

August- October 2008

Focusing principally on the rights to education, identity, freedom of expression, and access to information, Tamer Institute for Community Education works across the West Bank and Gaza Strip, primarily targeting children and young people and developing alternatives and supplements to formal education. This Fact Sheet provides a quarterly update on children's right to education in the OPT, where children are defined as anyone under the age of 18.

Background on the Right to Education

The Right to Education is recognized in various international human rights instruments:

- The **1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights** proclaims the right of everyone to an education, and states that elementary education shall be free and compulsory (Article 26).
- The **1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** enshrines the right of everyone to education, with primary education as "compulsory and available free to all" and secondary education "generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means" (Article 13).
- States signatory to the **1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** recognize the right of all children to education, and must "make primary education compulsory and available free to all" and "take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop out rates", among other obligations (Article 28).

Context: Education in the occupied Palestinian Territories

Formal education in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) is provided mainly by the Palestinian Authority, who operates 1833 schools in the OPT, with 1460 in the West Bank and 373 in the Gaza Strip. Students in these schools total 766730 (529 019 in the West Bank and 237711 in the Gaza Strip). UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East also provides education for a large percentage of children and young people in the oPt, providing free primary and junior secondary schooling for all Palestinian refugee children in the oPt. According to PCBS, UNRWA schools in the oPt host a total of 253,116 students, with 66,753 in the West Bank and 11,358 in the Gaza Strip. Private schools also provide education for those who are able to pay the higher school fees.

Non-governmental organizations and civil society or community based organizations also provide non-formal education to children and young people. Tamer Institute for Community Education is one such organization that works with various regional and international partners to enable children to learn outside the formal school setting. Our projects include the National Reading Campaign and its many reading and learning promotion activities; Adolescent Friendly Spaces for young people to learn and interact creatively and peacefully outside school; Oral History for children and young people to learn about their community and history through local elders; and Voices and Yara'at, improving children and young people's confidence and creativity through writing, reading and dialogue.



School girls get their faces painted at Beit Ummra Elementary Girls School in Southern Hebron in the West Bank as part of the Protective Sphere for Palestinian Children project, financed by the European Union and Save the Children UK, and implemented by Tamer Institute in partnership with Save the Children UK and MaDad Consultancy Firm for Early Childhood.

Quick Facts

- Children make up almost 53% of the total population of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The median age across the OPT is 16 years old (17 in the West Bank and 15 in the Gaza Strip).
- There are approximately 450,000 students in the Gaza Strip.
- Israeli military operations disrupted a total of 256 school days at UNRWA schools in the 2007-2008 academic year. These disruptions affected over half a million students.
- Over 6000 Palestinian children have been held in Israeli detention centers since September 2000. As of August 2008, only two out of the 12 prisons and detentions centers that hold children provide any basic education.
- Approximately 85% of UNRWA run schools in the Gaza Strip operate on 'double shifts' in order to accommodate the number of children. In the West Bank, around 6% of UNRWA schools and 20% of government schools also operate on 'double shifts'.
- There are 43,559 teachers across the oPt; 27,338 of them in the West Bank and 16,111 in the Gaza Strip.
- The average number of students per teacher in Ministry of Education (government) schools for 2007-08 was 25.1 students per teacher (with 24.6 in the West Bank and 26.1 in the Gaza Strip).
- UNRWA schools have an average of 29.8 students per teacher, with a 27.7 average in the West Bank and 30.6 in the Gaza Strip

Right to Education Updates August-October 2008

Students:

Israeli settlers harass and endanger school children in Hebron. Two Israeli settlers from the Ma'on settlement near Yatta in Hebron threw stones at Palestinian students from Tuba when they were left by their Israeli military escort before reaching the end of the settlement on October 14. Also in Hebron, Israeli settlers threatened and harassed Palestinian children walking to their elementary school in At Tuwani on two separate occasions at the end of October when the children's Israeli military escort left them on their route to school.

Israeli Forces open fire into schools, endangering school children in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The biggest incident resulting in student casualties was on September 8, in an Israeli attack on Ni'lin Secondary Girls School, where 3 girls were injured by Israeli forces' rubber-coated bullets and another 50 inhaled tear gas and required medical attention after the forces fired canisters inside their school. In a separate incident, a 15 year-old girl from Khuza'a (near Khan Younis in Gaza) was injured by Israeli forces who opened fire into her school at the end of October.

Teachers:

A teacher strike in the Gaza Strip initiated at the end of August will continue until the end of the year. An estimated 53% of teachers employed by the Ministry of Education (based in Ramallah) have participated in the strike, affecting the quality of education provided to students in the Gaza Strip. Hamas has responded to the strike by employing and training approximately 6000 new teachers, who are meant to receive 40 hours of training. Despite the replacements, Ministry of Education schools in Gaza are reportedly lacking sufficient Math, Science and Arabic teachers for all levels, resulting in teacher sharing and fewer hours taught in these subjects. UNICEF and partner NGOs including Tamer are continuing to offer remedial after-school programs for children, with a focus on Math and Arabic. It is estimated that 250,000 students have been affected by the strike.

Schools:

Access to schools was limited by Israeli practices, Fatah-Hamas clashes, closures in Gaza and the Jerusalem Municipality's refusal to grant building permits for schools.

West Bank: A number of schools were closed 14 and 15 September in Bethlehem and on 28 September in Nablus, both in mourning of a child killed by the Israeli military in each district. These closures affected the schooling of a total of 3,130 children for one day or more. On October 12, the Israeli military prevented access to a school in Bethlehem by surrounding a building while the building's wall was bulldozed.

Gaza Strip: Despite the announcement from Egyptian authorities that the Rafah crossing would be open for the full day on 21 September, the crossing was reportedly closed abruptly in the afternoon. This closing affected approximately 800 students who were registered with the Ministry of Interior to travel on that day. Following this incident, the Gaza Interior Ministry opened an online registration page for those wishing to cross Rafah when it re-opens. Between 05 and 13 October 2008 when the page was open, a total of 3,500 Palestinians including 600 students registered their names on the list.

Jerusalem: The Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Education estimated in September that approximately 9,000 Palestinian children in East Jerusalem alone are unable to attend schools this academic year because of insufficient classrooms. The Israeli Municipality of Jerusalem has refused to issue the necessary permits to build new schools or classrooms and the increasing number of students are left with overcrowded classes or none at all. In addition, new buildings constructed by schools to address the shortage in schools are facing demolition orders by the Municipality of Jerusalem.

School supplies:

Gaza authorities allow families to send children to school without uniforms. Israeli authorities continued to prohibit the entry of school stationary and school uniforms into the Gaza Strip at the beginning of the new academic year. As a result, many families could no longer afford school uniforms. Responding to this setback, Gaza authorities declared that families would not have to buy school uniforms for this academic year.

Non-Governmental Organizations:

Non-governmental organizations and other non-state institutions have continued to provide formal and non-formal education to children and young people across the oPt. These include international organizations like UNICEF, UNRWA and Save the Children, and Palestinian organizations like Tamer Institute for Community Education and others. Local and international organizations have worked together to minimize the impact of school closures, the teacher strike and settler attacks, among other risks to education.



Part of our National Reading Campaign, the National Reading Week takes place every April, with activities across the oPt for Palestinians of all ages to encourage active learning through reading, writing and creative self-expression. Our theme for this year's National Reading Week was "One People, One Story".