and 3.3 deaths per thousand respectively, while infant mortality rate was 5 deaths per thousand live births. Notably, these figures exclude Arab citizens in the Syrian Golan Heights, citizens in J1 of the Jerusalem governorate, as well as, Lebanese Arabs who have moved to live temporarily in Israel, for it considers all these within its population and as part of the Arab population as a whole (see table 4/2).

A study on the high rate of murders in the 1948 occupied territories indicated an unprecedented increase in the rate of murder among Arab Palestinians in the 1948 occupied territories. The year 2020 witnessed the murder of 111 Arab Palestinians, an increase of 23.3% compared to 2019.[18] The Abraham Initiatives, which monitors and campaigns against violence in the Arab community revealed that the "killing brings the number of Arabs killed in Israel in 2021 as a result of violence and crime to 126."[19]

According to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) data at the end of 2020 (which also include East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights), Muslims in the 1948 occupied territories counted for 1.671 million comprising 85.4% of the population, while Druze counted for 146.8 thousand and Christians 137.6 thousand comprising 7.5% and 7% respectively.[20]

c. Jordan

Palestinians living in Jordan at the end of 2021 were estimated at 4.5 million from 4.39 million at the end of 2020, most of whom hold Jordanian citizenship (Jordanian citizens of Palestinian descent) (see table 1/2).

According to the Jordanian Department of Statistics, annual population growth was 2.4% in 2020, a percentage that included Jordanian citizens of Palestinian descent as well. Statistics also reveal that in 2017–2018, the total fertility rate in Jordan was 2.7 children per woman, the infant mortality was 17 deaths per thousand live births, and the under-5 mortality rate is 19 deaths per thousand live births. These statistics include all Jordanians.[21] Jordanian citizens of Palestinian descent most likely have the same rates.

According to a study by FAFO Foundation regarding the living conditions in Palestinian refugee camps (RCs) in Jordan in 2011, 39.9% of RC residents were under 15 years old, while those aged 65 and above comprised 4.3%. The average household size was 5.1 persons per household.[22] It's worth noting that there are no documented scientific updates of these information at the time of writing this report.

According to UNRWA, there were 2,463,130 Registered Persons (RPs) in Jordan as of 31/12/2020 compared to 2,376,481 RPs in February 2019.[23]

d. Syria

According to UNRWA figures, the total RPs in Syria was 655,729 as of 31/12/2020 compared to 643,142 in February 2019. It is worth noting that these are estimated figures due to the unstable situation of Syria.[24]

Although the Palestinian gatherings in Syria were among the most stable, yet, the events that erupted since 2011 have had a tremendous impact on them. The 2020 estimates indicate that out of 656 thousand, about 200 thousand were forced to leave Syria. More than 120 thousand immigrated to Europe, about 10 thousand moved to Turkey, and tens of thousands left to Lebanon; where a number of them resided temporarily in order to arrange their immigration, some of them returned to Syria, while about 25 thousand remained in Lebanon.

Moreover, about 40% of those who remained in Syria were internally displaced (more than 180 thousand) after their RCs were destroyed, especially the following camps: al-Yarmouk, Dera'a, Handarat, and Khan al-Shiekh. They live in a tragic state where they suffer from unemployment, poverty and instability, threatening them with more misery. The Commissioner-General of UNRWA Philippe Lazzarini revealed that over 90% of the Palestinian refugees in Syria live below the poverty line.[25] UNRWA also announced in a statement in March 2021 that, "ten years after demonstrations started in Syria, over half of the Palestine refugees in the country have been displaced at least once because of the brutal conflict that ensued, including 120 thousand who have sought safety in neighbouring countries, mainly Lebanon and Jordan, and beyond." The agency adds that "since the start of the conflict, many UNRWA installations inside Syria, such as schools and health centers, have become inaccessible or sustained severe damage," where "40% of UNRWA classrooms have been lost and almost 25% of the Agency's health centres are currently unusable due to the conflict. UNRWA in Syria has also lost 19 staff members during the 10-year conflict." [26]

According to UNRWA report "Syria Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal 2021," the vulnerability of Palestine refugees in Syria is increasing. In July 2020, UNRWA assessed the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on Palestine refugees in Syria, and found that close to 80% had reduced the number of meals or quantity of food consumed. The report also revealed that as of 10/12/2020, more than 8,600 confirmed COVID-19 cases, including 465 deaths had been reported in Syria. [27]

The Syrian conflict had its impact on the Palestinian refugees. The Action Group for Palestinians of Syria (AGPS) revealed on 2/10/2021 that more than six thousand physical violations perpetrated against Palestinian refugees since the launch of the Syrian conflict. Of those 1,797 have been secretly held in Syrian dungeons, among them 110 women and girls. [28]

AGPS documented in February 2022 "the death of 4,116 Palestinian refugees in Syria, including 493 women and girls, since 2011 as a result of war-related incidents."[29] Moreover, 620 refugees were killed under torture in Syrian prisons until December 2020.[30]

AGPS also indicated that 57 Palestinians from Syria, mostly women, children, and elderly refugees, drowned onboard the death boats to Europe, fleeing the tattered Syrian territories.[31]

Because of the current political situation and the war in Syria, the available data on the social and family conditions of Palestinians in Syria cover only the period 2009–2010. They indicate that the Palestinian community in Syria is a young one and that, as of 2009, individuals aged under 15 years comprised 33.1% of the total population, while those aged 65 years and above comprised 4.4%. The 2010 data indicate that the total Palestinian fertility rate in Syria was 2.5 births per woman and the CBR was 29.2 births per thousand, while the annual growth rate was 1.6%. Palestinian Infant mortality rate in Syria was 28.2 deaths per thousand live births, while the mortality rate among children aged under 5 years reached 31.5 deaths per thousand live births.[32]

e. Lebanon

According to UNRWA figures, RPs residing in Lebanon as of 31/12/2020 constituted a total of 543,284, compared to 533,885 until February 2019.[33] However, the census in Palestinian RCs and gatherings in Lebanon for 2017 revealed that there are only 174 thousand refugees residing in Lebanon.[34] Even if we assume that there is a higher margin of error in this census; the estimates that most researchers agree on are 200–250 thousand, with a high percentage of the rest is willing to immigrate if given the opportunity. This means that the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have been suffering from a high rate of migration, which has increased in recent years with the continued work restrictions on the Palestinians, and emergence of the political and economic crises in Lebanon. ‘Abdelnasser el Ayi, the office director of the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) stated that "the wave of Palestinian immigration from Lebanon has been on the rise since 2005, but the numbers doubled in the last two years, 2020 and 2021, both through legal and illegal immigration." He added that in 2020 between 6 and 8 thousand Palestinians left Lebanon without return, whereas in 2021 and until the end of October, 12 thousand Palestinian travelers were recorded and did not return to Lebanon. This is a higher number than the average of previous years.[35]

The Lebanese government "estimates that the country currently hosts 1.5 million people who have fled the conflict in Syria," of whom about 866 thousand are registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and about 28 thousand are registered with UNRWA as Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS).[36] The UNRWA report, "Emergency Appeal 2021," stated that 87% of Palestine refugees who fled from Syria to Lebanon live below the poverty line, while this percentage reached 65% of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The report counted more than 104 thousand confirmed COVID-19 cases, including more than one thousand deaths during 2020.[37]

The Palestinian Association for Human Rights “Witness,” conducted a study concerning the Lebanese crisis and its impact on the Palestinian refugees. The study monitored the dismissal of hundreds of Palestinian workers from their jobs, noting that 65% of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are already unemployed. As for the income of Palestinian families, the results showed that 49% of families have a monthly income that is below the minimum wage, noting that 38% of the Palestinians in Lebanon suffer food insecurity. The study stated that 72.4% of the refugees surveyed confirmed their inability to pay the substitution in the medical bill, according to the UNRWA treatment system.[38]

According to the Population and Housing Census in the Palestinian RCs and Gatherings in Lebanon 2017, people aged under 15 comprised 29% while those aged 65 years and above comprised 6.4%. The average household size of the Palestinian family in Lebanon was 4 members and families headed by women comprised 17.5%. The fertility rate among Palestinian women in Palestinian RCs and gatherings in Lebanon was 2.7 births per woman.

f. General Comparisons Among Palestinians

Before comparing the major demographic indicators summarized in table 4/2, we would like to point out that, occasionally, some data are used for different years, which may disturb the comparison process. Nonetheless, they remain useful as general indicators, according to the latest available statistics. The following are the main observations:

- The percentage of Palestinians under the age of 15 is highest in GS and lowest in Lebanon
- The percentage of Palestinians aged 65 and over is highest in Lebanon followed by the territories occupied in 1948 (Israel) and Syria, and it is lowest in GS.
- CBRs are highest in GS, then in Jordan and Syria, followed by WB then Lebanon, and the lowest are in the territories occupied in 1948 (Israel). This rate is consistent with the general trend of births in the past years, where GS remained the area with the highest rate of the CBRs, which leads to demographic pressure on the besieged GS, which has a limited capacity.
- CDR remained high in WB and GS reaching 3.7 deaths per thousand in 2021. This was due to Israeli policies pursued over decades, particularly the killing of Palestinians.

Table 4/2: Selected Demographic Indicators of Palestinians by Residence[39]

Indicator	WB 2021	GS 2021	WB & GS 2021	Israel 2020	Jordan 2011	Syria (2009–2010)	Lebanon 2017
% of individuals under 15 years	35.6	40.9	37.7	32 males 31 females	39.9	33.1	29
% of individuals 65 years and over	3.7	2.8	3.3	4.6 males 5.6 females	4.3	4.4	6.4
Sex ratio (males per 100 females)	103.8	102.7	103.4	102.7 (2015)	–	100.4	102
CBR (births per 1,000 population)	27.2	32.9	29.5	21.9	29.2 (2010)	29.2	25.8 (2010)
CDR (deaths per 1,000 population)	3.9	3.4	3.7	3.3	–	2.8 (2006)	–
Total fertility rate (births per woman)	3.8 (2017–2019)	3.9 (2017–2019)	3.8 (2017–2019)	2.8	3.3 (2010)	2.5	2.7
Average household size (individuals per house)	4.7 (2020)	5.7 (2020)	5.1 (2020)	4.4	5.1	4.1 (2010)	4

3. Palestinian Refugees

Although it is difficult to accurately determine the number of Palestinian refugees in the world, it is possible to benefit from the data available to estimate approximate numbers. According to PCBS, the number of Palestinians abroad at the end of 2021 are estimated at 7.04 million, while the PCBS statistics in 2017 have indicated that the Palestinian refugees in WB and GS are estimated at 42.2% of the population. This means that their number has reached 2.242 million at the end of 2021, of whom 830 thousand are living in WB, and 1.412 million in GS representing 26.3% and 66.1% of its population, respectively.[40] These figures are close to UNRWA's, which stated that the number of registered refugees was about 872 thousand in WB, and about 1.477 million in GS at the end of 2020. Probably the reason for the differences is that some refugees have left WB and GS. Furthermore, a number of Palestinians living abroad are from WB and GS, they have the Palestinian "citizenship" and can return to reside there (see table 5/2). Furthermore, it is estimated that there are at least 150 thousand Palestinians from the 1948 occupied territories, who were displaced from their historical cities and villages, but remain within the geographical borders of occupied Palestine in 1948. Therefore, the total number of Palestinian refugees at the end of 2021, is estimated at 9.432 million, constituting 67.4% of the Palestinians worldwide.

There might be problems of replications, due to changes of residence where the refugee is registered or holds his/her passport; However, this affects only a limited amount of the large proportion of refugees.

It's worth noting that UNRWA statistics have been limited to registered refugees in its five areas of operation: WB, GS, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Thus, these statistics do not accurately reflect the refugee population worldwide as they exclude many refugees residing outside UNRWA's operation areas, and even do not include a lot of those residing in its areas of operations, because they did not need to register with the Agency and benefit from its services. Also, UNRWA's figures exclude the Palestinian refugees who took refuge after the war of 1967 (*Naksah*). Besides, there are refugees who had to flee Palestine under different circumstances (other than war) and were prevented from returning. As a result, UNRWA statistics are incomplete and should not be dealt with as factual numbers reflecting the reality of the refugee population in 1948 (except in Syria and Lebanon to some extent). These numbers only reflect those who have registered with UNRWA, and can receive its aid and services, rather than all Palestinian refugees.

The number of registered refugees in UNRWA's five areas of operation on 31/12/2020 is estimated at 6.389 million of whom about 2.463 million live in Jordan (38.6%); 2.726 million in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 (42.6%), where1.643 million live in GS (25.7%) and 1.083 million live in WB (16.9%); and the rest constitutes 1.2 million (18.8%), who are registered in Syria and Lebanon. The number of families registered in UNRWA's five areas of operation reached 1.5 million, while the average household size was 4.3 persons.[41]

Refugee numbers remain estimated figures, especially when it comes to Palestinians abroad, outside UNRWA's operation areas, where there are no official statistics, nor accurate knowledge of growth rates. There is also the difficulty of resolving problems of replication due to changes in country of residence or citizenship, as is the case with the Palestinians of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, and Palestinians in historic Palestine residing abroad.

Table 5/2: UNRWA-RPs According to Their Area of Operation as of 31/12/2020[42]

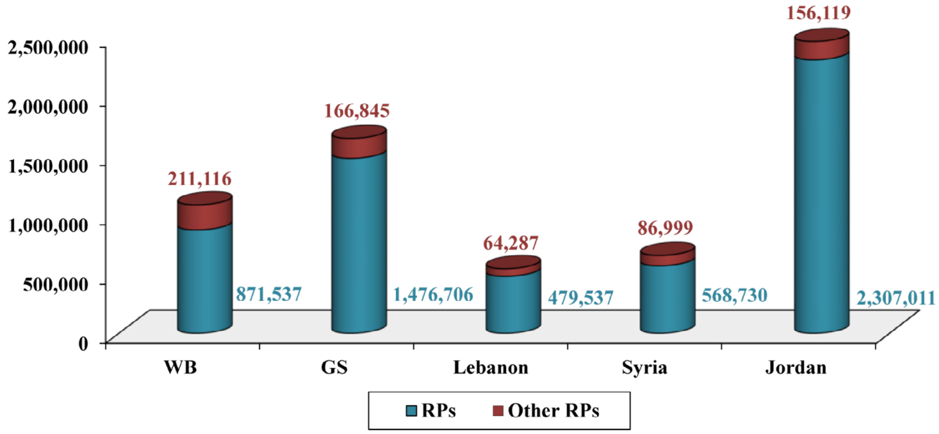
	WB	GS	Jordan	Syria	Lebanon	Total
RRs	871,537	1,476,706	2,307,011	568,730	479,537	**5,703,546**
Other RPs*	211,116	166,845	156,119	86,999	64,287	**685,366**
Total RPs	1,082,653	1,643,551	2,463,130	655,729	543,284	**6,388,887**
Families	278,707	358,043	558,842	192,105	145,078	**1,532,696**
Official camps	19	8	10	9	12	**58**
Schools	96	278	169	102	65	**710**
Pupil enrolment	45,883	286,645	119,047	50,609	37,586	**539,770**
Primary health-care facilities	43	22	25	23	27	**140**
Area staff	3,849	12,132	6,094	3,014	3,046	**28,563****
International staff	17	16	16	13	13	**193*****

* Other RPs: include non-refugee wives, non-refugee husbands, non-refugee children, Frontier villagers, Jerusalem poor, Gaza poor, and Compromise cases.

** Agency total includes staff in UNRWA headquarter, Amman.

*** The number of Agency-wide international staff in 2020 includes 11 international staff based in UNRWA liaison offices, including UNRWA headquarter, Amman.

UNRWA's Figures as of 31/12/2020



UNRWA–Total RPs by Area as of 31/12/2020

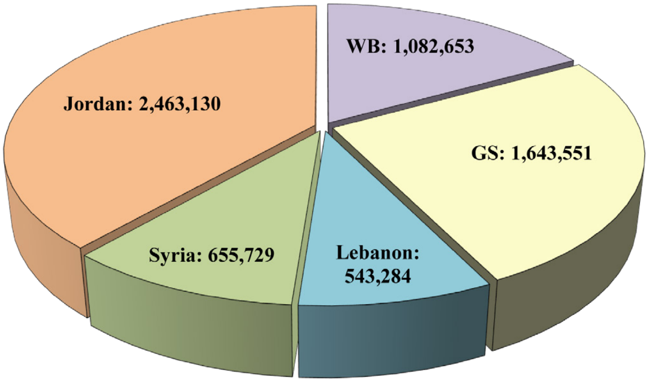


Table 6/2 indicate that the UNRWA refugee communities, like the Palestinians in general, are young, where 30% of refugees registered with the Agency are children under the age of 18, with highest rate in the GS (41.3%) and lowest in Lebanon (22%).

The data shows that fertility rates among refugees in WB and GS are the highest among UNRWA's five operation areas (3.6 births per woman), as is the case for the average family size in WB and GS (5.6 individuals per household). The dependency ratio (number of dependent persons per 100 individuals of working age, 15–64 years) among registered refugees is significantly high in the GS (75.6) mainly due to the high percentage of people aged under 15, which may be challenging in light of the high unemployment rates and deteriorating economic conditions.

Table 6/2: Selected Demographic Indicators of Palestinians by Residence 2020[43]

Indicator	GS	WB	Jordan	Syria	Lebanon	Agency
Children below 18 years (%)	41.3	27.5	25.8	28.3	22	**30**
Average household size (individual per house) (2015)	5.6	5.6	5.2	4.8	4.7	**5.3**
Fertility rate	3.6	3.6	3.2	2.7	2.7	**3.2**
Dependency ratio	75.6	50.5	46.4	49.5	47.5	**54.1**

Regarding education, figures showed that refugees are better educated than non-refugees in WB and GS, where the illiteracy rate was 2.5% among refugees (15 years and over) compared to 3% among non-refugees, while holders of a bachelor's degree and above comprise 16% for refugees and 14% for non-refugees.[44]

4. Demographic Growth Trends

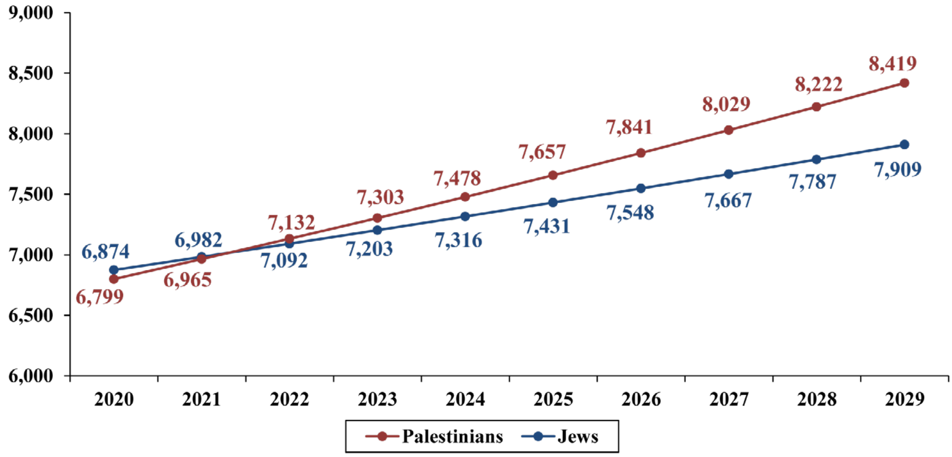
Despite the relative decline in the rate of natural population growth among the Palestinian population, the rate remains high compared to other populations including the Israelis. Based on PCBS estimates, Palestinians in historic Palestine reached 6.965 million at the end of 2021, while Jews reached 6.982 million according to Israel's CBS estimates.

Based on annual growth rates, the Palestinian and Jewish population in historical Palestine is expected to be equal at the end of 2022, reaching approximately 7.1 million. Palestinians are expected to outnumber Jews in historic Palestine in 2029 by about 510 thousand.

Table 7/2: Estimated Population Count of Palestinians and Jews in Historic Palestine 2020–2029 (thousands)[45]

Year	Palestinians in historic Palestine	Jews
2020	6,799	6,874
2021	6,965	6,982
2022	7,132	7,092
2023	7,303	7,203
2024	7,478	7,316
2025	7,657	7,431
2026	7,841	7,548
2027	8,029	7,667
2028	8,222	7,787
2029	8,419	7,909

Estimated Population Count of Palestinians and Jews in Historic Palestine 2020–2029 (thousands)



From a Palestinian point of view, the positive interpretation of these projections, confirms that the Palestinian people, despite suffering oppression, displacement and occupation, are still steadfast in their land. Moreover, it shows that after the establishment of the World Zionist Organization by 125 years, and after the establishment of Israel by 74 years, this Zionist project is facing the fact that the Palestinian population inside Palestine exceeds the number of Jews there, whom were gathered throughout those years from more than a hundred countries. This is undoubtedly a disturbing fact for Israel. However, talking about the Palestinian "demographic bomb" should not make Palestinians swept up in the euphoria of victory or make them feel relaxed. For Palestinian steadfastness and population growth are important phenomena, but they are not enough. History has shown that, in many cases, colonialism was able to deal with and overcome such phenomena.

Second, the Israelis are aware of the risk this phenomenon poses, they have been working on it for decades. Hence, their disengagement from GS in 2005. Their plan in the WB was to annex the largest area of land that has the smallest number of inhabitants, keeping the Palestinians in "cantons" that have the form of a distorted self-rule and nominally bear the title of a state. This is what actually has been happening, after the collapse of the peace process and the two-state solution.

Moreover, Israel has made the living environment for the Palestinians unbearable. Some statistics indicate that about 415 thousand Palestinians left WB and GS during 1967–2003, in addition to tens of thousands of people from each WB and GS in the past years, for which accurate statistics are not available. In addition, the displacement and "transfer" files are still on the Israeli decision-maker's desk, whose society is developing to become more extreme, more religious and nationalistic.

Although the Israeli population growth rate was in 2021, around 1.57%, i.e., less than its Palestinian counterpart, however, the fact that the number of Palestinians would exceed the number of Jews in historical Palestine must be placed within an objective context, and must be viewed within a framework of many challenges and dangers facing the Palestinian people inside Palestine.[46]

5. Palestinians Outside Palestine and the Right of Return

The Palestinian people abroad continued to resist all attempts to liquidate the Palestine issue, by reiterating the right of return and liberating their land, and by rejecting the Deal of the Century and normalization. They continued to hold activities and events that emphasize their association with Palestine, and which remind the emerging generations of the right to land and return.

On 25/9/2021, the Palestinians in Europe Conference held its 19th annual conference online, under the slogan "Jerusalem Unites Us till We Return," with the participation of prominent Palestinian, Arab, and European figures. The conference called for the reform of the PLO, the suspension of "absurd negotiations" and the prevention of normalization with the Israel. Moreover, it confirmed in its closing statement, the adherence of the Palestinian people, everywhere, to their inalienable rights, especially the right of return. Furthermore, it valued the Palestinian people unity in their last confrontation against the Israeli aggression on Jerusalem and the holy sites.[47]

The first Palestinians in Europe Conference was held in London in 2003, and then it was held annually in several European capitals and cities, the last of which was the 18th Conference in Paris in April 2020, which was canceled due to COVID-19 pandemic.[48]

On 11/1/2022, in the first meeting of its coordinating office, the "European-Palestinians Initiative for National Action" announced the formation of a pressure group in favor of the Palestine issue in Europe, consisting of the initiative' members, who are more than 200 figures from 18 countries. It is noteworthy that the "European-Palestinians Initiative for National Action" was established by Palestinians from various European countries, it is based in Brussels, and was launched in March 2020.[49] In its founding statement in October 2020, the initiative reported that it was founded to unite "all national efforts across Europe to serve the Palestinian cause, developing national action in proportion to the size of risks and in order to achieve a work methodology aimed at protecting legitimate national rights, and calling for true national unity."[50]

On 5/3/2021, The Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad organized a three-day conference entitled "The National Dialogue for Palestinians Abroad," with the participation of more than 200 Palestinian figures from 26 countries of six continents. It discussed the future Palestinian leadership scene and the pivotal role of Palestinians abroad.[51]

Furthermore, in solidarity with Palestine, the Palestinian Forum in Britain (PFB) organized the annual Palestine Festival 2021, which kicked off with the participation of thousands from the Palestinian and Arab communities. The festival witnessed the honoring of a number of pro-Palestine figures in UK, most notably Jeremy Corbyn, the former leader for the British Labour Party.[52]

The activities of the second annual Return Week, held by the Palestinian Return Centre, kicked off on 3/12/2021, with an art exhibition displaying paintings by Palestinian artists, whose theme is the Palestinian refugees' adherence to the right of return.[53] It is noteworthy that "Return Week" is an annual event that was organized for the first time in 2020. It aims to commemorate the UN Resolution 194 regarding the return of Palestinian refugees.[54]

Latin America is witnessing growing solidarity with the Palestine issue, due to the continuous efforts of the Arab and Muslim community, especially the Palestinian one. They have been informing the public about the suffering the Palestinians under Israeli occupation, while emphasizing the right of return.

The PLO had sponsored the establishment of the Confederation of Palestinian Organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean (COPLAC), but its impact declined in recent years due to the weak performance of the PLO and the PA abroad. Therefore, in order to reactivate the role of the Palestinians there, the Palestinians of Latin America established in 2017 the Palestinian Union of Latin America (Unión Palestina de América Latina—UPAL), whose elected leader is Siman Khoury.

Communities in Latin America organized activities in support for the Palestine issue, including the week of solidarity with Palestine (27/11/2020 to 2/12/2020), coinciding with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.[55] The organizers were the Latin Palestinian Forum (FLP), a non-governmental organization based in Sao Paulo, Brazil; the Friends of Palestine, an Argentinean organization founded by a number of Palestinian activists residing in Latin America; and the Middle East Monitor website.[56] After the normalization deal between Israel and the UAE, the FLP called for launching a campaign to support humanitarian work in WB and GS.[57]

Several European capitals and cities, in addition to US, Canada, Brazil and other countries, witnessed dozens of demonstrations and protests in solidarity with Palestine, emphasizing the right of the Palestinians to their land and their right of return. These activities also rejected the Deal of the Century, the displacement of Palestinians in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem, the GS siege, the May 2021 aggression, and the violations against Palestinian prisoners. In January 2020, dozens of demonstrations and protests took place in European and non-European countries, rejecting the Deal of the Century.[58] On 18/2/2020, Palestinian and Dutch institutions supporting the Palestine issue protested in front of the Dutch parliament, States General of the Netherlands, in the Hague, rejecting the Deal of The Century.[59]

On 7–9/8/2020, the "Days of Resistance" activities were launched in several cities and capitals in Europe and the Americas, to perpetuate the culture and concept of the Palestinian resistance against colonial policies, Zionism and the plans of liquidation and normalization.[60] Moreover, in May 2021, tens of thousands of Palestinians, Arabs, Americans and Europeans participated in demonstrations and activities in several US states and European and Canadian cities, in rejection of the Israeli aggression on GS.[61]

Second: Economic Indicators in WB and GS

1. GDP in PA Territories (WB and GS)

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reflects the overall economic activity carried out by all institutions producing goods and services in the public, private and other sectors in a country over one year. It is a widely used indicator employed locally, regionally and internationally on different levels. It shows the state of economic development and growth, and the PCBS measures it periodically and presents its current data and future forecasts.

a. GDP Growth Rate

Table 8/2 shows that 2020 saw the lowest economic growth for the Palestinians throughout 2015–2021, as GDP growth witnessed unprecedented decline. This was due to several reasons, most notably COVID-19, which brought the application of a state of emergency, restrictions on economic activity and productive work which was strictly limited to activities meeting essential needs, as well as health services, police and local government units. There was noticeable GDP growth improvement in 2021, reaching, in preliminary estimates, 6%,[62] close to the PMA forecasts ranging between 5.3–7.1% based on the base and optimistic scenarios.[63]

In sum, the general trend of 2015–2021 showed limited relative growth at an average of 1.6%, for economic growth took a sharp turn after 2017, and it was reflected in the significant decline of growth in 2021, and in the downward general trend.

This growth was the result of what was achieved in WB and GS, with large differences in their rates in favor of WB. It is reflected in the general trend until 2023 reaching 2.7% and –1% for WB and GS respectively. Gaza's contribution to the GDP during the same period would witness significant decline from 20.8% to 16.6%, which implies the significant obstacles preventing growth, which based on the indicator of the share of the GS in the total population of WB and GS, must be 40–42%.[64]

Moreover, according to a report prepared by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the cumulative economic cost of tighter Israel restrictions during the period 2000–2019 was estimated at $58 billion, with an annual average $2.9 billion, equivalent to 3.7 times the 2019 GDP of the occupied Palestinian territory.[65]

As for growth prospects for 2022–2023, they remain subject to interventions, most of which are beyond Palestinian control, and based on the estimates announced by the PCBS for the base and optimistic scenario of 2022, and that growth would range between 2.5–10.4%,[66] as well as based on the joint forecasts of the PMA and PCBS, the 2022 growth is anticipated to be limited to just 3%.[67]

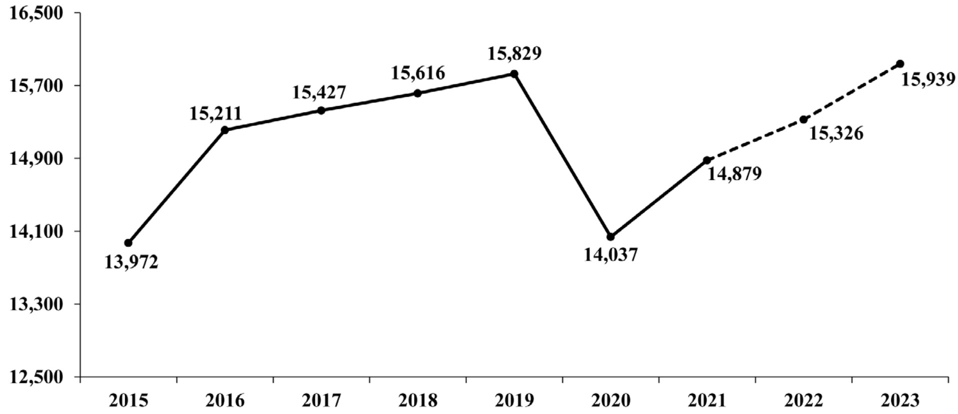
The Palestinian context continues in terms of division, blockade, obstacles, deductions of clearance revenues and health instability due to the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas relative improvement is expected due to external support and the expansion of local tax collection. Accordingly, and based on the UNCTAD report on the prospects of economic development in the 1967 occupied Palestine throughout 2019–2025, the growth in 2023 could reach 3.7%.[68] As positive factors are expected to occur in terms of increasing and stimulating performance, we expect that growth in 2023 will reach 4%, although there are expectations from other parties that may agree or disagree with what we have presented, based on available data.

Table 8/2: GDP in PA Territories 2015–2023 at Constant Prices ($ million)[69]

<table>
<tr><th rowspan="2"></th><th colspan="7">Actual</th><th colspan="2">Forecasts</th></tr>
<tr><th>2015</th><th>2016</th><th>2017</th><th>2018</th><th>2019</th><th>2020</th><th>2021</th><th>2022</th><th>2023</th></tr>
<tr><td>GDP</td><td>13,972</td><td>15,211</td><td>15,427</td><td>15,616</td><td>15,829</td><td>14,037</td><td>14,879</td><td>15,326</td><td>15,939</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Average annual growth (%)</td><td rowspan="2">+3.7</td><td rowspan="2">+8.9</td><td rowspan="2">+1.4</td><td rowspan="2">+1.2</td><td rowspan="2">+1.4</td><td>–11.3</td><td>+6</td><td>+3</td><td>+4</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">–2.7</td><td colspan="2">+3.5</td></tr>
</table>

Note: The data excludes those parts of Jerusalem, which were annexed by Israel in 1967. The base year is 2015. This will be applied to all the following tables in this chapter.

GDP in PA Territories 2015–2023 at Constant Prices ($ million)



b. GDP Growth in WB and GS

There was significant variation in GDP growth rates between WB and GS in 2020 and 2021. In GS, GDP decreased by 12.6% in 2020 and increased by 2.3% in 2021, compared with growth in WB by 11% and 6.8% in 2020 and 2021 respectively. As for the share in GDP by region, the decline of the GS share continues, which was 17.6% in 2020 and 17% in 2021, indicating weak GDP growth in GS. Therefore, there is an urgent need to increase the Palestinian GDP growth rate significantly, especially in GS, in order to adjust the growth balance in WB and GS. In return, the WB share was 83% of total GDP in 2021, although its share of the population is 60% compared to 40% in GS.

Table 9/2: GDP in WB and GS 2015–2021 at Constant Prices ($ million)[70]

Year	WB		GS		WB and GS	
	GDP	Percentage (%)	GDP	Percentage (%)	GDP	Percentage (%)
2015	11,072.3	79.2	2,900.1	20.8	13,972.4	**100**
2016	12,046.1	79.2	3,164.9	20.8	15,211	**100**
2017	12,505.5	81.1	2,921.4	18.9	15,426.9	**100**
2018	12,797.3	81.9	2,818.9	18.1	15,616.2	**100**
2019	12,998.8	82.1	2,830.2	17.9	15,829	**100**
2020	11,564.1	82.4	2,473.3	17.6	14,037.4	**100**
2021	12,349.6	83	2,529.4	17	14,879	**100**

GDP in WB and GS 2015–2021 at Constant Prices ($ million)

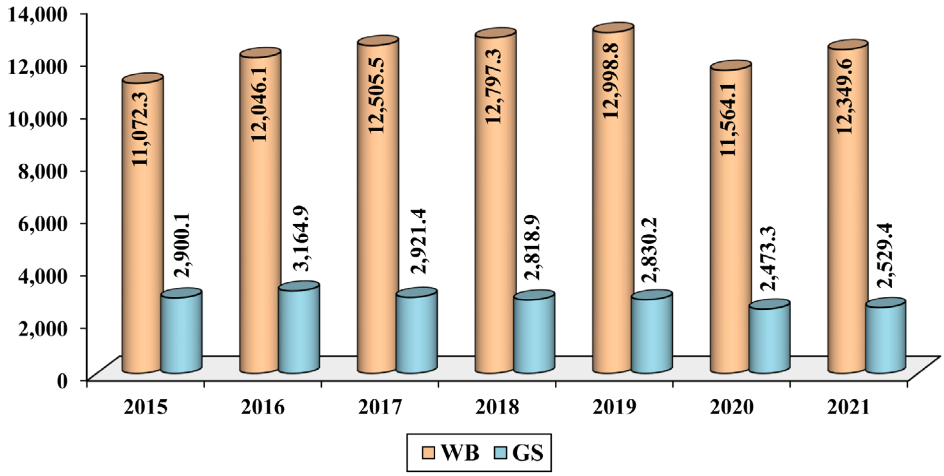


Table 10/2: GDP Growth in the WB and GS 2015–2021 at Constant Prices ($ million)[71]

		Actual						Estimates
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
WB	GDP	11,072.3	12,046.1	12,505.5	12,797.3	12,998.8	11,564.1	12,349.6
	Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	+4.4	+8.8	+3.8	+2.3	+1.6	–11	+6.8
GS	GDP	2,900.1	3,164.9	2,921.4	2,818.9	2,830.2	2,473.3	2,529.4
	Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	+1.4	+9.1	–7.7	–3.5	+0.4	–12.6	+2.3

c. GDP in PA Territories and Israel

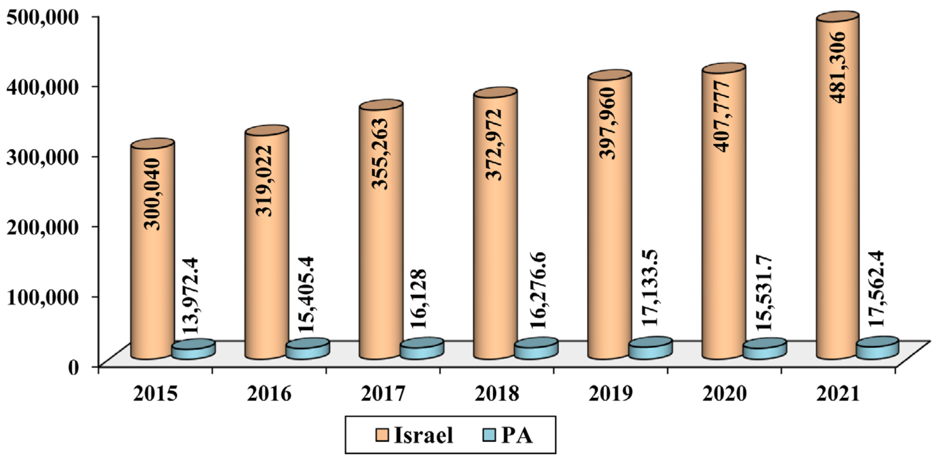
Examining the Israeli GDP at current prices, which reached $407.78 billion in 2020 and $481.3 billion in 2021, we notice that it is more than 26 times the size of its Palestinian counterpart in 2020 and more than 27 times in 2021. This is a clear indication of the nature of the Israeli occupation and its impact on the Palestinian economy, the extent to which it exploits Palestinian resources, and prevents Palestinians from realizing the free and efficient use of their energies and potentials. The population of Israel for 2021 was 9.45 million compared to 5.29 million in WB and GS, a reality which should be taken into consideration.

Table 11/2: GDP in PA Territories and Israel 2015–2021 at Current Prices ($ million)[72]

Year	PA	Israel	% Palestinian GDP to Israeli GDP
2015	13,972.4	300,040	4.7
2016	15,405.4	319,022	4.8
2017	16,128	355,263	4.5
2018	16,276.6	372,972	4.4
2019	17,133.5	397,960	4.3
2020	15,531.7	407,777	3.8
2021	17,562.4*	481,306	3.6

*Based on estimates of the first three quarters of 2021.

GDP in PA Territories and Israel 2015–2021 at Current Prices ($ million)



2. GDP per Capita

This indicator reflects the overall development and growth of GDP at constant prices, after excluding inflation rates and population growth rates. It refers to the average per capita share of the GDP over time, which is being reformulated as an average per capita income or disposable income that reflects as a purchasing power per person. It is affected by remittances received from abroad and deductions from the individual.

a. Average Growth of GDP per Capita

The GDP per capita of 2020–2021 was unusually low compared to previous years as shown in table 12/2. It amounted to about $3,025 in 2021 compared to about $2,923 in 2020 and $3,378 in 2019, with an average decline of 5% during 2020–2021 compared to 2019.

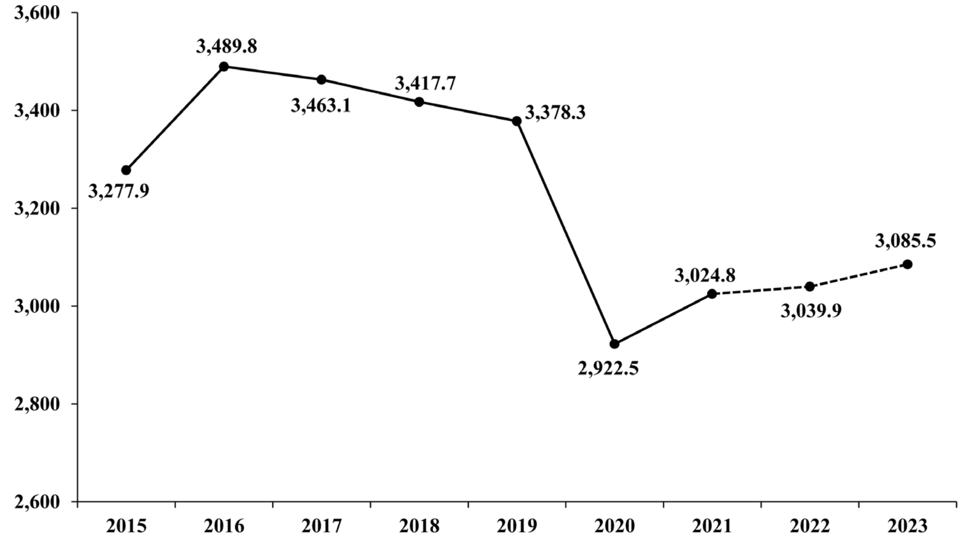
The WB GDP per capita could have reached $6,964 in 2019, but Israeli closures caused this level to deteriorate by 44.5% in the said year.[73] In general, the large differences between the levels of production and income constitute a significant gap between the rich and the poor and make the poor the largest segment in the country, with a few of the rich possessing most of the wealth.

As for the 2022–2023 estimates, there will be a growth of about 0.5% and 1.5%, respectively, based on the state of GDP growth. However, it is an improvement compared to the low levels of 2021; therefore, it is not expected to bring about a tangible breakthrough in the purchasing power of individuals or families.

Table 12/2: Average GDP per Capita in PA Territories 2015–2023 at Constant Prices ($)[74]

	Actual							Forecasts	
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
GDP per capita	3,277.9	3,489.8	3,463.1	3,417.7	3,378.3	2,922.5	3,024.8	3,039.9	3,085.5
Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	+1.4	+6.5	–0.8	–1.3	–1.2	–13.5	+3.5	+0.5	+1.5

GDP per Capita in PA Territories 2015–2023 at Constant Prices ($)



b. Average GDP per Capita in WB and GS

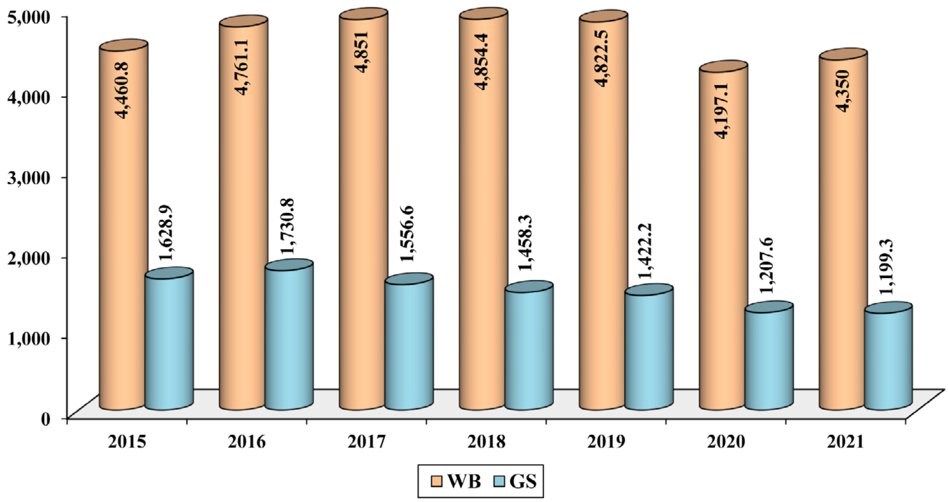
In 2020, the GDP per capita was high in WB compared to GS, amounting to $4,197 in WB versus $1,208 in GS, with a difference in their respective growth rates relative to the previous year. According to estimates, there was an increase in the GDP per capita in WB in 2021 to $4,350, or 3.6%, compared to 2020, and a decrease to $1,199 in GS, by 0.7% (see table 13/2). This is a reflection of the GDP volume in WB and GS and the consequent huge differences in the GDP per capita, as it was 3.6 times higher in WB than in GS in 2021, while it was 2.7 times higher in 2015. It also remained below its level compared to previous years, with a general decrease trend and negative growth, and this was due to the GS's harsh conditions of high unemployment, low wages, the ban on working in Israel as well as the blockade and the internal Palestinian schism, which have all had sharp impacts on living standards, purchasing capabilities and society's ability to meet the population's basic needs.

The above dynamics demand attention is given to the causes of this gap, identifying how wealth is concentrated and distributed, and highlighting the need to adopt appropriate economic policies to improve output and performance to correct the current situation.

Table 13/2: Average GDP per Capita in the WB and GS 2015–2021 at Constant Prices ($)[75]

		Actual						Estimates
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
WB	GDP per capita	4,460.8	4,761.1	4,851	4,854.4	4,822.5	4,197.1	4,350
	Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	+2.3	+6.7	+1.9	+0.1	–0.7	–13	+3.6
GS	GDP per capita	1,628.9	1,730.8	1,556.6	1,458.3	1,422.2	1,207.6	1,199.3
	Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	–1.4	+6.3	–10.1	–6.3	–2.5	–15.1	–0.7

GDP per Capita in the WB and GS 2015–2021 at Constant Prices ($)



c. Comparison of GDP per Capita Between PA Territories and Israel

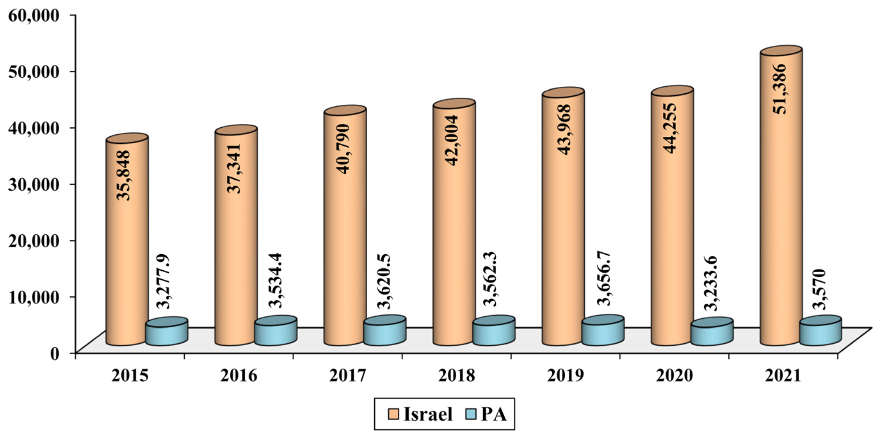
There is a significant gap between GDP per capita in PA territories and Israel. At current prices, it was $3,234 and $3,570 in the PA territories in 2020 and 2021 respectively, while in Israel (at current prices) it was $44,255 and $51,386 for the same period. This means the latter was 14 times higher than the former. This is primarily due to the Israeli occupation and its policies that prevent the normal growth of the Palestinian economy, leading to a decline in Palestinian GDP. This has happened at a time when Palestinians experienced higher rates of population growth than the Israeli side and worked in harsher conditions under occupation, which had a negative impact on wages, living standards, and savings. Furthermore, the huge gap between the two sides has allowed Israelis to enjoy a far higher standard of living than Palestinians.

Table 14/2: GDP per Capita in the PA Territories and Israel 2015–2021 at Current Prices ($)[76]

Year	PA	Israel	% Palestinian GDP per capita of Israeli GDP per capita
2015	3,277.9	35,848	9.1
2016	3,534.4	37,341	9.5
2017	3,620.5	40,790	8.9
2018	3,562.3	42,004	8.5
2019	3,656.7	43,968	8.3
2020	3,233.6	44,255	7.3
2021	3,570*	51,386	6.9

*Based on estimates for the first three quarters of 2021.

GDP per Capita in the PA Territories and Israel 2015–2021 at Current Prices ($)



3. Public Debt

Public debt, both domestic and external, was linked to the great expansion of government expenditures and consequently the chronic budget deficit. A significant decline in unstable external aid was also noticed since 2009,[77] then there were increased obligations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to unjust Israeli deductions. Consequently, the PA to borrowed, especially from local sources, such as the banking system and public bodies, including the Palestinian Pension Agency.

Table 15/2: PA Government Public Debt 2015–2023 ($ million)[78]

	Actual							Forecasts	
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Domestic debt	1,467	1,440	1,501	1,338	1,577	2,325	2,529	2,874	3,199
Annual growth rate (%)	+30.1	–1.8	+4.2	–10.9	+17.9	+47.4	+8.8	+13.7	+11.3
						+28.1		+12.5	
External debt	1,071	1,044	1,042	1,032	1,218	1,325	1,320	1,359	1,397
Annual growth rate (%)	–1.6	–2.5	–0.2	–1	+18	+8.8	–0.4	+3	+2.8
						+4.2		+2.9	
Total public debt	**2,538**	**2,484**	**2,543**	**2,370**	**2,795**	**3,650**	**3,848**	**4,233**	**4,596**
GDP at current prices	13,972.4	15,405.4	16,128	16,276.6	17,133.5	15,531.7	17,562.4*	16,001	16,241
Total public debt as % of GDP	18.2	16.1	15.8	14.6	16.3	23.5	21.9	26.5	28.3

* Based on estimates for the first three quarters of 2021.

PA Government Public Debt 2015–2023 ($ million)

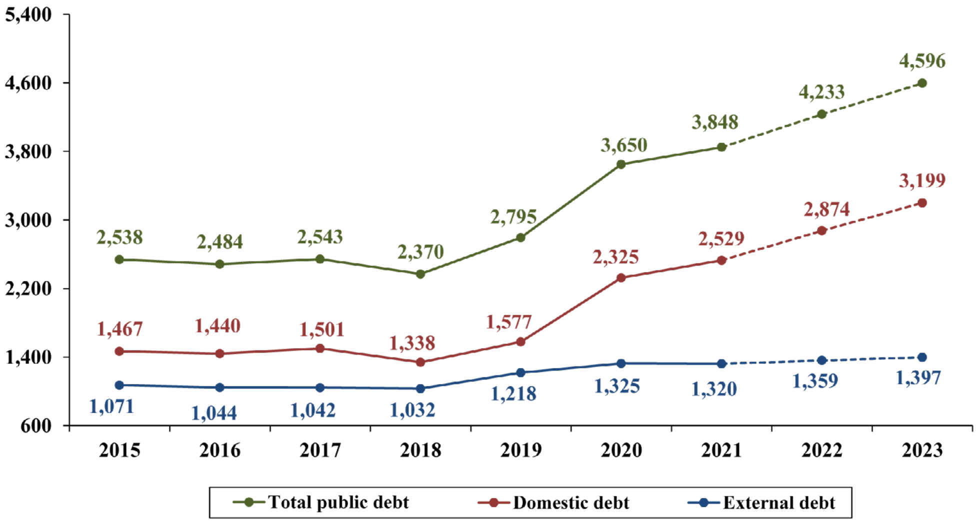


Table 15/2 shows that public debt took two paths throughout 2015–2021, at first decline until 2018, and then a rise during 2019–2021, at 17.9%, 30.6% and 5.5% respectively. This was affected by the size of deductions from the clearance funds and the decline of foreign aid and grants, which led to the exacerbation of financial crisis forcing the government to increase debt as a means to carry out its public services.

Domestic debt constituted the largest part of total public debt, at 57.8% and 65.7% in 2015 and 2021 respectively. The banking system was the largest provider of this debt by virtue of its surplus liquidity and the desire to invest it, where the government was committed to fulfill them and pay their interests at time. This borrowing was also done in the local currency, which enables local banks to maintain sufficient cash liquidity, on the one hand, and on the other hand, helps the PA avoid the risks of currency exchange rate fluctuations.

There remains another aspect of indebtedness represented in "arrears," which are additional public debts that the government does not set a binding period for their repayment. They are the PA's resort to hide the real volume of its debts, where it would exceed the legally permissible percentage of public debt, i.e., 40%. In addition, these arrears have negative, harmful repercussions on service providers needed by the PA, such as hospitals,[79] suppliers of goods, construction companies and others. Government arrears at the end of Q2 2021 amounted to $5,076 million. This sharp rise in arrears is due to the critical escalation of domestic debts which increased in pace during Q2 and Q3 of the year,[80] in the wake of the clearance crisis and the protest of the PA and its reluctance to receive the collected amounts believing the Israeli deductions to be unfair. This brought the total public debt, including arrears, to $8,924 million, representing 50.8% of the GDP, a ratio that remains high and unprecedented, while exceeding the legally permissible rate, which deepens the government's financial crisis with ongoing negative repercussions. However, local borrowing has maximum limits that cannot be exceeded, especially regarding the banking system, which made the PA resort to temporarily reduce the salaries of public employees in late 2021.[81]

Debt forecasts for 2022–2023 will be affected by the actual budget deficit, which in turn depends on the growth of both revenues and public expenditures, as well as external aid, and also on the government's will to repay the arrears which have time limit, given the reverberations on creditors and the services they provide. With the possibility of an improvement in financial performance, including an increase in total net domestic revenues, clearance taxes, and external aid, which would be within the US and European vision, i.e., humanitarian, and economic considerations, the total public debt is expected to reach $4,233 million and $4,595.7 million in 2022 and 2023 respectively, where the growth rate for the aforementioned two years deteriorates to 10% and 8.6% respectively.

4. The PA's General Budget

The general budget reflects the government's financial activity in a country during a given year. It includes revenues and expenditures in their various forms, the state of the total balance in terms of surplus or deficit, how the surplus is used and ways to cover the deficit.

Table 16/2: PA Fiscal Operations 2015–2023 Cash Basis ($ million)[82]

	Actual							Forecasts	
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
– Domestic revenues	913	1,317	1,222	1,346	1,210	1,210	1,537		
– Clearance revenues	2,047	2,332	2,483	2,255	2,219	2,400	2,775		
– Tax returns	–68	–97	–53	–138	–138	–84	–91		
Total net revenue	2,891	3,552	3,652	3,463	3,291	3,526	4,221	4,263	4,348
Annual growth rate (%)	–	+22.9	+2.8	–5.2	–5	+7.1	+19.7	+1	+2
– Salaries and wages	1,760	1,927	1,954	1,658	1,678	1,891	1,986		
– Non-wage expenditure	1,352	1,421	1,533	1,688	1,590	1,659	1,621		
– Net lending	301	270	266	268	320	351	373		
– Earmarked payments	33	44	42	46	73	54	50		
Total expenditures	3,445	3,662	3,795	3,660	3,660	3,955	4,030	4,473	4,786
Annual growth rate (%)	–	+6.3	+3.6	–3.5	0	+8.1	+1.9	+11	+7
Current balance	–554	–110	–143	–197	–369	–429	191	–210	–438
Development expenditures	176	216	258	277	200	169	167	209	220
Overall balance excluding grants and foreign aid (deficit)	–730	–326	–401	–474	–569	–598	24	–419	–658
Grants and aid	797	766	720	664	492	464	317	650	800
Overall balance including grants and foreign aid	67	440	319	190	–77	–134	341	231	142

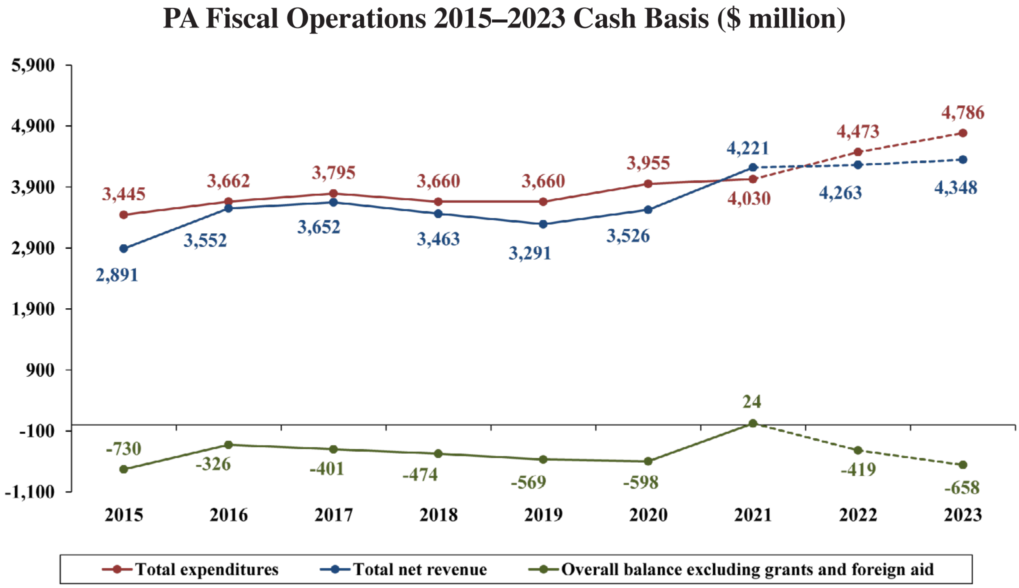


Table 16/2 shows that the government's finances have gone through fluctuations in terms of growth. In 2020, there was a noticeable increase in total revenues by 7.1% due to a large increase in clearance revenues amounting to 8.1%, due to their retention for several months. Total expenditure also witnessed a significant increase of 8.1%, which led to a deficit in the current balance amounting to $429 million with a larger deficit in the overall balance, excluding grants and foreign aid, amounting to $598 million, after calculating development expenditures.

As for 2021, the overall balance, excluding grants and foreign aid, turned into a surplus of $24 million as an exceptional precedent,[83] due to a significant increase in clearance revenues by 15.6%, arising from their retention or delay in disbursement, and a greater increase in domestic revenues by 27%. This happened despite the persistence of unfavorable conditions, specifically Israel's withholding of large sums of clearance revenues; the commitment to pay government obligations towards the banking system and high interest payments, which in Q1 and Q2 amounted to $93 million and $34.3 million respectively, at interest rates close to 6% annually;[84] the 31.7% sharp drop in aid between 2020–2021; and other unfavorable conditions outside Palestinian control. Unless specific policies and a clear strategy for financial reform are adopted, this pattern is likely to reoccur.

To systematically expand revenues and reduce expenditure growth, the PA can take the following steps:

- Make demands for Palestinian rights, including issuing Palestinian sovereign currency, whose income at the lowest estimates would be about 0.31–1.68% of GDP annually.[85]
- Expand domestic tax collection from the wealthy and high-income earners, as it amounted in 2020 to only 20.9% of total revenues compared to 65.8% of clearance proceeds.[86]
- Re-issue the Social Security Law (Decree Law No. 19 of 2016 issued on 29/9/2016) after amending it on systematic and fair bases, while considering the needs of the various relevant parties. The law was suspended after sharp criticism, bearing in mind that its application provides protection for hundreds of thousands of workers who are in dire need, whether working locally or in Israel, in addition to the potentially large public revenues that can be invested in beneficial projects.[87]
- Perform a comprehensive review of the expenditures of various ministries and public authorities, including that of the Palestinian Ministry of Interior and National Security, which accounted for 22.1% of total expenditures in 2021 on commitment basis,[88] compared to around 13.3% of the 2022 approved budget in Israel,[89] which faces severe criticism whenever there is inclination to increase its allocations. Accordingly, it is necessary to conduct systematic evaluations of such cases to reach fair allocations, while benefiting from the experience of others.
- Address cases of financial corruption that many parties have talked about, such as the reports of State Audit and Administrative Control Bureau 2020, the Coalition for Integrity and Accountability—AMAN and other reports published in the media.[90]

Instead of examining the possibility of benefiting from any of the steps proposed above, the PA prepared a decree on the "new value-added tax" law, which includes imposing a tax of 16% on all commercial activities and on all goods, regardless of their importance to consumers.[91]

As for growth forecasts for 2022–2023, they depend on the actual reforms that can be introduced to the government's structure and spending, the efforts made to address outstanding issues and cases of corruption, and on the commitment to financial rules; i.e., preparing and approving the annual general budget estimated six months before the start of the new fiscal year. Our estimates show that growth of revenues will remain at about 1% and 2% in 2022 and 2023 respectively, since they made leaps in 2020–2021 that may not be repeated at the same level later, and the growth of expenditures would be about 11% and 7% respectively, especially since there are many government obligations which are overdue.

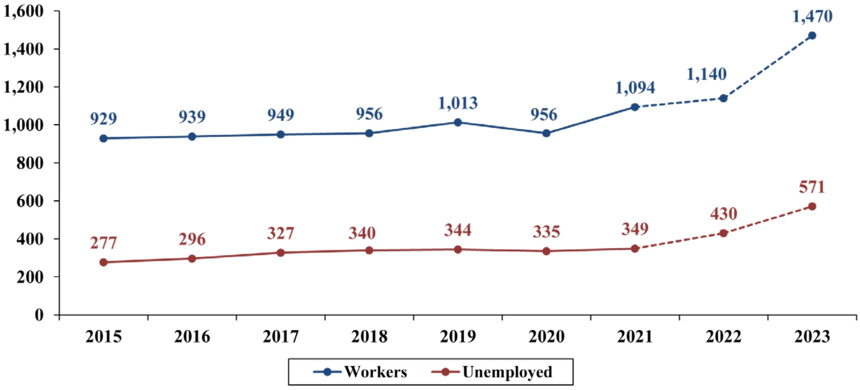
5. Work, Unemployment and Poverty

The human element represents the basis of economic activity and its production processes taking the form of multi-skilled employment, including craftsmen, professionals, and specialists in various disciplines in the government sector, the private sector and non-profit institutions, along with other elements such as land and investments. The human element is directly related to the population count with the new labor force turning to the labor market in the hope of obtaining an appropriate opportunity to avoid unemployment and falling into poverty.

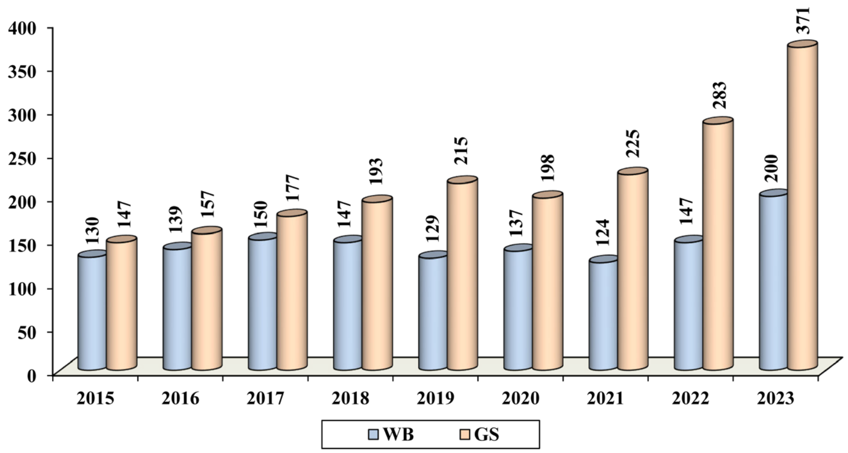
Table 17/2: Distribution of Palestinians Aged 15 Years and Above in WB and GS by Labor Force and Unemployment 2015–2023 (thousand)[92]

		Actual							Forecasts	
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
WB	Labor force	783	792	820	849	881	867	940	1,014	1,318
	Workers	653	653	670	702	752	730	816	867	1,118
	Unemployed	130	139	150	147	129	137	124	147	200
	% of unemployment	16.6	17.5	18.4	17.3	14.6	15.7	13.2	14.5	15.2
GS	Labor force	423	443	456	447	476	424	503	556	723
	Workers	276	286	279	254	261	226	278	273	352
	Unemployed	147	157	177	193	215	198	225	283	371
	% of unemployment	34.8	35.4	38.8	43.1	45.1	46.6	44.7	50.9	51.3
WB & GS	Labor force	1,206	1,235	1,276	1,296	1,357	1,291	1,443	1,570	2,041
	Workers	929	939	949	956	1,013	956	1,094	1,140	1,470
	Unemployed	277	296	327	340	344	335	349	430	571
	% of unemployment	23	23.9	25.7	26.2	25.3	25.9	24.2	27.4[93]	28
Workers in Israel and the settlements		112.3	116.8	122	127	133	125	145		
Workers in the settlements		22.4	20.8	21	22	23	–	22		

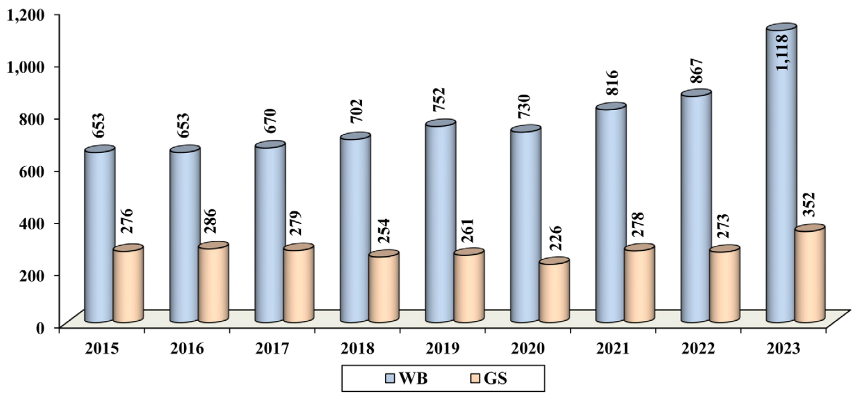
Distribution of Palestinians Aged 15 Years and Above in the WB and GS by Labor Force and Unemployment 2015–2023 (thousand)



Unemployed Palestinians in WB and GS 2015–2023 (thousand)



Palestinians Workers in WB and GS 2015–2023 (thousand)



a. Work and Unemployment

Table 17/2 shows that 2020 constituted an exceptional situation regarding the number of unemployed, as most activities during the COVID-19 pandemic did not generate new jobs. On the contrary, there was a reduction of 46 thousand existing jobs and a decrease in the Israeli labor market by approximately 8 thousand job opportunities, causing a state of frustration among workers. As a result, the number of workers decreased and there was a limited increase in unemployment rates between 2019–2020 from 25.3% to 25.9%,[94] all in the absence of a policy that would positively affect the labor market, quantitatively and qualitatively, as indicated in:

- The registered unemployment rate in WB and GS remained among the highest levels in the world, with an increase in its rates among females reaching 40.1%. It is also higher in the camps compared to urban and rural areas. In addition, there has been a decline in labor productivity, especially in intensive activities in the WB and GS in favor of the WB.[95]
- The great discrepancy and vast differences in the Palestinian labor market between GS and WB in unemployment reached 44.7% and 13.2% respectively in 2021, resulting mainly from the opportunities available to WB residents to work in Israel and the settlements. Also, the unemployment rate in GS has continued to increase, compared to a relative stability at a low level in the WB.
- High unemployment rates among youths (18–29 years; around 1.16 million individuals representing 22% of the total population), reaching 64% for females and 33% for males, which is higher in GS (67%) than in the WB (24%).[96]
- Most employees were classified as working in the informal sector[97] in 2000, with 410 thousand employed people or 62% of the total workforce. Also, 138 thousand employees, or 14% of the total workers, were absent from their work in 2020.[98]
- The continuation of the state of contradiction in the field of public service that emerged from the division between the WB and GS in 2007. Its manifestations include the fact that tens of thousands of government employees in GS receive their salaries from Ramallah, without going to work, in addition to others who have been deprived of their salaries without any rulings being issued against them, compared to tens of thousands of Gaza government employees who do not receive their full salaries.

- Adopting a government policy amidst these conditions represented in the approval of the National Employment Strategy 2021–2025, as a unified reference for priorities in the PA territories, which was prepared by all partners to achieve positive transformations in the economy.[99] The question remains about the objectives included in this strategy concerning unemployment reduction, and what has been achieved of them.
- Seeking to hold an international donor conference to support employment in WB and GS, expected to be held in Geneva in March 2022, with the aim of reducing poverty and unemployment rates and responding to the requirements of the National Employment Strategy.[100]

b. Poverty and Food Insecurity

Poverty is a global problem, and it is prevalent in poor and rich countries alike. Given its seriousness, the world has designated an International Day for the Eradication of Poverty since the issuance of UN General Assembly resolution in December 1992. Then the call was renewed more broadly at the beginning of the third millennium to adopt the first goal of sustainable development which aims to eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2030, currently measured as people living on less than $1.25 a day.[101]

It is natural to link the state of poverty to unemployment rates and prevailing wage levels. The PA was keen to determine a wage level that would prevent workers from falling into poverty and thus issued a decision setting the minimum wage at 1,450 shekels per month (about $448); however, in 2021, 29% of wage employees in the private sector received monthly wages less than the monthly minimum wage.[102] As the government was convinced that wage levels were low and unfair, it sought again to increase the minimum wage to 1,880 shekels (about $580), to be implemented in April 2022. According to the latest official statistics in WB and GS, the poverty line and extreme poverty for a family consisting of five members (two adults and three children) are 1,947 shekels (about $609) and 2,470 shekels (about $762) respectively. Accordingly, the new minimum wage, if applied, does not protect those who are at the poverty line or in extreme poverty, especially in terms of providing bare necessities. In 2020, the number of food-secure families was less than half of the total number of Palestinian families, with wide differences between the WB and GS, and from one governorate to another, as well as from one residential complex to another.[103]

The problem of poverty remains much deeper by measuring its general rates, as the GDP per capita may be high and the minimum wage high as the case of Israel, but the poverty rate (without calculating the direct repercussions of COVID-19 pandemic) increased significantly throughout 2019–2020, as it rose for poor families from 36.7% to 40.8%, among individuals from 32.2% to 36.3%, and among minors from 36.5% to 40.9%.[104] The minimum wage in Israel is 5,300 shekels (about $1,636).[105] This is an example of a rich country getting richer at the expense of the poor. Poverty levels automatically affect purchasing power and nutritional levels that in turn maintain public health and physical safety, and unless this level is treated, health impacts are severe, and the cost of treatment is high.

The Ministry of Social Affairs, which provides financial allocations to poor families within the general budget, and in line with the Ministry's strategy for 2017–2022, has directed its efforts towards strengthening social protection, which ostensibly should have a positive impact on the poor, by launching the national registry with the support of the World Bank.[106] However, the positive impact, if it occurs, remains partial and limited and does not cover the poor and the marginalized.

Poverty causes hunger and lack of food locally and globally, and malnutrition causes inefficiency in the stages of production, manufacturing, distribution, local conflicts, extreme climatic conditions, slowdowns and economic downturns, as the food crisis is exacerbated by poverty and its expansion, income inequality, production capacity, education, health and technology.[107]

In 2022–2023, labor force conditions are expected to remain within the general trend of growth, where unemployment rates will range between 27–28%, with a significant difference between the WB and GS in favor of the WB, which means that this catastrophic situation continues to worsen, whether concerning the unemployed, expansion of poverty or food insecurity. The question remains about the feasibility of the National Employment Strategy, as well as the feasibility of relying on the business sector to create job opportunities for graduates within this strategy,[108] or the feasibility of what the international conference of donors can offer to increase employment levels and job opportunities. In practice, despite their importance, the ability of these factors to reduce high unemployment and poverty rates remain severely limited, and will remain so while the occupation and schism remain.

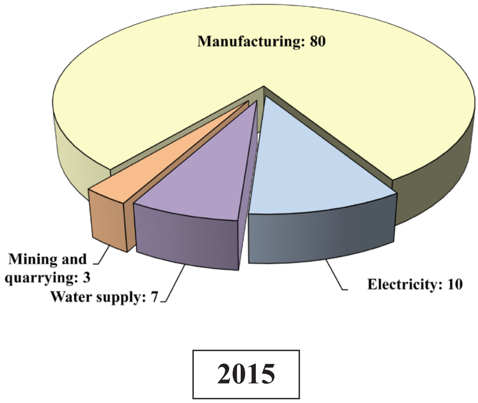
6. Industrial Activity

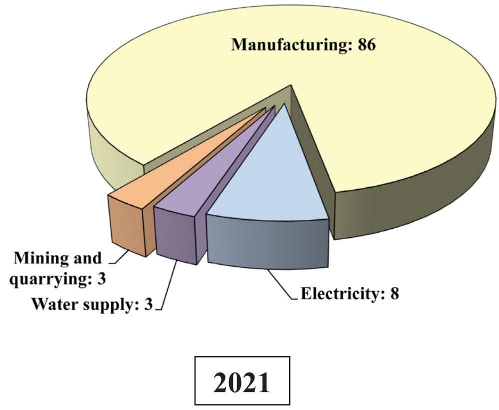
The successive industrial revolutions were accompanied by global economic development, by which modern production methods were introduced, hence markets were flooded with new products. These modern methods impacted the manufacturing and operation of machinery and equipment, the energy used in these operations, and the ways of exploring minerals, oil, gas and other industrial materials. As a result, many countries developed. The 1967 occupied Palestinian territories possess many elements for industrial development, however but remain unused.

Table 18/2: Industrial GDP in PA Territories 2015–2023 at Constant Prices ($ million)[109]

	Actual							Forecasts	
	2015	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**
Mining and quarrying	48.7	46.4	43	66.7	68.7	49.9	52.6	53.4	55.2
Manufacturing	1,302.4	1,499.6	1,756.8	1,762.8	1,779	1,500.7	1,583.2	1,605.4	1,660
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	158.2	158.6	171.2	165.9	164.1	138.6	146.2	148.3	153.3
Water supply, sewerage and waste treatment	120.4	124.8	123.2	61.2	62.9	55.2	58.2	59.1	61.1
Total	**1,629.7**	**1,829.4**	**2,094.2**	**2,056.6**	**2,074.7**	**1,744.4**	**1,840.3**	**1,866.2**	**1,929.6**
Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	–5.3	+12.3	+14.5	–1.8	+0.9	–15.9	+5.5	+1.4	+3.4
% of GDP	11.7	12	13.6	13.2	13.1	12.4	12.4	12.2	12.1

Industrial Sector Activities of GDP 2015 and 2021 (%)





Industrial GDP in PA Territories 2015–2023 at Constant Prices ($ million)

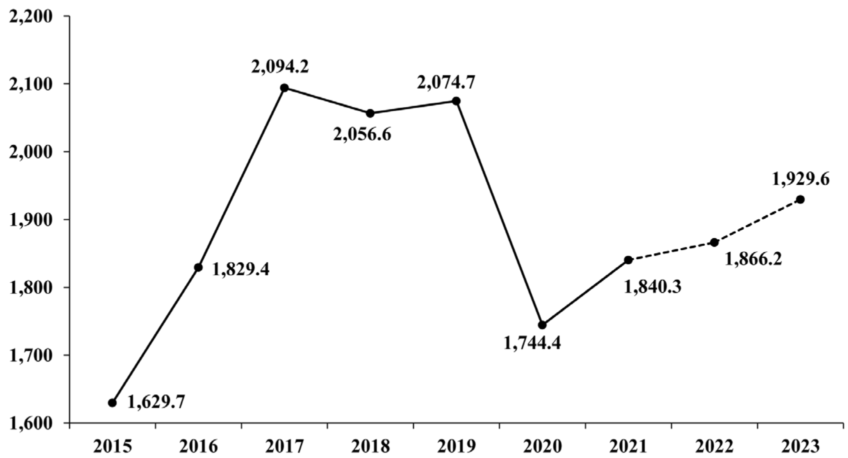


Table 18/2 reveals that manufacturing ranks first at 86% of productivity, an indication of its utmost importance in terms of its broad capability to generate new products and serve other sectors, especially agriculture, with a promising role of solid waste treatment, hence making landfills disappear. Then comes electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning supply at 7.9%, followed by water supply, sewerage, and waste treatment at 3.2%, and finally mining and quarrying at 2.9%, according to 2021 estimates. The decline in the contributions of other non-manufacturing activities reflects inadequacies in addressing them, despite their increasing importance.

It appears that there remains a decline in the mining and quarrying industries despite the huge reserves such as stones, marble, and granite, as this item is the first on the list of the top ten categories of Palestinian exports. The Gaza coast is also rich in large reserves of natural gas whose flare was lit in September 2000, without the Palestinian side being able so far to obtain its right to benefit from it.

The development of industrial activity remained limited and fluctuated from year to year, and its contribution to the GDP remained with an average of 12.7% for 2015–2019, compared to 15.4% for 2000–2004,[110] despite what was mentioned regarding the adoption of a policy of disengagement from Israel and the desire to expand the national product and encourage investment in industrial cities. The reliance of the PA on clearance funds as the most important source of public revenue has prevented any noticeable forward leap in industrial activity, in addition to the abolition of the Ministry of Industry, established with the emergence of the PA.

In 2021, the industrial sector in PA territories is considered small or very small, as the number of its establishments is 21 thousand, with 109 thousand employees, a 10% decrease compared to 2019, with 5.2 workers/institution, with heavy dependence on unpaid employees (owners of enterprises and their household members) constituting 22.6% of the total workforce. Throughout 1994–2020, the contribution of industrial activity to the GDP declined from 22% to 13%.[111] Growth in 2021 witnessed a relative increase of about 5.5%, while expectations for 2022 show that it would increase by only 1.4%.[112]

Growth in 2023 is expected to remain within the general average growth throughout 2015–2022, estimated at 3.4%, close to the average growth rate of industrial GDP of 2021–2022. This reflects the failure to disengage from the occupation and implement cluster development policies, which would include industrial clusters. Such steps require increasing public investment, regulating and developing the industrial sector, protecting the national product, applying the anti-dumping law and implementing the 10-year national strategy for industry.

7. Agricultural Activity

Agricultural activity has an important role in achieving self-sufficiency by producing many agricultural crops, thus responding to the local market needs of food and other essential products. It is a traditional production activity that depends on available agricultural land, the abundance of irrigation water, and the ability to keep pace with technological developments that increase productivity and take advantage of narrow and limited spaces. In the Palestinian case, there is an urgent need to exploit all cultivable areas, intensify this activity as a consolidation of the Palestinian identity and curb the relentless settlement expansions, which have continued despite the sacrifices made by Palestinians to stop it.

Table 19/2: Agricultural GDP in PA Territories 2015–2023 at Constant Prices ($ million)[113]

	Actual							Forecasts	
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Agricultural GDP*	1,035.2	1,142.9	1,074.1	1,091.1	1,100.7	1,001	970	1,013	1,054
Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	–4	+10.4	–6	+1.6	+0.9	–9.1	–3	+4.4	+3.9
% of GDP	7.4	7.5	7	7	7	7.1	6.5	6.6	6.6

* Includes forestry and fishing activities.

Agricultural GDP in PA Territories 2015–2023 at Constant Prices ($ million)

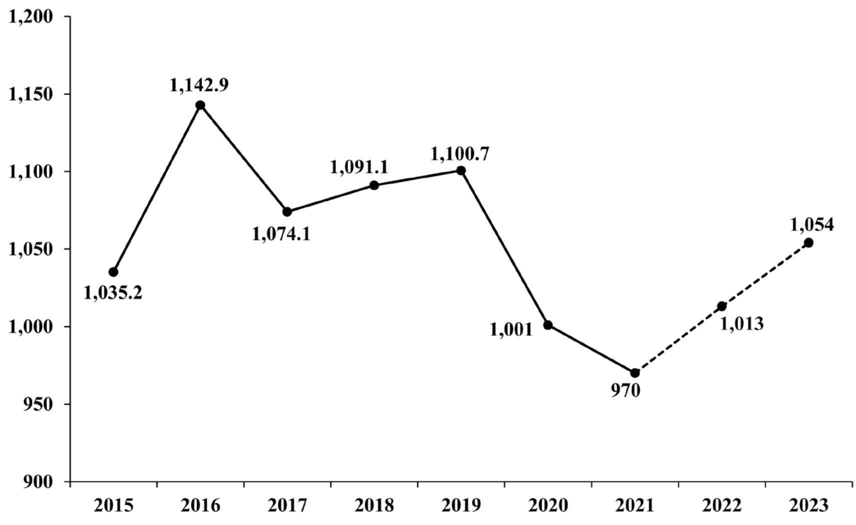


Table 19/2 shows that agricultural growth is fluctuating and that there is generally slow growth, but its contribution to GDP is decreasing. Despite the ability of agricultural activity to absorb the labor force, it is noted that the percentage of employed persons in agriculture has decreased, where it was 14.1% in 2008, falling to 6.4% in 2020.[114]

This decline in the contribution of the agricultural sector to the GDP is due to several reasons, such as the decrease of government financial allocations within the annual general budget appropriations to 0.9%,[115] settlement expansion and its accompanying aggression in addition to the deprivation of farmers from cultivating large areas of their lands.

This has happened despite the decisions adopted in favor of the Palestinians regarding the right to permanent sovereignty over their natural resources.[116] Therefore, there is a strong need to activate these decisions through a unified approach in the context of popular resistance and through national unity.

Agriculture remains a potentially hopeful area of the economy as it deals with various segments of landowners, farmers and professionals who have unlimited capabilities. It is a diversified activity covering various types of crops, livestock and poultry, which receive wide input from non-profit organizations at home and abroad that have vast experience and creative solutions to challenges.[117]

The Palestinian Agricultural Credit Institution might have a role in the renaissance of agricultural activity through its vision of seeking sustainable agricultural development with distinguished financing services, and through its mission to improve the level of food security and raise its contribution to the GDP.[118]

Based on the share of agricultural activity to the GDP, PCBS estimates the growth of agricultural activity in 2022 will be 4.4%. Estimations for 2023 remain subject to the serious government support of this activity in all possible ways, increasing its allocations and investment needs such as irrigation water, clean energy, and necessary compensation, while embracing small farmers and exporters, stimulating volunteer youth work and curbing settlement. Unless such factors are available, growth expectations will remain limited and under the previous year's 3.9%.

8. Trade

Trade is one of the most prominent forms of international economic relations. Because of the importance of trade, the international community has been keen to organize it through the World Trade Organization (WTO). The PA has sought to be part of this system, by concluding several trade agreements with many Arab and foreign countries and seeking WTO membership.

Table 20/2: Commodity Trade Balance in PA Territories 2015–2023 at Current Prices ($ million)[119]

	Actual							Forecasts	
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Trade volume	6,183	6,290	6,919	7,695	7,717	6,116	7,878	7,755	7,862
Exports	958	926	1,065	1,155	1,104	1,094	1,458	1,470	1,495
Imports	5,225	5,364	5,854	6,540	6,613	5,022	6,420	6,285	6,367
Deficit	–4,268	–4,437	–4,789	–5,384	–5,510	–3,928	–4,962	–4,816*	–4,872
% Exports to GDP	6.9	6	6.6	7.1	6.4	7	8.3	9.2	9.2
% Deficit to total imports	81.7	82.7	81.8	82.3	83.3	78.2	77.3	76.6	76.5
% Deficit to GDP	30.5	28.8	29.7	33.1	32.2	25.3	28.3	30.1	30

*There are limited differences due to approximation.

PA Trade Indicators 2015–2023 at Current Prices ($ million)

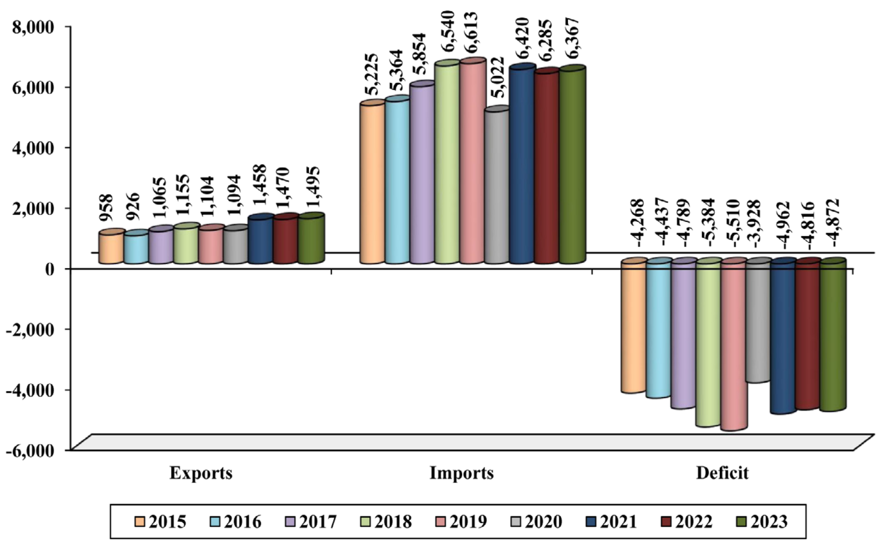


Table 20/2 shows that trade volume tends to increase with fluctuations in exports or imports. In general, the volume of exports for 2020 was low compared to imports, and it declined in GS. This was attributed to many factors, notably the weakness of Palestinian products in foreign markets, due to the high cost of production caused by Israel's imposition of obstacles and restrictions on free movement and access, and the destruction of infrastructure, as well as internal factors related to the levels of technology used, economies of scale and other obstacles.[120]

If the PA's relationship with the outside world is developing significantly, it remains more connected to Israel, at 84% for exports and 55% for imports in 2020 as exports to Israel amounted to about $886 million and imports reached $3,343 million.[121] The general trend of exports and imports is growing with some fluctuation, which reflects the importance of these exchanges, the advantages they entail and the challenges they face. However, the dominant feature of this trade is the severe deficit in the Palestinian trade balance, which constitutes a high percentage of GDP. The ratio of exports to imports have also remained at a low level.

The continuing deficit is a sign of low productivity and high unemployment rates. In general, the balance of trade deficit reflects the weaknesses of the economy and its inability to meet the needs of the domestic market, which leads the Palestinians to look abroad to meet these needs, particularly Israel, which allows its goods to flow freely, legally, and illegally, into the Palestinian market in exchange for many restrictions limiting the access of Palestinian exports to the external market.[122]

Turkey had the second highest share of Palestinian imports with 10.1%, then China with 6.8%. As for PA exports, Jordan ranked second, with 6.5% in 2019 (see table 21/2).

Apparently, the National Export Strategy (NES) still faces many obstacles in terms of what it seeks to achieve. Several objectives have already been set for this strategy, the most important of which is generating overall growth in productive export sectors over the period 2014–2018 by 67% with an annual growth rate of 13% and increasing the value of Palestinian exports during the same period by about $722 million.[123] However, the situation on the ground does not indicate tangible achievements in this regard.

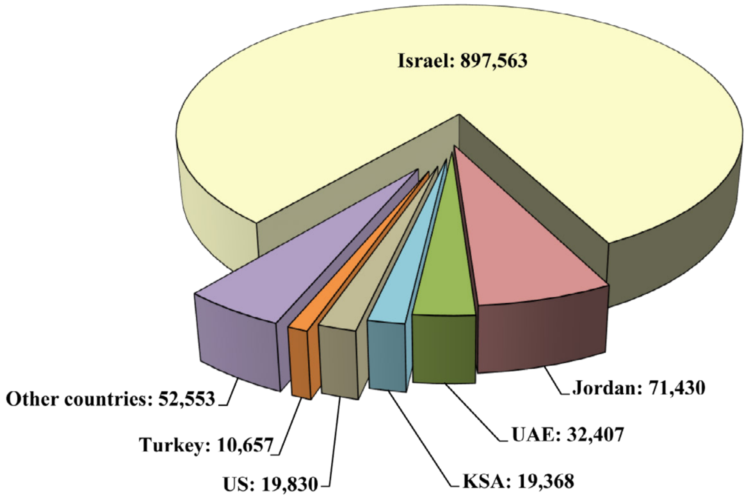
These results may have subsequently constituted an incentive for the government to consider the energy sector a priority. Thus, on 6/9/2021, the Palestinian Cabinet took a decision to establish the Palestine Natural Gas Station in the hope of liberalizing the energy sector, facilitating the exploitation of natural resources, and managing gas pipelines and distribution lines.[124] This was alongside a focus on renewable energy, seen as a symbol of sovereignty over the land and its resources, and also as part of the global trend in favor of developing clean energy sources.[125]

As for the growth expected in 2022–2023, there is no indication of the possibility of a real breakthrough beyond the current rates of the trade balance deficit, especially the large gap between exports and imports. Hopes remain for an awakening regarding activating trade agreements concluded with dozens of countries, which can be only realized through great efforts and continuous hard work in confronting the policies and practices of the occupation. Unless this is achieved, trade exchange in 2022 will remain within the PCBS estimates represented in the expansion of exports by 0.8% and the reduction of imports by 2.1%. Expectations for 2023 tend towards stimulating exports relatively and keeping the growth of imports at a low level, with a growth rate of 1.7% and 1.3% respectively.

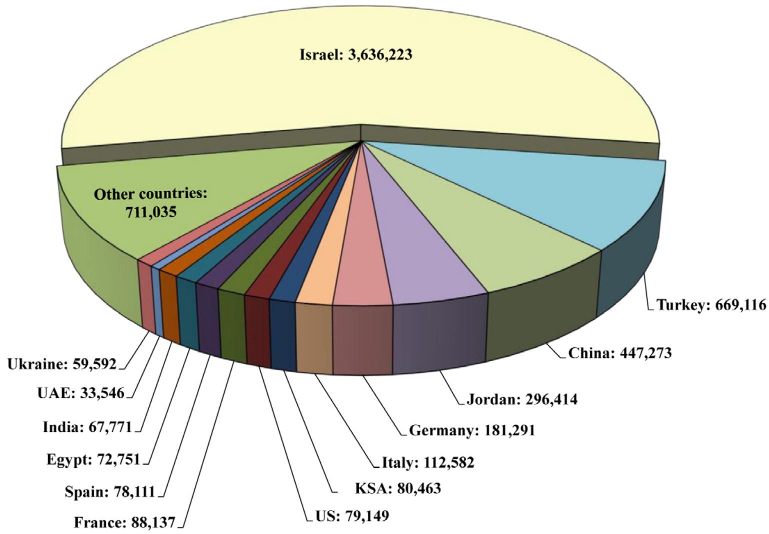
Table 21/2: Volume of Palestinian Trade, Exports and Imports in Goods in PA Territories to/ from Selected Countries 2018–2019 ($ thousand)[126]

Countries	Trade volume		Palestinian exports to:		Palestinian imports from:	
	2019	2018	2019	2018	2019	2018
Israel	4,533,785	4,573,307	897,563	967,462	3,636,223	3,605,845
Turkey	679,773	665,572	10,657	7,760	669,116	657,812
China	447,470	425,407	197	489	447,273	424,918
Jordan	367,844	272,975	71,430	73,953	296,414	199,022
Germany	183,521	211,409	2,230	2,090	181,291	209,320
Italy	114,010	111,415	1,428	1,108	112,582	110,308
KSA	99,831	108,655	19,368	21,009	80,463	87,647
US	98,979	82,665	19,830	14,532	79,149	68,134
France	89,785	111,124	1,648	878	88,137	110,246
Spain	78,250	82,036	139	127	78,111	81,909
Egypt	72,766	93,799	15	9	72,751	93,789
India	68,697	66,658	926	444	67,771	66,214
UAE	65,954	60,267	32,407	26,413	33,546	33,854
Ukraine	59,592	88,594	–	–	59,592	88,594
Other countries	757,006	741,341	45,970	39,360	711,035	701,978
Total	**7,717,263**	**7,695,224**	**1,103,808**	**1,155,634**	**6,613,454**	**6,539,590**

Palestinian Exports in Goods to Selected Countries 2019 ($ thousand)



Palestinian Imports in Goods from Selected Countries 2019 ($ thousand)



9. External Financing and Foreign Aid

External financing has always been important to Palestinian economic conditions, especially with the establishment of the PA under the occupation, and the PA's urgent need for this financing which was mainly linked to its plans for economic and social development. However, the expansion of public spending and the growing budget deficit led to directing the bulk of this financing towards covering the indicated deficit, with less or a limited part directed towards development projects.

Table 22/2: External Financing to the PA 2015–2023 ($ million)[127]

	Actual							Forecasts	
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
External budgetary support	707	608	545	506	496	346	186	500	600
External financing for development expenditures	90	158	175	158	–4*	118	131	150	200
Grants and foreign aid	797	766	720	664	492	464	317	650	800
Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	–35.2	–3.9	–6	–7.8	–25.9	–5.7	–31.7	+105	+23.1
% of Development expenditures out of total external financing	11.3	20.6	24.3	23.8	–0.8	25.4	41.3	23.1	25

* This was because the Ministry of Finance returned $125 million (according to data) to the US Consulate in response to the US position on Jerusalem.

External Financing to the PA 2015–2021 ($ million)

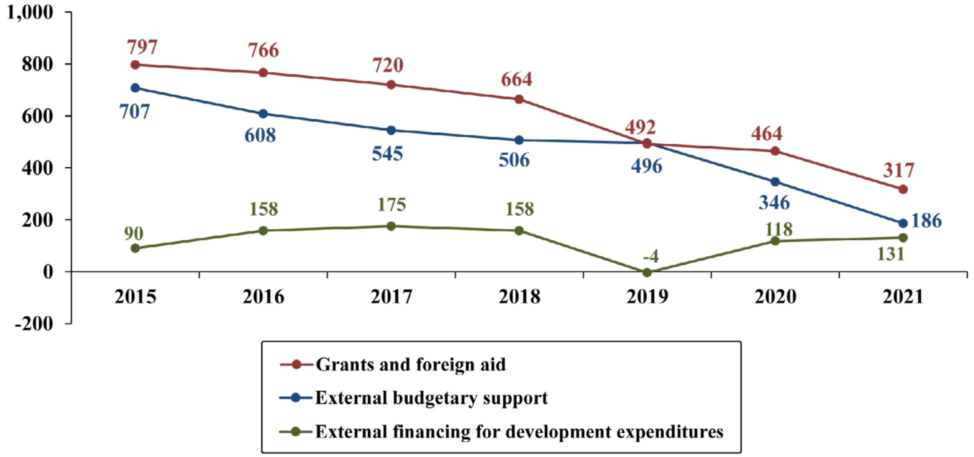


Table 22/2 shows that the decline in grants and foreign aid was the dominant feature throughout 2015–2021, reaching an unprecedented limit in 2021 of 31.7%, with a severe fluctuation in external financing for development expenditures. The impact of these developments was severe in terms of fulfilling public services entrusted to the PA, with significant increase of domestic debt to compensate for this shortfall. This entailed recognizing that external financing is not binding to the donor countries, since it is done voluntarily and is subject to their conditions, including their capabilities, conviction and mostly whether it serves their political agendas.

In 2022–2023, external financing is expected to remain dependent on the internal scene, in terms of failure or success in reaching a national accord, with Israel exploiting the prevailing situation to force the PA to make more concessions regarding the final solution of the conflict. In practice, the possibility of meeting the humanitarian needs and improving the economic conditions of the Palestinians as a priority are high, for it is a policy that has become internationally more acceptable, while also considering Israel's interests. The donor countries are encouraged in that direction. Accordingly, this financing is expected to increase in 2022–2023, to reach, in our estimation, about $500 million and $600 million respectively, and external financing for development expenditures to about $150 million and $200 million respectively, in light of encouraging beginnings of financing in early January 2022 by signing agreements with the Islamic Development Bank worth $33 million for infrastructure.[128] It remains for this conviction to be reinforced by what may result from subsequent developments in Palestinian endeavors and supporting efforts.

In 2021, Algeria topped the list of donors with $97.3 million, then the World Bank with $48.4 million, followed by the Mecanisme Palestino-Européen de Gestion et d'Aide Socio-Economique (PEGASE) with $29.9 million. In 2020, the PEGASE mechanism topped the donor countries with $221.1 million, followed by the World Bank with $86.9 million, then the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) with $31.3 million. It is noted that special grants have been added to mitigate the coronavirus pandemic starting with $300 thousand in 2020, then increased to $83.3 million in 2021. A sharp decline in Arab funding in 2020 is also noted, reaching $38.6 million compared to $267.9 million in $2019 (table 23/2).

Table 23/2: Sources of External Financing for the PA 2018–2021 ($ million)[129]

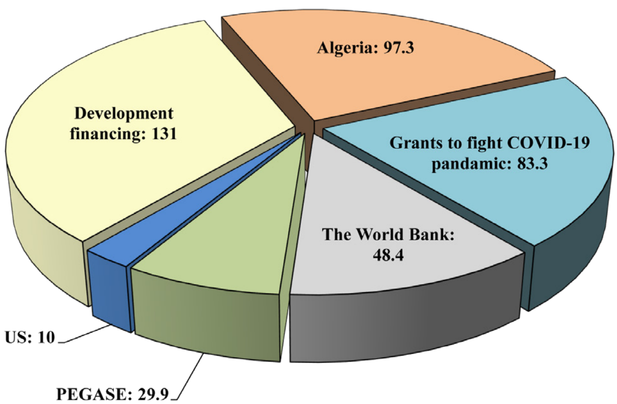
Donor	2018	2019	2020	2021
Arab donors	**305.5**	**267.9**	**38.6**	**97.3**
– KSA	222.4	176.4	31.3	–
– Algeria	26.7	28.7	–	97.3
– Qatar	–	52	6.3	–
– Oman	–	–	1	–
– Egypt	3.6	–	–	–
– Kuwait	52.6	–	–	–
– Iraq	–	10.8	–	–
International donors	**210.1**	**275.3**	**317.1**	**88.3**
– PEGASE	183.8	196.1	221.1	29.9
– World Bank	10.4	64.9	86.9	48.4
– US	–	–	–	10*
– France	9.5	9.4	9.1	–
– Turkey	6.4	4.9	–	–
Development financing	**160**	**–9.4**	**131.5**	**131**
Grants to fight COVID-19 pandemic	–	–	**0.3**	**83.3**
Total	**675.6**	**533.8**	**487.5**	**399.9****

Note: External financing and development financing figures are different in tables 22/2 and 23/2 because of the difference in shekels exchange rate adopted as an annual average between the PMA and PA Ministry of Finance.

* Financing Jerusalem hospitals.

** The Ministry of Finance fixed the total financing at about $316.6 million, excluding grants allocated to confront the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, which were included in the total.

Sources of External Financing for the PA 2021 ($ million)



10. Economic Repercussions of the GS Siege

The GS is economically dependent on the outside world through travel and exchanges via available crossings. However, the tightening of the Israeli siege by land, sea, and air with a complete rationing of the permitted movement had severe economic and social repercussions as GS represents a border strip with a small area, limited resources, high fertility and high population growth of 32.9 births per one thousand people,[130] which made the population jump to 2.137 million people by the end of 2021.

Regarding the movement of people, Gazan workers, estimated at tens of thousands, have been completely prohibited from working behind the Green Line since 2005, with travel abroad being limited for most purposes. This has led to a significant increase in unemployment, reaching about 225 thousand unemployed persons by 2021. Consequently, this segment is deprived of job opportunities and income, coupled with poverty and food insecurity.

The siege has also affected the supply and distribution of electricity of which only 8 hours at most are available per day, with harm to consumers and producers who are burdened with additional expenses to obtain a minimum number of alternatives, and frequent fire accidents and casualties. Also, 30% of Gaza residents have been deprived of their right to water because of the continuous power cuts, in addition to more than 95% of Gaza's water becoming contaminated, despite the investments directed towards desalinating seawater and underground water. Moreover, the desalination projects have not prevented the pollution of water, making the residents of Gaza vulnerable to slow poisoning, as the Israeli occupation and siege remain an obstacle against any genuine improvement.[131]

The Water and Environmental Quality Authority in Gaza issued a distress call to find a solution to the crisis of water which suffers from severe and dangerous pollution of the aquifer's water because "more than 97% of the water pumped from the coastal aquifer in Gaza Strip does not meet the water quality standards of the World Health Organization."[132]

The siege's repercussions extended to the poor state of infrastructure such as sewage which was directed towards the soil and into the aquifers, and beaches have become polluted by 75%, nitrates in water wells by 124%, and bacteria in desalination plants by 65%.[133] Consequently, Gazans have been deprived of spending time in nature and engaging in recreational activities, especially in summer.

This is happening despite the role of the EU which has expressed its willingness to support any viable step forwards, in light of many challenges that have not yet been addressed. This is while noting that the blockade, the siege and the schism need more EU efforts in order to be solved.[134]

Other forms of suffering include:

- Strict restrictions on the import of 62 items considered by Israel to be dual-use, designations that contribute to the deterioration of the infrastructure, economic, health and educational conditions as well as the lack of pumps, communication equipment, large electric generators, various types of wood, cranes, heavy equipment, electric elevators, and x-ray imaging equipments.[135]
- Farmers have been deprived of the ability to cultivate their lands, especially along the GS border, where "the 'off-limits' land represented about 35% of the Gaza's land suitable for agriculture."[136]
- The unemployment rate reached 48%, poverty 53% and food insecurity 68%, which constitutes a collective punishment for the GS residents.[137]
- Imposing a ban on the export of Gaza's products while Israel allows, with limited exceptions, the export of small quantities of goods, mostly to the WB and a few to Israel and abroad. November 2021 exports were equivalent to only 13.8% of the monthly exports volume before the imposition of the blockade in June 2007 which used to reach 4,500 trucks.[138]
- The value of GS exports in 2019 was very small in comparison to that of WB exports, where the former reached $11.1 million, while the latter $1,092.7 million. Thus, GS exports constituted only 1% of total Palestinian exports.[139]
- Fishermen were greatly affected by the blockade as 95% of them live below the poverty line. Although they have the right to fish within 20 nautical miles, what is permitted by the occupation does not exceed 12 miles in the best conditions.[140]
- Successive wars left massive destruction on buildings, residential towers, public and private utilities and infrastructure besides agricultural, commercial and industrial facilities, with the imposition of severe restrictions on the movement of construction.

- The losses resulting from the war on GS in May 2021 amounted to about $190 million, where losses are estimated in the flows of the economy that arise from the temporary absence of the damaged assets. In addition, the cost of meeting recovery and reconstruction needs for 24 months starting June 2021 was estimated at $485 million.[141]
- There is still a significant shortfall in the funds needed for reconstruction following the first three wars, at about 72% of the value of the pledges, which made the GS an environment unfit for investment or life. Many businessmen were forced to move their activities abroad in search of a safe and attractive environment for investment. Moreover, in 2020, unemployment rates in GS were three times those in WB, hence a wide gap between them which increases from time to time. In addition, young people leave the Strip as individuals and in groups, in search of job opportunities abroad amidst unfavorable conditions and great risks.[142]
- There are indications that reinforce the desire for immigration. In November 2021, for example, 11,923 travelers left GS through the Rafah crossing, and 8,477 passengers returned with a difference of about 28.9% between those who departed and returnees.[143]
- Gazans are still victims of various forms of collective punishment imposed by the Israeli siege, whose intensity is periodically exacerbated through military operations and various forms of aggression.[144]

The direct translation of the damages of the economic siege, schism and wars made most of the population subsist on social protection and poverty-aleviation programs. During the first half of 2021, 297 thousand families benefitted from such programs, which means 1.5 million individuals representing about 70% of the total population of the Strip, at a cost of $107 million, and an average of only about $360 per family during six months.[145] This contrasts with other poor segments of society, whose needs are no less than these categories, but did not benefit from these limited allocations. GS remains a large prison in which the basic rights guaranteed by local and international laws for prisoners are not met.

11. Outlook for the PA Economic Performance 2022–2023

Based on the economic performance of the PA since the Oslo Accords until now, one can predict its future performance. From the beginning, an economic approach based on development planning was absent. Although in 1993, prior to the establishment of the PA, experts, and specialists under the supervision of the PLO Economic Department in Tunis prepared the "Development Program for the Palestinian National Economy 1994–2001," in the hope that it would be a beacon to an economic and social strategic path. However, it was replaced by programs and plans that depend mainly on external aid to support the annual general budget and part of the needs of development projects.

Over more than 25 years, until 2017, external financing to the PA exceeded $35.4 billion.[146] However, these funds were not directed towards addressing core problems, such as unemployment, poverty, lack of job opportunities and the reality which urged about 22 thousand WB workers to work in Israeli settlements,[147] considering feverish settlement expansion. Also, the public debt and its arrears exceeded 50.8% and reached unprecedented limits, with many violations, including the absence of an effective supervisory role and the disruption of the legislative authority.

Negative indicators included the absence of a clear strategy that would benefit from the past and mobilize domestic efforts and potentials, with a speedy change of course whenever a new government was formed. One example of this was the preparation of the PA's National Policy Agenda 2017–2022: Putting Citizens First, in December 2016, as the fourth national plan and an extension of the three plans since 2008, which aimed to leads towards the efficient and effective use of available resources to improve the quality of life for citizens, with ten priorities identified, starting with ending the occupation and achieving independence.[148] However, the current government has ignored this agenda, and turned instead to a strategy of disengagement from Israel and development by clusters, which was accompanied by low economic performance.

There are many unsettled issues with Israel about clearance and deductions, as it still seizes millions of dollars, equivalent to the allowances of the wounded, prisoners and families of the martyrs, in addition to unilateral deductions without informing the Palestinian side, which costs the treasury huge losses and exorbitant money.

There is also a disregard for the law, such as the Diplomatic Corps Law No. 13 of 2005, which limits the maximum period a diplomat can spend abroad to no more than five years in one country. Notably, there are explicit and exaggerated violations in many countries, including the representation of the Palestinian Embassy in Iran which lasted for about 39 years, and in China for about 30 years.[149]

The integrity of governance continues to face challenges, most notably the non-respect for the principle of separation of the legislative, executive, and judicial powers, which has negatively affected integrity, weakened the confidence of citizens, impeded efforts to combat corruption and kept the executive authority without real oversight and accountability.[150]

This explicit acknowledgment by AMAN reflects the current situation. Knowing that the "State of Palestine" has signed the International Convention against Corruption, on top of which are the rights of access to information and more transparency and openness.[151] There was also the formation of several investigation committees in various cases, and months and years go by, without a decision on any of them.

Decades of occupation, intertwining and overlapping, and more than 14 years of schism have created an integrated environment in which some groups became interested in maintaining the status quo, whose change strips them of the influence, ranks and wealth they acquired under division and occupation.[152] The US and EU have frequently warned that the PA is on the verge of collapse, in an attempt to entrust the task of saving it to Israel, which hastened to respond.[153]

It seems that the policy of the new US administration does not differ from previous ones, where Israel is fully supported, and no pressure is put on it to make concessions concerning settlement expansion and land seizure. This makes it impossible to implement the two-state solution and forces the PA to accept subsidies, relief, and facilities as an alternative to addressing the main issues, while remaining committed to holding an international conference that may come up with recommendations that do not go beyond resolutions of the General Assembly. Although these are renewed annually without receiving attention from any party.

In general, the performance of the PA represented by the current government has been accompanied by a tangible decline and negative growth reaching a peak in 2020 at about 11.3%, with its repercussions on the various segments of society, especially regarding living and the ability to satisfy the minimum needs.

On the international level, the economic and fiscal situation is described as dire, which makes “it increasingly difficult for the PA to cover its minimum recurrent expenditures, let alone address outstanding arrears and make critical investments in the economy and the Palestinian people.”[154]

As for the expected PA performance in 2022–2023, and based on the above, this performance will remain low in general, especially regarding core issues such as slow economic growth rates, high unemployment, poverty and food insecurity levels. Also, there will be a widening trade deficit, public budget deficit and an increase of the public debt and its arrears. The violation of regulations and legislation will continue to be ignored, settlement expansion and the departure of landowners and youth will continue, while investments will search for a safe environment. As for the main actors, they will continue to provide facilities in the humanitarian and economic fields away from the issues of final resolution.

Conclusion

Despite the presence of about half of the Palestinian people in forced asylum and Diaspora, the remaining half in historic Palestine have continued their steadfastness on their land facing the Israeli occupation and siege. Their numbers have increased, which reflects the expectations of the statistical studies, that the number of Palestinians will exceed the number of Jews in historical Palestine by the end of 2020. This means that the Israelis have failed to resolve their dilemma of the identity of the inhabitants of the land, even after 125 years since the launch of their Zionist project, and after 74 years since the establishment of Israel. Although two thirds of the Palestinian people are refugees inside and outside Palestine, most of those abroad are still residing in the countries surrounding Palestine, which indicates their attachment to their land and their aspiration to return. However, the study of the numbers of Palestinians, their population growth and presence, has indicated that there is a gradual decrease in the birth rate and population growth. It also reflects what the Palestinians in Syria and Lebanon are suffering, because of exceptionally difficult conditions they are living in. This means that all efforts must be made to support the steadfastness of the Palestinian people and end all forms of their suffering at home and abroad.

As for the economic indicators of WB and GS, they reflect the continued hegemony of the Israeli occupation and the consolidation of PA dependency on the Israeli economy. They also show how the Palestinian economy is being depleted because of the unjust Oslo Accords and the Paris Protocol, which perpetuated a state of injustice and dependency. Therefore, it was not surprising that the PA's trade depended mainly on the Israelis; most of the PA's revenues are subject to the Israeli mood, as they are "clearance" revenues collected by Israel; the Israeli GDP is about 26 times the Palestinian one; and that the Israeli GDP per capita is 14 times the Palestinian one. What added insult to injury was the significant decline of external support to the PA, thus making it unable to carry out any real development projects or pay the full salaries of its employees.

At the same time, despite the stifling siege and the very high rates of poverty and unemployment, GS sets an example of steadfastness and resilience, using available resources and employing all potentials and capabilities to support the resistance. This calls for great Palestinian, Arab, Islamic, and international efforts to lift the unjust GS siege and support its steadfastness.

Endnotes

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This Report

Al-Zaytouna Centre is pleased to present to its readers the Palestine Strategic Report (PSR) 2020–2021, the 12th PSR to be published.

With an academic methodology and comprehensive objective approach, the report details the developments concerning the Palestine issue and provides the latest information and data available at the end of 2021, along with analyses and forecasts.

This report is the result of collaborative work of 15 experts and researchers. In eight chapters, it addresses the internal Palestinian scene; Palestinian demographic and economic indicators; the situation in Jerusalem and the holy sites; the specifics of Israeli aggression, Palestinian resistance and the peace process; the internal situation in Israel, politically, economically and militarily; and Palestine's Arab, Islamic, and international relations.

The PSR now occupies a prominent position as an indispensable reference, integral to Palestine studies and research. Al-Zaytouna Centre hopes the PSR will continue to make valuable contributions in this field.

Prof. Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh

The Palestine Strategic Report 2020 – 2021

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