

Education is an inalienable and universal right. In situations of conflict and instability, education can be both life-saving and life-sustaining. For children in the occupied Palestinian territory, the right to education remains unfulfilled as a result of armed conflict and military occupation, the ongoing blockade of Gaza and discriminatory policies that prevent investments in education.

As a consequence, schools are not available in adequate numbers and are difficult for many students to access. The barriers related to accessing education are varied and may be physical, administrative and socio-economic in nature. Children are unprotected and at risk of violence from the armed conflict while on their way to and from and also inside their classrooms. The learning environment for children is difficult, with negative consequences for the quality of education received.

All children should have protected access to quality education in a safe and dignified environment, free of violence, harassment or abuse.

## KEY ISSUES

### West Bank

More than 60% of the West Bank is considered Area C, where Israel maintains full security and civil control, including over planning and zoning.<sup>1</sup> An estimated 150,000 Palestinians live in Area C, and 18% are Bedouin and herders.<sup>2</sup> There are approximately 50,000 students enrolled in 183 schools in Area C.<sup>3</sup> Here, discriminatory planning and a restrictive permit regime mean that schools are lacking in number or are in poor condition



**School children in Khirbet Tana (Area C, near Nablus) stand in front of the tent school that was set up following the demolition of their school by Israeli authorities in January 2010.**

with inadequate or unsafe infrastructure. Because schools are inadequate in number, children confront long and difficult journeys to and from school.

<sup>1</sup> The Oslo negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization called for a phased transfer of power from the Israeli military and its civil administration to the Palestinian Authority. As part of this process, the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) was divided into Areas A (full Palestinian civil and security control), Areas B (full Palestinian civil control and joint Israeli-Palestinian security control) and Areas C (full Israeli civil and security control). See UN OCHA Special Focus, "Restricting Space: The Planning Regime Applied by Israel in Area C of the West Bank", December 2009.

<sup>2</sup> UN OCHA, "Humanitarian Fact Sheet on Area C of the West Bank", July 2011.

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF Press Release, "Over one million go back to school in occupied Palestinian territory, Schools continue to fight for survival in Area C of the West Bank", 4 September 2011.



Photo credit: M. McGivern / EAPPI

### **A young girl crosses Zaytoun checkpoint on her way to school in Jerusalem.**

- 15% of 113 West Bank communities surveyed, many of them in Area C, reported that school children and youth must walk along busy and dangerous routes to get to school; 33% (37 communities) reported that more than 1,700 children walk more than five kilometres in one direction to reach their schools, and 11% (12 communities) reported that more than 700 children walk between three and five kilometres to reach their schools.<sup>4</sup>
- 31% of these same 113 communities reported that school children, youth and teachers had to cross one or more military checkpoints to reach their schools, affecting more than 2,500 children daily; 29% (33 communities) reported that children must cross the Separation Wall, which comprises a series of concrete

walls, electrified fencing, military watchtowers and crossing points.<sup>5</sup> In 16% (18 communities), children reported experiencing harassment by Israeli military and security personnel while crossing the Separation Wall on their way to school.<sup>6</sup>

- In one-quarter of the communities (26 out of 101), school children, youth and teachers experienced harassment and/or violence by Israeli military or security forces while going to and from school. A slightly higher number (28 out of 101) reported settler violence.<sup>7</sup>
- Inadequate educational infrastructure is also a key concern in Area C. Nearly 10,000 students in Area C began the 2011/12 school year learning in tents, caravans or tin shacks with minimal protection from the heat and cold.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Based on a mapping exercise conducted in the West Bank by Save the Children UK, UNICEF and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Full report forthcoming.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF Press Release, "Over one million go back to school in occupied Palestinian territory, Schools continue to fight for survival in Area C of the West Bank", 4 September 2011.

## CASE STUDY: Children Far From Home in the Jordan Valley

In Al Bqai'a in the northern Jordan Valley, 46% of 166 students travel an average of 32 kms to reach their school, and 51% must cross checkpoints on the way. Because of this distance and the high cost of transportation, at least 65 children live alone in apartments close to their schools during the week. Parents worry about their children staying away from home for days without adult supervision. Families are particularly reluctant to let girls travel so far or live on their own.

These communities report that most students drop out of school after 9th grade and only a small percentage go on to complete their secondary school exam (*tawjihi*).<sup>13</sup>

- 31% of schools in Area C had inadequate water and sanitation facilities in 2010.<sup>9</sup>
- Schools are also threatened with attack. At least 23 schools serving 2,250 children in Area C of the West Bank and in East Jerusalem have pending stop-work or demolition orders, meaning they could be demolished at any time.<sup>10</sup> In 2011, part of a school was demolished in Dkaika village (South Hebron), and in 2010, the school in Khirbet Tana, near Nablus, was demolished twice.<sup>11</sup> Several schools are currently under imminent threat of demolition.<sup>12</sup>

### Gaza

The blockade of Gaza, in place since 2007, restricts the import of cement and other building materials. This has prohibited the construction and rehabilitation of schools. As a result, class

sizes are large and learning conditions poor. In addition, violence pervades the learning environment.

- 59.4% of Gaza primary school students and 69% of preparatory students surveyed did not feel safe going to and from school some or most of the time due to violence related to the armed conflict.<sup>14</sup>
- 13 schools serving 4,497 girls and boys and employing 326 faculty members are located in the Access Restricted Areas in Gaza (the area extending 1.5 kms from the border with Israel). These areas see frequent Israeli incursions and activity by Palestinian armed groups, putting children and teachers at risk of violence.<sup>15</sup>
- Elsewhere, 30 students transferred out of Al Qastina Boys' School<sup>16</sup> in northern Gaza at the start of the 2011/12 year out of fear associated with recurrent attacks affecting the school.<sup>17</sup> The school was heavily damaged during the Israeli offensive in 2008/09, and again by Israeli air strikes targeting nearby locations in March 2011 and most recently in August 2011 by a Palestinian rocket that fell short of the border with Gaza.<sup>18</sup>
- Gaza officials estimate that, in the coming five years, 130 new government schools and 100 new schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) must be built to accommodate students.<sup>19</sup>
- 80% of government schools and 90% of schools operated by UNRWA ran in double shifts during the 2010/11 school year to cope with the shortage of classrooms. This meant the reduction of class time and elimination of extra-curricular activities.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Data from Education Cluster: Area C and East Jerusalem School Profile 2010.

<sup>10</sup> UN OCHA, Humanitarian Monitor, July 2011. See also UNICEF Press Release, "Over one million go back to school in occupied Palestinian territory, Schools continue to fight for survival in Area C of the West Bank", 4 September 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Information provided by the Israel/OPT Working Group on Grave Violations Against Children and the Education Cluster.

<sup>13</sup> OCHA Central Field Coordination Unit, Jordan Valley Case Study, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> UNESCO, Psychosocial Assessment of Education in Gaza and Recommendations for Response, Report on the findings of an assessment conducted by Kathleen Kostelny, PhD and Michael Wessells, PhD of the Columbia Group for Children in Adversity, September 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Data provided by UNESCO, Crisis-Disaster Risk Reduction Project in Gaza, 2010. See also, OCHA-WFP Special Focus, "Between the Fence and a Hard Place: The Humanitarian Impact of Israeli-imposed Restrictions on Access to Land and Sea in the Gaza Strip", August 2010.

<sup>16</sup> The Al Qastina School operates on two shifts, serving 433 secondary students in the morning and 264 elementary students in the afternoon.

<sup>17</sup> Information provided by the Gaza Ministry of Education and Higher Education to UNICEF and the Education Cluster.

<sup>18</sup> Information provided by the Israel/OPT Working Group on Grave Violations Against Children.

<sup>19</sup> UN OCHA, Humanitarian Monitor, July 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



Photo credit: UNESCO

**Shattered glass and broken window frames fill a classroom floor in That Al Sawari Girls School in northern Gaza following Israeli air strikes on a nearby location in March 2011.**

- UNICEF sought in 2011 to support the construction of 500 classrooms in government schools. The funding was reallocated, however, because Israel did not allow required building materials to enter Gaza.<sup>21</sup>

## Jerusalem

In East Jerusalem, an estimated 10,000 children are unable to register with Israeli authorities because this process has been frozen since 2003. As a result, these children are unable to attend municipal schools.<sup>22</sup>

Discriminatory resource allocation and lack of investment by Israeli authorities has resulted in classroom shortages and substandard educational facilities for Palestinian children in East Jerusalem. Also, the route of the Separation Wall has effectively cut off 55,000 Jerusalem residents from the city, forcing thousands of school children to cross difficult checkpoints to access education.<sup>23</sup>

## CASE STUDY: Violence Impedes Education in Gaza's Access Restricted Areas

Prior to Israel's 22-day Gaza offensive in 2008/09, the Shuja'iya Boys Secondary School, located one kilometre from the border with Israel and within the Access Restricted Area, was known for its academic performance and extracurricular activities including debate, poetry, writing and football.

But studies have linked the frequent violence and threat of attack in Gaza with declining educational achievement.<sup>27</sup>

"Most days when we leave for school, we hear the sounds of bullets coming from the military post in the north of the village," said one teenage girl who attends school in the Access Restricted Areas. "Two days ago... a 22-year-old man was killed while grazing his sheep near the border."

At the Shuja'iya school, fear has taken its toll: while the school once ranked top in the district in the *tawjihi* exam results, the results of the 2009/2010 exams were average.<sup>28</sup>

- In 2009, the Jerusalem municipality spent four times educating the average Israeli child in West Jerusalem than that spent educating a Palestinian child in East Jerusalem.<sup>24</sup>
- By 2011, East Jerusalem public schools were expecting a shortage of 1,500 classrooms. Further, the city in 2009 found that more than half of East Jerusalem classrooms (704 out of 1,360) were "sub-standard" and 221 housed in "unfit" buildings.<sup>25</sup>
- 12.7% of school age Palestinians (11,900 children) were not registered in any public or private educational institution in the 2009/10 school year.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Coalition for Jerusalem and the Palestinian Network of Non-Governmental Organisations. "The International Campaign against Revoking the Residency Rights of Palestinians from East Jerusalem". See also OCHA Special Focus, East Jerusalem, Key Humanitarian Concerns, March 2011.

<sup>23</sup> OCHA Special Focus, "East Jerusalem: Key Humanitarian Concerns", March 2011.

<sup>24</sup> The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), "Human Rights in East Jerusalem: Facts and Figures", May 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Based on Israel's State Comptroller Report for 2009. See Ir Amin and The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), "Status Report: The Arab-Palestinian School System in East Jerusalem as the 2009-2010 School Year Begins", September 2009. See also, The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), "Human Rights in East Jerusalem: Facts and Figures", May 2010.

<sup>26</sup> The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), "Human Rights in East Jerusalem: Facts and Figures", May 2010.

<sup>27</sup> UNESCO, "Psychosocial Assessment of Education in Gaza and Recommendations for Response", Report on the findings of an assessment conducted by Kathleen Kostelny, PhD and Michael Vessells, PhD of the Columbia Group for Children in Adversity, September 2010.

<sup>28</sup> UNESCO, "Safe Schools: Protecting Education from Attack, Twelve Schools in the Gaza 'Buffer Zone'", 2010.