



*30 years & beyond: WCLAC Continues to forward Women's Human Rights*



للارشاد القانوني والاجتماعي



Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling

**WCLAC Annual Report**

**2020**

**March, 2021**



## ***Introductory Note by the General Director***

**Dear Partners,**

The year 2020 was unique in its compounded threats and challenges, which WCLAC and all other feminist and human rights organizations working in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) have faced. The global spread of COVID-19, combined with the Israeli systematic violations of Palestinian human rights especially those impacting women, and patriarchal structures and practices governing the daily lives of Palestinian women and girls, exacerbated the sufferings of women and increased the demand on WCLAC's services and interventions to combat increased gender based violence (GBV) and protect the victims.

Israeli violations of Palestinian rights continued to the same extent as usual and often intensified during lockdowns and the spread of COVID-19. Israel continued with its collective punishment policy of house demolitions when homes were the only remaining safe haven during lockdowns. Israeli military forces continued with its violations unabated; night raids, arrests especially child arrests, restrictions on movements, expansion in settlements, house demolitions, the Gaza blockade and countless other violations of human rights. Israeli discriminatory policies against the Palestinian civilian population, especially against Palestinian women married to Jerusalemites, continued as regular, but was further exacerbated by the restrictions of movement and the permit regime. This prevented women who exceeded the duration of their permits from leaving their homes or receiving medical treatment during the spread of COVID-19. Israel's denial of its legal obligations under international law led to additional discriminatory measures against Palestinians in the oPt in detecting the virus, receiving the necessary medication as well as the provision of the vaccination at a later stage. Restrictions of movement and the permit system imposed by the Israeli's denied women access to movement for family visitations due to overstaying their permits, but also prevented them from necessary medical treatments. Women under these situations were also forced to overstay their permits, and often to endure domestic violence and other forms of GBV due to restrictions of movement imposed by the Israeli military occupation.

Despite those compounded challenges, WCLAC has achieved a lot during the year and has been able to develop responsive strategies to meet the needs of Palestinian women victims of gender-based violence. With the wide spread of COVID-19 and the lockdowns imposed on Palestinian controlled territory, WCLAC had to develop non-conventional means of interventions and to adapt its programs to ensure that we could continue serving victims of GBV, providing necessary



consultations, social and legal counseling and protection services. WCLAC also intervened to ensure that official protection systems were functioning and providing sheltering and protection for potential victims of GBV. With only a few interruptions, litigating in courts continued and all legal and social support was provided to the victims. WCLAC services on free lines were available 24/7 during lockdowns, and WCLAC staff activated protection networks as well as protection committees in local communities to ensure immediate and efficient responses to emerging needs of women victims of GBV. WCLAC staff also joined response committees in their own locations to ensure the provision of humanitarian support to victims of GBV.

The year 2020 has proven that WCLAC was well-prepared to meet new challenges and positively intervene with innovative strategies and methods to address needs and priorities of women victims of GBV. We were able to join coalitions and networks to influence policies and legislation and to campaign against the increased rate of registered GBV and femicide cases. Due to the lock-down measures, the “locking in” of women with their abusers and the intrusion of men into the private sphere where women and girls are mostly present, WCLAC’s interventions were needed more than ever.

Many women lost their jobs and sources of income, often in informal sectors of the economy, thereby increasing the sufferings of women, especially those who are heading their own households. Increased levels of unemployment resulted in increased economic hardship for Palestinian families, and increased burdens of women to manage their families and meet their needs within the limited resources available. Women’s household responsibilities increased with on-line teaching, while the unpaid care duties to all members of the family, including children, the sick, the elderly and persons with disabilities doubled if not tripled. All of these factors increased GBV and the sufferings of Palestinian women who were mostly relegated back to their traditional roles as housewives and caregivers, while their participation in strategic committees and response emergency committees to COVID-19 were limited. Women’s participation in decision-making response committees remained limited to local committees in their own neighborhoods, and reached 16% representation at the most.

While it was globally known that during the global spread of COVID-19 there might be a remarkable increase in GBV, especially in the home, Palestinian feminist organizations like WCLAC were heavily attacked by conservative elements within Palestinian society. These conservative voices counter-campaigned against the feminist and women’s human rights organizations who were calling on the Palestinian President to pass the Family Protection Bill (FPB) by a Presidential Decree. The lack of political will on part of the Palestinian government combined with the conservative, tribalistic counter campaign, resulted in leaving it up to the women’s feminist movement to confront the conservative elements within the Palestinian society. Conservatives severely attacked the adoption of international human rights principles and our calls to the Palestinian authority to meet their legal obligations under international human rights law by harmonizing national legislation with treaties and conventions to which



Palestine has acceded, especially the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The Palestinian government was reluctant to adopt the FPB and claimed that the draft law was controversial, and suggested the postponement of its passage until after the Palestinian elections which will take place in May 2021. WCLAC joined efforts with the General Union of Palestinian Women and other feminist and human rights organizations to develop a wide national front for the adoption of the FPB and conducted a conference on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October, 2020 to launch the national front for the adoption of law. This was followed by a conference where all political parties were invited to ensure a wider Palestinian women's engagement in decision-making and representation in the upcoming elections. We called for our right to at least a 30% quota in the upcoming Palestinian Legislative Council Elections and requested the commitment of the political parties to the wider representation of women and youth in the upcoming elections. Despite that, legal, political interests and political alliances remain major obstacles for women's and youth's leadership and full representation in the upcoming PLC elections.

We are proud to present to you WCLAC's detailed annual report of 2020 which starts with a lengthy analysis of the major political developments during the year and their direct and indirect impact on women in our society. We then move to the operational part of the report to highlight major achievements and obstacles during the year to conduct our work. The report reflects the marvelous work that WCLAC and their partners from Palestinian Community Based Organizations (CBOs) have carried out during the year, and highlights achievements, statistics of services provided for women victims of GBV, as well as success stories of our services and interventions. It also highlights our national and international advocacy work towards achieving gender equality and women's rights.

I also wish to thank all WCLAC staff for their diligent and committed work during 2020 despite the unique and difficult circumstances under which we worked. They have proven to be highly committed to the core values, vision and mission of WCLAC, and have shown their readiness to work under pressure and in difficult situations, and to effectively respond to emergency situations. Special thanks to all WCLAC senior staff for their commitment to work professionally and under extreme pressure and to also undergo the process of strategic planning (2021-2025) despite the difficult circumstances under which we worked during 2020.

This year is WCLAC's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an organization committed to protecting and promoting women's human rights in Palestine. To the late Maha Abu-Dayyeh the cofounder of WCLAC and to all our Board Member and members of our General Assembly, we convey the deepest respect and appreciation for the support that you provide us in continuing to pursue our human rights vision and mission. We have now seen 30 years of diligent work in protecting and promoting women's rights, and many more years are still to come....



A special thank you to WCLAC partners and donors who supported us and ensured the sustainability and continuity of our work through their belief in us and their generous contributions to our programs.

**Randa Siniora**

**General Director**

# Annual Report 2020

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# Part I. Summary Report

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## 1.1 Political Brief

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The year 2020 has been unlike any other, and for Palestinian women it has brought increased challenges on multiple fronts. This section of the annual report outlines the main events and political developments of the year, and how they have affected the lives and human rights of Palestinian women.

**Section 1** looks at the first months of the year, before the outbreak of COVID-19. These months saw *inter alia* an increase of violence and attacks against the Gaza Strip, increased instability due to the protracted Israeli elections, and advocacy for a new Palestinian Family Protection Law. In **Section 2**, we then turn to the outbreak of COVID-19 in March, looking at the gendered impact of the pandemic and associated restrictions, and how this has affected Palestinian women's access to human rights. Disturbingly enough, despite the ongoing pandemic, International Humanitarian Laws (IHL) violations carried out by Israeli forces against Palestinians have actually increased compared to previous years. A review of IHL violations throughout 2020 and their impact on women is found in **Section 3**. Finally, **Section 4** deals with the other main political developments of 2020 – including the looming threat of an Israeli annexation of the West Bank, which added yet another dimension of fear, violence and insecurity to an already difficult year.

### ***1.1.1 2020 begins: increased violence towards Gaza, Israeli annexation plans, and advocating stronger legal protection for Palestinian women***

#### ***Increased violence in Gaza***

The beginning of the year witnessed a marked increase in the violence against Gaza. Throughout January and February, Israeli forces launched a series of attacks against the Gaza Strip. The violence escalated after January 21<sup>st</sup> when three Palestinians crossed the perimeter fence, reportedly throwing an explosive device, and were shot dead. The following disproportionate and brutal retaliation from Israeli forces included multiple airstrikes and explosive balloons launched toward Gaza. Several civilian targets were damaged in the attacks, including the destruction of a major water well with the interruption of water services to 30,000 residents in the Rafah area.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> OCHA Occupied Palestinian Territory: Overview January-February 2020.



On February 23<sup>rd</sup> a member of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) was killed by Israeli occupation forces, and his body retrieved by an Israeli military bulldozer in a degrading and distressing manner. This sparked outrage across Gaza, and led to even further hostilities and violence, including multiple Israeli airstrikes against targets in the Gaza Strip and the firing of rockets and mortar shells by the PIJ towards Israel.<sup>2</sup>

Escalation of violence and unrest of this kind highly affects the well-being of Palestinian women and their families. Besides causing physical injuries and death, the interruption of services and damaging of essential facilities disrupt the health and quality of life for Palestinians across Gaza. Vulnerable and marginalized groups are particularly at risk since they are not able to protect themselves or prepare for crisis to the same extent as others. Women most often also bear the responsibility of caring for children who are psychologically impacted by witnessing violence and airstrikes, as well as maintaining the household despite on-going crisis and conflict. The Gazan population thus began 2020 amidst an ever-worsening humanitarian crisis, compiled with an increased level of violence and attacks. It was a Gaza already facing deeper struggles than ever, that then had to rise up to the added challenge of the pandemic.

### *The Israeli elections, release of the US “Peace Vision” and plans for illegal annexation*

The first few months of the year were also marked by instability caused by the protracted Israeli elections, where a political deadlock had persisted ever since the first round of elections held in April 2019. This caused uncertainty and concern, especially among parts of the Palestinian population that are particularly vulnerable to possible changes in Israeli politics, there among women living in East Jerusalem, close to the Annexation Wall or adjacent to illegal settlements in the West Bank.

It was during this political stalemate that the Likud party with Benjamin Netanyahu at the forefront, began to use plans for further illegal annexation of the West Bank to gain political traction. *De facto* annexation had already been expanded earlier in the year, as it has been consistently for decades. Plans and tenders were announced for the continued expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank, particularly Area C and East Jerusalem, already in the first week of January.<sup>3</sup> Further plans were announced in February which if realized, would create a ring of settlements between East Jerusalem and Bethlehem.<sup>4</sup> However, the new vows of Netanyahu stretched even further, and involved the *de jure* annexation of large parts of the West Bank.

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<sup>2</sup> OCHA Occupied Palestinian Territory: Overview January-February 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Under-Secretary- General for Political Affairs Rosmeary DiCarlo, Briefing to the Security Council on the Situation in the Middle East, 21 January 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Nickolay Mladenov UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Briefing to the Security Council on the Situation in the Middle East, 24 February 2020.





The Likud party's plans for annexation were further bolstered and legitimized by the release of the US-led "Peace to Prosperity" vision on January 28<sup>th</sup>. As feared, the proposed plan did not abide by international standards or agreements, and in some respects presented direct violations of international law. Among these violations was the clearly expressed support for the further annexation of the West Bank by Israel, which would severely violate the Palestinian people's right to self-determination as enshrined in the common article 1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Following the release of the US vision, there was a marked increase in tension also in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, with a number of violent incidents. At the same time, the US vision seemed to give a sense of legitimacy to many Israeli politicians and illegal settlers, who were encouraged in moving forward in expansion of settlements and plans for annexation. These developments continued to increase the violence, uncertainty and fear experienced by Palestinian women and their families on a daily basis.

Almost immediately following the release of the US vision, Israel officially announced their plan to unilaterally annex large sections of the West Bank. This included the Jordan Valley and all illegal Israeli settlements,<sup>5</sup> and would violate international law and agreements as well as go against the repeated urging by the UN Secretary General against unilateral steps and annexation. With a coalition agreement struck between Netanyahu and former rival Benny Gantz in April 2020, Netanyahu was sworn in as Prime Minister of Israel for a period of 18 months on May 17<sup>th</sup>. The power-sharing agreement enabled the furthering and concretization of the annexation plans.<sup>6</sup>

The release of the US "Peace" vision, the instability of the Israeli elections and the electoral pledge to illegally annex more of the West Bank, set in motion events that continued to impact the rest of the year. The continued consequences of the threats of annexation are further discussed below under section IV.

### *Advocating for a new Family Protection Bill*

On the Palestinian political arena, the passing of a new Family Protection Bill has been debated throughout the year. Beginning in mid-February, a first reading of the Bill was held in the Palestinian Cabinet. WCLAC was invited to draft recommendations on how to render the law more gender sensitive along with Al-Muntada Palestinian Forum to Combat Violence Against Women and Amal's Coalition in the Gaza Strip. The issued recommendations included inter alia the need to more clearly define domestic violence, including all manifestations of violence against women and children. The recommendations also highlighted the need to render the Bill more gender sensitive by taking into consideration the power imbalance between the two gender groups, and between victims and perpetrators of GBV.

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<sup>5</sup> Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nikolay Mladenov, Remarks at the Security Council Open Briefing on the Middle East, 11 February 2020.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/17/netanyahu-takes-office-in-deal-that-could-see-west-bank-annexation>



At the next reading which was held in the Palestinian Cabinet on May 11<sup>th</sup>, it was clear that the recommendations lifted by WCLAC and women's rights partners had not been incorporated into the Bill in a meaningful way. However, while WCLAC and partners continued to advocate for a more gender sensitive legislation, a counter campaign was launched by conservative elements in Palestinian society. The counter campaign led by Sharia lawyers, advocated against the proposal submitted by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) and the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) for the passage of the Family Protection Bill as it was most recently presented to the Cabinet. The primary reason for this was the apparent link between the Family Protection Bill and the Palestinian accession or ratification without reservations of international conventions, including the widely debated Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW). The defamation and backlash against women organizations and women activists caused dramatic unrest within Palestinian society. The social media counter campaign influenced the policy making process and postponed the process of the review and enactment of the Family Protection Bill.

In light of this development, WCLAC and several other women's rights organisations joined force to advocate for the immediate passage of the Family Protection Bill through Presidential decree, to ensure that women are afforded the essential protection guaranteed therein. Although there are still gender gaps to be addressed, the passing of the Family Protection Bill would gain ground for the better protection of women's rights and safeguard against the risk for a backslide in women's emancipation.

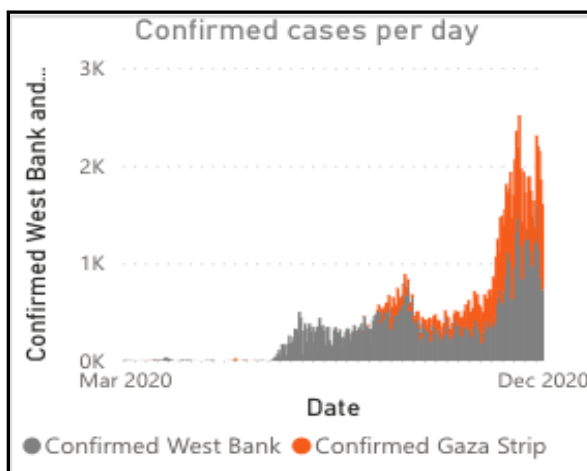
The campaign to pass the Family Protection has continued throughout the year. Women's rights organizations have highlighted the importance of passing the Bill, emphasizing that it increases the protection of Palestinian families, particularly women and children. It also outlines necessary reporting mechanisms, judicial procedures and family protection counsellors, all of which add to the security and access to justice of women victims of violence. At the end of the year, it seems that the Cabinet is close to passing the Family Protection Bill. In the meantime, the advocacy of WCLAC and other women's rights organizations continues.

### ***1.1.2 COVID-19 and the effect on Palestinian women***

On March 5<sup>th</sup>, the context of Palestinian women's lives changed drastically as the first seven cases of COVID-19 were confirmed in Bethlehem, and more were soon found in other locations throughout the West Bank. A state of emergency was declared by the Palestinian Authorities the same day, calling for the closure of educational and religious facilities as well as restrictions on gatherings and movement between cities. The first lockdown lasted from March 5<sup>th</sup> - May 26<sup>th</sup> but was soon followed by further restriction measures.

Understanding early on the high vulnerability of Palestinian society to the COVID-19 crisis, authorities took serious measures from the very outset. The first attempts of the Palestinian authorities to combat the spread of COVID-19 were largely successful, with levels of infection remaining significantly lower than in Israel and other countries throughout the region.<sup>7</sup> However, from August and onwards, there was a sharp rise in the number of new cases recorded per day in the West Bank,<sup>8</sup> reaching an all-time high in December, as can be observed in the graph from the World Health Organization (WHO) in Figure 1 below. By the beginning of January 2021, the number of new cases per day had begun to decrease but remained high, at around 1,000 new cases per day in all of Palestine.<sup>9</sup>

Following the first lockdown, short term local lockdowns or closures were declared throughout the West Bank during the summer as a second wave emerged – including the areas of Hebron, Nablus and Bethlehem inter alia – and again in November and December as cases began to increase in an unprecedented rate.



**Figure 1.** WHO statistics on confirmed cases of COVID-19 per day in West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza. (accessed: December 20, 2020)

In Gaza, the level of infection remained highly limited until August, after which the number of new cases per day soared. Strict restrictions and partial lockdowns were enforced between March and June,<sup>10</sup> and again in November and December as cases spiked. Social distancing and lockdowns have been particularly difficult to follow and enforce in the Gaza Strip due to the extreme population density, with large households often sharing small living spaces, and generally high-spread economic hardship and lack of resources.

Meanwhile, Palestinians in East Jerusalem have been subject to Israeli public health regulations, with social distancing first enforced by Israeli authorities on March 11<sup>th</sup>. Lockdown or severe closures and restrictions were maintained between March 19<sup>th</sup> – May 4<sup>th</sup>; July 6<sup>th</sup> – October 18<sup>th</sup>; and again on December 24<sup>th</sup> – January 9<sup>th</sup>. Throughout this entire period, East Jerusalemites have been discriminated against in terms of access to information, health care and testing.

<sup>7</sup> [https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unsco\\_socioeconomic\\_report\\_october\\_2020.pdf](https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unsco_socioeconomic_report_october_2020.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unsco\\_socioeconomic\\_report\\_october\\_2020.pdf](https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unsco_socioeconomic_report_october_2020.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.emro.who.int/countries/pse/index.html>; accessed January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2021.

<sup>10</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/double-quarantine-gaza-covid-19-and-blockade>



### *Palestinian women: at the intersection of two vulnerable groups*

Declared a global pandemic by WHO on March 11<sup>th</sup>, the COVID-19 virus is first and foremost a health crisis with severe effects on the lives, safety and wellbeing of human beings worldwide. Access to health care and information during the pandemic has been unequal, with Palestinian women being discriminated against both due to their gender and nationality. This is further explored under “Access to health care”, below. In addition to this however, the far-reaching regulations and safety precautions, necessary for the protection of people’s health, have caused a series of other detrimental effects on society. These include an economic recession, increased risk of violence, decrease in mental health and difficulties in accessing justice, inter alia. These secondary impacts have amplified societal structures and inequalities of gender, ethnicity and class. Throughout the pandemic and ensuing lockdown, vulnerable groups have become increasingly vulnerable, and those already at risk have been further stripped of protection and support.

Both the Palestinian population and women globally, represent particularly vulnerable groups who are targeted by these effects. Palestinians, because the health care system which has already been undermined and weakened by decades of Israeli occupation has been placed under additional strain. In addition, high population density, a high frequency of underlying health conditions and already widespread economic hardship makes Palestine even more susceptible to the negative impact of COVID-19. For women across the world, the impacts of COVID-19 have been particularly severe simply by virtue of their sex. They have had particular difficulties in accessing health care and witnessed an increase in gender-based violence (GBV). Women are also in general more vulnerable on the labour market, face greater risk for economic hardship, and have had disproportionately increased hours of unpaid labour while caring for children, ill family members and households in crisis.

At the intersection of these two vulnerable groups, Palestinian women have spent most of 2020 dealing with the impact of IHL violations and the occupation of Israeli military forces, the patriarchal structures and high prevalence of gender based violence within Palestinian society, and now the added third threat of COVID-19 which exacerbated all structural inequalities even further. WCLAC released the report [COVID-19 and Women's Rights in Palestine](#) in July, further highlighting the gendered impact of the pandemic. The struggle of Palestinian women has been palpable and WCLAC can bear witness to the manifestations in the testimonies collected by our field researchers as well as from the hundreds of women that have reached out to the GBV helpline to ask for urgent support, protection and counseling.

### *Accessing the right to health: Israel's neglect of responsibilities as an occupying power*



Needless to say, COVID-19 has placed an immense stress on the Palestinian health care system, which was already significantly weakened and undermined by decades of Israeli occupation and systematic oppression. For many years, the withholding of Palestinian Authority taxes by Israel and the cutting of aid to Palestinians has had a highly damaging effect on the budgetary allocation for public services including health care.<sup>11</sup> The purchasing of pharmaceuticals and importing of medical supplies is also restricted by the Israeli occupation, leading to further shortages.<sup>12</sup>

As an occupying power, Israel has a clear legal obligation under Article 56 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (GC IV) to ensure adequate food and medical supply for Palestinians, and to maintain medical services, public health and hygiene, particularly during a pandemic. If the supplies and capacities of the occupied territory are still lacking, the occupying power has an obligation under Article 59 of the GC IV to allow and facilitate relief and aid to the territory. Israel is also bound under international human rights law, with the ICESCR art 12.1 specifying the duty to meet Palestinians' right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.<sup>13</sup> This also includes underlying determinants to health such as the right to adequate food, water, sanitation and housing, which are all considered necessary requisites for health and well-being. Article 6 of the ICCPR enshrines the right to life, which is to be protected by the state while applying the principle of non-discrimination. Finally, the denial of medical treatment has in itself been classified as a form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, in accordance with the Convention against Torture or other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).

From the very beginning of the pandemic, Israeli authorities have consistently neglected their legal obligations under international law, and in several cases have even undermined or obstructed Palestinian authorities' attempts to care for the Palestinian population. Restriction of movement for Palestinians, enforced through settlement infrastructure and the annexation wall, have made it difficult or even impossible for people to access hospitals and health care services, and for medical equipment, including testing kits, to reach clinics.<sup>14</sup> Israeli authorities that exercise control over planning and construction in Area C have hampered Palestinian efforts to mobilize health care services. In some instances, they have even destroyed facilities necessary to address the outbreak, including the demolition of a building in Hebron that was intended to serve as a hospital specialized on COVID-19.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> UN Women: COVID-19: Gendered Impacts of the Pandemic in Palestine and Implications for Policy and Programming, Findings of a Rapid Gender Analysis of COVID-19 in Palestine, April 2020

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> ICESCR, article 12(1), as clarified through CESCR, General Comment No. 14: The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health (Art. 12), 11 August 2000, UN Doc. E/C.12/2000/4, para. 4

<sup>14</sup> UN document A/75/532.

<sup>15</sup> UN document A/75/532.

**Fact check:** Legal underpinnings for Israel's obligations as an occupying power, with regards to health

- ❖ **Geneva convention IV, Article 56:** "To the fullest extent of the means available to it, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring and maintaining, with the cooperation of national and local authorities, the medical and hospital establishments and services, public health and hygiene in the occupied territory with particular reference to the adoption and application of the prophylactic and preventive measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics [...]"
- ❖ **Geneva Convention IV, Article 55:** "To the fullest extent of the means available to it, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring the food and medical supplies of the population; it should, in particular, bring in the necessary foodstuffs, medical stores and other articles if the resources of the occupied territory are inadequate. [...]"
- ❖ **Geneva Convention IV, Article 59:** "If the whole or part of the population of an occupied territory is inadequately supplied, the Occupying Power shall agree to relief schemes on behalf of the said population, and shall facilitate them by all the means at its disposal.[...]"
- ❖ **ICESCR, article 12.1:** "The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health."
- ❖ **ICCPR, article 6.1:** "1. Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life."

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Michael Lynk, stated already in March that Israel was in "profound breach" of international obligations with respect to ensuring the health of Palestinians.<sup>16</sup> In a report released in October, he stated further, on the topic of COVID-19 that:

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25728&LangID=E>



*"It has also clearly demonstrated that, during a serious health crisis, one that crosses borders and communities, a two-tier occupation regime reinforces unequal rights, particularly the right to adequate health."<sup>17</sup>*

Despite the multiple Israeli violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, there was a certain level of coordination between Israeli and Palestinian authorities during the first few months of the pandemic. This was praised by international actors, including the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov.<sup>18</sup> This coordination came to a full stop, however, when it became clear that Israel was looking to use the opportunity of the world looking the other way during COVID-19, to unilaterally annex large parts of the West Bank in stark violation to international law.

Security coordination between Palestinian and Israeli authorities was officially suspended on May 19<sup>th</sup>. This led to even further reduced access to health care for Palestinians, and significantly increased challenges in containing the spread of the virus.<sup>19</sup> The rupture in coordination also put a hold on the import of essential medical supplies and further delayed or blocked the reference of patients to hospitals in Israel and East Jerusalem.<sup>20</sup> Finally, clearance tax revenues due to be transferred from Israeli to Palestinian authorities were blocked for seven consecutive months, dealing a final blow to Palestine's ability to fund the necessary health security measures and pay their life-saving medical personnel.

The compounded effect of an increasingly overburdened health care system, the rupture of any security coordination with Israel, and an economic crisis further deepened by the blocked tax revenues, have all contributed to further weakening Palestine's capacities and resources in dealing with COVID-19.<sup>21</sup> This may help explain the significant rise in cases that began in August and continued for the rest of the year. In November, Palestine announced that it would resume coordination with Israel,<sup>22</sup> and on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, it was announced that 1.14 billion USD in tax revenues had been transferred from Israeli to Palestinian authorities.<sup>23</sup> The actual effects that this will have on the ability of Palestinians to access health care is yet to be determined.

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<sup>17</sup> UN document A/75/532.

<sup>18</sup> UN Special Rapporteur Nickolay Mladenov, Briefing to the Security Council, March 30<sup>th</sup>

<sup>19</sup> UN document A/75/532.

<sup>20</sup> OCHA: "End of Palestinian Authority coordination with Israel in response to annexation threat: decision already impacting medical referrals", July 20th 2020.

<sup>21</sup> [https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unsco\\_socioeconomic\\_report\\_october\\_2020.pdf](https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unsco_socioeconomic_report_october_2020.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/17/pa-to-restore-israel-ties-as-annexation-threat-fades>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20201203-israel-transfers-1-14bn-in-tax-revenues-to-pa/>





As with many impacts of COVID-19, women have been particularly vulnerable to the effects of not being able to access health care and health information. In terms of contracting the disease itself, the statistics in Palestine have run contrary to the global trend, and shown that more women than men have tested positive to COVID-19.<sup>24</sup> The reasons behind this are still not clear, but may be connected to women's disproportionate participation in health care and their informal caregiving roles. UN Women reports that 60% of workers in the care sector, and 70% of frontline health workers in Palestine are women.<sup>25</sup> Already in a vulnerable position, and more confined to their homes than their male counterparts, women also risk having a more difficult time accessing health care and health information that is already scarcely available.

Most of all, WCLAC has noticed an effect on women's ability to access health care for treatments not related to COVID-19. As observed by UN Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk, movement restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation compromised Palestinians' access to health care already before the outbreak of the pandemic.<sup>26</sup> With lockdown restrictions, border closures and finally the rupture of coordination between Israel and Palestine, this has increased even further. As many Palestinians, especially from Gaza, depend on travelling past checkpoints in the West Bank or to East Jerusalem to access hospital care, the practical implications are, that vital treatments and diagnoses have been effectively put on hold.<sup>27</sup>

WCLAC has supported women cancer patients from the Gaza Strip who need to travel to the West Bank or East Jerusalem for chemotherapy, but whose access to health care was restricted as a result of border closures. In the beginning of the outbreak, the women continued to travel for treatment, but no precautions were taken to ensure their safety and health while traveling back to the Gaza Strip. They were denied testing for COVID-19 and were transported on crowded buses without any protection in place. The women were very fearful of contracting the virus, especially given their already lowered immune systems and lack of emergency health care available upon their return to Gaza. In April, they were informed that their upcoming trips to receive chemotherapy had been cancelled, with COVID-19 cited as the reason. At

#### **In her words...**

"Now I have missed my treatment day and I do not know when I will have treatment again. The Ministry of Health in Gaza told me that they will provide us with treatment in the Gaza Strip and we will not be able to travel due to [Israel's] measures to combat COVID-19. Israel refuses to issue entry permits and will not guarantee that we can take our treatment safely."

**Figure 1.** Testimony from woman supported by WCLAC, recorded in April 2020.

<sup>24</sup> CARE: "Reaching higher - Women's Political Participation and Access to Decisionmaking in the COVID-19 Crisis", October 2020.

<sup>25</sup> UN Women. COVID-19: Gendered Impacts of the Pandemic in Palestine and Implications for Policy and Programming. April 2020.

<sup>26</sup> COVID-19: Israel has 'legal duty' to ensure that Palestinians in OPT receive essential health services – UN expert, 19 March 2020, SR Michael Lynk.

<sup>27</sup> WHO, "Right to Health – Palestinian patient voices – Patients in the Gaza Strip unable to access healthcare", June 2020.





that time, no concrete plan for alternative treatment was introduced, except the verbal assurance that they would receive treatment in the Gaza Strip.

After fighting COVID-19 for over nine months, the much awaited vaccine was announced in December. Unfortunately, the access and distribution of the vaccine has proven to be just as discriminatory as provision of other health care throughout the year. On December 20<sup>th</sup>, vaccinations began in Israel and by January 1<sup>st</sup>, 10% of the Israeli population had received the first dose of the vaccine.<sup>28</sup> In the West Bank however, Israeli authorities will only be extending these vaccinations to illegal Israeli settlers,<sup>29</sup> despite Israel's obligations as an occupying power outlined above. This means that Israel is once again in breach of its legal obligations to respect Palestinians' right to health, by neglecting to secure access to vaccines.

Palestinian authorities have signed up with the Gavi Alliance, which is working to secure vaccines for low-income countries, and expects to receive some vaccinations for those most at risk through COVAX, an initiative co-led by the alliance and WHO.<sup>30</sup> Palestine has also been in negotiations with a number of other vaccine distributors, and announced in the end of December that the first shipment of 100,000 vaccines was expected to arrive within two weeks.<sup>31</sup> Once again, the effects of the occupation, blockade against Gaza and constant violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) is likely to impede Palestine's ability to secure the health of its population. Not only are financial resources needed, but there are also immense logistical challenges connected to the import since Israel exercises control over the borders. Also the storage of the vaccine is likely to pose significant problems, not in the least in Gaza where electricity is highly unreliable.<sup>32</sup>

### *Discrimination against East Jerusalemites in accessing the right to health*

Already before the pandemic, Israeli policies of fragmentation, lack of infrastructure and de-development in Palestinian neighbourhoods have created stark inequalities between the populations of East and West Jerusalem. This includes underlying determinants of health, and a population density that is twice as high in Palestinian neighbourhoods than in Israeli ones.<sup>33</sup> On top of this, residents of East Jerusalem have been systematically deprioritized and discriminated against by Israeli authorities in combatting COVID-19.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/01/world/middleeast/israel-coronavirus-vaccines.html>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/17/palestinians-left-waiting-as-israel-is-set-to-deploy-vaccine>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/covax>; <https://www.opb.org/article/2020/12/31/israel-coronavirus-vaccines-per-capita-palestine-covid-19-pandemic/>

<sup>31</sup> UNSCO Daily Press Brief, December 31st.

<sup>32</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/israel-vaccine-palestinians-coronavirus/2020/12/18/f1d8d572-4083-11eb-b58b-1623f6267960\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/israel-vaccine-palestinians-coronavirus/2020/12/18/f1d8d572-4083-11eb-b58b-1623f6267960_story.html); <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1780651>

<sup>33</sup> Al-Haq, JLAC, MAP: "COVID-19 and the systematic neglect of Palestinians in East Jerusalem", July 2020.



During the particularly sensitive first weeks of the pandemic, communication and messaging on COVID-19 and precautionary measures were spread by the Israeli authorities almost exclusively in Hebrew with no Arabic translations.<sup>34</sup> In addition, epidemiological investigations, testing, and the supply of medical drugs and treatment have all been inadequate and significantly more limited than the services provided to West Jerusalem neighbourhoods.<sup>35</sup> It was not until April 2<sup>nd</sup> that a drive-through testing clinic was set up in East Jerusalem, and even then only after significant lobbying from human rights organizations.<sup>36</sup>

Even so, local initiatives to increase access to health care, were also shut down. When local activists organized a testing clinic in Silwan, one of the areas of highest prevalence, the Israeli authorities promptly closed the clinic under the pretence that the test kits were provided by the Palestinian authorities.<sup>37</sup> Israeli authorities later opened a new testing clinic in the area,<sup>38</sup> but thereby missed several weeks of valuable mobilization against further spreading. Palestinian volunteers in Jerusalem have also been arrested while participating in efforts to disinfect schools and distribute food to underserved areas, and their aid materials have been confiscated.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the discrimination and hampering of East Jerusalem's attempts to deal with COVID-19, the rate of infections remained relatively low throughout the first wave. During the second wave that started during the summer months however, cases increased drastically. Now, relaxed restrictions, increased gatherings and the high population density all contributed a spike in infection rates.<sup>40</sup> In addition, several testing clinics that had closed after the first wave did not reopen, and discrimination against East Jerusalem in the provision of health care and medical supplies continued. Health care professionals in East Jerusalem have reported working under severe restrictions from Israeli authorities and continue to be undermined in their efforts.<sup>41</sup>

One group of women that has been particularly at risk throughout the year, are women who hold West Bank IDs but are married to Jerusalemites and residing in Jerusalem. As West Bank ID holders they have

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<sup>34</sup> CARE Palestine West Bank / Gaza, Urgent Call to Protection and Response to COVID-19 in East Jerusalem, Policy Brief 20 April 2020.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Al-Haq, JLAC, MAP: "COVID-19 and the systematic neglect of Palestinians in East Jerusalem", July 2020.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israeli-police-raid-palestinian-coronavirus-testing-clinic-in-east-jerusalem-1.8767788>

<sup>38</sup> UN document A/75/532

<sup>39</sup> Joint statement: Israeli Apartheid Undermines Palestinian Right to Health amidst COVID-19 Pandemic, April 8th 2020.

<sup>40</sup> [http://arabcenterdc.org/policy\\_analyses/another-test-of-palestinian-sumud-covid-19-in-the-west-bank-gaza-strip-and-east-jerusalem/](http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/another-test-of-palestinian-sumud-covid-19-in-the-west-bank-gaza-strip-and-east-jerusalem/)

<sup>41</sup> UN document A/75/532



not been entitled to health care in Jerusalem, but border closures and travel restrictions have also hindered them from moving between Jerusalem and the West Bank to access health care.<sup>42</sup>

### *The particular vulnerability of Gaza*

In all of this, Gaza stands out with a particularly high level of vulnerability. In the soon to be fourteen years of Israeli blockade, a human-made humanitarian crisis has unfolded in the Gaza Strip, and deepens for every year. The blockade itself is a glaring violation of Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, amounting to collective punishment of the entire civilian population of Gaza.<sup>43</sup> It has also brought with it untold suffering, the destruction of basic societal functions, and a never-ending series of violations of both IHL and IHRL. In 2020, the collapse of Gaza's health care system has been brought into the spotlight, along with an ever-deepening economic crisis. In many ways, it is often the women of Gaza who bear the brunt of the blockade. The economic crisis is seen to have a deeper impact on women, with higher rates of unemployment and food insecurity. Women also tend to report lower levels of mental and physical health, most likely due to the compounding effects of the blockade and patriarchal structures, including the heavy burden of caring for households and children amidst trauma and violence.

Already before the pandemic, Gaza's health care system had been pushed to the brink of collapse.<sup>44</sup> In March when the outbreak began, the Gaza Strip had 87 ventilators, of which 80-90 per cent were already in use, to serve a population of two million.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, as recalled by UN Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk, Gaza's population was more vulnerable to the pandemic due to being densely populated, having a rising level of malnutrition and poorly controlled non-communicable diseases, among other factors.<sup>46</sup>

With a surge of COVID-19 infections that has persisted from August and onwards, Gaza has suffered just as expected from a health care system placed under a level stress that it cannot bear. Between July and October the amount of confirmed COVID-19 cases rose from 11 to 4,285.<sup>47</sup> Strict restrictions have mitigated some of the spread, but has not been able to alleviate the severe strain on the health care system. By the end of September, WHO reported that 47 per cent of essential drugs were at zero stock

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<sup>42</sup> WCLAC submission to the Special Rapporteur "The Culture of Impunity: Israel's Ongoing Violations against Palestinian Women during COVID-19", May 2020.

<sup>43</sup> UN document A/75/532.

<sup>44</sup> Joint statement: Israeli Apartheid Undermines Palestinian Right to Health amidst COVID-19 Pandemic, April 8th 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Joint statement: Israeli Apartheid Undermines Palestinian Right to Health amidst COVID-19 Pandemic, April 8th 2020.

<sup>46</sup> COVID-19: Israel has 'legal duty' to ensure that Palestinians in OPT receive essential health services – UN expert, 19 March 2020, SR Michael Lynk.

<sup>47</sup> UN document A/75/532.



level.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, during the rupture of coordination between Israel and Palestine, many of those most in need of urgent health care in East Jerusalem were not permitted to access it.

In tandem with the growing health crisis, the economic recession has also hit the Gaza Strip particularly hard. The Gaza Strip was already facing a significantly higher level of unemployment and economic hardship than the West Bank. Now, COVID-19 related lockdowns have compounded with the blockade and frequent closings of Gaza's border crossings throughout the year, to generate an unemployment rate of 48.6 per cent, compared to 18.7 per cent in the West Bank. The figure among women is even higher, at 65 per cent (compared to 32.2 per cent in the West Bank).<sup>49</sup> This meant that in the third quarter of the year, the number of employed persons in the Gaza Strip had decreased by 17 per cent, compared to the same quarter 2019. As a comparison, the equivalent decrease in the West Bank was 5.5 per cent.<sup>50</sup>

Amidst this, another shadow epidemic has spread and further tightened its grip on Gaza – a deepening mental health crisis. In September, there had already been 24 reported cases of suicide, compared to 22 in all of 2019. Out of these 24, four were women, and five children.<sup>51</sup> The actual number of suicides is thought to be significantly higher, as they are often misclassified as accidents due to stigmatization and fear of legal ramifications.

According to mental health organizations working in the Gaza Strip, the reason behind the rising number of suicides is a loss of hope in the future, especially among youth, who see no end to the suffering of Gaza and no way to exercise agency in their own lives. COVID-19 is thought to have exacerbated this even further, as the economic recession and skyrocketing unemployment deprives young people of the chance to start careers and families. Another reason behind decreasing mental health, among women particularly, is post-traumatic stress and anxiety disorders brought on by intimate partner violence (IPV), something which has also increased significantly in 2020. The taboo on speaking of IPV or other forms of gender based violence (GBV) is thought to further deepen mental health problems among women, who then see suicide as the only way out of oppression and abusive relationships.<sup>52</sup>

### ***Deprioritizing women's health – accessing SRHR***

In addition to being at greater risk of contracting COVID-19, and blocked access to essential treatments, the pandemic has also had another adverse affect on women's health. Throughout the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, health issues that specifically concern women are at risk of being deprioritized when

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<sup>48</sup> UN document A/75/532.

<sup>49</sup> [Gisha.org/updates/11690](http://Gisha.org/updates/11690).

<sup>50</sup> [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_En\\_31-12-2020-end-en.pdf](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_31-12-2020-end-en.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> OCHA article "Deterioration in mental health situation in the Gaza Strip", October 5th 2020.

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/deterioration-mental-health-situation-gaza-strip>



resources are limited. Limited access to sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) has been a concern throughout Palestine long before the outbreak of COVID-19. A combination of severe lack of resources in the Palestinian health care system due to the Israeli occupation and patriarchal norms within Palestinian society, has meant that SRHR have long been deprioritized. Shortage of equipment and restricted mobility have had a negative impact on maternal health care, with essential natal care services being inaccessible particularly to women in remote or restricted areas (e.g. Gaza, Area C, H2 and areas cut off by the Annexation wall or settlements).<sup>53</sup>

As COVID-19 has demanded an ever-increasing amount of resources within the health care system, a portion of funding has been rerouted from other areas. Globally, women's health issues and SRHR in particular have been deprioritized during the pandemic.<sup>54</sup> In Palestine, this has been compounded with the effects of movement restrictions, with women in need of emergency health care, childbirth or postpartum care placed at risk of not being able to access life-saving services. Particularly Palestinian women who would have needed care in Jerusalem or Israel, have been unable to travel to access hospital services.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, deprioritizing of women and a lack of gender aware health planning, has also placed women in situations where they cannot access their SRHR. CARE and UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) note for instance, from quarantine centers in Gaza in April of this year, that all medical and security staff were male, although over 45% of the persons staying in the centers were women. Gender norms and taboos, and lack of female staff then created further barriers for the women from accessing SRHR, basic hygiene needs and mental health support, inter alia.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> CARE-OCHA: Rapid Gender Analysis to inform the 2021 Humanitarian Programme Cycle in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, September 2020.

<sup>54</sup> CARE & International Rescue Committee: Global Rapid Gender Analysis for COVID-19, March 2020.

<sup>55</sup> CARE-OCHA: Rapid Gender Analysis to inform the 2021 Humanitarian Programme Cycle in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, September 2020.

<sup>56</sup> CARE-OCHA: Rapid Gender Analysis to inform the 2021 Humanitarian Programme Cycle in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, September 2020.

### Increase in gender-based violence

In tandem with these other effects, COVID-19 has had a substantial impact on women's risk for violence. As lockdowns have ensued and people encouraged to stay home as much as possible, it has become painfully clear that home is not a safe place for everyone. Instead, for many women it is the place where they are most at risk in terms of health and personal security. As women worldwide have been effectively locked into their homes with a potential perpetrator, the level of gender-based violence (GBV) has escalated – and Palestine has been no exception. From studying other public health emergencies,<sup>57</sup> we can see that they tend to have a two-pronged effect. Firstly, a worsening of several factors linked to GBV exacerbate the risk of violence for women. Secondly, the pandemic and associated restrictions make it more difficult for women to access support and protection services.<sup>58</sup>

In Palestine, women already face a particularly high prevalence of GBV, further exacerbated by the Israeli occupation. The 2019 Violence Survey carried out by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, found that 29 per cent of Palestinian women have experienced some form of violence during the past twelve months of the survey. It also revealed that 3 out of 10 married women witnessed some form of violence and that 57 per cent of currently or ever married women had experienced psychological violence by their husbands at least once in the past twelve months. The equivalent figure for physical violence is 18 per cent and sexual violence at 9 per cent.<sup>59</sup> Several known risk factors of GBV have been significantly exacerbated by COVID-19, as seen in Figure 3.

#### GBV risk factors – all exacerbated by COVID-19

- ❖ Increased economic hardship and unemployment
- ❖ Increased stress and tension in the household
- ❖ Enforced coexistence (often in small living quarters)
- ❖ Inability to leave escalating situations or seek refuge
- ❖ Decrease in contact with social support networks, friends and family
- ❖ Perceived or real food insecurity

**Figure 3.** GBV risk factors.

As referral pathways and support systems have been obstructed by COVID-19, women's organisations throughout Palestine have risen to the challenge of finding new ways of reaching women at-risk. Like WCLAC, several organisations have established or expanded toll-free helplines to replace or complement the function of in-office counselling and support. Online campaigns have been launched drawing

<sup>57</sup> E.g. the Ebola outbreak in West Africa (2014-2016) and DRC (2018), and cholera outbreak in Yemen (2016)

<sup>58</sup> UNICEF Helpdesk Gender-based Violence in Emergencies, Emergency Response to Public Health Outbreaks, September 2018.

<sup>59</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics: 2019 Violence Survey.



attention to the risk of increased violence and how to seek help, including the campaign ["We are your voice"](#) that was launched by WCLAC and other members of the coalition FADA in June.

By May, UN Women reported that 53 per cent of respondent service providers in Palestine had observed an increase in domestic violence during lockdown. Similarly, CARE reported that 27 per cent of male and 33 per cent of female respondents indicated that GBV was an increased risk for women and girls in the crisis.<sup>60</sup> CARE has also noted an alarming 20 per cent increase of GBV in certain Palestinian towns, including Nazareth.<sup>61</sup> A survey carried out by Juzoor in April, found that 19.5 per cent of respondents indicated that domestic violence had increased during the lockdown, and a striking 70.8 per cent believed that it would grow even worse if the lockdown were extended.<sup>62</sup>

WCLAC observed a remarkable spike in consultations in mid-April (a 75 per cent increase compared to previous weeks), which coincided with the lockdown across the West Bank being extended. Moreover, there was an increased level of severity to the violence reported to WCLAC throughout the year, and an increase in threats to women's lives. Many cases also revealed long backgrounds of violence in the family that escalated further during lockdown. In addition to this, more women have reported economic hardship due to lockdown restriction, which has clearly interacted with and further exacerbated the risk for domestic violence.<sup>63</sup>

WCLAC has also particularly noted the link between economic hardship and GBV throughout the year. COVID-19 has clearly exacerbated both of these issues, and consultations with women have revealed that they are often intertwined. Families that have suffered from increased economic difficulties throughout the year have often also reported a raised level of violence. In several instances, it has been necessary to first secure the family's access to food and adequate living space before being able to address the GBV. Based on WCLAC's observations, the depth of economic hardship revealed through consultations has grown more severe throughout the year, as has its correlation with increased violence.

### *Decrease in reporting*

According to UN Women, figures from April 2020, suggested that while 50 per cent of providers saw an increase in calls to helplines, only 33 per cent experienced an increase in the official reporting of cases of violence against women, and 28 per cent reported a decrease, suggesting that fewer women were able

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<sup>60</sup> CARE-OCHA: Rapid Gender Analysis to inform the 2021 Humanitarian Programme Cycle in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, September 2020.

<sup>61</sup> CARE-OCHA: Rapid Gender Analysis to inform the 2021 Humanitarian Programme Cycle in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, September 2020.

<sup>62</sup> Juzoor for Health and Social Development. Gender-Based Violence during COVID-19 Pandemic Palestine , May 2020.

<sup>63</sup> See more in WCLAC's report "COVID-19 and women's rights in Palestine", June 2020.



to seek proper help and protection despite an increase in need.<sup>64</sup> Understandably, when confined to the home, many women have found that they lack the privacy and possibility to reach out to a helpline or even e-counselling, and are especially unable to reach out for protection or the filing of a police report. The decreased reporting may also be attributed to barriers, actual or perceived, for women to access justice and services during lockdown and restrictions.<sup>65</sup>

This echoes a global trend where both service providers and the general population indicate an increased level of violence that is not necessarily being reported. As noted above, COVID-19 has not only exacerbated risk factors for violence, but also hindered women from seeking help and protection. CARE and OCHA note in a joint assessment that fear of contracting the virus, restrictions of movement, and lack of privacy during lockdowns have all contributed to making it more difficult for women to seek assistance.<sup>66</sup>

WCLAC has noticed a similar trend, with many women reaching out through chat functions on Facebook for instance, when not able to visit or call. It has also been common for friends or relatives of a woman at-risk to reach out in her place. Finally, many women have reached out under other pretences, such as asking for economic support, and have only after several conversations made clear that they are in need of protection from GBV. This is believed to be a way for women to seek support without angering a perpetrator that may be listening in on the call, when privacy is hard to come by.

### *Shelter services*

The pandemic also hampered referral pathways in 2020. Women were prevented from leaving the house to search for protection and support, and shelters were at times unable to provide a space that was safe both in terms of protection from violence and from COVID-19. In Gaza, the government-run shelter of protection for women was closed down during the first lockdown restrictions.<sup>67</sup> WCLAC's shelters have also, like those of other women's organisations been affected. In March and April, at a time when the level of violence and number of calls to WCLAC's helpline was peaking, restrictions and quarantine regulations put a temporary stop to admitting women to protection shelters. The regulations at the time called for two weeks' quarantine before a woman at-risk could enter a shelter, but offered no guidelines as to how to provide a safe quarantine period that also ensured women's security and confidentiality.

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<sup>64</sup> UN Women. In brief – Rapid assessment on COVID-19 and domestic and family violence services across Palestine, May 2020.

<sup>65</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/impact-covid-19-crisis-access-women-victims-and-survivors>

<sup>66</sup> CARE-OCHA: Rapid Gender Analysis to inform the 2021 Humanitarian Programme Cycle in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, September 2020.

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/crisis-within-crisis-fighting-gender-based-violence-gbv-during-covid-19>





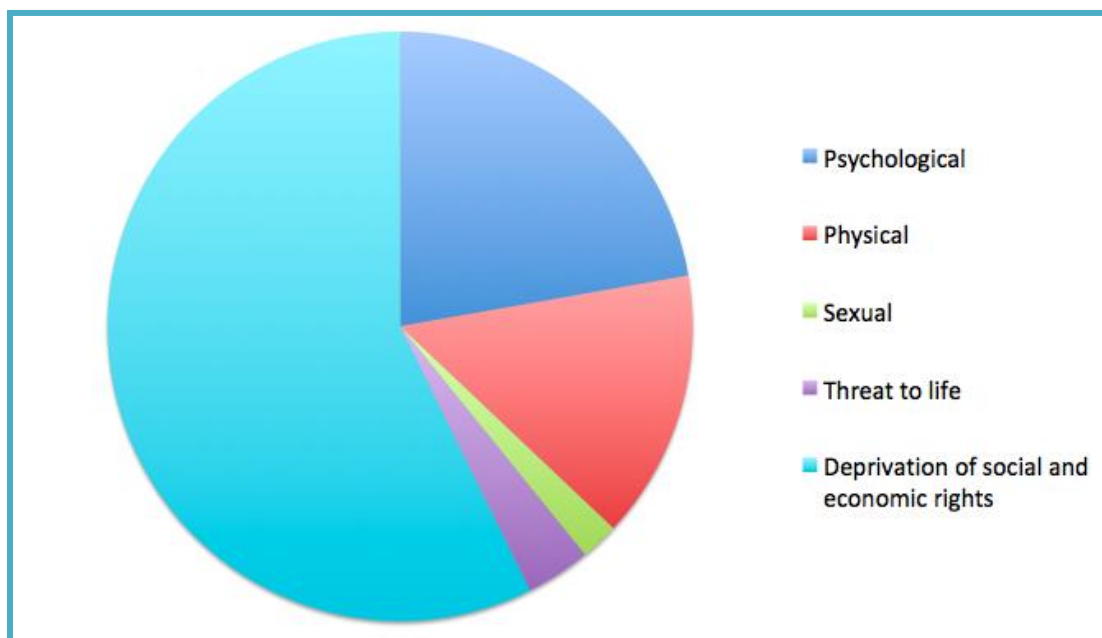
Following advocacy efforts by WCLAC and other women's right organisations, the Ministry of Social Development drafted new procedural guidelines later adopted by the Palestinian Cabinet that enabled protection and safety for women at risk. The new procedural guidelines included COVID-19 testing for victims of domestic violence in need of protection, and cooperation between the Police Family Protection Units and Ministry of Health to facilitate a safe space for protected persons while awaiting their test results. Women were then allowed to quarantine in isolated rooms in existing protection shelters. These guidelines made it possible once again for shelters, including WCLAC's, to protect women and also ensure the health and well-being of all involved.

### ***Accessing justice***

Besides an increase in GBV, one of the most palpable impacts of COVID-19 for the women supported by WCLAC has been blocked access to justice. Following the declaration of a state of emergency, Civil Courts were completely closed between March 22<sup>nd</sup> and May 10<sup>th</sup>, Sharia Courts closed on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, opened partially for follow-up on urgent cases on April 14<sup>th</sup>, and completely opened on May 18<sup>th</sup> in governorates that were considered free of COVID-19 by the Ministry of Health. After the Eid al-Fitr holidays, all courts were officially declared open on May 26<sup>th</sup>, both for the filing of new cases and to follow up on previously lodged ones.

Blocked access to justice had concrete and devastating effects for women across Palestine. Unable to file for divorce, fight custody battles or even petition for the enforcement of previous custody rulings, women found themselves separated from their children or locked into volatile marriages without anywhere to turn for help. WCLAC heard from women whose former husbands refused to return their children after court ordained visitation hours were over, but also those whose former husbands refused to visit or care for their children according to their responsibilities. This has caused significant psychological distress for women and has also presented a high risk of harming the emotional and physical well-being of both women and children. In addition, women were unable to file for or follow up on cases concerning alimony or maintenance, further deepening economic hardship for a group already particularly vulnerable throughout this crisis.

Consultations on economic and social rights were by far the most common reason to call WCLAC's helpline, between March 5<sup>th</sup> and May 30<sup>th</sup>. The surge of consultations during the second week of April was particularly dominated by this increase, with women across Palestine calling for information and advice on how to deal with the court closures. After this initial surge, the amount of calls concerning court cases decreased, but consultations on economic hardship, gender based violence and psychological difficulties remained. This suggests that women, after the initial shock, accepted the fact that they could not access legal remedies during lockdown, but instead requested support in dealing with the aftermath of this.



**Figure 4.** Calls to WCLAC's GBV Helpline March 5th-May 30th, reported by type of incident.

UN Women warned in May that the needs of women victims of violence were not being adequately addressed when justice and security institutions developed emergency plans in response to the pandemic and lockdowns.<sup>68</sup> The same month, WCLAC communicated an official request to the Chief Justice of Sharia Courts for the partial reopening of courts to hear emergency cases. WCLAC has also lobbied for a gender conscious understanding of what constitutes an "emergency case" and for this to include cases that have particular impact on the lives of women and their children, including custody, alimony, maintenance and visitation rights.

The reopening of courts in May was a great relief for women across Palestine. WCLAC saw an immediate resurgence in the amount of women calling to receive consultations on existing court cases and also to file new ones. Although lockdown and other regulations have been essential for the safety and health of society, accessing justice remains a basic human right to be safeguarded,<sup>69</sup> and also serves as a

<sup>68</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/impact-covid-19-crisis-access-women-victims-and-survivors>

<sup>69</sup> See e.g. CEDAW General Recommendation no. 30 on Women in Conflict Prevention, Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations and General Recommendation No. 33 on Women's Access to Justice, which highlight the obligation of states to ensure that justice is accessible and responds to the specific needs of women.



fundamental means of accessing the enjoyment of other rights. The necessity of securing access to justice has become clearer than ever before throughout this year.

In Jerusalem, courts closed again during each of the following two lockdowns, but maintained online services for emergency cases. Alimony and custody cases were included as emergencies, which was important for safeguarding the rights of women. Divorce and several other pressing matters of family law have however not been viewed as emergencies. In the West Bank, the courts remained open after May, but not at full capacity. Due to COVID-19, courts operated only with 30 per cent of their personnel. This, in combination with long waiting lines and high pressure on the courts after the closures, has continued to impact women's access to justice throughout the year. The hearing of cases and communication with the parties have been slowed down, and cases have been significantly delayed. WCLAC noticed throughout the second half of the year that many women avoided filing or following up on court cases, presumably due to these delays. Particularly, women who were already involved in one court case were hesitant to open another.

### *An economic recession and denied labour rights*

With an already fragile economy and high unemployment, Palestine has been particularly susceptible to the economic crisis that has followed in the wake of COVID-19. Lockdown restrictions have led to closure of businesses and loss in livelihoods, affecting people throughout the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, and women especially. The Palestinian Bureau of Statistics (PBS) has recorded a 12 per cent decrease in the GDP during 2020. The sharpest decline, 20 per cent compared to the previous year, was noted in the second quarter when strict lockdowns and restrictions were imposed.<sup>70</sup> It is estimated that after the first lockdown period, approximately 121,000 Palestinians lost their jobs.<sup>71</sup> Two out of five household had their income halved or more, during the same time period (March-May 2020).<sup>72</sup> In addition to this, the seven months' blocking of tax revenues that were due to be transferred from Israel to Palestine, has further deepened the economic recession, as these tax revenues are estimated to constitute 70 per cent of the total Palestinian revenues.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup><http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?tabID=512&lang=en&ItemID=3879&mid=3171&wversion=Staging>

<sup>71</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/more-demolitions-new-settlement-expansion-plans-form-backdrop>

<sup>72</sup> [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_En\\_31-12-2020-end-en.pdf](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_31-12-2020-end-en.pdf)

<sup>73</sup><http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?tabID=512&lang=en&ItemID=3879&mid=3171&wversion=Staging>

Also in the financial sphere, women have been hit particularly hard by the effects of COVID-19. It was reported already in March that more than half of survey respondents in Palestine experienced a significant decline in livelihoods and income as a result of the pandemic. In nearly every respect, female respondents found it more difficult to earn a living during the pandemic than their male counterparts. 28 per cent of female respondents stated that they were not able to work at all, compared to 8 per cent of men. Similarly,

UN Women found that 95 per cent of Palestinian women leaders of MSMEs reported that their businesses were negatively impacted by COVID-19, due to a decrease in demand, movement restrictions and less support in childcare.<sup>74</sup>

### The Palestinian economy 2020, in numbers

Decrease in GDP	-12%
Decline in service sector	-10%
Decline in construction activity	-35%
Decline in industry activity	-12%
Decline in agriculture	-11%
Decline in exports	-7%
Decline in import	-5%
Increase in unemployment rate	+1.5%
Total unemployment rate	27.8%

**Figure 5.** The Palestinian economy 2020

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_En\\_20-12-2020-eco-en.pdf](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_20-12-2020-eco-en.pdf)

By May, it was measurable that 71 per cent of respondents had fully or partially lost family income due to the crisis, with women noting it to a larger degree (76 per cent) than men (65.5 per cent).<sup>75</sup> As noted by AWRAD, the reason for this may be two-fold: firstly female-headed households are likely to lose income more readily than male-headed ones, and secondly women most often bear the responsibility for purchasing food and other essential items and caring for the household, and may therefore be more affected and aware of decreased earnings.<sup>76</sup> CARE also reports that during the first half of the year, the participation of Palestinian women in the labour force dropped from 18% to 15%, which is particularly devastating given the efforts that have been taken to reach the current level of participation.<sup>77</sup> It may take many years to recover the lost ground and reach the levels of female employment that were measured before COVID-19.

Palestinian women have been particularly targeted by the economic impacts of COVID-19 due to several reasons. They represent a more vulnerable group in the workforce, with an unemployment rate three times greater than their

<sup>74</sup> CARE Palestine, Gender Rapid Assessment: A Summary of Early Gender Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic, March 2020.

<sup>75</sup> AWRAD: Coping with COVID-19 Impacts and Coping Strategies among Palestinians, May 2020.

<sup>76</sup> AWRAD: Coping with COVID-19 Impacts and Coping Strategies among Palestinians, May 2020.

<sup>77</sup> CARE Palestine: "Reaching Higher - Women's Political Participation & Access to Decisionmaking in the COVID-19 Crisis", October 2020.



male counterparts, lower wages and less access to benefits and social security.<sup>78</sup> In 2018, the daily wage rate for men was 129 NIS for men, but only 92 NIS for women.<sup>79</sup> Women are also overrepresented in the informal sector, with 40.5 per cent of women employed in some form of informal work.<sup>80</sup> This places them at a particularly high risk of losing their employment and of finding themselves completely without benefits or social and legal protection. In addition, the programmes and interventions introduced to stimulate the economy, are not always gender conscious and risk not targeting the hundreds of thousands of women that have been affected by the economic recession. WCLAC commemorated Labour Day of this year by issuing a call for the greater prioritization of the needs of Palestinian working women in the governmental economic interventions and responses to COVID-19, which can be [accessed here](#).

As in many emergency settings, women have also faced greater responsibilities at home and often shouldered the caregiving and home schooling role during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among several other consequences, this has meant that many women cannot continue working as much as they have before. CARE found that 44 per cent of women reported an increase in unpaid work due to the pandemic, compared to 31 per cent of men.<sup>81</sup> The economic effects of COVID-19 are particularly devastating for the 11 per cent of Palestinian women who are the main providers within their households.

In connection with these dire economic impacts, many families have also faced increased food insecurity.<sup>82</sup> This has led to increased tension and insecurity in many homes, further exacerbating the risk for GBV. In addition, lack of nutrition can lead to a weakened immune system with a greater risk of contracting the virus and more severe complications. Women are known to be more likely to reduce their own intake of food when facing food shortages both in terms of quantity and quality, and to adopt other negative coping strategies.<sup>83</sup>

Respect for labour rights has also decreased, and the situation for Palestinian workers employed in Israel has become increasingly precarious during the pandemic. After the initial outbreak of COVID-19, Israeli authorities closed the border but allowed approximately 60,000 Palestinian workers to temporarily reside in Israel for two months so that they could continue their work despite border closures. Israeli employers were mandated with ensuring adequate housing, sanitation and food for temporarily residing Palestinian workers, but most did not live up to this requirement. Instead, workers were forced to live in dire

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<sup>78</sup> WCLAC: Demands Greater Prioritization of the Needs of Palestinian Working Women in the Governmental Economic Interventions and Responses to COVID-19, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020.

<sup>79</sup> CARE-OCHA: Rapid Gender Analysis to inform the 2021 Humanitarian Programme Cycle in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, September 2020.

<sup>80</sup> CARE-OCHA: Rapid Gender Analysis to inform the 2021 Humanitarian Programme Cycle in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, September 2020.

<sup>81</sup> CARE Palestine, Gender Rapid Assessment: A Summary of Early Gender Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic, March 2020.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> UNESCWA: "The Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality in the the Arab Region", 2020/Policy Brief.4.



conditions, many reporting that they had to sleep at construction sites or in greenhouses. Israel also refused to test Palestinian workers for COVID-19, and on several occasions workers who displayed symptoms were dropped at checkpoints without proper information, testing or coordination for further treatment or quarantine,<sup>84</sup> thereby violating their right to health care and undermining Palestinian efforts to control the outbreak within its borders. After the first lockdown, Israel started allowing more workers to cross the border for three weeks at a time. Once again, the living conditions reported for the workers were dismal.<sup>85</sup> As of July, workers could pass freely across the border again.

Palestinian workers returning home from Israel throughout this entire period, placed their families at great risk of contracting the virus. Wives of husbands who came home with symptoms were placed under an enormous psychological and emotional workload. Women reported caring for their quarantined husbands and children in small living quarters, and at the same time facing stigma in their community as they were seen as potential bearers of COVID-19. In some cases, wives and children had to evacuate their homes so that the husband could quarantine alone. Even in these cases however, women were then expected to care for both households, while also dealing with psychological stress and health concerns.<sup>86</sup>

In tandem with this, the economic and labour rights situation has also intersected with the detrimental effects of the Israeli occupation itself. Israeli authorities have continued to target Palestinians' livelihoods despite the crisis. During the first lockdown, the Palestinian NGO Al-Haq reported several attacks that harmed Palestinian workers and their livelihoods, including settler attacks in the West Bank on shepherds and their livestock, a violent attack on a farmer tending to his agricultural lands, as well as Israeli warships firing at fishermen's boats in Northern Gaza.<sup>87</sup>

### *Israeli prisons and COVID-19*

The situation for Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons continues to be dire and was further exacerbated by the outbreak of the pandemic. By the end of November, there were 4400 Palestinians in Israeli prisons, of which, 41 women and 170 children.<sup>88</sup> These figures have remained relatively unchanged throughout the year, with no noticeable decrease in the amount of prisoners held, despite Palestinian and international urgings to release prisoners at risk of contracting the virus. In November alone, Israeli military forces detained 413 Palestinians, including 48 children and 7 women.<sup>89</sup> Many prisoners, estimated

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<sup>84</sup> <http://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/16831.html>

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/.premium-palestinian-workers-forced-to-sleep-in-factory-because-employers-feared-lockdown-1.8991921>

<sup>86</sup> UN Women: "COVID-19: Gendered Impacts of the Pandemic in Palestine and Implications for Policy and Programming", April 2020.

<sup>87</sup> Al-Haq: "Israel's Gross Violations of Human Rights in the Face of COVID-19", 2 April 2020-

<sup>88</sup> Addameer, November newsletter.

<sup>89</sup> Addameer, November newsletter



at 700 persons in April, have pre-existing conditions that place them at particular risk during the pandemic.<sup>90</sup> Of the 43 women who were detained at the outset of the pandemic, 12 of them were already suffering from some form of illness.<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, the dire conditions in the prisons greatly compound the risks for all prisoners.

WCLAC called for the immediate release of all prisoners, in a [statement](#) issued on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, and in the meantime for Israeli authorities to meet their responsibilities to protect all Palestinians deprived of their liberty. Overcrowding, poor nutrition and lack of sanitation and hygiene have all increased the risk of exposure to COVID-19 within prisons. Israel has a clear legal obligation under the Fourth Geneva Convention articles 3 and 76, to protect Palestinian prisoners and detainees, and an obligation under international human rights law to particularly protect the rights of women and children (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW] and Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC] respectively). The specific need to protect prisoners during COVID-19 was also further stressed by IASC,<sup>92</sup> and in several statements made by UN human rights experts, including one particularly highlighting the need to release Palestinian minors and to pay increased attention to their needs during the pandemic.<sup>93</sup>

Despite this, Israel continued to discriminate against Palestinian prisoners and neglected to secure adequate protection within detention facilities. UN Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk, noted that hundreds of Israeli prisoners were released citing COVID-19 as a reason, but that this act of precaution was not extended to Palestinian prisoners and detainees. Along with other UN experts, the Special Rapporteur again urged Israel not to discriminate in the protection of prisoners, and to immediately release the most vulnerable groups, particularly women, children, older persons and those with pre-existing medical conditions.<sup>94</sup>

Instead, the spreading of COVID-19 took hold in prisons as predicted. By November, over 100 cases of COVID-19 had been confirmed in Galboa prison.<sup>95</sup> UN Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk noted with concern the increase in rates of infection among Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons, and drew particular attention to a child who contracted the virus, despite calls to release or protect those most vulnerable to COVID-19.<sup>96</sup> For the women detainees this has posed a great health threat, and for the countless women

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<sup>90</sup> COVID-19: Israel must release Palestinian prisoners in vulnerable situation, say UN experts, 24 April 2020.

<sup>91</sup> <http://www.addameer.org/publications/international-women%E2%80%99s-day-%E2%80%A643-palestinian-women-detention>

<sup>92</sup> IASC Interim Guidance – COVID-19: Focus on Persons Deprived of their Liberty, March 2020, OHCHR and WHO

<sup>93</sup> “In light of COVID-19 crisis, UN officials call for immediate release of all children in detention, including Palestinian children,” May 11<sup>th</sup> 2020.

<sup>94</sup> COVID-19: Israel must release Palestinian prisoners in vulnerable situation, say UN experts, 24 April 2020.

<sup>95</sup> Addameer, November newsletter.

<sup>96</sup> UN doc A/75/532.





whose children or other relatives are imprisoned it has caused fear and severe anxiety. Disturbingly enough, instead of taking precaution measures it seems that COVID-19 has in some instances been used as an excuse by Israeli forces to inflict further suffering on prisoners, including children. A 15 year old child was detained on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, and subsequently held in isolation under dire conditions for 45 days after having tested positive to COVID-19. He was not given any medical treatment during this time, and denied soap and shampoo for 14 days.<sup>97</sup>

With the vaccination campaigns in Israel now begun, it has also been made clear that Palestinian prisoners are not among the first prioritized, despite being at significantly high risk. Instead they will fall under the second priority group which may have to wait additional months before receiving their first dosage.<sup>98</sup> Recently there have been indications that they may not even be included in the second priority group, with news sources reporting that the Israeli Public Security minister ordered for Palestinian security prisoners to not be vaccinated.<sup>99</sup>

In addition to the severe health hazards facing prisoners, visits from family members and lawyers to prison facilities were halted during COVID-19 restrictions. This despite the fact that these visits are regularly held using telephones and with a glass wall separation, which means that the risk of contaminating prisoners is already minimal.<sup>100</sup> The restriction of visits led to great psychological suffering for detainees and family members, particularly for children detainees. It also compromised detainees' right to legal advice and support, which was especially damaging to those waiting in pre-trial detention and whose trials were temporarily suspended.

### *COVID-19 and the role of women: unpaid labor increases*

2020 has also seen a dangerous trend of backtracking in the emancipation of women. Gender roles and division of responsibilities are already rigid and wide-spread in Palestinian society. In accordance with traditional patriarchal structures, men are often considered decision-makers and providers, whereas women are primarily responsible for household maintenance and care. These roles have also been further accentuated and entrenched after decades of stress, trauma and threats from living under Israeli occupation.

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<sup>97</sup> Addameer, August newsletter.

<sup>98</sup> <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.HIGHLIGHT-against-covid-directives-israeli-minister-orders-not-to-vaccinate-prisoners-1.9402652>

<sup>99</sup> <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-orders-jails-not-vaccinate-palestinian-security-prisoners>

<sup>100</sup> Addameer: "Palestinian Prisoners' Day – Prisoners Fight Imprisonment and COVID-19".





Throughout this year, COVID-19 has exacerbated these roles even further. Lockdowns and movement restrictions relegated hundreds of thousands of women to their traditional role as caregivers and service providers in the home. When messages of social distancing and other precautions began to be circulated, women were among the first to be asked to stay home. When schools closed on March 5<sup>th</sup>, women overwhelmingly shouldered the responsibility of home schooling their children, often while attempting to continue their own work from home as well. Traditional caregiver roles also ensured that women bore the majority of the responsibility in caring for sick and elderly family members.

Besides representing several steps back in the forwarding of women's empowerment in society, this has also led to widespread emotional and physical exhaustion among women. On a global level, women already perform 76.2 per cent of the total hours of unpaid care work,<sup>101</sup> and emergencies such as this tend to further increase the burden. Many women have also dealt with emotional and physical exhaustion from the added burden of increased unpaid labour. Reports indicate that overall, women have experienced higher levels of stress than men due to the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>102</sup> A survey carried out by Juzoor showed that both men (42.5 per cent) and women (39 per cent) indicated that men were helping out more with housework during the pandemic.<sup>103</sup> However, the workload still seems to have been significantly heavier for women. Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD) found that among Palestinian respondents, 68% of women noted a significant increase in household duties compared to only 44 per cent of men.<sup>104</sup>

At the same time, a CARE rapid gender analysis indicates that when it comes to household decision-making, COVID-19 has done little to challenge the patriarchal norms of men having the final say.<sup>105</sup> This paints the picture that Palestinian women have been called upon during the pandemic to take a greater responsibility in terms of care and household duties, with their unpaid

### In her words...

"My routine changed before and after the quarantine, as I am a feminist and working with the governorate of Hebron, I used to go out every day to finish my work and do the needs of the house, but now my husband is the only one who is going out at the permitted time only. My daily burdens increased, my daily work increased at home as a result of the demands and needs of the family, my movement became less [...]"

**Figure 6.** Testimony of woman from Hebron, recorded by WCLAC field researchers.

<sup>101</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_633135.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_633135.pdf)

<sup>102</sup> CARE-OCHA: Rapid Gender Analysis to inform the 2021 Humanitarian Programme Cycle in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, September 2020.

<sup>103</sup> Juzoor: "Impact of the COVID-19 Outbreak and Lockdown on Family Dynamics and Domestic Violence in Palestine", June 2020.

<sup>104</sup> <http://www.awrad.org/en/article/10707/Coping-with-COVID-19-Pandemic-Impacts-and-Coping-Strategies-among-Palestinians>

<sup>105</sup> CARE Palestine, Rapid gender analysis, April 2020.



labour increasing significantly more than that of their male counterparts. Meanwhile, the added stress and responsibility has come with no increase in decision making power within the household, but with a noticeable decrease in mental health and well-being.

### Women in leadership

Women's leadership stands out as another important challenge for Palestinian women, not in the least in the aftermath of COVID-19. Today, fewer than 12 per cent of Palestinian decision makers are women.<sup>106</sup> Women also face significantly higher unemployment rates than men, despite graduating at higher rates from both secondary school and higher education.<sup>107</sup> This means that despite being more educated, women are not able to affect the development of their society to nearly the same extent as men.

The same patterns are reflected on the household level, where 80 per cent of men and 48 per cent of women indicate that men should have the final say in family decisions. According to surveys conducted in some parts of Palestine, women's employment does little to change the patriarchal decision making patterns in the home. In fact, in the Jordan Valley, where women are the most economically active, only 9 per cent of women had final say in household decisions, compared to a 22 per cent average in West Bank and Gaza.<sup>108</sup>

This year marks the 20 year anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), which established the necessity of ensuring that women's needs, voices and perspectives are an integral part of preventing, resolving and recovering from conflict, and in building sustainable peace. COVID-19 has put this framework to the test, and once again shone a

#### Women in Palestine represent...

70% of frontline health workers

60 % of care workers

49 % of the population

23 % of ministers

12 % of decision makers

**Figure 7.** Women's participation in Palestine

Source: CARE, "Women's Political Participation<sup>[113]</sup> & Access to Decision making in the COVID-19 Crisis", October 2020.

<sup>106</sup> CARE Palestine, Gender Rapid Assessment: A Summary of Early Gender Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic, March 2020.

<sup>107</sup> CARE Palestine: "Reaching Higher - Women's Political Participation<sup>[113]</sup> & Access to Decisionmaking in the COVID-19 Crisis", October 2020.

<sup>108</sup> CARE Palestine: "Reaching Higher - Women's Political Participation<sup>[113]</sup> & Access to Decisionmaking in the COVID-19 Crisis", October 2020.



light on women's participation and leadership in emergency settings. Particularly so in the militarized, patriarchal and violent reality that many Palestinian women are already navigating.

In Palestine, as in many other contexts worldwide, women have been noticeably absent from the planning and implementation of emergency response during the pandemic. Despite women making up nearly 60 per cent of workers in the care sector and 70 per cent of frontline health care workers, men still represent the majority of senior health staff,<sup>109</sup> and have made up the overwhelming majority of health decision makers. Women have also been significantly underrepresented in local emergency and neighborhood committees, and in higher level strategic planning. Women constituted only 14 per cent of the members in strategic committees, emergency committees and local committees during the pandemic. Meanwhile, the few women who have been in notable decision making positions, particularly the Minister of Health Dr. Mai al-Kaila and the Minister of Women's Affairs Dr. Amal Hamad, were scrutinized and criticised to a disproportionate extent compared to their male peers.

In January 2021, WCLAC published a report together with partners Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), Mercy Corps and Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) titled ["Now and the Future: Gender Equality, Peace and Security in a COVID-19 World"](#), which highlighted the experiences of women during COVID-19 and addressed them from within a framework of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. The report revealed that most of the interviewed women's organizations were not approached to engage in response planning and implementation during the first three months of the outbreak. Some organizations reported instead taking the initiative to advocate for their own involvement in emergency response after the first three months.<sup>110</sup> In the Gaza Strip, organizations noted that women had been almost completely excluded from emergency leadership. Leaders of women's organization were not called upon to provide support until the very late stages of the outbreak, and even then many of them felt that they were primarily being used in order for authorities to share the responsibility of failure of the implemented response.

Women's rights organizations throughout Palestine also reported that the COVID-19 response had negatively impacted their work. For instance, a women's center in the northern Jordan Valley was closed down in order to make space for an expanded health center, and ended up having to move to a different location.<sup>111</sup> Lack of gender sensitive response has also had a negative impact on the programs put in place to tackle increased economic hardship, violence and food insecurity in the wake of COVID-19, as they have

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<sup>109</sup> CARE-OCHA: Rapid Gender Analysis to inform the 2021 Humanitarian Programme Cycle in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, September 2020.

<sup>110</sup> "Now and the Future: Gender Equality, Peace and Security in a COVID-19 World", AIDA, GAPS, Mercy Corps, WCLAC, January 2021.

<sup>111</sup> Now and the Future: Gender Equality, Peace and Security in a COVID-19 World", AIDA, GAPS, Mercy Corps, WCLAC, January 2021.



not taken into account the gendered dimension of women's experiences. Besides not making use of frontline workers' knowledge and experience, the exclusion of women from decision making has thus also created a gender bias in the relief and care offered. These shortcomings would likely have been alleviated to some extent by including women and women's rights organizations in emergency response planning and implementation.

On all levels of planning and implementation, WCLAC has observed a tendency to view women as recipients of services and charity, rather than as actors and decision makers. To the extent that the role of women in the crisis has been observed, the official discourse within emergency response has focused on the traditional and care-giving role of women within the household. This is highly problematic as it calls on women to offer their care-giving services and increase their unpaid labour, without offering a seat at the decision making table.

Women's organizations across Palestine have recognized this issue throughout the year, and actively campaigned for greater female representation in leadership and decision making. WCLAC launched a campaign in October, to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNSCR 1325 and highlighting the WPS Agenda within the context of COVID-19. Moving forward, we must also be aware of the image of women that is spread during these times, and guard the hard-won advances that feminism has made. Emergencies present a significant risk of backsliding into traditional gender roles, especially when patriarchal structures are already a prominent part of society.

### **1.1.3 IHL violations**

At the outset of the pandemic, there was some hope that the restrictions and the need to focus on virus containment would at least lead to a slight respite from the Israeli IHL violations that otherwise impact Palestinian lives on a daily basis. The UN Secretary General called for a global ceasefire on March 23<sup>rd</sup> in light of COVID-19,<sup>112</sup> and was joined by WCLAC and 64 other women's rights organisations on the occasion of Eid-al-Fitr.<sup>113</sup> Instead, 2020 has marked a year where the frequency and severity of IHL violations seems to have increased, or at best continued under the premise of "business as usual".

One of the most flagrant violations of IHL has already been explored above: Israel's failure to respect Palestinians' right to health care and to fulfil its obligations as an occupying power. In addition to this, COVID-19 has in several instances led to new dimensions of other IHL violations and increased violence. This includes settlers spitting and threatening to infect Palestinians in the West Bank, soldiers entering

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<sup>112</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1059972>

<sup>113</sup> [https://www.wclac.org/News/315/WCLAC\\_joins\\_call\\_with\\_other\\_civil\\_society\\_organisations\\_from\\_the\\_MENA\\_regions\\_for\\_global\\_ceasefire\\_and\\_unity\\_in\\_light\\_of\\_COVID19](https://www.wclac.org/News/315/WCLAC_joins_call_with_other_civil_society_organisations_from_the_MENA_regions_for_global_ceasefire_and_unity_in_light_of_COVID19)



homes during night raids without wearing face masks, or the demolition of hygiene structures that are essential for keeping healthy during the pandemic. All of these are further explored below.

### *Night raids, arbitrary detentions and detention of minors*

Night raids and arbitrary detentions are a frequent occurrence throughout Palestine and always cause great damage and suffering. They have continued throughout the entire year, and even in the period March 1<sup>st</sup> – April 3<sup>rd</sup>, while both Palestine and Israel were enduring the first lockdown, 100 home raids were recorded in the West Bank, during which 16 minors were arrested.

These violations tend to disproportionately impact the well-being of women, as they often bear the traditional responsibility of caring for the household and children. Minors are frequently arrested during the raid, or at the very least left traumatized. COVID-19 has added yet another dimension to the intimidation and harassment associated to home raids. Testimonies recorded by WCLAC's field researchers highlight that in many of the cases Israeli soldiers were not wearing protective gloves or masks when entering homes or detaining persons. Women reported spending days trying to disinfect their homes after Israeli Occupation Forces had entered, often without wearing masks or gloves. Several of the testimonies collected by WCLAC also highlighted that the Israeli soldiers were accompanied by dogs during night raids. This has caused distress for Muslim families who do not allow dogs to enter the house or interact with them due to religious beliefs.

Women supported by WCLAC have also expressed great distress about detention or interrogation of family members, worrying that loved ones or they themselves would contract COVID-19 as a result. The detention of underage children has caused particular suffering for mothers and other family members. Several children were kept in detention without any health precautions in place, and mothers have remained anxious about their health for weeks after the children returned home.

#### *In her words...*

"I was very strong during the raid and even after the arrest of my husband, I was strong and coherent in front of my children, but deep inside I felt great anxiety and fear, because these raids negatively affect the psyche of my children. Moreover, the repeated incursions intended to be in the early morning hours just before the children go to school and we leave to work, results in spreading terror for family members. Nevertheless, I always try to relieve them even though every time the house is stormed with Israeli occupation soldiers, it will be more difficult than before, this time it was the first time they bring dogs inside the house, and also in amidst of corona."

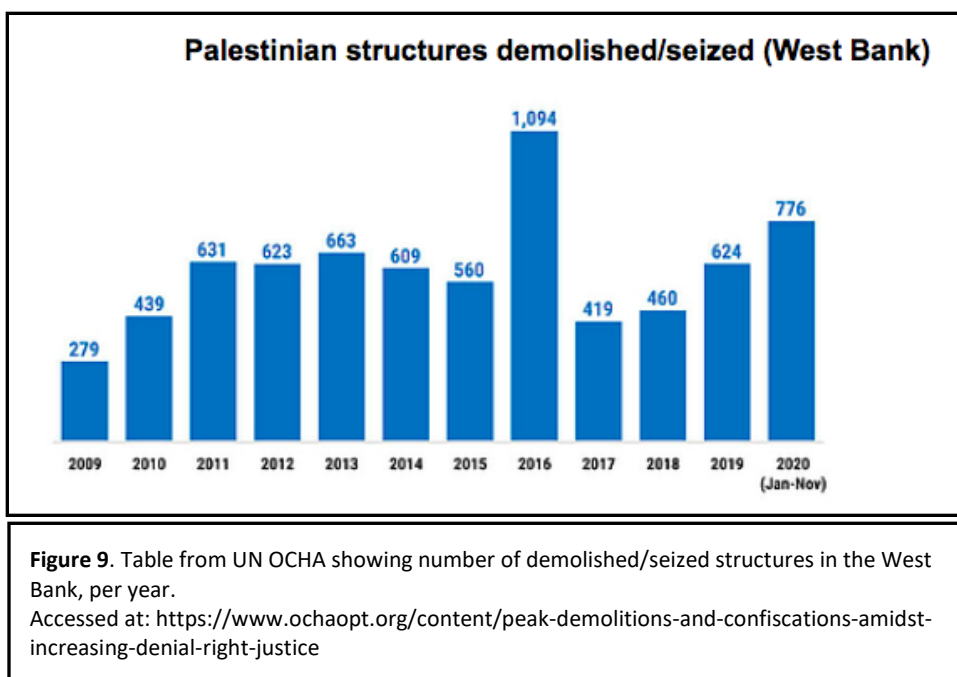
**Figure 8.** Testimony recorded by WCLAC field researcher.

### *House demolitions*

House demolitions have also continued throughout the entire year and have in fact increased, despite the pandemic and lockdown. United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported

that by the end of November, 766 Palestinian-owned structures had been demolished or seized across the West Bank – the second highest figures ever recorded by OCHA (the highest being in 2016). In total, 946 Palestinians had been displaced by the end of November, including 488 children. The vast majority of demolitions and seizures were carried out in East Jerusalem or in Area C.<sup>114</sup>

House demolitions and the destruction of other essential structures have a highly detrimental impact on Palestinian women, as they are most often responsible for caring for the home and raising children. Among other things, women often shoulder the responsibility for gathering water, maintaining the hygiene and cleaning of the house, and caring for relatives who have taken ill – tasks which have all been particularly burdensome during COVID-19. However, these undertakings are rendered near impossible when water and hygiene structures are targeted. Home demolitions have an even deeper impact on women as they try to keep caring for their families and children without shelter. Most often, house demolitions force families to seek refuge in the homes of relatives. This leads to the further diminishing of wives' influence in the domestic sphere, and erosion of their decision-making power. There is also an increased risk of domestic violence and abuse against women who move into homes of their husband's relatives.<sup>115</sup>



Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the imposed lockdown restrictions, Israeli authorities announced in March that there would be a suspension on demolitions of inhabited structures. Despite this, OCHA

<sup>114</sup> [www.ochaopt.org/content/peak-demolitions-and-confiscations-amidst-increasing-denial-right-justice](https://www.ochaopt.org/content/peak-demolitions-and-confiscations-amidst-increasing-denial-right-justice)

<sup>115</sup> CARE-OCHA: Rapid Gender Analysis to inform the 2021 Humanitarian Programme Cycle in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, September 2020.



reported the demolition or seizure of 127 Palestinian structures by Israeli occupying forces between March and May, marking the highest number of targeted structures during the month of Ramadan in recent years. The targeted structures included numerous residential buildings, and also structures related to water and hygiene, including community water tanks and mobile latrines.<sup>116</sup> This is particularly alarming as it has been detrimental to Palestinians' ability to mitigate the spread of the virus and significantly obstructs Palestinians' ability to realize their right to health in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law. Targeting of essential structures and residential homes has also further deepened the impact of economic hardship among the most vulnerable.

In East Jerusalem, the record for the highest number of home demolitions in one year was broken already in October, when the number of demolitions had reached 125 residential homes.<sup>117</sup> Out of these 84 housing units were self-demolished due to the enactment of Amendment 166 of the Planning and Building Law, which came into full effect in the end of 2018 and has caused an upwards trend of demolitions since then.<sup>118</sup> Self-demolitions have had a particular increase, as families are threatened with high fees if they do not carry out the demolition themselves. OCHA reports of families being threatened with demolition fees amounting to 90,000 shekels, the equivalent of 28,500 USD.<sup>119</sup>

Amendment 166 has sharply increased fines and punitive measures for building violations, which particularly targets Palestinian neighbourhoods and families in East Jerusalem and the West Bank for whom building permissions are near impossible to obtain. OCHA estimates that the area that Palestinians are allowed to build upon represents less than 1% of the land in Area C, and 15% in East Jerusalem.<sup>120</sup> To illustrate, the NGO Ir Amim reports that out of the 21,000 housing units that were advanced through housing plans in Jerusalem in 2019, only 8% were in Palestinian neighbourhoods, although Palestinians make up 38% of the population in Jerusalem.<sup>121</sup> OCHA also notes that less than 4% of Palestinian building permit applications were approved between 2015 and 2019.<sup>122</sup> The sharp increase in home demolitions in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, and especially self-demolitions, is a direct consequence of this dual discrimination – and not even a pandemic has stopped 2020 from continuing the trend of increasing demolitions.

### *Environmental negligence and chemical sprayings*

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<sup>116</sup> OCHA West Bank Demolition and Displacement reports January – May.

<sup>117</sup> Ir Amim, "Two Months Before the End of the Year, 2020 is Already the Record Year for Home Demolitions in East Jerusalem", 28 October 2020.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/peak-demolitions-and-confiscations-amidst-increasing-denial-right-justice>

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Ir Amim, "Two Months Before the End of the Year, 2020 is Already the Record Year for Home Demolitions in East Jerusalem", 28 October 2020.

<sup>122</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/peak-demolitions-and-confiscations-amidst-increasing-denial-right-justice>





Throughout the year, WCLAC field researchers and IHL unit have placed special emphasis on recording violations related to environmental negligence or harm. These types of violations have long been carried out against Palestinian communities and their land, and affects their health, safety and well-being, both in the long and short term.

In Gaza, fourteen years of the Israeli blockade has had a detrimental effect on the environment. One of the main hazards is the lacking waste management. As one of the most densely populated areas in the world, with highly limited waste management equipment due to the blockade, Gaza faces significant challenges in dealing with waste. With a population of two million, Gaza produces nearly 2,000 tons of waste per day, and does not have the resources or space to manage this in a safe way. Informal dumping sites have opened in several locations across Gaza, many of which are bordering residential areas. The sites are growing by the day without any clear possibility of curbing the growth. UNDP reports on how one such dumping site in Beit Lahia has significantly polluted the surrounding environment, causing health hazards for children, and contaminating agricultural lands. During COVID-19 the resources made available to waste management service providers has diminished even further, causing a further worsening of the situation. In addition, infectious waste has increased heavily presenting further health hazards. UNDP was set to introduce a specialized microwave device to treat infectious waste, however the import of the devices was impeded by the rupture in coordination between Palestinian and Israeli authorities.<sup>123</sup>

#### In her words...

“The water here is much polluted and the smell of water and air is nasty. Mosquitoes and flies abound in the summer and in winter because of the occupation’s refusal to spray these areas from the Palestinian side.”

- Woman from Gaza,  
interviewed by WCLAC field

During the first half of the year, WCLAC also recorded numerous testimonies on the pollution of groundwater wells and aquifers in the Gaza Strip by Israel leading to increased risk of severe diseases among the population. Women were particularly affected by pollution and water shortages as they are overwhelmingly responsible for agriculture, livestock and household duties. Several women in Gaza explained to WCLAC’s field researchers that their villages are surrounded by wastewater basins controlled by the Israeli occupying forces. The women described that wastewater basins were regularly opened and emptied toward their villages, at the behest of the Israeli forces, and also leaked into previously clean underground water wells. Buying clean water is expensive for families already constant shortage or exposure to disease by using the polluted water. The leaking of waste water toward the villages also has other effects on the quality of life, as described in “In her words”, Figure 10. This causes even further psychological and emotional suffering for Palestinian families living close to the Israeli border.

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<sup>123</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/waste-away-living-next-dumpsite>





In addition, chemical spraying of agricultural lands in the Gaza Strip continued to be carried out by Israeli occupying forces. Israeli crop-duster planes fly along the perimeter fence, spraying highly concentrated herbicides when the wind is blowing westwards so as to target farmlands on the Gazan side. These sprayings have detrimental effects on the crops, and also on the health of farmers. The fields are not possible to farm for up to 10 days after chemical sprayings, and often the crops are damaged beyond repair. This causes enormous financial losses, with one farmer reporting losses of 5,000 USD after having to dispose of his crops.<sup>124</sup> Chemical sprayings also disproportionately target Palestinian women who have a particularly large role in agriculture and food production. Agricultural work is the primary source of work for a large portion of Palestinian women in the affected areas, and is especially crucial for women who are the main providers of their households.

EuroMed Rights reported several incidents of chemical spraying between January 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> of this year on Gazan agricultural lands adjacent to the perimeter fence, stretching from Beit Hanoun in the north to Rafah in the south.<sup>125</sup> In April WCLAC's field researchers recorded testimonies from eleven women on chemical sprayings in Gaza. These sprayings took place on April 5<sup>th</sup> from 6.30 am to 12 pm and again on April 7<sup>th</sup> from 7.30 am to 9.00 am. Women described how they fled the agricultural fields as the planes approached and sprayed a foul-smelling substance that they did not recognize. One woman's son was on a horse as they tried to escape the field, and the horse was shot and killed by occupation soldiers. Women feared for their health, but also their main source of income and nutrition during the months of the pandemic.

#### In her words...

"These are their usual practices since years, in order to make us want to leave our land. However, I will not leave, and I teach my sons also to be patient, we will still cultivate even if they continue to flood the lands and spray them with chemicals and despite my major loss, I will continue to cultivate and plant the land."

- Mother and farmer from Gaza, after the repeated chemical spraying of her land

### Settler violence

Violent attacks by Israeli colonial settlers against Palestinians and their property increased with the outbreak of COVID-19. In the month of April, the human rights organization B'tselem recorded a spike in settler attacks.<sup>126</sup> OCHA also reported an increase in settler attacks during the first lockdown, with a 20 per cent increase of settler violence during the period March – May 2020, compared to the same time

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<sup>124</sup> EuroMed: "Israel's Herbicide Spraying: Palestinian Farmers' Means of Sustenance Jeopardised", 22 April 2020.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> [https://www.btselem.org/press\\_releases/20200423\\_violent\\_attacks\\_by\\_settlers\\_spike\\_in\\_april](https://www.btselem.org/press_releases/20200423_violent_attacks_by_settlers_spike_in_april)



period 2019.<sup>127</sup> Oxfam called to attention the impunity that settlers were enjoying in carrying out these violent attacks in the shadow of lockdown regulations.<sup>128</sup>

Attacks continued throughout the year, with OCHA recording 759 incidents of settler attacks/trespasses in all of 2020, representing levels similar to previous years.<sup>129</sup> Attacks were carried out toward persons and property, with a spike in vandalized olive trees during the harvest season. Not only were attacks during this time carried out in direct violation of the lockdown regulations enforced in both Israel and Palestine, they also significantly endangered the lives and security of Palestinians and once again the fear of contracting COVID-19 added yet another dimension to the harassment, intimidation and suffering caused by the violations.

During the first lockdown, WCLAC's field researchers noted a shift in violence patterns. More settler attacks were carried out during the night-time, presumably since the lockdown regulations made it difficult to move freely during the day. Much like night raids, night time attacks by settlers add yet another layer to the traumatization that Palestinian families experience. Also, fear of COVID-19 was exploited to cause further psychological harm during the attacks, with several testimonies noting that settlers sprayed unknown substances or spat saliva on doors, cars and electronic gates. In one case a family's water tank was contaminated with an unknown substance, and they were without access to water until the Palestinian authorities were able to change the tank the next day.

#### Settler violence in 2020 – OCHA reports:

- ❖ 759 incidents
- ❖ 135 Palestinian injuries
- ❖ 60 Palestinian casualties
- ❖ 9,360 trees vandalized
- ❖ 284 vehicles vandalized

**Figure 13.** Settler attacks recorded by OCHA in 2020. Source:  
<https://www.ochaopt.org/page/settler-related-violence>

<sup>127</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/unprotected-settler-attacks-against-palestinians-rise-amidst-outbreak-covid-19>;  
[https://ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/PS/A\\_75\\_376\\_AUV.pdf](https://ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/PS/A_75_376_AUV.pdf)

<sup>128</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/violence-and-impunity-west-bank-during-covid-19-pandemic>

<sup>129</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/page/settler-related-violence>



Settler attacks cause enormous psychological, physical and economic damage. Palestinian women living close to settlements report living in constant fear of attacks, especially knowing that these are most often carried out under impunity without any judicial repercussions. Attacks cause trauma among both adults and children, which women are then often responsible for trying to heal and restore. In addition, women are particularly at risk of settler violence during the day, when men are away at work, and the targeting of pregnant women or women who have recently given birth have severe and long lasting consequences.<sup>130</sup> The particular vulnerability of women in settler attacks is illustrated in the story below, shared in the UN Special Committee's report to the Secretary General in October of this year.

**Excerpt from the UN Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories:**

*"On 15 December 2019, a group of six settlers threw stones at three Palestinian women and a four-year old girl who were sitting in the yard of their house in Madama village, adjacent to Yitzhar settlement, Nablus Governorate. As they fled into the house, two of the women were hit with stones and one of them - at the time five months pregnant - fell twice. She reported that she was later treated in the hospital for an injury to her shoulder and for medical examination of possible complications related to the pregnancy. Another 20 settlers gathered and smashed three windows with iron pipes and threw one stone into the house, before a group of Palestinians approached the house, prompting the settlers to leave. Fearing further attacks, the family relocated for over two months."*

Accessed at: [https://ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/PS/A\\_75\\_376\\_AUV.pdf](https://ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/PS/A_75_376_AUV.pdf)

#### **1.1.4 Annexation threat, international relations and Palestinian reconciliation**

Along with COVID-19, there has been one other significant threat looming over Palestine in 2020. After the Likud party announced plans to formally annex large parts of the West Bank during the election campaigns early in the year, the plans started to become all the more concrete. As mentioned above, the power sharing agreement reached between Netanyahu and Gantz, also facilitated the forwarding of

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<sup>130</sup> [https://ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/PS/A\\_75\\_376\\_AUV.pdf](https://ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/PS/A_75_376_AUV.pdf)



annexation plans. The official plans included annexation of all illegal Israeli settlements throughout the West Bank as well as the Jordan Valley.

In one way, the annexation plans represent a continuation of Israel's repeated violations over the past seven decades of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. This right is enshrined in the common article 1 of both the ICESCR and the ICCPR. In violation of international law and signed agreement, Israel has *de facto* been annexing Palestinian territory in the West Bank for decades, by building illegal settlements, fracturing and enclaving Palestinian communities and broadening their own. What makes the current plans even more harmful and threatening, is that they will lead to annexation not only *de facto*, but also *de jure*. Once formalized this illegal annexation can prove near impossible to reverse.

### *The impact of annexation*

Annexation of the West Bank is a flagrant violation of international law, human rights law and previous agreements between Israel and Palestine. In itself, annexation constitutes a unilateral act of aggression, forbidden under international law.<sup>131</sup> On a more practical level, the annexation of large parts of the West Bank would fundamentally violate Palestine's right to self-determination, and also have a devastating impact on the Palestinian people's daily lives, and their ability to exercise multiple human rights.

The Annexation wall and the isolation of Palestinian villages by surrounding illegal settlements and checkpoints already have a detrimental impact on Palestinian women's lives. This year has shown more clearly than ever how these policies hinder Palestinians' possibilities to access health care as well as basic goods and services.

Testimonies recorded by WCLAC's field researchers show that women who needed to cross checkpoints to access their work, studies or health care have been subjected to humiliation and often forced to wait in line for hours, causing daily disruptions in their lives or jeopardizing their health. The effects of the Annexation Wall were further exacerbated during 2020, as lockdowns and restrictions led to border closings. It also granted yet another a pretence for military personnel at borders could arbitrarily block Palestinians from accessing their lands or livelihoods.

The Annexation Wall has also blocked people at risk from accessing health care in time. As illustrated above, cancer patients in need of chemotherapy treatment have been blocked from traveling to East Jerusalem to access hospital care. It is also not uncommon for Palestinians in the West Bank to need to

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<sup>131</sup> Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.



cross through checkpoints in order to reach the nearest hospital. WCLAC has been in touch with several persons who were denied passage, or made to wait for hours, despite needing urgent health care. Often COVID-19 has been cited as the reason. One woman's story can be viewed in Figure 14 below.

Other women have been separated from their agricultural lands because of the Annexation wall, and are not allowed to regularly access them, hindering them from planting more profitable foods that need regular tending to. During the pandemic, restrictions have been further increased, with one woman explaining how she and her husband were working on their fields when they were forced by Israeli soldiers to immediately leave, despite the fact that they were wearing protective masks and gloves and had entry permits. The reason cited was the risk of them spreading COVID-19.

These testimonies give a preview of what the proposed annexation would lead to. Palestinian villages outside of the annexed areas would become even more isolated, leading to the further fragmentation of Palestinian society and people. For Palestinians, everyday difficulties already faced as a consequence of the Annexation Wall would be significantly multiplied.

Other consequences of the proposed annexation include that Israel would be able to impose an Israeli curriculum in schools of the annexed areas. Many mothers that WCLAC has been in touch with have expressed deep concern about this, fearing that their children would lose touch with their own culture and heritage. There is a significant risk that schools would be forced to teach Israeli political views, history and narratives rather than Palestinian, violating the children's right to their culture and jeopardizing their right to education.

### **Her story...**

WCLAC met with a young woman who suffers from anaemia, and needs to cross a checkpoint in order to reach the closest hospital. One day, she started suffering acute dizziness, nausea and difficulties breathing. Her family urgently tried to help her to the hospital. When they reached the checkpoint, her family was told that the crossing was completely closed due to COVID-19 restrictions and that they could not pass. It took six hours of arguing, traveling back and forth to their village trying to find alternative health care, and then trying to access the checkpoint soldiers' superiors or the municipality before the family was finally allowed to pass. By this time, the young woman was barely conscious, and her family rushed her to the hospital. When she arrived, the doctor told the family that a few more minutes' delay could have cost her life.

**Figure 14.** Testimony recorded by WCLAC field researcher.



**In her words...**

"My village is one of the prettiest. People here are very concerned and take care of girls' education and encourage us to go to university even though most women are unemployed despite being graduates.

The Occupation Forces constantly and systematically violate human rights, confiscate lands, cut the water and electricity supply and demolish houses. I remember when I was a kid, I was studying on the farm while my mom was working, and I saw the forces with vehicles coming to tell us to get off our farm. They do this a lot and they always have excuses for it : 'the army is training' or saying 'that's a secured area' and sometimes they would ask about our licenses.

I'm not surprised by the annexation plans, none of us are. I'm not scared of it, I'm just scared about my future and the future of the girls here. We've been living under the occupations for so many decades, we're used to resistance, we live it on a daily basis. What worries most of us is the unknown future. What will happen to our education, to our jobs, our homes? I'm going to study medicine in Turkey now. I don't want to leave but I'm grateful for the opportunity, it's my only chance of achieving my dreams or else all the hard work I've done will be for nothing.

*- 18 year old young woman in the Jordan Valley, who aspires to one day be "the best doctor in the country"*

In addition, Israeli civil law would apply to the Palestinian residents of the annexed areas, raising concerns that the situation would resemble that of Palestinian residents of Jerusalem who are not extended the benefits and privileges afforded to Israeli citizens, but still live under the constant threat of having their residency status revoked for breach of allegiance to Israel, which would often lead to being

**Figure 15.** Testimony recorded by WCLAC field researcher in the Jordan Valley.



forcibly removed from the territory.<sup>132</sup> Also, an even further increase of violence from settlers and Israeli military can be expected, as well as an increase in house demolitions, night raids and detentions.

In the Jordan Valley in particular, Palestinian women are already suffering as a consequence of settlements and de facto annexation. WCLAC has placed particular emphasis this year on studying the gendered impact of occupation and the proposed annexation in the Jordan Valley, and *inter alia* conducted a field visit to interview women in the area. Many women in the region work in nearby settlements where they are hired in the informal sector. Due to high unemployment in other sectors and the settlements' refusal to hire Palestinian men, many of these women have become the main providers of their households. The working conditions are often difficult, with low wages and no social benefits or security. In addition to this, the exploitation of Palestinian women by illegal settlements has intersected with the patriarchal systems in Palestinian society to generate an increase in polygamy in the Jordan Valley, where one woman becomes the main provider and another one cares for the household. In addition, women in the Jordan Valley suffer from lacking access to legal and social support and high prevalence of GBV. Access to water, health care and other essential services is limited for Palestinians in general, and women in particular.

The women interviewed by WCLAC emphasized that the proposed annexation did not come as a surprise, but rather was seen as a continuation of the same illegal annexation and IHL violations that they have been living under for decades. Several women however said that the proposed *de jure* annexation created increased levels of fear and uncertainty. In their daily lives, they were most concerned about further destruction of their agricultural lands, which are already subjected to poisoning and attacks by near-by illegal settlers. Another key concern was the future of the educational system, and the prospect of finding employment upon graduating from higher education, particularly for young women. Figure 15 shares the words of a 18 year old young woman on this topic. For a long time she nurtured a dream to study medicine in her home country but has found herself unable to achieve this due to the occupation and uncertainties of the annexation. Thankfully, she has been able to find an opportunity to study abroad instead, but for most women this is not an available option. The situation of women in the Jordan Valley illustrates the effect that illegal annexation, settlements and exploitation can have on Palestinian women, and what we could expect more of if the annexation plans were to be realized.

### *The annexation plan's timeline*

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<sup>132</sup> CARE: Immediate Call to Stand Against and Prevent West Bank Annexation Plan Advocacy Brief, 8 June 2020.



Carried out in the shadow of COVID-19, the annexation plans did not attract as much attention and international protests as they otherwise would. However, several international organizations and UN experts still stepped up to protest, UN Special Rapporteurs Michael Lynk and Nickolay Mladenov voiced repeatedly how this not only constituted a grave violation of human rights and international law, but also undermined any serious chances of reaching a lasting peace agreement.<sup>133</sup> Several world leaders spoke out against unilateral action, and human rights organizations worldwide called to attention the cascade of human rights violations that would follow.<sup>134</sup> The US under President Donald Trump, however, continued to back the annexation plans.

*"Israel's decision to unilaterally march ahead with the planned annexation on July 1 undermines human rights in the region, and would be a severe body blow to the rules-based international order."*

- UN Special Rapporteur  
Michael Lynk, May 1<sup>st</sup> 2020.

Even as the COVID-19 crisis continued, the Israeli state pursued their plans, with Netanyahu repeatedly stating his intention to begin the annexation k starting July 1<sup>st</sup>. On May 19<sup>th</sup>, Palestine halted all security coordination with Israel as a consequence.<sup>135</sup> For Palestinians on the ground, the looming annexation caused anxiety, fear and further instability – this amidst the economic recession and turmoil already caused by COVID-19. The ruptured security coordination also further hampered Palestinians' ability to access health care, goods and travel permits as mentioned above.

Shortly before the July 1<sup>st</sup> deadline, however, it was understood that the plans were stalled. The reasons were ostensibly disagreement between Netanyahu and Gantz on the plans, and also the need to focus on counteracting the pandemic.<sup>136</sup> No clear indications were issued, however, on how Israel planned to move forward, causing continued concern and instability. The coming weeks made it clear that the plans were significantly delayed, but gave away nothing further.

### ***Normalization of relationships with Arab States***

In August, the plans finally became clearer when Netanyahu announced that he would suspend the plans for annexation as part of a bargain to normalize diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates

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<sup>133</sup> See e.g. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25857>

<sup>134</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53248810>

<sup>135</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/end-palestinian-authority-coordination-israel-response-annexation-threat-decision-already>

<sup>136</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/01/world/middleeast/israel-annexation-netanyahu-johnson.html>;  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/israels-west-bank-annexation-stalls-for-now-amid-pandemic-and-political-distractions/2020/07/16/31b7c2c8-c764-11ea-a825-8722004e4150\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/israels-west-bank-annexation-stalls-for-now-amid-pandemic-and-political-distractions/2020/07/16/31b7c2c8-c764-11ea-a825-8722004e4150_story.html)





(U.A.E.).<sup>137</sup> The normalization deal was brokered by the US, and widely condemned throughout Palestine as a betrayal of the relationship between Palestine and its Arab neighbors throughout the region. It has been understood for decades, that the price that Israel would have to pay for normalizing ties with the Arab states, would be the independence of Palestine and a comprehensive peace plan. Now instead, all Israel had to concede was the abstract, non-realized plans of annexation. The normalization deal titled the “Abraham Accords” was soon joined by Bahrain. In November normalized diplomatic ties were also announced between Israel and Sudan, followed by Morocco in December.

Meanwhile, in the background of these political plays, the *de facto* annexation of the West Bank has continued and in fact intensified throughout the year. By October, 12,150 settlement homes had been approved or advanced. According to the organization Peace Now, this is the highest figure yet, since they began to record settlements in 2012. In other words, the actual annexation of the West Bank continues, and has in no way been halted by diplomatic deals or accords. On the contrary, a spurt in the advancing of settlements was observed in October,<sup>138</sup> suggesting that the new diplomatic ties and the continued support of the US has bolstered Israel’s confidence to expand its illegal activities.

### *Palestinian reconciliation*

In parallel with these events, the two major political factions were able to take important steps toward reconciliation. Given the Israeli annexation plans and the release of the US “Peace” vision, the two major factions began talks to better coordinate the Palestinian cause. Talks were held in Turkey in September and seen as largely successful. This led to an agreement between the two factions, and a plan to hold Palestinian elections for the first time in fifteen years. The elections are set to be held in the oPt, including the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem.<sup>139</sup>

### *American and Israeli elections*

In November, the United States elected Joe Biden as their new president. Although the actual effects of this on the country’s policies toward Israel and Palestine are yet to be seen, an improvement can be expected as President Trump leaves office. Biden is at least expected to take a stance against illegal annexation and expansion of settlements, for instance, although he may not take many further steps to improve the lives of Palestinians. Following the American election, Palestine and Israel resumed security

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<sup>137</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/13/world/middleeast/israel-uae-annexation.html>

<sup>138</sup> UN Document A/75/532

<sup>139</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/24/fatah-hamas-say-deal-reached-on-palestinian-elections>



coordination, and Palestinian ambassadors also returned to U.A.E. and Bahrain from which they had been revoked in protest of the normalization process.<sup>140</sup>

At the very end of the year, on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, Israel also announced that they would be holding yet another round of reelections in the new year, marking the fourth Israeli elections in just two years. The consequences of this have yet to unravel, but what is clear is that an increased level of political instability is likely to once again lead to higher levels of uncertainty, fear and increased risk of violence.

## 1.2 Progress towards Outcomes & Achievements

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*The year 2020 marks the last phase of implementing WCLAC's five-year strategic plan "Learning, Adapting, and Imagining to Creating Change". This section outlines what progress has been made toward implementing the strategic plan in its final stages. In addition, this year WCLAC and other organizations around the world dealt with the outbreak of COVID-19 and its impact on women through designing relevant response plans that were integrated within its strategic action plan. This response and its relation to WCLAC's overarching strategic goals is also outlined below.*

### ***WCLAC Response to Violence against Women during the time of COVID-19 outbreak***

As has been clarified above, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early March 2020 affected every aspect of Palestinian society. Early in the process, WCLAC developed an immediate response plan to operate and provide relevant emergency response to women victims of violence during the pandemic. Through this emergency response plan WCLAC has been able to continue supporting and protecting women at risk by working remotely while the office has been closed, and by providing social and legal consultations to women through the free helpline and e-counselling. The emergency response strategy of WCLAC has included the following cornerstones:

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<sup>140</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/5/what-is-behind-mahmoud-abbass-diplomatic-offensive>



- Providing around-the-clock social and legal consultations to women victims of violence through the free helpline service, in addition to an online counseling service for women who need support.
- Providing protection through the emergency protection shelter to women survivors of gender-based violence and women whose lives are in jeopardy, taking into account health protocols disseminated by Ministry of Health and procedures adopted by the government.
- Launching a campaign through mainstream and social media to raise awareness of women and the general public on the impact of the pandemic on women, as well as how to access protection and support services during the lockdown.
- Coordinating with other women's rights organizations locally and globally to address the situation of women during the pandemic.
- Continuing to document and advocate against violations of IHRL and IHL against women in Palestine.

### ***WCLAC's Emergency protection Mechanism***

Like many other women's rights organizations, WCLAC's ability to protect women through shelter services was significantly hampered by the regulations issued by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) in March, which stated that a woman could not enter a shelter without first having been quarantined for 14 days. At this time there were no guidelines or routines in place for quarantining women at risk of violence, making it near impossible for shelters to provide protection services to women while maintaining safety of women and the workers at the shelters. This came at a time when there was also a palpable need for protection, with an increase in threats to women's lives and severe violence.

WCLAC together with partner women's rights organizations advocated for the adoption of the quarantine regulations and guidelines on how to safely refer women to the protection shelters, as protection was needed now more than ever. On April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020 a sectoral meeting was organized by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) and attended by the MoSD, WCLAC and several other women's rights organizations. The meeting highlighted the need for transitional shelters where women could be quarantined before entering protection shelters, clear guidelines on how to adapt the referral systems to the emergency situation caused by COVID-19, and a clear gender component in emergency response taking into consideration the specific needs of victims of GBV. Following this meeting, the MoSD drafted a policy paper that was submitted as a proposal to the Palestinian Cabinet and later issued new guidelines for protection. These new procedural guidelines included COVID-19 testing for victims of domestic violence in urgent need of protection, cooperation between the Family Protection Unit at the Police and Ministry of Health to facilitate a safe space for protection while awaiting their test results, and the guaranteed approval of entering a protection shelter after negative test results had been confirmed. Procedures were also established for those that may test positive to COVID-19, guaranteeing a dedicated safe space for them to protect both their health, safety and confidentiality.



### ***WCLAC Publishes Situational Reports on COVID-19 and Women's Rights Violations in Palestine***

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, WCLAC has paid particular attention to the impact of this crisis on women. WCLAC realized early-on that gendered impact of the pandemic would multiply in a patriarchal society like the Palestinian one, and exacerbate current challenges. Women have borne the burden of unpaid labor within the private sphere and marginalization from the decision making process in the public one. This situation combined with constant Israeli violations of IHRL and IHL that continued during the lockdown have further increased the adverse impact of the pandemic on Palestinian women.

To monitor this situation, WCLAC developed situational reports that have analysed the impact of the pandemic on Palestinian women, based on our own interventions and also analysis of secondary data. The reports served as an important reference and source of data for different women and human rights organizations working in the context.

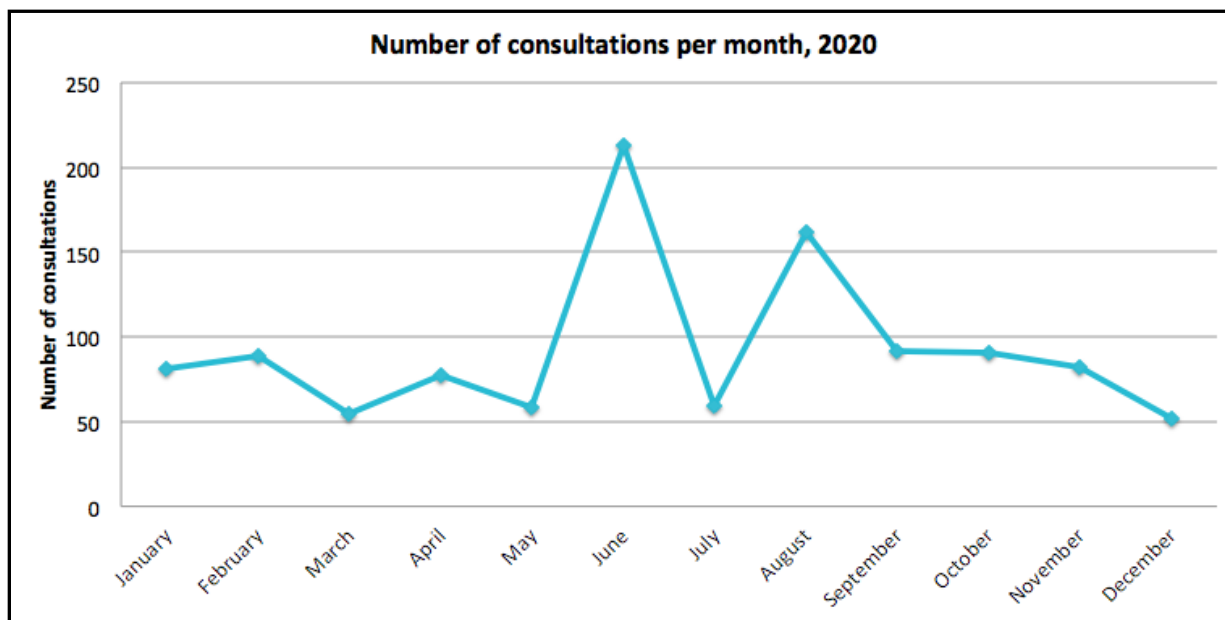
In particular, WCLAC published the six situational reports between April 16<sup>th</sup> and June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020, covering the period of the first lockdown. These reports provided detailed analysis on women's rights violations in Palestine throughout the numerous renewals of the state of emergency which continued the lockdown throughout Palestine. The reports came alongside efforts by WCLAC and other service providers to mitigate increasing GBV during the pandemic through an emergency response plan. The situational reports can be found [here](#). WCLAC also developed a [gender assessment report](#) concerning the gendered impact of COVID-19 on women in Palestine in July 2020; and the analytical report "[Compounded Threats in February 2021 which](#)" analyses how the pandemic, the Israeli occupation and the patriarchal system have all compounded women's difficulties in 2020. The report highlighted COVID-19 as a third threat, which drastically affected women's access to their rights.

#### ***1.2.1 Strategic goal 1: Contribute to the protection and empowerment of women suffering discrimination and violence***

WCLAC has continued working toward Strategic Goal 1 throughout the year. Although COVID-19 has presented a significant challenge, the progress toward this goal has been largely successful, as WCLAC has found ways to continue contributing to the protection and empowerment of women victims of discrimination and violence. Most notably, WCLAC has provided psychosocial support and legal support through helpline and in-person consultations, as well as protection through shelter services.



Despite the significant challenges presented by quarantine regulations during the first lockdown, WCLAC has protected 18 women accompanied by 4 children at the emergency protection shelter, this year.



As for the number of consultations with supported women, this has fluctuated throughout the year, and can also be seen to correspond with the major events of 2020. There was an initial decrease in consultations in March, when the first lockdown was introduced, likely due to women and families focusing on the pandemic and crisis management within the household. Also, with disrupted support networks and referral pathways, it is likely that many women had not yet found a way to contact support through telephone or internet at this point in time. In April, when the state of emergency was extended, there was instead an increase in calls. Most notably, the second week of April saw a 75 per cent increase in calls compared to the previous week. A majority of these concerned questions on legal cases, as it was announced that courts of law would remain closed during the extended lockdown. Consultations on GBV in the home were also common, as were concerns about economic hardship or economic violence.

WCLAC's service unit noted already in April that although the number of cases concerning domestic violence were not increasing by much, the severity of the violence was. This trend has continued throughout the year, and has caused concern. This may be brought on by added pressure within households leading to more severe cases of violence. It may however also be an indication that the level of violence has increased overall, and that it is only the women targeted by the most severe forms of violence who have managed to overcome the obstacles of reaching out for support during closures, whereas others have suffered in silence.

May saw again a decrease in consultations, but following the end of the first lockdown and reopening of the courts of law there was an unprecedented surge in consultations in June (213 consultations, compared to 58 the month before). Women were particularly searching for support in the reopening or filing of court cases. WCLAC's service unit also noted that an increased number of women wanted to file for divorce

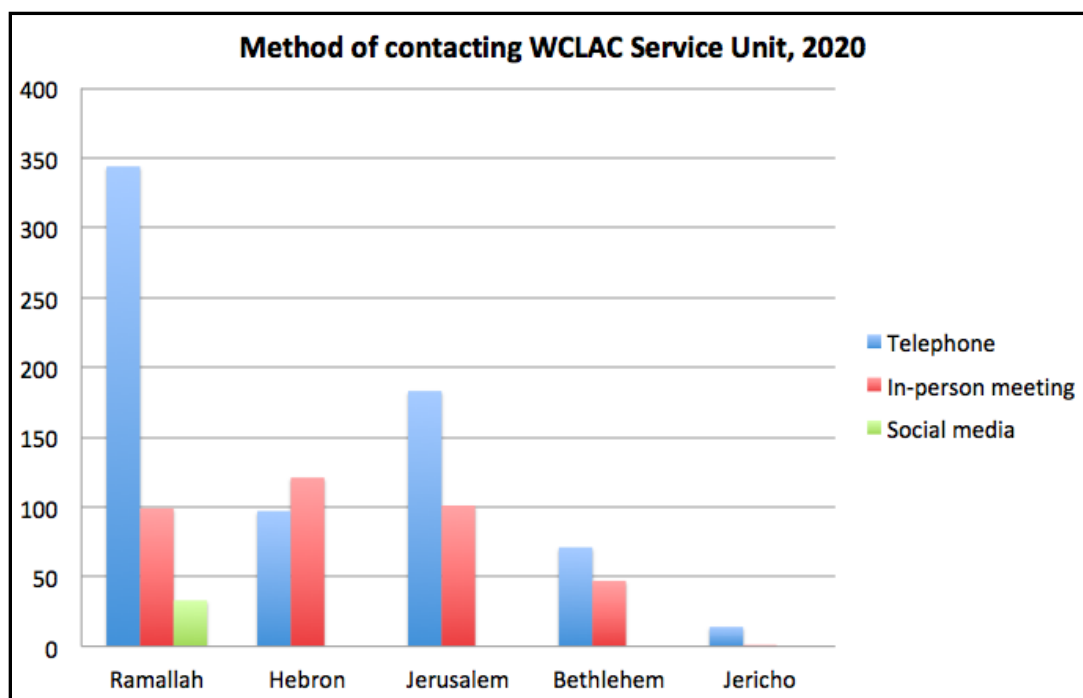


rather than opt for family counseling, suggesting that many families had been dealing with severe problems during the closures without being able to access remedies or support, and now wished to move straight to divorce.

August saw another spike in consultations, which then remained at a high but stable level September through November. In December, the number of people infected by COVID-19 reached an all-time high and Jerusalem was affected by yet another closure, as were several towns in the West Bank. This is thought to have led to another decrease in consultations in the month of December as women have once again been called upon to focus on their families, care and crisis management.

Despite the fluctuations described above, the total number of consultations this year remains at levels similar to previous years. This is in itself noteworthy given that it has become significantly more difficult for women to reach out for consultations due to COVID-19 and closures. Not only have women's movement been heavily restricted, but many women have noted that it was near impossible to find the privacy or time to call for support given that whole families stayed home and were often in need of care. Women suffering from violence perpetrated by their husbands were often unable to escape the home to privately call for legal advice or social support. The perpetrators were never out of earshot for long enough.

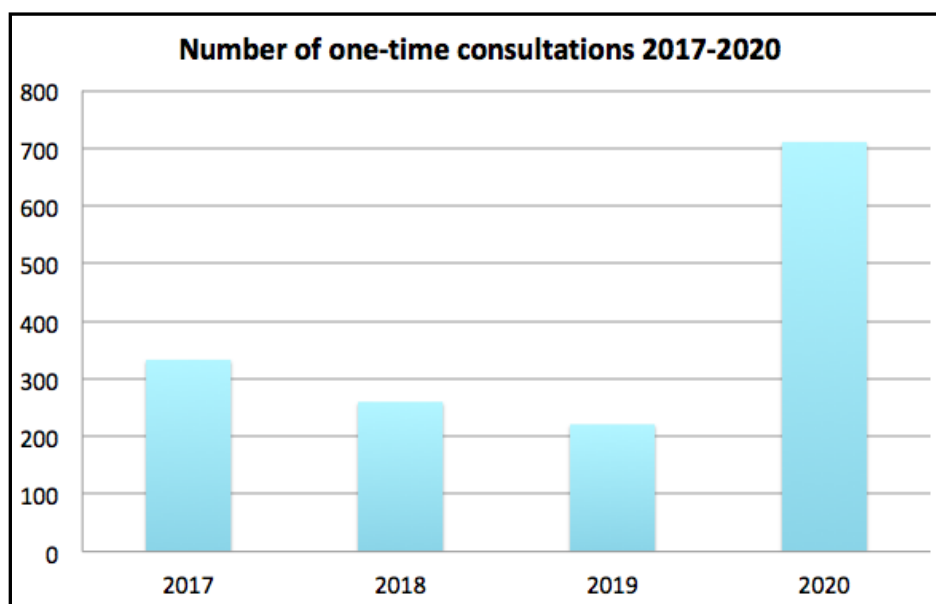
Despite this, women have found ways to contact WCLAC for legal, social and psychological support. 64 per cent of WCLAC's consultations this year have been carried out over telephone, and 33 per cent have been in-person consultations. An additional 3 percent have managed to contact WCLAC through social media to access services.





WCLAC has also noted a significant increase in one-time consultations compared to previous years, and a corresponding decrease in long-term cases. Presumably, the difficulty in reaching support services has led to more women contacting the Service unit for urgent one-time support, but has left many unable to continue receiving support in a systematic way. This can be due to disrupted support and referral pathways, but also to women lacking time and energy to seek further help while simultaneously coping with loss of employment, increased tension in the household, homeschooling and caring for ill relatives. Instead, women have reached out when they have been able to, and when it has been most urgent – and WCLAC has been there to answer the call. This year, WCLAC has held 711 on-time consultations, compared to 221 in 2019.

### 1.2.2



### ***Strategic goal 2: Promote women's rights to access justice and eliminate discriminatory policies against them***

WCLAC has also continued working toward Strategic Goal 2, through advocacy based efforts that aim at promoting women's rights to access justice and eliminating discriminatory policies. Throughout 2020, this has primarily been carried out through advocating on a domestic level for legal reform of the Family Protection Law, and on the international level through the submission of reports to the CEDAW Committee and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967.

### ***Development of Policies & Procedures to eliminate Discrimination against Women***

Despite Palestine's accession to international conventions and treaties, there is a lack of credible political will to enact modern and non-discriminatory laws that comply with these conventions. At the national level WCLAC continued its efforts to influence the Palestinian Authority to comply with international



conventions and treaties it has acceded to; especially the CEDAW. WCLAC's strategy is to influence policy and decision-making processes through research and feedback from target communities and beneficiaries, providing the Palestinian government with evidence on priorities and themes to undertake legal reform and to better understand gaps in the legal system that prevent women from accessing their rights.

Joint marital property rights might be considered one of the taboos in Palestinian society. During this reporting period WCLAC continued its work to advocate for better protection for women through the revision of several draft amendments of the Family Protection Law. WCLAC, Al-Muntada Forum to Combat Violence against Women and the Amal Coalition have previously submitted several recommendations on how to render the new law more gender sensitive and secure better protection against gender-based violence. After a reading of the draft law in the Palestinian Cabinet on May 11<sup>th</sup>, WCLAC and several other women's rights organizations attended a meeting with the Minister of Women's Affairs (MoWA) Dr. Amal Hamad, and expressed further recommendations and comments on the draft law. The Minister expressed her commitment to influence the Cabinet to adopt a law that protect women from violence within the private sphere. The Minister expressed her willingness to adopt and present recommendations set forth by women organizations to the Palestinian Cabinet and push for the delay of the next reading until appropriate amendments could be made to the draft law.

Following this, a counter campaign was launched by conservative elements in Palestinian society, led by Sharia Lawyers. The campaign advocates against the passage of the Family Protection Law and stands in opposition of the proposal submitted by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Social Development for the passage of the draft law as it was most recently presented to the Cabinet in the previous reading. One of the main reasons for this is the apparent link between the draft law and the Palestinian accession or ratification of international treaties and conventions, including CEDAW. In light of this development, WCLAC and other women's organizations joined efforts to encourage the passage of the law in order to provide the necessary legal framework for women victims of violence.

WWCLAC issued a report "[The Palestinian Experience of the Family Protection in the Context of Due Diligence Principles](#)", which emphasizes State responsibility towards women victims of violence. The Palestinian government is responsible for providing measures to prevent violence against women and define means to protect them from violence. In line with the due diligence principles the Palestinian government is also responsible for adopting rehabilitation mechanisms of the perpetrators prior to taking them to the prosecution stage. Furthermore, the due diligence principles emphasize that violence against women is not a "private" matter. On the contrary the State is responsible for providing necessary measures to protect the most marginalized groups within the community.

### ***WCLAC Submits A Report to the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967***

On May 31<sup>st</sup>, WCLAC submitted a report to the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, Mr. Michael Lynk. The submission, titled "The Culture of





Impunity: Israel's Ongoing Violations against Palestinian Women during COVID-19", highlights the numerous IHL and IHRL violations that have continuously been carried out by Israeli forces despite national lockdowns and specifically how these have impacted Palestinian women.

The submission addressed Israel's continued evasion of its responsibilities as an occupying power, which has been affecting Palestinian lives for the past 53 years and now continues despite the global pandemic. This includes Israel evading obligations under Article 56 of the Fourth Geneva Convention to undertake all necessary preventative measures to combat contagious diseases and pandemics, and to cooperate with national and local authorities to ensure and maintain medical and hospital establishments and services, public health and hygiene in the occupied territory. Israel has also disregarded the UN Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire during the pandemic, and numerous UN Security Council resolutions. WCLAC has highlighted seven types of violations that have been carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic that have all had a detrimental impact on the well-being and security of Palestinian women and severely harm their physical and psychological well-being. WCLAC has requested inter alia that the Special Rapporteur draw attention to the specific impact that Israeli IHL and IHRL violations have on Palestinian women, and to exert pressure on Israel to comply with its legal obligations as an occupying power. WCLAC has also specifically highlighted the situation of women with West Bank IDs that are married to Jerusalemites that have fallen between two systems. In the submission, it is requested that these women be granted renewed residency permits so as to facilitate their movement and access to health care. [Read the submission here](#)

### ***WCLAC submits CEDAW Follow-Up Parallel report to CEDAW Committee***

Following the concluding remarks of CEDAW Committee, the Palestinian government was obliged to submit a follow-up report to the Committee within two years from the official review of the State report. The Palestinian government submitted its report to CEDAW Committee in 2020 presenting development made. Therefore, it was our responsibility as a women human rights organization to present a parallel report with critical assessment of the State report to the CEDAW Committee to provide better insight into the actual critical situation of Palestinian women. The [report](#) was submitted to CEDAW Committee both in English and Arabic in partnership with Al Muntada for Combating Violence against Women.

### ***1.2.3 Strategic goal 3: Develop institutional and human capacity in order to ensure the sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency of WCLAC***

Finally, work has also continued toward Strategic Goal 3 throughout 2020, as WCLAC has developed its capacity in order to maintain its sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency. It is important to note that



throughout the year 2020, the institutional capacity of WCLAC has been challenged and in fact further developed through facing the crisis of the pandemic.

### ***WCLAC Elects New Board of Directors***

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, The Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling held its General Assembly Annual Meeting at the Carmel Hotel in Ramallah. To launch the meeting, Dr. Sahar Al Qawasmi, Chairperson of the Board of Directors, welcomed the members and began to address a number of financial and programmatic reports and plans to discuss and approve. Later on, Dr. Sahar Al-Qawasmi submitted her resignation from the previous Board of Directors in front all of the General Assembly's members and called for electing a new Board of Directors for the next three years (2020-2023). Nine candidates were nominated for the Council seats and won by acclamation.

The candidates were: Ms. Fateemah Muaqet, Ms. Hania Al-Bitar, Ms. Samira Huleileh, Ms. Ratibeh Al-Natsheh, Ms. Lili Feidi, Miss Tami Rafidi, Ms. Lana Al-Bandak, Mr. Abdul Qader Al-Husseini and Mr. Fahmi Shaheen. [Read in Arabic](#)

### ***WCLAC increases its resilience in the face of crisis***

Another main development for WCLAC's institutional and human capacity building has been more or less forced upon the organization through the arrival of COVID-19. As has been extensively explored throughout this annual report, the pandemic has introduced new and exacerbated challenges for the women supported by WCLAC. As is the case for many women's rights organizations, it has also introduced significant challenges for WCLAC as an organization, in being able to carry out our work and services despite lockdowns and other COVID-19 related hazards and regulations.

WCLAC's shaping and implementation of an emergency response plan early on in the process, has greatly strengthened the organization in terms of resilience, and increased our capacity in addressing emergencies. New working methods have been identified, tested and strengthened throughout the year, most notably enabling and supporting staff to work distance-based, as well as the ability to offer support and consultations through telephone and e-counseling. This capacity building has strengthened the organization's ability to also deal with other unforeseen crises within society, and has increased the resilience and WCLAC's institutional capacity for emergency response.

## 1.3 Challenges

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### *Outbreak of COVID-19 and its Impact of WCLAC's Interventions*

After the announcement of the spread of COVID-19 in the end of February 2020, the Palestinian government took preventive measures starting by closing public places, preventing crowdedness and closing governorates. For WCLAC, this caused suspension of some activities; especially workshops and training sessions. After having a large number of affected cases in the governorate of Bethlehem, the President announced state of emergency on March 5<sup>th</sup> 2020 to counter the spread of COVID-19. This announcement was followed by decisions of the government on March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2020 to shut down the governmental institutions and impose a curfew for 14 days. WCLAC followed up closely on the developments and emergency measures taken to counter COVID-19, and developed an initial emergency response early in the process. This was then regularly reviewed to modify and adopt relevant response measures, by keeping the staff informed of any developments and basing decisions off of these. Initially, and to prevent gatherings WCLAC decided to postpone workshops and training sessions, a measure which was communicated with respective partners for approval to ensure the safety of both WCLAC's team and supported target groups. Therefore, many activities were put on hold, and staff placed a larger emphasis on conducting desk work, including research, studies and reports which can be done either from the office or from home depending on the personal family situation. Finally, WCLAC abided by official instructions and announcements made by the Palestinian government. All the staff were requested to take their laptops and work home on daily basis, to avoid any interruptions in our work to the best of our abilities.

### *Israeli Occupation Policies and Political Instability*

The occupation policies continue to be the main obstacle towards women's attainment to their rights. It is evidenced that increased Israeli occupation violence leads to more violence endured by women within the general society and the household. The violence of the occupation disproportionately affects women, both directly and indirectly especially in relation to residency revocation, minors' house arrests and house demolitions. As the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women highlights in her report on Israel, "patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes are deeply entrenched in society and petrified and tolerated in the context of conflict and occupation constituting [the] root causes of GBV against women." Recognizing the gendered nature of the occupation, and its direct effect of legitimizing and perpetuating GBV, she makes a clear call for Israel to end "the occupation and conflict and to promptly address its gendered impact in line with its obligations under human rights and humanitarian law principles."<sup>141</sup> Israeli violations of IHRL and IHL have continued throughout the outbreak of COVID-19. During the lockdown and mobility restrictions, Israel continued its military measures through night raids, house demolitions, arbitrary

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<sup>141</sup> [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session35/Documents/A\\_HRC\\_35\\_30\\_Add\\_2\\_EN.docx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session35/Documents/A_HRC_35_30_Add_2_EN.docx)



detentions and settler violence. As further explored above in the Political Brief section, the fear of contracting COVID-19 has in fact added yet another dimension to the threat and stress associated to IHL violations.

This situation is also further exacerbated by the continued internal political divide which works against the interests of the Palestinians of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and increases sufferings of women, especially victims of gender based violence. The unstable political situation and split between West Bank and Gaza has also adversely affected WCLAC's efforts to influence policy and decision-making processes to promote women's rights. The dysfunctional status of the Palestinian Legislative Council stopped enactment of new laws and provided power for the President to issue these laws through Presidential decrees. This limited WCLAC's ability to pursue its mission on influencing policy and decision-making processes.

Political instability also leads to an increase of settlers' violence and night raids against Palestinians; especially in areas adjacent to Israeli settlements. This is combined with mobility restrictions through the checkpoint regime. WCLAC realizes that impact of such aggression and mobility restrictions on women are paramount. These women live in a patriarchal society, which increases its dominance on women through imposing certain rules to *protect* women. Thus, women in need of social and legal services will be victimized both from the patriarchal society and the Israeli measures. Therefore, WCLAC's free helpline provides some refuge for these women through providing them with social and legal advice without the need to physically access our offices.

WCLAC also documents cases of Israeli violations in these areas from women themselves to define impact of human rights and IHL violations on their lives. These testimonies are then analyzed and submitted to different UN mechanisms. Instability of the political situation in the region and increased waves of conservatism are also affecting Palestinian society either directly or indirectly. This has created new perceptions within local communities about women's rights and created a kind of recession on women's rights in some local communities. Therefore, WCLAC paid attention to this issue through targeting university students, young male and female volunteers and community activists to raise their awareness on women and human rights and increase their skills to design and carry out community initiatives to promote these rights.

### ***Fundraising Challenges, and a Shrinking Space for Human Rights and Civil Society Organisations***

During the past years, funding amounts available to WCLAC in general have been reduced. Also, the type of funding we receive has changed. WCLAC used to receive mostly core funding but nowadays special projects have taken over, and this has a strong impact on our organizational structure designed to carry out programs rather than special short-term projects. However, WCLAC has so far been able to deal with these changes. In 2020, WCLAC was able to maintain its main donors (Norwegian Representative Office, SDC, Dan Church Aid, Bread for the World, Oxfam Novib, European Union, UNDP, UN Women) and was able to develop new strategic partnerships and attract new funding (CARE International, MERCYCORPS, WAR Child).

The main challenge in fundraising remains accessing multi-year funding that covers our general programs rather than special projects. Another important issue to be mentioned is that managing a large number of



special projects funding has a heavy impact on our workload, as they cover a smaller amount programmatically and financially, but require the same amount of administrative work and reporting.

Israeli policies constrain the movement of funds to bank accounts of Palestinian NGO's in occupied East Jerusalem. Many NGO and International NGO bank accounts in Jerusalem were closed down completely. These impediments persist also due to new measures adopted by the Palestinian Ministry of Interior, which further complicates the transaction process from organisations in areas under the Palestinian Authority control and those in East Jerusalem. Transactions to East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank are treated as international transfers, causing delays and extensive bureaucratic measures. WCLAC is addressing these issues in cooperation with the Palestinian NGO network, to overcome the complications imposed by these restrictions.

In addition, Human rights Organisations and Women's Rights Organisations are facing immense threats through shrinking spaces due to the restrictions imposed by Israeli policies. There are also examples where the NGO Monitor, which is an Israeli led/supported organization has tried to discredit the work of human rights organisations producing reports using false and incorrect information and analysis to present Palestinian NGO's as supporting "incitement and hatred", this with the final purpose of trying to influence donors and partner organizations to stop their support.

WCLAC also recognizes that political changes in neighbouring Arab countries is directly and indirectly affecting our work. The increase of conservatism is indirectly affecting advocacy and awareness raising attempts to promote women's rights. This means that WCLAC has to utilize new strategies and to invest in young males and females to challenge existing patriarchal norms and to create preventive measures to equip men, women and male and female youth with skills and knowledge to remain and endure social change in their communities.

### *Increased Leverage of Tribalism and Conservative Political Parties*

One of the risks that emerged last year and still can be identified for this reporting period, revolved around calls of some tribes and political groups to have Palestine withdraw from the CEDAW convention and/or impose reservations. This created social unrest; especially through incitement made through statements published by some tribal leaders. This was combined with incitement led by some lawyers against adoption of the Family Protection Law.

In this context, WCLAC understood the importance of reviewing its approach to address the public, governmental bodies, partnering women and human rights organizations and the donor community. The staff were also aware of the impact of this situation on their work and outreach to local communities. Therefore, WCLAC defined its unified human rights message to be communicated with different stakeholders, while emphasizing that WCLAC will not compromise its principles towards promoting women's rights and gender equality. WCLAC also called for a meeting with members of the Palestinian Women General Union, members of Al-Muntada in addition to the Board of Directors, in order to define a unified position against any incitement and calls to withdraw or impose reservations on CEDAW. WCLAC



*30 years & beyond: WCLAC Continues to forward Women's Human Rights*

also addressed local media outlets emphasizing its position towards advancing gender equality while calling the PA to abide by the international conventions that it has acceded to; especially CEDAW.

## 1.4 WCLAC's Interrelated Issues

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The Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) is an independent Palestinian, non-profit, non-governmental organization that seeks to develop a democratic Palestinian society based on the principles of gender equality and social justice. Based on its feminist vision fostering equality and social justice, WCLAC doesn't only play prominent role in addressing gender-based violence in Palestinian society it also contributes in addressing:

### *Principles of Human Rights*

Women and human rights are a basic principle of WCLAC's work and mandate. Principles of human rights are maintained not only through programs and strategies but also through WCLAC's code of conduct and bylaws. This is evidenced through supporting women access their rights and access justice including their social and legal rights in addition to protection provided to women whose lives are under threat. WCLAC has further developed its bylaws to further maintain child safeguarding through its interventions and partnership with other national and international organizations.

### *Protection of Environment*

Despite that WCLAC doesn't have a specific policy related to the protection of environment, it ensures environmental friendly interventions. For example, WCLAC uses MIS to record clients' data to minimize as much as possible the use of paper files, most of the time we use recycled paper, the usage of glass cups instead of plastic cups in the organization's offices in addition to the use of emails for correspondence to ensure our concern regarding the protection of environment.

### *Anti-corruption*

WCLAC's long-standing commitment to assisting women in achieving their rights with integrity means avoiding corruption in any form, including bribery, maintaining confidentiality and privacy while providing services, as well as complying with the anti-corruption law. WCLAC provides guidance to the team (lawyers, social workers and field workers) on how to conduct legal aid, testimonies and counselling in a fair, ethical and legal manner. All associates of our organization are required to read, understand and follow the precepts of our Code of Conduct and procurement manual, which includes anti-corruption expectations for all employees. WCLAC decision making process is done at different levels to ensure transparency and accountability. Based on the organizational structure and internal procedures, decisions taken at the Board of Directors are separate and binding for the whole organization. These decisions are separated from those taken by executive management. Further, WCLAC has developed its procurement manual in a way that ensures transparency and separation of roles and responsibilities throughout the procurement process. A committee is defined to open and review tenders responsible of analyzing the offers technically and financially and present their recommendation. The decision is then taken by another level, which is a major part of the anti-corruption process WCLAC follows.



## Part II. Detailed Activity Report

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### 2.1 Strategic goal 1: Contribute to the protection and empowerment of women suffering discrimination and violence

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#### ***2.1.1 Provide quality legal and social services that respond to the needs of women exposed to violence and discrimination***

WCLAC provides social-legal counseling and protection services to Palestinian women in order to promote their self-autonomy and raise understanding of their rights and how to claim them through social counseling or Sharia courts. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC) immediately developed an emergency response strategy to be implemented during the pandemic period. This strategy has allowed WCLAC to continue to support and protect women at risk by working remotely while the main office and branch offices have been closed, and despite the inability of many women to leave their homes.

The emergency response strategy of WCLAC included providing a 24-hour gender-based violence helpline service, in addition to an online counseling service for women who needed support through social and legal consultations. Shelter services to protect survivors of gender-based violence have also been provided throughout the pandemic period. In addition, media interventions and awareness campaigns on gender-based violence have been implemented through social media, radio and television in order to emphasize the increased risks during the lockdown and to publish information on how to access available services and protection.

##### ***2.1.1.1 Continuous thorough legal and social services for women in Palestine***

WCLAC provides some of the most vital and effective services for female survivors of GBV through four organizational branches: Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron, and Jerusalem. Over the reporting period, WCLAC provided long-term legal or social counseling to **403** women of all ages, 216 of whom were from Ramallah and Jerusalem, 187 of whom were from the Southern West Bank. Out of these cases, 15 women received only social counseling, 33 women received only legal; a majority of 355 women received both legal and social services.

WCLAC has found that certain social realities are exacerbating the situation, requiring social or legal support. Some of these conditions include: early marriage, polygamy, poverty, unemployment, and denial of education that can prevent them from achieving full access to their rights and economic independence. This situation combined with COVID-19 pandemic further increased women's suffering and GBV. Women's inability to access services during the shutdown of different institutions and mobility restrictions imposed

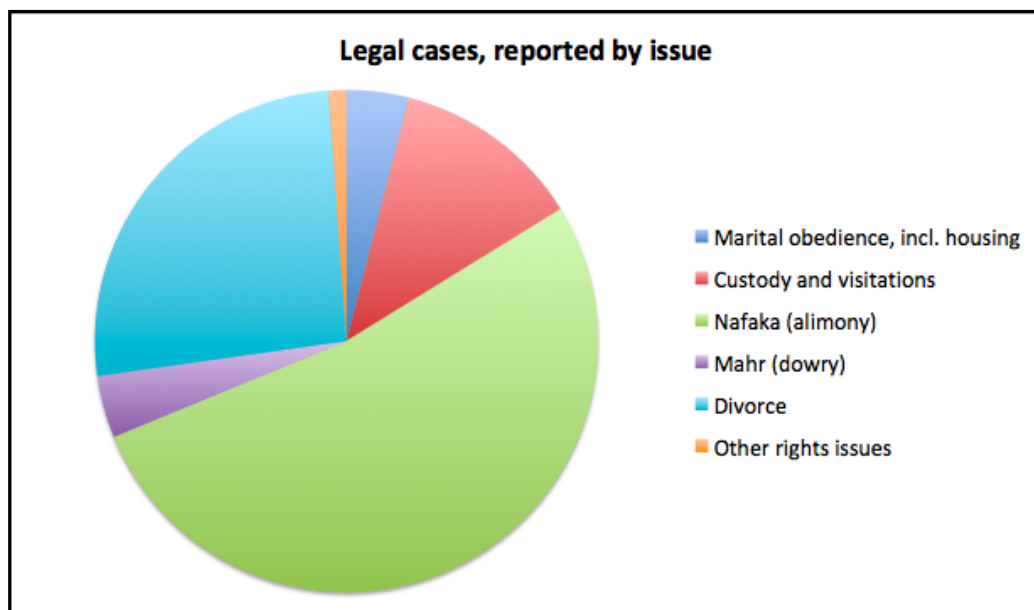




through the lockdown increased GBV and women's inability to access their social, legal and protection rights.

Throughout the reporting period, **525** new cases for legal support were brought to WCLAC. Each woman might have more than one court case, and 153 cases from previous years were followed up on. Since the start of the year WCLAC lawyers obtained 324 verdicts in favor of the supported women. 113 of these cases were closed through mediation by WCLAC's team of lawyers and social workers while the rest remain pending within the courts. Through mediation, WCLAC was able to support the relevant parties in reaching long-term solutions to the problems faced by WCLAC's female clients. Most women were able to claim some or all of their rights via agreements signed by the husband/family member without bringing the case to court.

Regarding the topics of cases and consultations handled, certain trends can also be observed throughout the year. The legal cases handled by WCLAC's legal aid services this year were dominated by issues of *nafaka* (alimony) (53 per cent), divorce (26 per cent) and custody of children (12 per cent). As for the rest of cases, 1 per cent of the cases were related to general rights issues and implementing court decisions, 4 per cent focused on dowry, and 4 per cent of the cases were on marital obedience and housing. This echoes the pattern of previous years. The high number of cases related to alimony reflects the living conditions of these women as they lack other economic resources, or income thus they depend on the alimony which doesn't provide just life for these women (it's around 400-600 NIS per month). It is also precisely these pressing legal issues that made the closure of courts of law so detrimental for women during the lockdown, further explored in the Political Brief above. Women who could not fight for their right to alimony risked even deeper economic hardship, whereas those who could not finalize or file for divorce were forced to stay in destructive relationships or in some cases were kept away from their children.





11 per cent of the women were referred to WCLAC by partners, 2 per cent were referred from other lawyers, 0.25 per cent from health care units and 28 per cent were referred by the courts. The rest approached WCLAC directly (45.5 per cent).

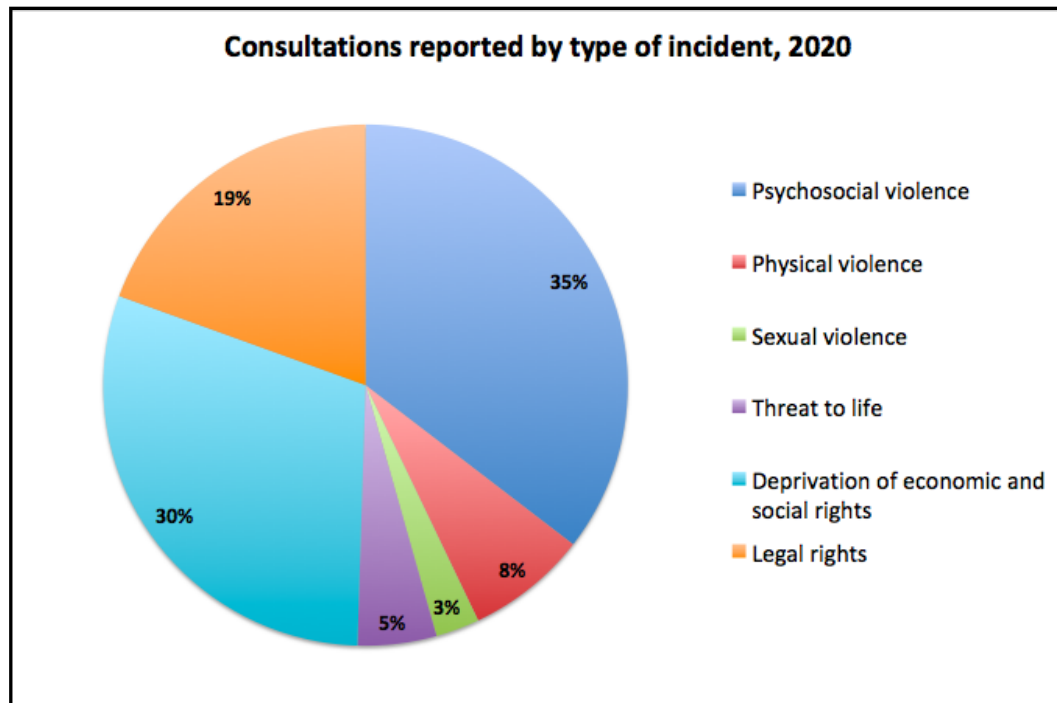
### *Provide one-off legal and social consultations*

In addition to long-term services, WCLAC is an active facilitator/provider of one-off legal and social consultations for women. This service helps women obtain help in legal issues and decision making. The consultations are provided after awareness raising sessions, e-counselling, and helpline discussions. Fifteen consultations took place following awareness raising sessions, where women would individually approach WCLAC lawyers and social workers and ask personal questions related to the topics discussed, and ask for advice on how to make the right decisions and what steps to take.

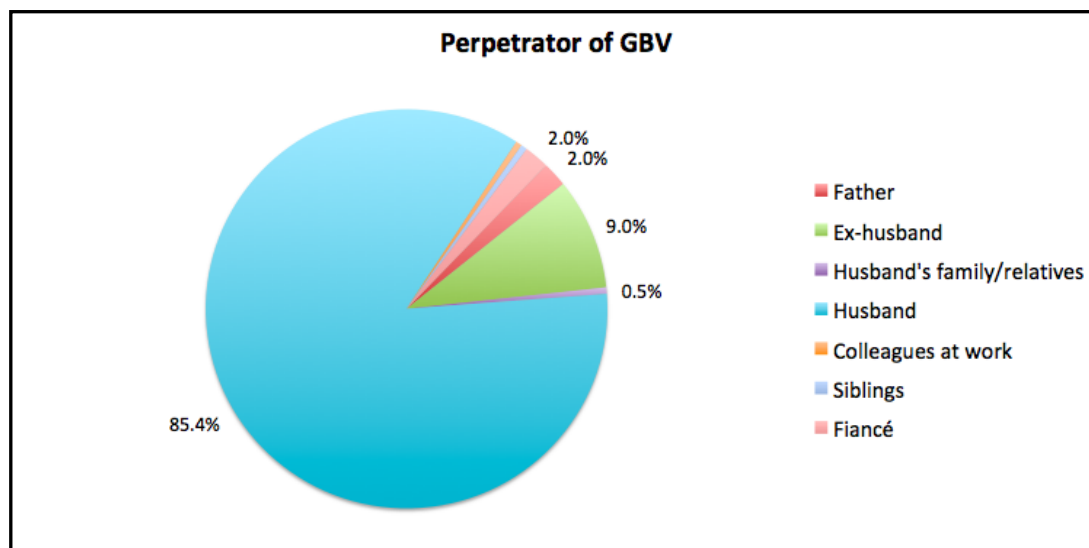
A total of **708** consultations took place via the helpline and social media where women were provided with advice on social and legal issues or referred either for long term intervention at one of WCLAC offices or to another institution. The main reason behind this increase is due to mobility restrictions where women could not access our offices, thus the helpline was the only means to access advice and consultation regarding social and legal rights. Furthermore, a number women approached WCLAC directly seeking a one-off consultation through one of our four branch offices in Hebron, Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Ramallah. The services provided by the Centre varied between cases of maintenance, custody, dispersion, divorce and family reunification cases, implementation of court decisions, custody, arbitrary divorce, and national insurance. There were also numerous social consultations on family problems, marital disputes, social empowerment, sexual assaults, marital problems, psychological support, shelter and sexual harassment.

### *Patterns of GBV*

Concerning GBV, the most common form reported through all helpline support and consultations this year has been psychosocial violence (394 cases), closely followed by deprivation of economic and social rights (334 cases). Consultations on legal rights have also been frequent (216 cases). These three types of incidents also correspond with the main events of the year. Psychosocial violence has long been noted as the most common form of GBV against Palestinian women, and this year it is believed to have increased even further due to augmented pressure and tension within households brought on by concerns about COVID-19 and economic hardship *inter alia*. Meanwhile, the economic recession coupled with increased levels of unemployment, decreased respect for labor rights and the partial or complete closure of courts of law have all led to women struggling to defend their economic, social and legal rights.



Other types of GBV recorded have included 83 cases of physical violence, and 30 cases of sexual violence. Throughout the year, WCLAC has also supported 54 women who have suffered from threats to their lives. This is a particularly severe form of GBV, and WCLAC's service unit noted with concern that the consultations on threats to life increased in frequency toward the end of the first lockdown. This is thought to have been caused by an overall increase in violence and the severe disruption of support networks and referral pathways for the women most at-risk.

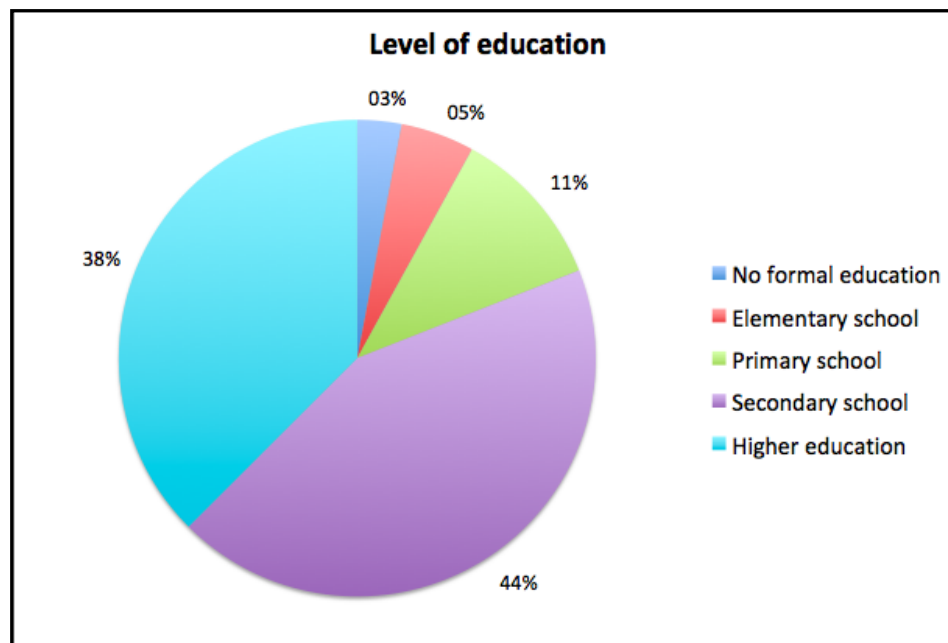


The most common perpetrator of GBV has by far been the husband of the woman seeking support, which echoes the overall trend in society. 85.5 per cent of the women that have sought support throughout 2020



reported that the perpetrator was her husband. The second most common perpetrator (9 per cent) was an ex-husband. These figures are similar to previous years, but with a slightly higher percentage of women reporting the husband as the perpetrator (75 per cent in 2019, 78 per cent in 2018). This can be explained by the lockdowns and home confinements where GBV in the home is believed to have increased, whereas exposure to violence outside the home has likely decreased.

Regarding the educational background of the women who were supported by WCLAC this year, there is a clear majority that have a relatively high level of education – 43.5 per cent had graduated from secondary school and 37.5 per cent from higher education. This suggests that it is still particularly difficult for women of lower educational background to seek support and to access their human rights.



However, WCLAC's team also noticed that the type of violence against women beneficiaries in 2020 was a composite of social and economic issues, often revealing the intersection between GBV, economic hardship and social vulnerability. 70 per cent of the women beneficiaries reported an income of around 500 NIS. It also turned out that 10 per cent of women were victims of early marriage, married at 14-16 years old; some of the women expressed that endogamy is a problem (as women might be unable to seek divorce to maintain family relations, or it urges them to waive their legal rights). It was obvious through analysing these cases that living in the same place as the husband's family or in a close neighbourhood might lead to serious family disagreements due to general interference in the woman's daily life. It should be mentioned that most of these women sought help due to their husbands' out-of-wed lock relations.



**Success Story: WCLAC enables a woman to access her legal rights**

A woman approached WCLAC requesting support in obtaining custody of her grandchild, as the mother and father are divorced and the child is with his grandmother from his father's side. Intervention was made through conducting both a legal and social session with the grandmother and the mother of the child. The mother is not opposed to the grandmother's custody, but there were special conditions related to hosting the child. WCLAC found that there were problems between the two women due to the divorce that occurred between the spouses and reflected on the relationship between the mother and her daughter. Through combined social and legal counseling, WCLAC succeeded in removing obstacles that prevented the two parties from communicating in a good way for the best interests of the child. Finally, WCLAC was able to help both the mother and the grandmother to find a midway for the best interest of the child through joint custody (between the grandmother from the father and the grandmother from the mother).

**2.1.1.2 Effective integrated and holistic protection system implemented by different sectors working on the protection of women**

In 2020, **18** women accompanied with 4 children were hosted at the emergency protection shelter in Jericho (there were also **3** women still in the shelter from last year). This shelter is a place of immediate protection for women whose lives are under threat and in need of immediate intervention. WCLAC believes that the shelter is only a temporary safe space for women to seek protection and does not substitute the need for social and communal transformation on the approach to GBV. Out of the 18 women (aged 14 – 42 years old), 8 were married, 8 were single and 2 were engaged. It should be mentioned that WCLAC hosted a girl under 18 years-old only for two days as an exception due to immense threat to her life as a result of escaping from home due to extramarital relation, WCLAC contacted MoSD, especially the department of childhood on this matter where they intervened to solve the problem.

Women sought assistance from the shelter for reasons such as escaping family retaliation for out-of-wedlock relationships or pregnancy, electronic blackmailing, inter-family violence and denial of rights. WCLAC noticed that 79% of the women were under 30 years old, and 33% of the women didn't have any source of income. Moreover, WCLAC noted a mix of socio-economic problems, an absence of free dialogue between family members, emotional neglect and electronic exploitation were all leading to numerous social problems. The lack of employment and study opportunities also increased vulnerability to GBV amongst women as they became trapped within their social sphere as 69% of the women beneficiaries didn't complete higher education.

Professional interventions were facilitated in partnership with the Family Protection Unit at the Police, the Governorate and the Ministry of Social Development through carrying out 17 case conferences, 11 meetings with families of women, and a meeting with the Coordination Committee for the Shelter in Palestine. These interventions resulted in returning 8 women to their families in better conditions with an emphasis on



ensuring prevention from violence and preservation of their dignity. 4 women were still residing in the shelter, 4 women were referred to another shelter for extensive intervention, another woman was referred to a psychiatric hospital due to severe psychological disorders; WCLAC worked on providing a psychological assessment for her with a specialized doctor, and one woman was helped to travel outside the oPt. and returned back to her home country.

It should be noted that the National Referral System could not accommodate the protection of women whose lives under threat through the emergency response plans during the lockdown. Referral protocols of women whose lives are under threat to the protection shelters were not clear during the beginning of the lockdown. It took some time for service providers and MOSD to define referral mechanisms while maintaining health safety of the women and service providers; especially the staff working at the shelters. WCLAC communicated with MOSD and MOH to provide referral and health protocols and requested specialized training to be provided by health workers to shelter staff to ensure their safety and the safety of women hosted at the shelters. WCLAC also contracted a health worker and nurse during the lockdown to provide direct support for women being hosted and put in quarantine for 14 days. The emergency shelter continues to abide by the Ministry of Social Development guidelines on the referral of women to protection shelters, which include COVID-19 testing for victims of domestic violence in need of protection, in cooperation between the Family Protection Unit at the Police and Ministry of Health to facilitate a safe space for protection to women while awaiting their test results. Moreover, a special space was established at the shelter for quarantine to prevent any possibility for transmission of COVID-19 to other women. This space is provided with all facilities; bathroom, small kitchenette with refrigerator. This is combined with provision of all necessary hygiene equipment such as sensitizers, gloves and masks.

It is worth mentioning that the shelter facilities were renovated during 2020 between July and September through UNOPS as part of our project with UN Women/HAYA program. This included rehabilitation of the infrastructure such as the bathrooms, the kitchen, tiling and painting. This also included the rehabilitation of a special space for quarantine, furnished with all necessary equipment. UNOPS also provided furniture based on a thorough needs assessment such as beds and air conditioners.

#### ***2.1.1.3 Develop capacities of service unit staff to provide better services to women victims of violence***

WCLAC views the personal and professional development of its lawyers and social workers as key to maintaining and developing the capacity of WCLAC's Service Unit to effectively respond to the needs of Palestinian women, improve service provisions for women suffering from gender-based discrimination across all the branches. During the reporting period, WCLAC held two supervision online sessions in May and June for 14 team members in the Services' Unit (each session was 4 hours long). In these sessions the team members discussed the pandemic and its impact on providing services to women victims of violence in addition to the challenges that the team faced as services providers, mainly in providing protection at the shelter and representing women in Shari'a courts.



## ***2.1.2. Promote the level of social responsibility towards women's rights and eliminate discrimination against women***

### ***2.1.2.1 Increase awareness in local communities on the elimination of discrimination and violence against women***

During this reporting period, due to COVID-19, lockdown and the banning of social gatherings, WCLAC had to postpone conducting awareness raising sessions in local communities. As a mitigation measure however, WCLAC reached out to women through social media and radio. In this context, in order to raise awareness on the increased risk of GBV during lockdown, and to disseminate information on available social, legal and protection services, WCLAC designed and launched media campaigns through different media outlets. The purpose of this has been two-fold. Firstly, with the disruption of daily life patterns and easy access to support services and referral pathways, there has been a need for increased information on how to access support and protection for women at risk. Secondly, WCLAC has stressed the responsibility of decision makers and service providers and emergency response committees to take a gendered approach when dealing with the effects of COVID-19. From the very beginning of the state of emergency, WCLAC began designing informational posters that were spread widely through Facebook and other social media, providing information for women on accessing services with contact information to WCLAC's GBV free helpline. These continued to be shared throughout the crisis to ensure that women in need of protection knew how to reach out.

### ***Carry out awareness raising initiatives for women to increase knowledge of their legal and social rights in five years (including East-Jerusalem)***

#### ***Jerusalem:***

WCLAC supported both the Shu'fat Women's Center, and Al-Essawiya Ambulance Center in conducting 6 awareness raising activities in their communities (2 in Al-Issawiya and 4 in Shu'fat), targeting 75 women between January 19th and January 29<sup>th</sup>. The activities focused on blackmailing and sexual harassment through social media and how to create protection mechanisms to prevent electronic blackmailing. They also focused on inheritance rights between law and traditions, how to protect children from violence and harassment or sexual abuse, the impact of violence on women's health, divorce rights and how to overcome social stigma associated with divorce.

#### ***West-Bank:***

Awareness-raising throughout the West Bank was carried out primarily through the social media and mass media campaigns. The total reach of the social media campaign that WCLAC implemented due to the outbreak of pandemic **31,072** persons according to Facebook, and the engagement with posts is **1,491**. As for the gender of the audience 70% were women and 30% were men. As for the geographical distribution the audience were 18.5% from Gaza, 13.9 from Ramallah, 7.8% from Hebron, 7.7% from Nablus, 3.1% from Bethlehem, 3% from Jenin, 4.9% from Jerusalem and 2.8% from Tulkarem. Regarding the age group, most of the audience were between 25-34 years old women consisted 33% and men 12.2%, as for 35-44 years





old women were 14% and men 7% as for 18-24 years old women were 14% and men 6%. As for Instagram the total reach was 2000 and the engagement was 203, as for the gender 68% were women and 32% were males. The top cities were Ramallah 21%, Gaza 13%, Hebron 9%, 4% Nablus and 4% Jenin.

In addition to this, during the first six months of 2020, trained women activists were able to conduct **10** awareness raising sessions in Bethlehem's surrounding villages, including Za'tara, Al-Khader, Wadi Fouqin, Beit Fajjar, and Nahaleen. **228** women from these communities were targeted, and the topics focused on gender-based violence, early marriage, rights related to divorce and domestic violence. Moreover, the activists provided participant women with information about service providers in their communities such as WCLAC and other institutions that are near-by, in addition to an introduction to the national referral system. It should be mentioned that another 5 awareness sessions should have been conducted as well as follow up meetings but due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the state of emergency WCLAC had to postpone the meetings.

WCLAC also carried out a media awareness raising campaign in cooperation with a local radio station to raise public awareness on women's rights, which were also posted through the social media. A total of **10** radio episodes were broadcasted on local radio stations on social, legal and protection rights. According to WCLAC's analysis of its Facebook page this campaign reached **9,580** people, most of them were women by (80%), around the age of 25-34 years old, situated throughout the occupied Palestinian territories. It should be mentioned that most of the people were from West-Bank 65%, 20% from Gaza and 15% from Jerusalem. As for the radio's analysis the campaign reached 36,499 people around the oPt.

### ***Carry out 10 counseling sessions for women activists who are engaged in WCLAC methodology in last year to a group of 10 women***

This year's self-support group was formed from a group of **12** feminist activists in the Bethlehem area, where 10 meetings were held with the group for 40 hours of supervision and counseling. The sessions focused on psychological and family support mechanisms, as one of the group's goals is to develop personal skills that free the person from the pressures of life. Including anxiety, tension, depression and interference from others, especially since women in society suffer from family and societal pressures. The meetings focused on enhancing the skill of self-affirmation, which means the ability to express feelings, thoughts, opinions and emotions, whether this expression was verbally through speech or writing, or physically through body language, or behaviorally through actions. Through the meetings, the importance of self-expression was emphasized through various techniques, the most important of which are constructive discussions, screening of films, and presenting life situations to the participants.

### ***Train 4 interns from universities of colleges in social work to at as in-takers (provide them with small monthly stipend)***





In 2020, **4** female social workers between the age of 21-25 years old were trained on receiving cases through the helpline as well as direct meetings with women beneficiaries and provide consultations. The training introduced the social workers to WCLAC's services, ethical code while working with female beneficiaries, rules and principles of conducting consultations and counselling sessions, how to study the case and collect information, as well as how to initially determine the needs of the beneficiary and the problem she suffers from and finally manual and electronic documentation mechanisms.

According to WCLAC's pre-post assessment the experience of the trainees increased by 85% after their involvement in the practical training, and they were able to develop their knowledge of social work and provide services to women victims of violence.

#### ***2.1.2.2 Empower local communities to support and protect women's rights***

##### ***Develop the skills of professionals on women's rights***

In 2020, WCLAC conducted a three-day training on Women's Rights as Human Rights, in cooperation with the Bar Association and the Legal Department of the Constitutional Court, which was attended by 17 employees. The training covered various topics, introducing participants to the concepts of gender and GBV in laws and legislations in Palestine and the impact of the patriarchal system and cultural norms on the current law and legislations.

WCLAC also developed the capacities of **19** (18 females and 1 male) human rights defenders. The training aimed at equipping human rights defenders with skills and knowledge to then be utilized while performing their role as members of the emergency support committees in their local communities, which were established to respond to COVID-19 pandemic. The training also focused on the gendered impact of the occupation, which increased during the lockdown. It is worth mentioning that participants will also be exposed to an extensive training or trainers (TOT) program combined with mentoring and coaching to support them in transferring their knowledge to their communities, which will be carried out early 2021.

##### ***Develop the skills of Sharia lawyer trainees on court procedures and gender sensitive representation to better provide legal service for women***

In 2020, WCLAC conducted **4** training programs targeting **73** female and male Shari'a lawyers' trainees (64 females and 9 males) between the age of 22 and 25 years old in Bethlehem, Ramallah, Jerusalem and Hebron. Some mitigating measures were followed to prevent condenses through diving the group of 20 participants into two groups. The training aimed at developing knowledge, skills and attitudes of Shari'a lawyer trainees on women's rights, and how to develop more gender sensitive court representations at Sharia courts. The training also aimed at raising the awareness of the trainees on the different laws applied in the West Bank and East Jerusalem; especially when they receive mixed issues (Jerusalem - West Bank) and spatial jurisdiction of courts. Furthermore, this training focused on teaching practical legal skills to create awareness on gender issues among the participants, and to work on supportive directions for women. As a result, the training managed to break the barrier between the theoretical and practical level.



It created an incentive for the lawyer trainees to get involved in working with women and family issues, while the panel discussions and lectures formed brainstorming among participants, and highlighted several points that pushed the participants to expand their knowledge, the training also provided an opportunity for female lawyers to identify the obstacles facing lawyers in providing evidence required by the woman and the corresponding pleas. Pre and post assessment revealed that 87% of Shari'a lawyers had increased knowledge on gender responsive court representation.

### ***Carry out awareness raising sessions for activists from political parties about women's rights and advocacy***

In September 2020, two awareness raising workshops were organized in cooperation with women CBOs; Social Relief Society for the Development of Palestinian Women in Tulkarem and Mothers School Association in Nablus. These workshops aimed to discuss the importance of the Family Protection Bill and mechanisms needed to advocate for its ratification. More than 55 representatives of political parties and human rights institutions have participated in discussing the importance of political parties to have an active role in raising awareness about the law and supporting advocacy campaigns to endorse it.

Another raising awareness session was held with the security services sector based on their request to discuss CEDAW and clarify the most important articles of the convention and the reasons behind the recent fierce attack on the convention. More than 300 participants attended this session. These activities were implemented following the participation in an intensive training on advocacy campaigns organized by Oxfam which aimed to implement a national campaign to advocate and put pressure on the Palestinian government to pass the Family Protection law.

### ***Carry out training for males and females from justice sector on gender, masculinity and women's rights within international conventions; especially CEDAW***

WCLAC built the capacity of **15** senior employees of the Justice Sector. In particular the session was attended by representatives from Shari'a High Judicial Council, BAR association, prosecution office, Civil High Judicial Council, and Security Judicial Council. The aim was to create space for intellectual discussion on issues related to women's rights and the role of the justice sector in promoting these rights, and also to support women to access justice and highlight methods of advancing women's leadership within the justice sector in accordance with international human rights conventions acceded to by Palestine.

According to the analytical report, **12** participants completed the evaluation: 33% of the participants were from the age group 15-29; while 42% were from 30-59 age group, and 25% were 60+ age group. As for analyzing trainees' pre-knowledge measures; the results of 12 participants that completed the evaluation as the following: 83% reported that they had a pre-knowledge about the training content; while 17% reported as new to training content and information, however, 17% out of the 83%; reported that the training was extremely effective, and 67% reported somewhat effective. Moreover, out of 17% who reported as new knowledge, distribution indicate; 17% reported that the training was extremely effective in adding new knowledge to their capacity.



### ***Participate in national and international landmark events***

In 2020, WCLAC conducted 4 roundtable discussions during the 16 Days of Activism using both face-to-face and virtual means. The first round table discussion was held on November 30<sup>th</sup> 2020, and during the 16 Days of Activism aimed to present results of a policy paper on women's acquiring leadership position in the Civil Service Law, discussing the main findings and recommendations. This discussion was attended by representatives from MOWA, Civil Service Bureau, CSOs, BAR association and women organizations. Results of this discussion provided us with informed decisions on the research methodology WCLAC is adopting to carry out the comprehensive research paper on Women Acquiring Leadership Positions in the Civil Service Sector.

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, the second roundtable discussion was held by WCLAC, in cooperation with the General Union of Palestinian Women, the NGO coalition for the implementation of USCR 1325, and UN Women. The aim of this roundtable discussion was to highlight the role of women in the national emergency committees and the support committees conducted at the governorates level, which were established to respond to the outbreak of COVID-19. The roundtable was conducted in Ramallah with a connection with Gaza and those who could not attend in person via a Zoom platform attended by 24 representatives of the Ministry of Women Affairs, the PWGU, NGOs and CBOs.

The first panel discussion was related to women's participation in the emergency committees during the Covid-19 pandemic. It reflected on the methods of engaging women in the emergency committee, which relied on factional and political party representation. Women's participation in the support committees at the governorates level could not adequately promote women's role in responding to COVID-19 or participation in the decision-making process. WCLAC also carried out a roundtable discussion on women's political participation as part of the NAP on implementing UNSCR1325, which focused on highlighting success stories related to women's participation in the emergency response to COVID-19 and turning the crisis into an opportunity for women and women human rights organizations to promote the WPS agenda and to influence decision makers to engage women in any future emergency response plans.

WCLAC virtually launched a research paper entitled "The Palestinian Experience of the Family Protection in the Context of Due Diligence Principles". The launch was attended by representatives of women and human rights organizations. The study discussed the experience of the Family Protection from Violence Law in the State of Palestine, which focuses in particular on state compliance with international conventions and treaties Palestine acceded to. The study reviewed the extent to which the State of Palestine observes good practice, in particular the principle of "due diligence". Analysis and recommendations emphasized the state's responsibility to provide direct response to GBV, while offering protection, prosecuting and punishing perpetrators, and providing redress for those affected by this form of violence.



WCLAC also put focus on the direct impact of COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown on women's access to basic rights. A roundtable discussion was virtually conducted and attended by representatives from different NGOs, ministries and women organizations. In particular, panel discussions focused on women's access to health, economic, and protection rights during the state of emergency and role of the Palestinian government providing the means for women to access these right. This session concluded the need for specific policies that should be adopted by the Palestinian Government to provide relevant and responsive protection, health and economic services to women during times of emergency. This roundtable discussion concluded that it will document all recommendations in a letter to be sent to the Prime Minister. The letter will also request a meeting to be conducted via Zoom platform with the Prime Minister to present the recommendations and ask him to respond to questions and inquiries of women and women organizations.

### ***2.1.3 Develop capacities of community activists and grassroots women's organizations working on women protection and advocate for their rights***

#### ***Extend women's service provision to underserved parts of Palestine through partnering and building the capacity of selected grassroots organizations***

Since 2005 WCLAC has worked with grassroots organizations in marginalized communities and remote areas of the West Bank in order to improve their capacity to defend Palestinian women's rights and to raise awareness on available services in local communities as well as providing social and legal services to women in remote and marginalized communities.

#### ***Develop the capacities Community Based Organizations to provide services to women in remote and marginalized communities***

In 2020, WCLAC held a specialized training for the staff working in both partner grassroots institutions targeting female specialists, lawyers, and the administrative team in addition to the volunteers of the institutions.

The training mainly focused on transferring experiences and training agents of change, and the special mechanisms it includes which contribute to empowering different groups. The training discussed the concept of forming groups and the role of the facilitator in groups, as well as its most important characteristics at the personal and professional level that contribute to the success of the group. Working with men and targeting them was also a topic of focus, given that the recruitment of men in favor of women issues strengthens support for a society that is considered masculine in its general form, and the concept of masculinity and gender. The importance of developing the idea of agents of change and recruiting men who are the members of the protection committees, was highlighted. The sessions also looked at practical applications in working with protection committees in terms of formation, recruitment, capacity building, and the stage of spreading knowledge, in addition to the stage of documentation, follow-up and evaluation, reflecting stories of change, and making use of the media in promoting this important work.



WCLAC also held several follow-up and supervision sessions with 10 staff members of the partner grassroots organizations, which were based on continuous follow-up of work requirements and review and evaluation of the intervention plans and services provided. COVID-19 restrictions changed the setup of some of these supervision sessions. WCLAC utilized online platforms such as Zoom and WhatsApp to carry out these sessions and to maintain communication with the team of social workers and lawyers. This enabled WCLAC to provide direct support to partner CBOs staff on challenges that they faced while providing services during the lockdown, and mechanisms of engaging community members in the protection committees. During 2020 the four partner CBOs provided social and legal counselling to **260** of women victims of GBV.

WCLAC extended its support to CBOs in East Jerusalem to engage them in early detection, prevention and referral of women victims of GBV to service providers. This aimed at creating social champions of change in local communities who can transfer their knowledge and experience through awareness sessions and community initiatives. WCLAC's media campaign through local radio stations in East Jerusalem also aimed at awareness raising to local communities, by raising awareness on women's rights and available social and legal services to women victims of GBV. The radio episodes focused on alimony, custody, marriage rights and divorce rights. Special attention was paid to the impact of different laws in force in East Jerusalem on women's access to their legal rights, which were clearly emphasized in the radio episodes.

***Building regional protection networks one in the North and one in the South for symbiosis between grassroots institutions that provide services in the health, social, and legal sectors***

WCLAC continued building the capacities of **90** service providers who are members of protection networks in Hebron, Tubas, Tulkarem Jericho and Qalqiliya. The sessions focused on challenges during the state of emergency in providing services to women victims of violence. Specific attention was paid to the counter campaigns led by conservative elements in society, which aimed at countering the efforts made by women's rights organizations and service providers.

During the first six months of 2020, 10 meetings were conducted attended by **90** members of the protection networks of service providers (**12** of them are males) for women victims of violence in the five governorates of Hebron, Tubas, Tulkarem, Jericho and Qalqiliya. The service providers emphasized that the protection of women from violence is a priority and they should invest collective efforts to confront the counter campaigns against women organizations. The COVID-19 pandemic had a direct impact on women through limited access to services, increased unpaid care work and no access to justice. This required cooperation between service providers to utilize the National Referral System differently during times of emergency, which decreased the dire impact of COVID-19 on women victims of violence. Shared experiences during the discussions contributed to exchange of knowledge between service providers not only during the meetings, but also while developing interventions plans for women victims of GBV.

As part of their responsibility to raise awareness of women on available services in their communities, service providers' members of the Protection Networks designed and implemented "We Are With You" initiative. The initiative carried positive messages in support of women and affirmed the continuity of the



work of institutions in providing services in all circumstances. The initiative also emphasized the gendered impact of the pandemic and the need of gender sensitive emergency response through their messages to influence the interventions of the emergency response committees.

Finally, all members agreed on the importance of having a formal follow-up committee that includes each of the department heads for the health and social services sectors in addition to the legal, so that these sectors include civil society institutions that are specialized in providing services for women to contribute to effective coordination and networking among each other. This is to ensure that all urgent and emerging issues are addressed during the application of the emergency state, which mainly affects women and their access to services and follows all the work paths related to facilitating women's access to services, such as providing them with helplines, in addition to listing issues of violence against women and urgent protection orders as a priority to work on with official institutions. Moreover, it was mentioned that members should work on the readiness of protection shelters to protect women in these circumstances, by working on rehabilitating them at all levels in terms of location, crews and procedures for this stage as well as all health measures for working crews and women during quarantine period.

## 2.2 Strategic goal 2: Promote women's rights to access justice and eliminate discriminatory policies against women

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The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic affected not only women's access to services but also gender equality in general. In this context, WCLAC's target group has been significantly affected, as well as our available means of advocacy.. This required introducing new advocacy and influencing means to highlight this impact, present evidence-based data and utilize different methods to hold duty bearers accountable. From April 16th to June 3rd, WCLAC published six [situational reports](#) detailing the current state of women's rights violations in Palestine after the renewal of the state of emergency for a third month and continued lockdown throughout Palestine. As mentioned above, several analytical reports have also been published throughout the year.

On May 21st, WCLAC's general director Ms. Randa Siniora contributed an article to the e-book "The Double Lockdown: Palestine under Occupation and COVID-19", published by the State of Palestine's Negotiations Affairs Department. The article, titled "Violence against Women and COVID-19 in Palestine" addressed the increase in GBV since the beginning of the lockdown on March 5th. It also described the compounded suffering of Palestinian women with regards to GBV, IHL violations and economic hardship, all exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### *2.2.1. Contribute to the development of laws, policies and procedures to eliminate discrimination against women*

#### *2.2.1.1 Amendment of laws and policies in line with CEDAW*

##### *Preparing CEDAW parallel follow-up report to the PA and submit it to the CEDAW Committee*

The CEDAW Committee's concluding remarks to the Palestinian government in 2018 included the submission of a follow-up within two years. WCLAC carried out a national consultation with Al Muntada for Combating Violence against Women to develop a parallel follow-up report based on the CEDAW Committee's concluding remarks. In particular, the report, which was submitted on Sept 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020 both in [English](#) and [Arabic](#) focused on the government response to the concluding remarks regarding the adoption of a **"national legislation that includes a comprehensive definition of discrimination against women covering all prohibited grounds of discrimination and encompassing direct and indirect discrimination in both the public and private spheres"**. Taking concrete measures to **"Accede to the Optional Protocol Annexed to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women"**, was the only tangible progress that the Palestinian state made within these two years. Another focus was on reunifying **"the legal systems in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to ensure that all women and girls in**





**the State party are afforded equal protection under the law, in line with the Convention".** In addition to **"expedite the review of draft laws to ensure their compliance with the Convention"**; especially the Penal Code and the Family Protection draft law. The report presented several recommendations to the CEDAW Committee to exert pressure on the Palestinian government to adopt concrete measures to comply with the concluding remarks.

### ***Review the Family Protection Bill***

The CEDAW Committee's concluding remarks emphasized a considerable number of laws that the Palestinian Authority should amend and adopt to eliminate discrimination against women. Family Protection from Violence law was one of the CEDAW Committee's recommendations that was also brought to the attention of the Committee through WCLAC's Shadow Report. Considerable efforts were made in 2019 to draft the Family Protection Law through developing policy papers and messages exerting pressure on the Government to include representatives from civil society organizations in the National Committee on Harmonizing Laws in accordance with International Conventions. WCLAC as a specialized organization that provides direct social and legal services to women victims of violence was assigned in the working committee along with Al-Muntada for Combating Violence Against Women to participate in drafting the law. WCLAC accumulated practical experience significantly contributed to introducing relevant legal provisions to the law. The policy paper, which was shared with members of Al Muntada and other CSOs, emphasized the Palestinian government responsibility of providing ensuring prevention, protection of women victims of violence, and developing mechanisms to rehabilitate the perpetrators as well as taking measure of prosecution.

The Palestinian Cabinet reviewed this in a meeting with the Minister of Women's Affairs (MoWA) Dr. Amal Hamad attended by WCLAC and members of Al Muntada, who presented recommendations to the minister on issues to be included in the Family Protection Law. The Minister emphasized her support and readiness to reflect this in the Cabinet meeting. Unfortunately, a counter campaign led by conservative elements within the Palestinian society began in March 2020. Since then the whole process of reviewing the Family Protection Bill was disrupted. The main focus of the counter campaign was on the linkages between the Family Protection Law and CEDAW, which is based on their perception against "existing culture and religious beliefs". This increased women and human rights organizations determination to carry on the advocacy campaigns to exert pressure on the government to adopt the law.

To this end, WCLAC issued a research paper ["The Palestinian Experience of the Family Protection in the Context of Due Diligence Principles"](#). The paper emphasized the principle of "due diligence" of the Family Protection Law, since this law is an important element in the state's responsibility to different forms of GBV. During the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence campaign, in particular on 2<sup>nd</sup> December, WCLAC presented the study, virtually to 29 participants (25 females and 4 males). The study discussed the experience of the Family Protection from Violence Law in the State of Palestine, which focuses in particular on state compliance with international conventions and treaties Palestine acceded to. The study reviewed the extent to which the State of Palestine observes good practice, in particular the principle of "due diligence" and contributed to changing the prevailing impression that it is not the state's





duty to intervene in people's private lives. However, this obligation or standard requires the state to provide direct response GBV, while offering protection, prosecuting and punishing perpetrators, and providing redress for those affected by this form of violence.

### ***2.1.1.2 Impediments to gender equality and women's leadership***

#### ***Carry out a Gender Sensitive Review of the Security Sector Law***

With the aim of supporting Palestinian women to have greater public leadership and influence over decision-making, WCLAC conducted a gender sensitive review of the security sector law. The analysis was based on applicable laws in Palestine and international conventions Palestine acceded to; especially the CEDAW. The process also included the collection of qualitative data through focus group discussions and in depth interviews with key security sector personnel. The [research paper](#), which was published in Arabic, highlighted impediments that prevent women in the security sector from acquiring high level leading and decision making positions. This research was launched in partnership with MOWA, where the Minister herself expressed her commitment to reflect the recommendations in the Cabinet meetings. She highlighted that the recommendations will be one of the top priorities of the Ministry and will take measures to exert pressure on the government to implement them.

#### ***Carry out a Gender Sensitive Review of the Civil Service Law***

WCLAC also carried out a gender sensitive review of civil service law to highlight the gaps and discriminatory articles that prevent women from acquiring leadership and decision-making positions within the civil service sector. The legal review spotted 19 articles in the draft civil service law that have clear discrimination against women and introduced suggested amendments to eliminate discrimination and increase support for them in competing for leadership and decision making positions. A policy paper was developed and presented to representatives for the General Personnel Council, governmental organizations and women and human rights organizations. The policy paper will be further developed to a research papers, which will be based on evidence based data collected through focus groups and in depth interviews. Results will be used to develop advocacy and influencing campaigns to exert pressure on the Palestinian government to modify the draft civil service law and to comply with international conventions. This ultimately should be followed with concrete measures to support women in acquiring leadership and decision making positions with the civil service sector.

#### ***Carry out strategic impact litigation and legal procedures to introduce new legal tools to change and modify existing laws concerning women***

Strategic impact litigation is a means to create a legal precedent that can influence the adoption of progressive laws and policies. WCLAC took two cases to strategic litigation on femicide and matrimonial rights, in 2020.



WCLAC also took a femicide case for strategic litigation requesting compensation for the victim's family. In particular, WCLAC took the case of Suha Al Deek who was brutally killed by her husband in front of her children. The murderer was finally sentenced to seven years in prison, and an advocacy campaign was led by WCLAC and Al Muntada for Combating Violence against Women. WCLAC took the case for strategic litigation to introduce a legal precedent and influence policy making process to modify provision of the Penal Code calling for compensation for the victim's family. Court sessions stopped for a while during 2020 due to the declaration of state of emergency and shutdown of institutions. Follow-up will continue after court sessions are resumed.

The second strategic litigation case was on matrimonial rights. WCLAC represented a woman who lost her right to the joint property accumulated after marriage, and would be forced to pay off the entire mortgage after being divorced. Litigation in this case will not only support the woman to restore her matrimonial rights but also serve as a legal precedent that can support our efforts to introduce new progressive laws.

The first court session was scheduled for the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. However, due to COVID-19, all the court sessions were put on hold. The external lawyer will resume his activities concerning the legal hearings of the case when the courts are in session again.

### ***2.1.1.3 Shed light on policies, laws and practices in place that deal with femicide and sexual violence***

#### ***Document cases of femicide and sexual violence and prepare analytical report***

WCLAC has carried out on-going documentation of femicide cases in order to collate a strong body of data on which to base our advocacy strategies in lobbying for gender-sensitive legislative reform. A sound argument, grounded in facts, can also be used to pressure the government into taking concrete steps in order to amend legislation towards protecting women from violence. It should be noted the structural violence inherent in the unequal balance of power relations between the perpetrator and the victim which is reproduced in social life. As a rule, WCLAC investigates all deaths of women and girls in the OPT, excluding those caused by the Israeli force. WCLAC continues to be a reliable resource in documenting cases of femicide and incest in Palestine. A large number of local and international organizations usually request ongoing updates on numbers of femicide cases because WCLAC is the only organisation documenting those cases. WCLAC also issues analysis reports every two years through providing evidence-based data to influence decision makers to perform legal reform and adopt non-discriminatory laws.

In 2020, WCLAC documented a total of 37 femicide, suicide and death in suspicious circumstances cases in West-Bank and Gaza (**19** women were killed in Gaza Strip and **18** women were killed in the West Bank.) through field workers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, most of the women were aged between 16- 65 years old. This year the age group varied between 1.5 and 90 years old, as for the majority of cases (67.6%)



the age group was related to the cases is between 18-40 years old. It is worth mentioning that 10 out of the 37 cases occurred between March – June, during the COVID-19 's state of emergency.

Moreover, the reasons of death varied; WCLAC documented 9 cases of obvious killings either committed by a partner or a member of the family (father or brother or son), in 3 cases WCLAC documented that women were “killed by a gun fire, mistakenly by one of the family members, usually a minor”, which entails a lot of questions. In 6 other cases, the reason of death was beating. Women were severely beaten, usually by one of the close family members (son, father or husband). Furthermore, 8 cases were reported under “falling from a high place”, which raises the question of suicide or a suspected crime, WCLAC believes that in some cases women and girls were forced to commit suicide, or killed in a way that looks like a suicide.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that during the year of 2020, WCLAC's researchers faced major challenges and difficulties collecting the testimonies. One of the major obstacles was the lack of cooperation from the different prosecution offices, the thing that was negatively reflected on the documentation process, and caused major delays in obtaining the necessary information timely.

### ***2.2.2 Advocate for women's rights at the international, regional and local levels***

WCLAC works within networks and coalitions to target national, regional and international decision-makers in order to affect essential legal and policy changes for women in Palestine. Coalitions are comprised of civil society actors, representatives from governmental bodies, members of political parties and other decision-makers. WCLAC also incorporates representatives from its volunteer clusters into the coalitions, thereby bringing the voice of the Palestinian community to the decision-making level. Participation, in turn, empowers volunteers with invaluable advocacy skills. WCLAC is a member in numerous local and international coalitions and networks including: 1) *The National Committee for Women's Labour and a commitment in a periodic meetings*, 2) *NGO Forum on Violence Against Women (Al Muntada)*, 3) *SALMA Network against violence against women in the Arab world*, 4) *AISHA Network (Arab Women's Forum)*, 5) *Arab Network for Monitoring and Changing the Image of Women and Men in Media (ANMCWM)*, 6) *Musawa Coalition (Equality without Reservations)*, 7) *Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network and the Gender Working Group*, 8) *National Committee to Combat Violence Against Women*, 9) *Arab Network for Human Rights and Citizenship Education (ANHRE) Network*, 10) *National Committee of the Palestinian National Coalition on UN Resolution 1325*, 11) *Media and Rights Coalition to Ensure Implementation of Courts Decisions*, 12) *The Coalition on women with disability*, 13) *The Palestinian coalition on social, economic, and cultural rights (ADALA)*, 14) *Women Employment committee*, 15) *PNGO-Network*.

As mentioned above, during this reporting period, WCLAC continued its work to advocate for better protection for women through the upcoming revision of the Family Protection Law. WCLAC carried out these efforts as an NGO and part of **Al-Muntada Forum to Combat Violence against Women** and partner of the Amal Coalition.



WCLAC also participated in a Training Program on Gender Statistics which aims to increase the knowledge on how to compile, analyze, disseminate and communicate gender statistics in a user-friendly way.

As an active member of the **Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network**, WCLAC participated in the periodic meeting of the Network in April where Human Rights updates were shared among the members and a special emphasis was given to the adopted criminal protection laws in each country, as well as the application of Council of Europe against Domestic Violence "Istanbul Convention", in terms of raising awareness on its importance and the adequacy of the domestic laws and legislations of each country with the Convention. Furthermore, focus was also given to evaluate the previous strategic plan of the Gender and Gender Working Group.

WCLAC has also been part of the discussion meetings on the strategic plan for the **gender group within the Euro-Med** and the future strategic plan for the Euro-Med Network.

WCLAC continued to be an effective member of the **Higher Committee on UNSCR1325**, which was formulated based on a Cabinet decision and responsible for following up the National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR1325. It is also an effective member of the **National Coalition on UNSCR1325**, which consists of representatives of CSOs and aims to engage civil society organizations in implementation of the NAP. In January, WCLAC participated in reviewing and developing a specialized strategic plan of the **National Women's Coalition on UNSCR1325** to align it with the current political challenges.

WCLAC participated in the meeting of the **Non-Governmental Women Coalition for the Implementation of CEDAW** in occupied State of Palestine. The meeting aimed at discussing the action plan of the coalition regarding CEDAW, the implementation of the convention especially after considering shadow report submitted by GUPW and next steps regarding developing the upcoming shadow report.

WCLAC also plays an active role in the **Committee on Minimum Wage** to ensure having fair and equal wages for women. This Committee plays a significant role to affect labour policies and influence Ministry of Labour to modify employment policies in accordance with international conventions Palestine acceded.

During this year, and within the framework of WCLAC's action plan, on the project of the **Personal Status Coalition** supervised by the Women's Center for Legal and Social Counseling, a reference paper was prepared on the identity and form of the coalition and the general objectives of the coalition in addition to drafting the vision and mission for this coalition as well as the committees that will emerge from this coalition, such as the Media Committee, the Advocacy Committee, and the Legal Committee. It was agreed that a general conference would be held to address these issues.

During the state of emergency WCLAC joined "**FADA - Palestinian Women Against Violence**" **Coalition Launches Its Campaign "We Are Your Voice"**. A national campaign was launched in June 2020 calling on all sectors of the Palestinian society to bear their responsibilities and intervene immediately at the individual and collective levels in an attempt to halt the escalating violence against women. The campaign came in response to the sharp rise of reported cases of violence against women that befall during the lockdown and the imposed restrictive measures relevant to the emergence to the COVID-19, which subsequently underlined the cavities in the women's social protection system and accentuated the scale of challenges and risks Palestinian women face everywhere. The "We Are Your Voice" campaign confirms the right of women to live in safety, and it is the duty and role of every individual and



organization in the society to protect this right and to combat the spread of violence epidemic against women.

This campaign is the first activity of the feminist coalition “FADA- Palestinian Women Against Violence”; it is a coalition that crosses geographical and political boundaries, and comprises 21 Palestinian women's and human rights organizations operating in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the 1948 lands and Jerusalem. FADA was created as a result of an initiative by “KAYAN, Feminist Organization”, which advocated for uniting and intensifying Palestinian women's efforts, and to collectively struggle to live in a just and secure society for women as well as men. Partner organizations with this coalition believe that the patriarchal violence Palestinian women endure, is merely caused for their being females, which intertwines with the colonial violence that suppresses them for being Palestinians. Mitigating this multiple and deadly violence is the responsibility of the entire Palestinian society, which in effect should be prioritized, while emphasizing that the consequences of its detriments will not only affect abused women, but rather will have implications on the entire society. It is imperative to impose an inclusive political will to eliminate and combat this violence, which comes in accordance with the fundamental principles of human rights that guarantee both justice and equality for all human beings.

"We Are Your Voice" campaign appeals to every woman subject to violence, to seek help and to never hesitate and wait until it is too late. It also pleads to those who witness violence - anyone who acknowledges a situation in which there's a performance of violence or threats against women - to intervene and contact those who can provide aid; the numbers can be obtained from the contacts list provided by “FADA Coalition” on its Facebook page. Anyone who calls or informs about such a case can be the voice of that victim who was being suppressed by repression and threats, in order for her to get the needed support, thus pull her out of the cycle of violence that threatens her safety and life.

## ***2.2.4. Improve women's position in the media and combat negative attitudes against them***

### ***2.2.4.1 Follow-up, document and analyse women's image in the media from a gender perspective***

During the reporting period, WCLAC has managed to update its website and Facebook pages. As for the website, WCLAC has new programming to become more user friendly. Regarding Facebook, the updates included different WCLAC activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, follow up on the advocacy work, coverage of the Personal Status Law and Family Protection Bill developments, TV interviews with WCLAC general director and employees, articles written by WCLAC employees and different laws and news on women's issues. As for the Facebook's page engagement it is mainly focused on beneficiaries' inquiries related to the type of services we provide, and how they can reach us.

Furthermore, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, WCLAC carried out a media campaign through its Facebook Page and website to help women contact the helpline due to the lockdown and the increase in



violence. The total reach of the social media campaign that WCLAC implemented due to the outbreak of pandemic in 2020 according to Facebook the total reach is 31,072 the engagement in posts is 1,491, as for the gender of the audience 70% were women 30% were men, as for the geographical distribution the audience were 18.5% from Gaza, 13.9 from Ramallah, 7.8% from Hebron, 7.7% from Nablus, 3.1% from Bethlehem, 3% from Jenin, 4.9% from Jerusalem and 2.8% from Tulkarem. As for the age group most of the audience were between 25-34 years old women consisted 33% and men 12.2%, as for 35-44 years old women were 14% and men 7% as for 18-24 years old women were 14% and men 6%. As for Instagram the total reach was 2000 and the engagement was 203, as for the gender 68% were women and 32% were males. The top cities were Ramallah 21%, Gaza 13%, Hebron 9%, 4% Nablus and 4% Jenin.

## ***2.2.5. Empower youth networks of defense and advocate for women's rights***

### ***2.2.5.1 Expand the network of volunteers to advocate and mainstream women's rights in their communities.***

WCLAC believes that meaningful change in favor of women's rights begins at the grassroots level. For this reason, WCLAC works with volunteer clusters to advocate for legal and policy reform and to grow an awareness of women's rights in underserved and marginalized communities throughout the West Bank. Volunteer mobilization also empowers women (as well as men who support women's rights) with skills to develop their capacities, self-esteem, social status and voice in the public sphere. WCLAC supports teams of volunteers working in 4 locations to promote women's rights across the West Bank. Volunteers – a mix of male and female young professionals, typically fresh graduates or university students – are trained with knowledge and information to organize and lead awareness-raising and advocacy events on women's rights in their local communities that contribute to the economic, legal, social and political empowerment of women and enable them to exchange experiences. These activities usually include information-sharing workshops on women's rights and gender issues, educational and recreational activities, and cultural events. Through this network of volunteers, WCLAC is able to extend its reach, bringing its vision to conservative isolated, hard-to-reach locations. WCLAC also believes in the importance of targeting male volunteers in its programmes, and indeed the number of male volunteers forms almost half of our total number of volunteers. WCLAC volunteers are highly committed and dedicated to furthering the vision and message of WCLAC.

In 2020, WCLAC continued its work with four volunteer groups one in each of the following governorates: Tubas, Tulkarem, Hebron and Qalqilia, the 4 volunteer groups consist of 80 (53 females and 27 males) volunteers. During this reporting period, and due to spread of COVID-19 pandemic WCLAC held 16 periodic meetings with the volunteers to follow up and supervise the volunteers' action plans and activities in Hebron, Qalqilya, Tubas and Tulkarm online via Zoom, and WhatsApp.

On a different level, the Qalqilya volunteer group conducted an initiative between the 25<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> March to respond to the impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown on women. Fourteen young male and female volunteers in Qalqilya identified women-headed households and women victims of violence who were not targeted by the Emergency Committee established at the governorate level. They provided 35 impoverished families with sanitizers and dignity kits and mobilized the Emergency Committee to include





them on their lists to provide them with necessary food items. Moreover, four initiatives were executed in Tubas, Qalqilya, Tulkarem and Hebron by WCLAC's volunteers between April and May. The initiatives aimed to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on women. The initiative supported 75 women living below the poverty line, who were exposed to domestic violence and who were also responsible for their families' sustenance. It is worth mentioning that WCLAC volunteer groups joined the Emergency Committees established in their respective governorates to ensure having a gender sensitive response plan to COVID-19 during the lockdown. They also emphasized providing not only food items and sanitizers but also dignity kits to girls, women and the elderly.

Two discussion workshops were led by volunteers with key decision makers during the reporting period. The volunteer groups carried out a meeting on September 24<sup>th</sup> with the Social Development Directorate in Qalqilya Governorate, which included the Director of the Social Development Office and the Head of the Woman and Child Office in the Qalqilia governorate. The meeting focused on mechanisms employed by the Social Development Office to provide services to women victims of GBV; especially those located in remote and marginalized areas. The meeting also focused on women's access to services in Area C and areas affected by the settlements and the Separation Wall, which create a double burden on women and increase their vulnerability. These meeting shed light on issues that might not be considered a priority, which contributed to having these topics on the agenda of the Directorate of Social Development in Qalqilia as well as emphasizing the role of young men and women in advancing WPS.

On October 1<sup>st</sup>, an accountability session was held with the Governor of Qalqilya governorate and a group of volunteers from Qalqilya to review gender responsiveness of the emergency plan to COVID-19 pandemic. The volunteer groups also emphasized the multi layered impact of COVID-19 on women in the Qalqilia district, which also include the impact of Israeli violation to IHL on women. The meeting also focused on marginalization of women from the decision-making process through excluding them from the membership in the emergency committees. The Governor was very responsive where he stressed the importance of women's right to live in dignity and to participate in the decision-making process. And he stressed the importance of the basic role of women in leadership and their presence in all sectors of life and the role of the governorate in protecting women from all forms of violence, especially during the home quarantine.

On a different level, a total of 2 awareness raising sessions were jointly organized by volunteers and feminist activists targeting members of the local communities in 2 Governorates in order to raise awareness on the importance of the Family Protection Bill. The first session was conducted on October 3rd in Hebron with the participation of 13 (1 male and 12 females) community members. The importance of passing the bill was confirmed in order to protect families in general and women in specific, especially with the increase in societal violence against women as well as cases of femicide in the year of 2020. Finally, the second session was conducted in Tulkarem on October 7<sup>th</sup> with the participation of 12 (1 male and 11 females) community members to raise the awareness on the importance of passing the bill and advocate on decision makers to pass it to protect women from violence as well as the mechanisms to overcome counter calls against it.

## ***2.6. Document Israeli human rights violations against Palestinian women and develop effective tools to present them***



Israeli violations of IHRL and IHL did not only continue but actually increased during the state of emergency and lockdown. The impact of these violations have directly and indirectly affected Palestinian women in different parts of the West Bank including East Jerusalem and Gaza. As part of our emergency response, WCLAC took some mitigating measures to ensure continuous documentation of Israel violations to IHRL and IHL during the lockdown and movement restrictions. Online coaching was provided to the field workers to undergo phone data collection from women on the impact of Israeli violation to IHRL and IHL on their lives. This ensured continued documentation of testimonies, which were then analysed and developed into submissions and reports to different UN procedures.

Despite the pandemic, WCLAC carried out field visits to Area C and the seam Zone to listen to women's stories on the impact of Israeli violations on their lives. These visits included Zbeidat, Bardala, Tubas, Ouja, Fasayel, Cardala, Tayasir and Ain al Bayda. Meanwhile, WCLAC met several women who invited us to their homes and shared their work in the community. They presented their stories about their daily struggles to maintain their land despite Israeli ongoing violations through settlers violence, land confiscation, settlements waste and its impact on their land and their health, and military waste. The women also explained their perceptions on Israel's annexation plan as they mentioned that they "cannot afford another Nakba".

During 2020, WCLAC documented 133 testimonies from Palestinian women in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, 45 were translated and posted into [voices](#) on the website; the violations mainly focused on environmental rights and their impact on Palestinian women, the ongoing impact of Israeli violations during Covid-19, the annexation wall, expanded annexation, access to health, military waste and training, housing demolitions, punitive measures, settlers' violence, soldiers' violence, residency revocation and family unification.

Moreover, WCLAC issued and submitted two UN submissions; [one submission](#) to the UN Special Rapporteur on the oPt, Mr Michael Lynk, which highlighted the situation of Palestinian women under occupation during Covid-19. The submission emphasized the lack of accountability and the importance of holding perpetrators accountable. Secondly, WCLAC joined a [call](#) with other civil society organisations from the MENA Regions for a global ceasefire and unity in light of COVID-19, along with UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

WCLAC's English language [website](#) continued to be active and regularly updated with new and original materials.

Meanwhile, WCLAC developed a report specialized on the issue of annexation and the gendered impact of it. The report included evidence-based data from different areas of the Jordan valley; moreover, it looked into annexation from different angles including political and historical aspects. In addition, incidents on the ground were highlighted, including effects of the Annexation wall, expanded settlements, the Trump peace plan and its relation to Israel's expanded annexation plan.

Moreover, WCLAC worked on developing a report addressing the Israeli environmental violations against the Palestinian population, focusing on the gendered impact and the daily influence of such violations on





the lives of Palestinian women and girls. The report is primarily based on evidence-based data from the field and first hand, testimonies it highlights different type of environmental violations including: **access to water, solid waste, wastewater, chemical spraying, air pollution, industrial zones and power shortage**. It is expected that the report's first draft will be ready by mid December 2020, after which WCLAC is planning to share the report with different UN procedures including **the Special Rapporteur on the oPt**

Finally, WCLAC is in the process of developing a report that will highlight the impact of military training and military waste in the Jordan valley, on the lives of women and their families; moreover, the report will be primarily based on evidence-based data collected from the field. 20 testimonies were dedicated to serve the report. It is expected that the first draft of the report will be ready by mid-December 2020.

During 2020 a total of 14 presentations and meetings were achieved with delegations visiting Palestine, or online due to COVID-19. The delegations comprised parliamentarians, diplomats, journalists, and civil society activists to present evidence of human rights violations under occupation. Most of the meetings were held to exchange information on the latest developments from our respective organizations and see what opportunities we might have to cooperate especially on the Family Protection Law. They also highlighted HR situations in the oPt, with focus on Jerusalem and the Gendered occupation on Women's Human Right, discussing UN resolution 1325, Women Peace & Security and the impact of Israeli HR & IHL Violations on Palestinian Women focused on Women in Jerusalem.

In June, WCLAC participated in an online webinar organized by its partners in Belgium (Oxfam and BD). The webinar focused on the annexation plan. During the webinar, WCLAC presented evidence-based data on the impact of annexation on Palestinian women and girls. Moreover, the webinar was concluded with some recommendations to the international community (counter measures). The meeting was attended by parliamentarians, civil society organizations and representatives from the different Belgium ministries.

In August, WCLAC participated in an international conference on the question of Jerusalem titled "Annexation in practice – Palestinian youth in Jerusalem". The conference was organized by the UN Palestinian Rights Committee, in collaboration with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The event was held with participation of H.E. Mr. Fadi Hidmi, Minister of Jerusalem Affairs of the State of Palestine, three experts - Ms. Reem Natsheh, Women Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling; Mr. Micha Kurz, former Grassroots Jerusalem and Breaking the Silence; and Ms. Rochelle Watson, Friends of Sabeel North America.

Throughout the conference, the field work coordinator highlighted the lives of Palestinian female youth living in Jerusalem, and the daily challenges they encounter due to the prolonged illegal Israeli occupation. Moreover, Ms. Natsheh emphasized the importance of ending the culture of impunity and holding Israel accountable for all of its violations against the Palestinian people.

In a [letter](#) addressed to the Special Rapporteurs, the United Nations Working Groups, and the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and other UN Agencies, WCLAC called for immediate UN intervention to secure the release of Palestinian women and children detained in Israeli prisons. WCLAC expressed its grave concern over the fate of Palestinian women and child prisoners in



Israeli prisons and detention centers in light of COVID-19's transmission in the State of Israel at that time. The Letter highlighted the obligations of Israel as an occupying power towards Palestinian political prisoners which are enshrined in the 1948 Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilians in Times of War and Under Occupation; Israel is in effective control of the OPT and has legal duty to ensure that Palestinians receive "essential health services." Attention is also drawn to Article (3) of the 1948 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which states that "Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed in 'hors de combat' by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely". The letter emphasized Article (27) which states that "protected persons are entitled in all circumstances, to respect for their persons... they shall at all times be humanely treated...". This is taken account of alongside Article (76) that ensures the occupying power provides adequate food and hygiene to ensure the good health of prisoners. Further rights to health are guaranteed for women and children in Convention on the Rights of the Child and Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.



## 2.3 Strategic goal 3: Develop institutional and human capacity in order to ensure the sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency of WCLAC

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### ***2.3.1. Develop WCLAC policies and procedures***

#### ***Draft new policies and procedures***

During 2020, WCLAC drafted three new policies related to the Child Safeguarding Policy, in order to provide guidelines for WCLAC and its employees with the aim to sustain a safe environment for children and to adopt a no harm policy throughout the design and implementation of its interventions. This comes in accordance with WCLAC's principles and commitment to protect children from both intentional and unintentional harm and to ensure compliance with the Palestinian Children Law. Moreover, WCLAC seeks to protect children from violence through supporting, empowering, and raising awareness of important psychological, social, legal and economic issues. Therefore, establishing a child protection policy is essential since the Center deals with women who may have children.

During 2020 WCLAC has also drafted an anti-corruption policy to promote and strengthen measures to prevent and combat corruption more efficiently and effectively. Moreover, the policy provides guidelines to all of WCLAC's employees during their daily operations by providing the required practical knowledge to detect and prevent any corrupt actions or practices. By doing so, this policy will assist the Center to conduct its operations with integrity, accountability, honesty, transparency and to prevent any form of corruption and bribery.

WCLAC also drafted a sexual harassment policy that aims to provide guidelines for all of WCLAC's employees with practical knowledge to detect and prevent any harassment actions, discrimination as well as sexual exploitation and abuse of authority. WCLAC is committed to providing a safe environment for all employees free from discrimination on any ground and from harassment at work including sexual harassment. Moreover, WCLAC finalized the complaint mechanism, which means that complaints could be processed from clients, partners and all stakeholders.

#### ***Develop WCLAC's Strategic Plan for 2021- 2025***

WCLAC developed its five years strategic plan 2021-2025 through extensive discussion and consultation meetings with different stakeholders. Initial rapid assessment was conducted to make informed decisions on strengths and progress made under the current strategy 2015-2020, and recommendations to inspire the new strategy. The first strategic planning workshop was conducted with staff in December 2019. This was followed by a workshop with the BOD and GA as well as meetings with local and international



partners. In addition, an online survey was designed and distributed to a sample of national and international partners as well as beneficiaries. This was combined with FGD conducted with groups from WCLAC beneficiaries.. Despite the lockdown, WCLAC continued its consultation meeting with the support of the consulting company with the staff and the Board of Directors.

WCLAC conducted virtual strategic meetings with the consultants to develop the Theory of Change , via Zoom, attended by selected number of staff members. Further, another virtual meeting was held to conduct the risk assessment; especially risks that will and might emerge due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Main strategic goals and objectives were developed and the vision and mission were reviewed in a participator manner. Finally, the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 and WCLAC action plan for 2021 as well as the budget were approved by Board of Directors.

### ***Develop WCLAC's library***

During this reporting period, WCLAC has inserted 82 books on WCLAC's electronic library catalogue, WCLAC also purchased 44 new books related to its field of work, mission and vision. Due to WCLAC's rich library many visitors come to read and photocopy books on women's issues. From January 1<sup>st</sup> – December 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, 211 visitors (180 females and 31 males) have accessed WCLAC's library.

### ***2.3.2. Develop professional skills of WCLAC staff***

WCLAC has on-going capacity building for its staff through an annual capacity building plan, which includes capacity building of staff, appraisal system and incentives policy based on staff evaluation, participation in local, regional and international learning opportunities, including conferences, workshops and trainings. Last year, WCLAC allocated budget to ensure that the administrative staff gets equal opportunities for capacity building since most of the opportunities are programmatic. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, WCLAC staff attended online training sessions that built their capacities on methods and approaches adopted to implement programs and interventions during times of emergency.

# Part III. Annex

## Tables for WCLAC's provided services

The following tables indicate the numbers of women that WCLAC has provided services to, in different categories:

**Table 1. Type of Service Provided**

		<i>Ramallah</i>	<i>South of the Pal. Territories</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Type of service</b>	Legal and social	107	154	94	355
	Legal	12	19	2	33
	Social	1	14	0	15
	One-off consultation	356	164	188	708
	Total	476	351	284	1111

**Table 2. Type of Case**

		<i>Number of cases</i>
<b>Legal/social case</b>	Marital obedience incl. housing	21
	Custody and visits	64
	<i>Nafaka</i> (alimony)	276
	<i>Mahr</i> (dowry)	21
	Divorce	137
	Rights issues	6
	Total	525

**Table 3. Social Indicators of Women Clients**

		<i>Ramallah</i>	<i>Bethlehem</i>	<i>Hebron</i>	<i>Jericho</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>
Average family monthly income (NIS)	Less than 500	1%	0	56%	33%	42%
	501 - 1000	0	0	0	0	1%
	1001- 1500	1%	0	6%	0	1%
	1501 - 2000	0	0	0	0	17%
	2001- 2500	1%	0	2%	27%	1%
	2501- 3000	95%	100%	36%	20%	38%
	No income	2%	0	0	20%	0

		<i>Ramallah</i>	<i>Bethlehem</i>	<i>Hebron</i>	<i>Jericho</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>
Age	Under 15	0%	0%	0%	7%	0%
	16-20	8%	10%	11%	20%	6%
	21-25	19%	42.5%	22%	7%	15%
	26-35	40%	10%	45%	52%	35%
	36-40	15%	22.5%	11%	7%	21%
	40 and above	18%	2.5%	11%	7%	23%
	Unknown	0%	2.5%	0%	0%	0%

		<i>Total from all WCLAC's offices</i>
Level of education	Unknown	0%
	No formal education	3%
	Elementary school	5%
	Primary school	11%
	Secondary school	43.5%
	Higher education	37.5%

**Table 4. Source of Referral**

		<i>Total percentage from all WCLAC's offices</i>
Source of referral	Courts	28%
	People	13%
	MoSD	3%
	Other institutions	8%
	Lawyers	2%
	Women by themselves	45.5%
	Police Departments	0.25%

Hospitals/ Health Departments	0.25%
Prisons	0

**Table 5. Type of perpetrator**

		<i>South of the Pal. Territories</i>
<b>Perpetrator</b>	Father	2%
	Ex-husband	9%
	Husband's family/ relatives	0.5%
	Husband	85.5%
	Colleagues at work	0.5%
	Neighbours/ Friends	0%
	Siblings	0.5%
	Fiancé	2%



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