



Repercussions of the Corona Pandemic on the Youth of Gaza Strip

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Observers unanimously agree that after the Corona pandemic, the world will not be the same, due to the repercussions it has left on all levels, and due to globalization and its dramatic global and rapid changes. The world has literally become a small village, in which it shares aspirations and challenges. The best evidence of this is the outbreak of the virus east and west, after it was discovered for the first time in the Chinese city of Wuhan in late December 2019¹ and its spread all over the world despite the distance, in a clear indication of the depth of this global connection and its effects.

1 WHO, Novel Corona Virus - China, January 12, 2020 <https://www.who.int/csr/don/12-january-2020-novel-coronavirus-china/ar/>

Palestinian Territories and Corona Virus:

The Palestinian territories were affected by the consequences of this global interconnection, following the detection of people infected with the virus in the city of Bethlehem². Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas issued on March 2020 ,5 a decree declaring a state of emergency in the country, followed by the imposition of many restrictions within the framework of efforts made to contain the pandemic.

The Israeli blockade and how ready is Gaza Strip to face the crisis:

The Israeli occupation authorities imposed restrictions on the Gaza Strip, which intensified in 2007³, after Hamas's takeover of the Strip. The occupation imposed a land, sea and air blockade, which resulted in catastrophic repercussions on various levels, including the health system, which is not going to be able to deal with the possibility of increased number of people infected with the Corona virus, due to lack of resources⁴ . This has prompted many international bodies to declare their concerns about the alarming situation⁵

The most prominent effects of precautionary measures on youth in the Gaza Strip:

Before delving into details, it must be noted that young people in Palestine constitute about %30 of the total population, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. This means that our society is a young one, but when we examine their reality we find that they suffer from multiple complications at various levels politically, economically, legislatively, institutionally, culturally and socially, etc.

With the pandemic arriving at Gaza Strip, Gazans are facing a new challenge, adding to a series of accumulated challenges, pending policies and interventions that are still absent. On the youth level, for example, government precautionary measures have left many repercussions for them, added to the series of complications that preceded it, where the environment is complex and not up to their aspirations. Things are even more complicated in the case of young people with disabilities, especially since they are among the most marginalized and stigmatized groups in the world, even in normal circumstances. Unless the government moves quickly to protect them, as part of the response to the spread of the virus, they will be at a high risk of contracting the virus and dying with the spread of the pandemic⁶.

2 Sama News Agency, President Abbas issues a decree declaring a state of emergency in Palestine for a month, 05 March 2020, <https://cutt.us/RGaJ6>

3 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Gaza blockade, <https://www.ochaopt.org/ar/theme/gaza-blockade>

4 Al-Quds Al-Arabi, warnings of the Gaza Strip's inability to cope with a widespread outbreak of the Corona virus, April 8, 2020, <https://cutt.us/zyrja>

5 United Nations News Site, McGoldrick: Corona's arrival in Gaza "may be frightening" as a result of overpopulation and we are working closely with the authorities to prevent the deterioration wherever we can with available resources, 21 March 2020. <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2020/03/1051802>

6 BBC Arabic, Corona Virus: How do people with disabilities live facing the pandemic? April 25, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/interactivity-52299318>

These effects can be summarized in the following points:

High rates of depression and anxiety:

Rory O'Connor, a researcher at the University of Glasgow, believes that "social isolation, financial insolvency and unemployment are factors that prepare people suffering from them for stress, depression and nervousness"⁷. According to Moroccan psychologist Osama Lahlou, those who are in a vulnerable psychological state are «more likely than others to suffer from these problems»⁸. As long as this is so, and because the youth in Gaza Strip already suffer from the above problems and perhaps more, it goes without saying that levels of anxiety, depression, stress and psychological distress are going to increase among them in the time of Corona, in light of the increased rates of anxiety, feeling isolated, tension, stress, fear and sleep disorders⁹.

Growing rates of violence, family violence and crime:

crime is considered a «social, moral, political and economic phenomenon before being a legal one»¹⁰,

resulting from the integration and interaction of a group of factors with each other, some of which are related to individuals themselves, while the others are due to the conditions of individuals within their environment. As long as things have an interlocked nature, then the repercussions of the pandemic's lockdown, and the poor social, political, economic and psychological conditions are all factors that will feed the expectations of «increasing domestic violence to 35 percent and community violence to about 40 percent»¹¹, as well as an increase in crime rates according to the International Criminal Police Organization «Interpol», which reports a change in the forms of crime around the world, due to the pandemic, and the fact that a third of the world's population is in quarantine¹².

The widening poverty, destitution and unemployment gap:

precautionary measures toppled the wheel of production of the various sectors, with GDP expected to decrease by 14 percent in 2020, compared to 2019¹³.

Gaza youth are considered the most affected by precautionary measures, especially those

7 Philippa Roxby, Coronavirus: Scientists warn of the pandemic's effects on mental health, 16 April 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/science-and-tech-52314172>

8 Boualam Ghobshi, Corona Virus: What are the psychological effects of quarantine and to avoid it? 2 April 2020, France 24, <https://cutt.us/Ojewu>

9 Alghad Poll. Increased anxiety primarily and then a disturbance of sleep are the most affected individual feeling as a result of Corona, May 7, 2020. <https://cutt.us/28CaQ>

10 Fathia Abdel-Ghani Al-Jumaili, Crime, Society and Crime perpetrator, National Library Department, Amman, 2001, p. 35.

11 Awrad Center, results of an opinion poll on the performance of the Palestinian government towards the Corona virus, March 2020, <https://cutt.us/Pihxt>

12 Emirates Today, "Interpol" warns of emerging crimes during the outbreak of "Corona" April 12, 2020, <https://cutt.us/REpzZ>

13 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics announces economic forecasts for the year 2020 during the Corona pandemic, <https://cutt.us/clzWf>

who lost their work and source of income due to the pandemic, as they are the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. This means widening the circle of poverty and unemployment amongst them according to the World Bank data¹⁴, in light of the absence of effective government policies to address such phenomena.

Disrupting face-to-face education:

According to the estimates of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the pandemic affected nearly 60 percent of the world's students¹⁵, and due to the specificity of the situation in Gaza Strip, the e-learning experience was faced with a number of issues, which posed a new challenge for young people, especially with universities adopting distance education systems, in an innovative and unprecedented fashion; this hindered the ability of many young people to receive education at all levels.

Increased negative adaptation: The pandemic has intensified the indicators of negative adaptation among a large segment of young people, as a result of lack of resourcefulness and inability to confront the pandemic. It also reinforced the culture of acceptance and recognition of reality, or getting barricaded inside oneself.

More exclusion and marginalization: precautionary measures have deepened the manifestations of marginalization and exclusion of young people from decision-

making positions, whether in formal or informal institutions. It has also enhanced already prevailing traditional culture that is not motivating for young people or supportive of their active participation. Young people were absent from the supreme emergency committee that was formed to confront the Corona virus outbreak, as well as from membership of the management of the "Honor Fund" (Waqfet Ezz).

Youth efforts to reduce the effects of the pandemic on the Gaza Strip:

With the outbreak of the virus, and despite the above challenges, youth throughout the Palestinian territories have been involved in efforts to confront the pandemic. They formed several emergency committees entrusted with many field missions, whether in terms of relief activities for those affected, or carrying out the tasks of distributing gloves, masks and pamphlets for the prevention of infection with the virus, or sterilization campaigns for facilities and streets. These efforts are in line with the call of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, of the need to harness the talents of young people to face the global health crisis and beyond¹⁶, and to affirm the role and responsibility placed on them in all stages of the national struggle.

Finally:

"A society that cuts itself off from its youth, severs its lifeline." Kofi Annan, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations.

14 PCBS: National economic forecasts for the year 2020 during the Corona pandemic http://www.pCBS.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_Ar_23-4-2020-forc-ar.pdf

15 UNESCO, Education: From Turmoil to Recovery. <https://cult.us/sFeM3>

16 United Nations News website, Secretary-General calls for the use of youth talents in efforts to combat COVID-19, 27 April 2020, <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2020/04/1053932>

Recommendations:

1. Promoting the values of social solidarity as an important pillar to confront the Corona pandemic, in light of the poverty, the blockade and the absence of real remedies for the crises.
2. Working to reinforce the idea of cooperatives and self-sufficiency through prioritizing income-generating projects for the youth in the coming stage, thus raising their immunity and their ability to address such a crisis in the future.
3. The need for the government to adopt policies and plans that contribute to overcoming the challenges the pandemic has left for young people, and involving them in the formulation and implementation of such policies.
4. The need for more beneficial partnerships between youth, civil society organizations (NGOs), and government institutions that work on the youth agenda. So far, there are no national action plans regarding these partnerships, that allow for effective engagement of young people in addressing the consequences of the pandemic on them or on society.
5. Reviewing the way the Honor Fund (Waqfet Ezz) was managed in terms of engaging youth in its management, and enabling them to receive financial support for the pandemic.
6. A serious evaluation of the emergency programs and plans, implemented by the government and related ministry, to determine their suitability and responsiveness to the needs of youth, especially young people with disabilities during the emergency period.
7. Incorporating youth into the priorities of the work of NGOs during the pandemic and after getting over it, through a participatory process and with adequate resources.
8. Civil society institutions should urgently regain the initiative and put forward creative models of social solidarity, including putting affected youth on the top of their priorities when planning the get-well strategy, especially as NGOs have originated in a different historical context, with sufficient experience in dealing with the details of daily life.
9. Serious endeavors by NGOs to work closely with donors, to increase their interest in supporting young people, and adopting a pattern of support for their economic projects, especially those affected by the pandemic, and directing support towards contributing to job creation opportunities for young people.
10. Putting advocacy campaigns back on top as an influencing means to pressure government agencies to ensure that their plans respond to youth issues, whether during the pandemic or any future emergency.
11. Working on investing in technological issues and the techniques of remote communication, in order to increase the readiness of response in any emergency,

in light of the World Health Organization data saying there is no end to the Corona epidemic before the virus disappears from the world¹⁷.

12. It is important to draw inspiration from successful international experiences in this regard. For example, the launch of a Palestinian Youth Hackathon similar to the Hackathon launched by the Arab Youth Center; which is the largest joint design platform of its kind for youth solutions, putting forward and sharing youth ideas about mechanisms

to support development, confront challenges and crises, and enhance youth participation in finding solutions to issues that concern Arabs. It aims to stimulate the Arab youth energies in various categories and specialties to share their ideas, and to provide innovative solutions and proposals that serve their reality, and contribute to the use of technical and technological solutions to help Arab societies to overcome challenges, and overcome crises, which they face especially in the current global conditions.

17 World Health Organisation: There is no end to the Corona epidemic before the virus disappears from the world, June 5, 2020. <https://www.maannnews.net/news/2008162.html>

This paper was prepared as part of the project
“Palestinian Civil Society Organisations Perspectives to
Face Socio-Political Challenges”

Implemented by: Palestinian NGO’s Network.

In Partnership with: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Palestine.



The information and views set out in this paper do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Palestinian NGOs Network and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.