

CRISIS WITHIN A CRISIS: RESISTANCE, RESILIENCE AND PERSISTENCE OF GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN



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Young women and girls are among the most vulnerable in the MENA region, which ranks the lowest on the Global Gender Index (GGI). According to UNFPA,¹ one in three women in MENA have experienced or are at risk of experiencing physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime, and gender-based violence (GBV) is the most common rights violation experienced by women and girls in the region.

Due to the social, political and economic complex situation, young women and girls are deprived of full enjoyment of their rights and freedoms. In Palestine, this oppression feels tripled.

Firstly, Israeli occupation deprives Palestinian citizens, especially women and girls, from their basic human rights, peace and security,

restricts their freedoms, in particular the freedom of movement, and limits their access to basic services, especially health and education.

Since 10 May 2021, Israel continued to bombard Gaza Strip with air strikes and artillery shells, targeting civilians and ignoring international calls for calm. According to OHCHR, as of May 17, 200 Palestinians, including 60 children, 34 women (of whom three pregnant) and 106 men, have been killed in Gaza. The overall number includes two people with disabilities, including one a child.

The Education Cluster reports that 47 education facilities, including 42 schools, two kindergartens, an UNRWA vocational training centre, a MoE directorate and a higher education facility have been damaged since the start of the

1. <https://www.unfpa.org/gender-based-violence>

attacks on Gaza. According to the Health Cluster, six hospitals and nine primary health care centres have been damaged, with one centre suffering severe damage. One hospital is not functioning due to lack of fuel.

The hostilities have also increased the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). According to UNRWA, 42,000 people are present in 50 UNRWA schools, primarily for protection purposes, including 23 designated emergency shelters (DES).²

At the same time, eight Palestine refugee families who have lived for decades in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in East Jerusalem, within the occupied Palestinian territory, continue to face imminent forced eviction, placing them at higher risk of forced transfer.

Across East Jerusalem, nearly a thousand Palestinians, almost half of whom are children, are at risk of forced eviction. In many of those cases, including the case of Sheikh Jarrah, the forced eviction of Palestinians is occurring within the context of Israeli settlement construction and expansion, illegal under international humanitarian law.

Secondly, the nature of the patriarchal society imposes many types of stigma, discrimination and challenges, especially that the “freedom of choice” and much needed safe spaces are not available for young women and girls to express or to implement their activism on the ground. Thirdly, the existing patriarchal legal and political system does not provide a safe environment for this marginalised segment, with an entrenched patriarchal culture of laws, regulations and policies.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic and the enforcement of lockdown, different types of abuse, violence against women, and domestic violence have been exacerbated. At the same time, access to GBV response and support services for young women and girls has been inadequate, with a lack of targeted programmes responding to their needs and priorities. On the other hand, limited resources and capacities, combined with social stigma and discrimination, impede and discourage young women and girls from seeking out or accessing the services they need. Refugee women and girls, and those who live in conflict regions, are at a greater risk of experiencing violence, exploitation, exclusion, discrimination and harm

2. <https://www.ochaopt.org/>

due to the nature of displacement and their vulnerable status like in Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and Jordan.

Despite the challenges and limitations, young women and adolescent girls face in the MENA region, they have been actively working on the frontline responding to the COVID-19 crisis and tackling its implications on their communities. The Global Resilience Fund has revealed the passion, capacities, energies and capabilities of young women and girls in this region, by providing them with much needed space and resources to be able to initiate positive change and improve the lives of the most affected groups. The crisis pushed this marginalised and usually unheard segment of the population to think of new ways and approaches to address gender issues and to make their work visible. Throughout the Global Resilience Fund journey, as a panellist I have been impressed and proud when reviewing the applications for the grants. Different interventions on different levels were provided, for example; service provision, humanitarian aid, awareness and advocacy campaigns, income generating projects, educational and cultural activities, and the monitoring of human rights violations.

The Global Resilience Fund is an inclusive, bottom-up, and participatory model that brings new definitions for empowerment, feminism and resilience. Working with and for young women and girls, and having the work designed and implemented by young women and girls, ensures the effectiveness of the response, and that the support provided, tackles the right needs and priorities of target groups and communities.

I consider this movement as a way of changing the existing dynamics in the region, where young women and girls are often perceived as recipients of services and interventions provided by others taking action (governmental and non-governmental). This model emphasises that more attention, trust, space and resource must be devoted to these groups, to enable, encourage and provide a safe environment to do their activism and lead the change. There are many lessons that must be drawn from the experiences of young women and girls within the Global Resilience Fund as they present resilient and creative models for crisis response. ■