



Palestinian Youth

with a special focus on Jerusalem



INTRODUCTION



April 2017

Approximately 30% of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) are “youth”, i.e., between the ages of 15 and 29.¹ Their reality today is significantly different than for the generations before them. Firstly, they were born or grew up in the post-Oslo Accords era and are thus not fighting for Palestinian self-rule *per se*. Secondly, they have been socialized not only under the all-dominant Israeli occupation but also in an environment of separation and division between the West Bank and Gaza, and of a rivalry between the two main political actors, Fatah and Hamas. Thirdly, as societies worldwide are grappling with technological, economic, and cultural transformations, Palestinian youth are also affected by the impacts of globalization and the use of the internet.

While today’s youth is better educated than any generation before it, the transition to the labor market is difficult, resulting in high unemployment rates. Youth are at the forefront of the struggle against occupation when it comes to death and injury, arrests and detentions, and face - as Palestinians at large - discrimination in almost every aspect of daily life from denial of basic human rights to attempts at eliminating their national identity. However, disillusioned by the decades of uprisings and negotiations that have, in their eyes at least, not produced anything but cynicism and a worsened situation on the ground, they rather stay away from traditional political participation, which keeps their representation and role in decision-making very low.

While the above is true for Palestine’s youth at large, those living in occupied East Jerusalem face particular difficulties. Being considered residents but not citizens of the state of Israel they live with a persistent threat

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¹ If not otherwise stated, ‘youth’ refers to the age group 15-29 throughout this bulletin.

over being displaced (i.e., having their ID cards revoked, thus losing the “right” to live and work in Jerusalem) when doing “normal” things such as applying to jobs or universities, enrolling their children in school, or even choosing a spouse. They see land confiscation and construction/expansion of Israeli settlement right next to their own neighborhoods² or even in the midst of them³, while being themselves forced to build “illegally” (thus becoming subject to home evictions and demolitions) due to Israel’s harsh building-permit restrictions. They are denied family unification and child registration, with an estimated 12,000 of them subsisting without legal status⁴. While they are subjected to the same tax rates as Israelis (whose per capita income is way higher), municipal services are provided unequally⁵ and any development in East Jerusalem is intentionally neglected. And as if those economic hardships were not enough, they are also confronted on a daily basis with the provocative presence of Israeli forces and settlers all over their city as well as with attempts to eliminate their history, and identity, by means such as changing street names, manipulating archaeology to serve the Jewish-only narrative, and imposing the Israeli curriculum in Palestinian schools.

This bulletin aims at providing a thorough overview over the status, statistics and living conditions of Palestinian youth today. Owing to their special situation, a special focus is thereby put on Palestinian youth in Jerusalem, which is geographically isolated from the rest of the West Bank and inextricably linked to the Israeli economy and polity, creating special conditions and challenges.

THE “SPECIAL” CASE OF JERUSALEM:

Fifty years after the 1967 War, most of the current residents of East Jerusalem were born and raised under the Israeli occupation. One third of them – youth aged 15-29 – forming the post-Oslo generation has not seen any political or diplomatic progress or achievement and has lost hope in the Palestinian Authority (PA), the peace process, and the prospect of both an own state and a better future.

Cut off from their Palestinian hinterland in the West Bank, denied the right to any significant political expression, and with no political agreement in sight, youth in Jerusalem are dangerously disillusioned. They feel they have no options amid Israeli discriminatory policies⁶, which have inhibited Palestinian development in both the civic and socioeconomic sphere. Since the closure of the Orient House in 2001⁷, there has been no official Palestinian “address” serving as the contact point to represent and support the citizens of East Jerusalem and their concerns. The absence of Palestinian or international political pressure to end this desperate situation adds to the growing frustration and has allowed individual “heroic martyrdom” to become an aspiration for a growing number of young people.

In addition, youth, confronted with a society whose elder are incapable of protecting them and providing a dignified living, ultimately lose respect for “adult authority”, which together with the abovementioned factors (e.g., unemployment, poverty, arbitrary



² As in the case of settlements such as Ramat Shlomo (Shufat) or Pisgat Zeev (Beit Hanina).

³ E.g., Shimon Hazadik (Sheikh Jarrah), Maale Hazeitim (Ras Al-Amud).

⁴ Hasson, Nir, “Over 12,000 Palestinians Living in Limbo, 15 Years After ‘Temporary’ Israeli Status”, *Haaretz*, 4 March 2017.

⁵ While Palestinian Jerusalemites constitute 37% of the population, Arab East Jerusalem receives only around 10% of the municipal budget, see ACRI, *East Jerusalem 2015: Facts and Figures*, May 2015.

⁶ For details on the legal aspects regarding Palestinian Jerusalemites see PASSIA Bulletin on *Legal Treatment of Palestinians in East Jerusalem*, 2016.

⁷ Orient House served as the main national, political and social address for Palestinians in East Jerusalem and as the PLO’s representation in the city until its closure on 10 August 2001 by the Israeli government.

aggressions by Israeli settlers and Israeli occupation forces, etc.), have resulted in dangerous levels of frustration and hopelessness among youth living in Jerusalem. This, paired with the lack of Palestinian leadership, protection and representation, as well as an easier access to the Israeli black market and criminal world has led to increased violence, drug abuse, crime, and religious militancy in the city.

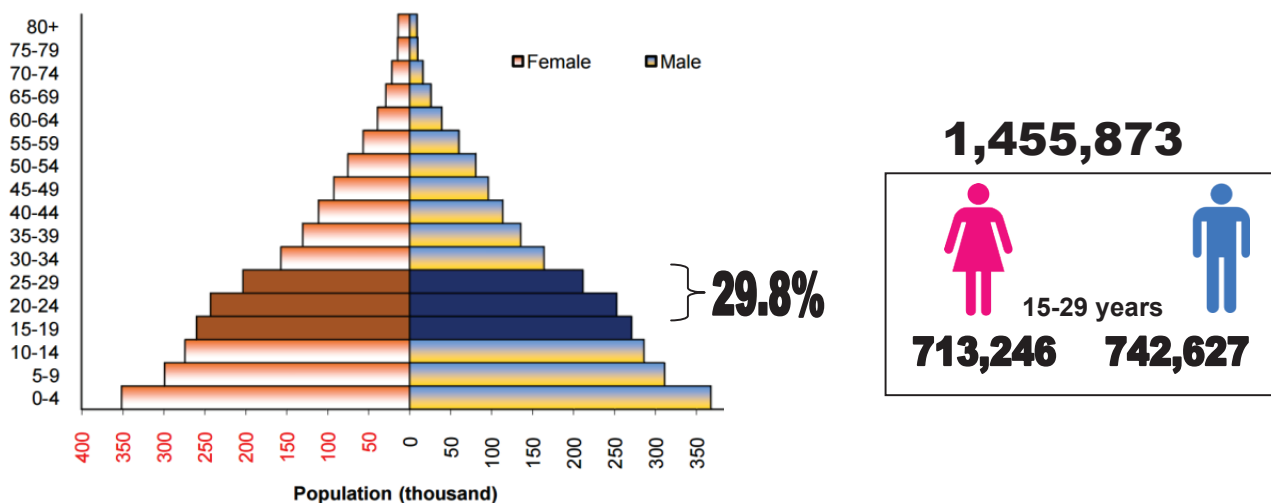
With regard to Jerusalem, the younger generation knows nothing but a “unified” city that is fully controlled by Israel, reinforced with checkpoints and the separation barrier, and will never be divided nor the capital of Palestine. Especially in recent years, as Israel is closing its grip on the city even further, young Palestinians have become increasingly pragmatic. This “trend” to arrange oneself with the facts on the ground for the sake of one’s individual benefits and safety in the absence of any political process and any support from “outside” can be witnessed in many spheres of daily life: more and more East Jerusalemites try to acquire Israeli “citizenship;” a growing number is going to malls, cinemas, restaurants and bars in West Jerusalem, as well as enrolling their children or themselves in Israeli educational institutions.

PALESTINIAN YOUTH - FACTS & FIGURES

SOCIETY

Palestinian society is very young with **children** (under 15 years) comprising 39.2% of the population and **youth** almost one third (29.8%) as of mid-2016. Of the youth, 37% are **adolescents** (aged 15-19 years) and 63% are **young adults** (20-29 years).⁸ **Median age** is 20 years (WB: 21.2, GS: 18,4).

Palestinian Youth in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, 2016



Sources: PCBS, *Women and Men in Palestine: Issues and Statistics*, December 2016; PCBS, *Palestinians at the end of 2016*, December 2016.

This overall picture is also mirrored in **Jerusalem**, where youth account for **29.4%** of the total population.⁹

The overall **sex ratio** in Palestine is 103.3 males per 100 females, that among youth 104.1 males to 100 females.¹⁰ Of the female youth, 40.8% are married, 4.9% engaged.¹¹

⁸ PCBS, *Women and Men in Palestine: Issues and Statistics*, December 2016, PCBS, *Press Release on International Youth Day*, 12 August 2016.

⁹ PCBS, *Jerusalem Statistical Yearbook 2016*, June 2016.

¹⁰ PCBS, *Press Release on International Youth Day*, 12 August 2016.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

East Jerusalem has the lowest **fertility** rate in Palestine, with 3.33 children per woman in 2014 compared to a total fertility rate of 4.1% - a trend that has been continuous in the city since 1967.¹²

The emergence of the internet has influenced **youth culture** in Palestine as have other regional and global trends, such as Hip-Hop music and culture and social media platforms as a main means of communication. According to recent statistics, 70% of youth know and use the **Internet** compared to 23% who were aware of it but do not use it. Some 84.8% of Palestinian youth (15-29 years) **own a mobile phone** (WB: 88.1%, GS: 79.5%; males: 91.9%, females: 77.3%).¹³ In a 2016 poll, 60.5% of youths named the internet and social media (Facebook and Twitter) as their first source of news 28.1% the TV, 4.6% radio, and 0.9% newspapers.¹⁴

Roughly one fifth of **youth** (19.6%) participate in some kind of **volunteer work**, 6.3% are members in **sports clubs** and 3% in civil, **cultural or other associations**, whereby the participation of females is significantly lower than that of males.¹⁵

Family and religion (the latter in a general, not radicalized, sense and due to internalized Islamic cultural values) remain powerful anchors for the development of identity. Youth (especially young females) are still facing restrictions from within society, which is yet constrained by both tribalism and patriarchy. Thus they often find themselves in the dilemma of wanting to be as “modern,” liberal and innovative as their peers worldwide (to whose style of life they are exposed more than any generation before them through the internet and Satellite TV), while at the same time they are demanded to “respect” and follow the instructions of their elders. The prevalence of “conservatism” among youth is also reflected in the aforementioned poll: some 65.3% of the respondents said they do not shake hands with the other sex, the majority of which (81%) for religious reasons, and half were opposed to co-education.¹⁶

Although patriarchal structures and thus the elders’ influence over the younger increasingly weakens, this phenomenon is still observable not only in family and school environments, but also with regard to public and political participation, a sphere still very much dominated by older men, whose positions and decisions are not supposed to be questioned (see below under political participation and activism for more on this). As a result of this, the voices of the youth are hardly being heard or represented in official channels.

IDENTITY

Since 1967, Israel has employed a network of oppressive measures to undermine, if not eliminate, the (collective) identity of Palestinians, particularly in Jerusalem, with the ultimate goal of compelling them to leave (the city) in search for better living conditions elsewhere and, thus, minimizing their presence in general and in Jerusalem in particular.

While somewhat dynamic, identity consists of elements that are more or less shared by society (e.g., common elements such as language, culture, religion, history, memory) and is both given and formed. As such, it can undergo changes and often people accumulate a plurality of “sub-identities”, with some more immediate to one’s consciousness than others.¹⁷ Palestinian youth also have several determinants

¹² *Ibid.* UNFPA, State of Palestine Prime Minister’s Office, National Population Committee, *PALESTINE 2030: Demographic Transition in Palestine and What it Means for Development*, December 2016.

¹³ PCBS, *Palestinian Youth Survey, 2015*, February 2016.

¹⁴ JMCC, *Youth Poll - Politics, Social Media and Conservatism*, April 2016, available at <http://www.jmcc.org/documentsandmaps.aspx?id=871>.

¹⁵ PCBS, *Palestinian Youth Survey 2015*, February 2016.

¹⁶ JMCC, *Youth Poll, op.cit.* However, this should not be mistaken for radicalization; in the same poll the majority (83.6%) had negative opinions of ISIS, with 50.1% considering it harmful to the Palestinian cause.

¹⁷ Baker, Ahmad, “Psychosocial-Political Perception of Identity among Palestinian Youth”, in Sharif Kanaana (ed.), *The Future of Palestinian Identity*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015.

of identity. In the comprehensive 2013 Sharek poll the majority identified according to their national identity (“Palestinians”), the remainder – especially those residing in Arab or Islamic countries - according to their Arab or religious identity.¹⁸ As identities form with the process of socialization, which transmits values and conceptions from one generation to the other,¹⁹ young people have some sub-national tendencies in defining their identity, for instance on the basis of region (West Bank/Gaza) or hometown (Nablus, Hebron etc.).



This is very challenging in the context of Palestinian youth in Jerusalem, whose status as holders of blue (=Jerusalem) ID cards is “distinguishing” and segregating them from the Palestinians in the remaining Occupied Territories.²⁰ Being sucked out of their original culture, deprived from their history, values, and traditions, at the same time exposed to a very different culture and lifestyle “next door”, they face a crisis of identity that contributes to the rise of those who resort to drugs and alcohol in order to deal with reality. About one-third of the estimated 80,000 substances users, are youth from Jerusalem, who are increasingly exposed to especially hallucinogens, narcotics like cocaine and heroin, sedatives, and marijuana.²¹ Some 63.2% of Palestinian households in East Jerusalem believe there are drug addicts in their environment!²² Many youth believe that the Israeli authorities protect, or at least turn a blind eye on, drug dealers as a way to control the minds of the young and diverge them from national and community issues.²³



EDUCATION

In 2015, 36.9% of the Palestinian youth (15-29 years), were **enrolled in education** (32.1% of the males, 42% of the females): 82% of the 15-17 years age group, 46% of the 18-22 years old ones, and 9% of those 23-29 years. The **dropout rate** was 34% (41% for males, 27% for females).²⁴ Some 51.5% of youth (15-29 years) have at most **completed basic education**, while 21.9% had **not completed any level** and 22.3% had **completed tertiary** level education.²⁵ Female Palestinians are proportionately more represented in education than their male counterparts. The **illiteracy rate** among Palestinian youth is 0.7%,²⁶ which is over average in Arab states.

¹⁸ Sharek Youth Forum, *The Status of Youth in Palestine 2013*.

¹⁹ Baker, Ahmad, “Psychosocial-Political Perception,” *op.cit.*

²⁰ Sharek Youth Forum, *The Status of Youth in Palestine 2013*.

²¹ UNFPA, State of Palestine Prime Minister’s Office, National Population Committee, *PALESTINE 2030: op.cit.*

²² PCBS, *Jerusalem Statistical Yearbook 2016*, June 2016.

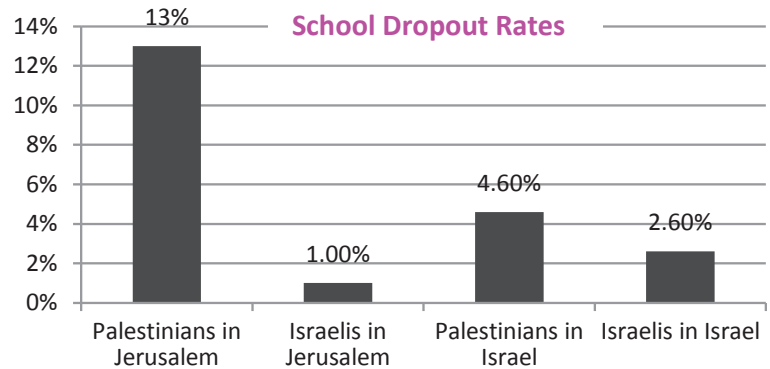
²³ Sharek Youth Forum, *The Status of Youth in Palestine 2013*.

²⁴ PCBS, *Press Release on the Eve of International Youth Day*, 12 August 2016. Main reasons for dropouts were failed examinations (20%) and lack of interest in education (36.6%) due to non-existing job perspectives. PCBS-ILO announce the results of school-to-work transition survey 2015, 5 October 2016.

²⁵ PCBS-ILO announce the results of school-to-work transition survey 2015, 5 October 2016.

²⁶ PCBS, *Press Release on International Literacy Day*, 7 Sept. 2016.

In **Jerusalem**, the education sector faces particular challenges, including the presence of five different school systems²⁷, ongoing attempts of Judaizing/Israelizing the curriculum, and Israel's refusal to allow a Palestinian university in the city, while not (fully) recognizing degrees from West Bank universities in the Israeli labor market.



Source: Municipal data, quoted in *Education in Jerusalem*, PASSIA Bulletin, Sept. 2016.

The **school dropout rate** amongst Palestinians from East Jerusalem is very high: an estimated **36%** fail to complete high school.²⁸ Some **13% of Palestinian students** in Jerusalem schools drop out of their classes each year, compared to only 1% of students in Israeli schools in West Jerusalem (and 6.4% in Arabs schools in Israel proper).²⁹ The Jerusalem Municipality does little to deter this trend from growing, as 30% of East Jerusalem schools lack any dropout prevention program whatsoever and another 40% have only minimal services.³⁰

Main reasons for the high school dropout in Jerusalem are³¹:

- (1) The lack of a stimulating educational environment due to a rigid education system, a shortage of schools resulting in cramped classrooms, and school interruptions due to arrests. Both often leads to academic underachievement and thus to weak prospects to enter universities.
- (2) The prevailing dire economic conditions induce many students to leave school to help supporting their families or gaining independence from them. In the case of girls, early marriage is often a preferred option as it lifts their financial “burden” from their families.
- (3) Massive challenges in enrolling in higher education both in the West Bank (checkpoints, separation barrier, transportation costs, non-recognition of Palestinian university degrees by Israel) and in Israel (difficult entry exams, lack of preparedness for higher education, high fees, exclusion from most scholarships as non-Israeli citizens)
- (4) Little chances to get proper jobs with university degrees make many students wonder why waste money and time in the first place, if the Israeli unskilled labor market promises higher wages than a skilled job in the West Bank.



²⁷ Namely: run by (1) the Israeli Department of Education (Ma'aref), (2) the PA, (3) the Islamic Waqf, (4) UNRWA schools, and (5) private providers.

²⁸ *Falling between the Cracks: Student Dropout and the Shortage of Classrooms in East Jerusalem*, Ir Amim, Aug. 2015, p. 5, available at: <http://www.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/1410>.

²⁹ *Education in Jerusalem*, PASSIA Bulletin, Sept. 2016.

³⁰ *Annual Status Report: The Failing East Jerusalem Education System*, Ir Amim and ACRI, 2013, p. 11.

³¹ Rawan Asali Nuseibeh, “Political Conflict and Exclusion in Jerusalem”, in *Political Conflict and Exclusion in Jerusalem*, Routledge Studies on the Arab-Israeli Conflict, Routledge, 2015.

EMPLOYMENT

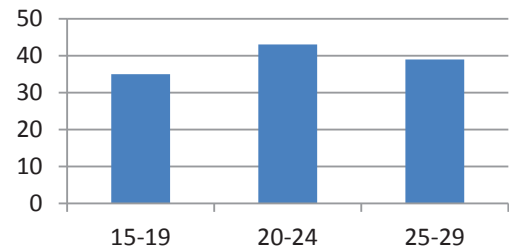
While the younger generation has higher education than the older as well as the competence, it suffers from high unemployment. In mid-2016, 41% of youth were economically active³², but their unemployment rate had reached 39%. The highest unemployment was among 20-24 year olds (43%), followed by the 25-29 years (39%) and the 15-19 years group (35%). Highest unemployment - 55% - was among youth who had not completed school, but unemployment among youth graduates stood also at 51%³³.

In 2015, only 16% of youth (15-29 years) had successfully completed the transition from education to the labor market and worked in stable jobs, while 84% had moved out of the labor force, were unemployed, or worked in temporary jobs (<12 months)³⁴. The main reasons for not working were unavailable jobs (76.4%) or jobs not matching qualifications and experience (9.6%).³⁵

Main reasons for the limitations of the labor market are, *inter alia*, the generally weak and restricted Palestinian economy, which is characterized by a lack of productive market opportunities, small-size businesses, and reliance on donor funds. There is no comprehensive policy to overcome these obstacles, which are further aggravated by a chronic mismatch between education and labor market needs³⁶ and the prevailing rather low esteem (and limited programs) for vocational training qualifications. As a result, not the “quantity” but the “poor quality” of (youth) employment creates structural problems, which are mirrored in the part time, nonprofessional, and thus low-paid nature of Palestinian job market characteristics in Jerusalem (and Israel).³⁷

While Jerusalem traditionally attracted Palestinian labor, the decline in tourism due to the overall security situation has hit the city hard and it now increasingly exports its labor force, either to the West Bank (mainly services, civil society and public sector organizations in Ramallah), or to West Jerusalem and the wider Israeli market (mainly manufacturing and services),³⁸ very often in jobs that have nothing to do with experiences and level of education and that are part-time and non-professional in nature. Data presented in the Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem³⁹ on the percentage of Arabs and Jews over the age of 15 who take part in the civilian work force indicate that 40% of Palestinian males and 85% of Palestinian females in Jerusalem do not participate in the labor market.

Youth Unemployment in Palestine



Source: PCBS, Press Release on International Youth Day, 12 Aug. 2016.



Workers passing through an Israeli checkpoint.

³² With the participation of young females in the labor force way lower than that of young men.

³³ PCBS, Press Release on International Youth Day, 12 Aug. 2016.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ PCBS, *Palestinian Youth Survey, 2015*, Feb. 2016

³⁶ World Bank. *Towards Economic Sustainability of a Future Palestinian State: Promoting Private Sector-Led Growth*, 2012, www.worldbank.org.

³⁷ Efrati, Amit, “A Troubling Correlation: The Ongoing Economic Deterioration in East Jerusalem and the Current Wave of Terror”, *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 19, No. 2, July 2016.

³⁸ *Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people: Developments in the economy of the occupied Palestinian territory*, July 2011, http://unctad.org/en/Docs/tdb58d4_en.pdf.

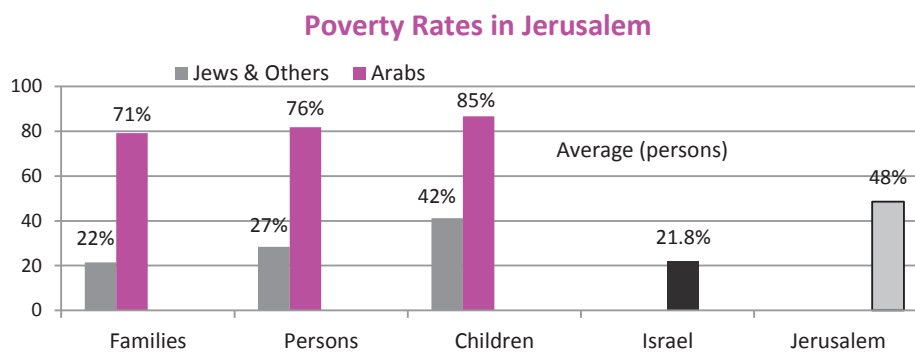
³⁹ Published by the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies.

Unemployment among young Jerusalemites has specific factors: besides movement restrictions and limited Palestinian employers and job opportunities, there are often encountered hostilities due to the overall political situation⁴⁰, language difficulties, non-recognition of their educational degrees⁴¹, and the problem not to be able to provide a clean police record or security file⁴², due to the Israeli authorities' frequent random arrests of youth in the city. In addition, separate public transportation systems results in high travel costs and long commuting times.

Palestinian data show an unemployment rate of 13.9% for Palestinians from the Jerusalem Governorate⁴³, compared to the West Bank average of 17.3%. However, the average labor force participation rate was only 29.2% - significantly lower than that of the West Bank at large (46.1%).⁴⁴

In comparison, Israeli figures put the labor force participation rate of those aged 15-24 years within the Jerusalem municipal boundaries at 62% in 2014, with the Jewish rate at 75% and the Arab rate at 46%. The unemployment rate was 18.5%: 19.5% among Jews and 20% among the Arab population.⁴⁵

The high unemployment rate is considered one of the main reasons for the extremely high poverty rates among Palestinians in Jerusalem:



Source: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, *Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem*, 2016.

This reality and the grim future prospects nurture a sense of despair and deprivation among the youth, 86% of whom stated in a 2015 poll that there are insufficient opportunities for growth.⁴⁶ The assumption that there is “nothing to lose” in turn provides a fertile ground for radicalization:⁴⁷ in a March 2016 survey, most Palestinian youth (33.8%) related the current wave of violence mainly to the frustration with their economic state. These findings were reflected in the fact that a majority of the violent episodes since September 2015 were perpetrated by youth from East Jerusalem neighborhoods with the worst socio-economic conditions.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ A survey by the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) revealed for example that 66% of Palestinian workers had experienced discrimination in obtaining employment in the Israeli labor market in Jerusalem, mostly in relation to wages and humiliating treatment. Quoted in ILO, *The Situation of Workers of the Occupied Arab Territories*, 2013.

⁴¹ Although very recently the media reported that the Hebrew University of Jerusalem will become the first Israeli university to recognize PA matriculation scores, which will significantly increase the number of East Jerusalemites to attend it. Hasson, Nir, “Hebrew University to Become First Israeli School to Recognize Palestinian Authority Test Scores”, *Haaretz*, 3 March 2017.

⁴² Many Palestinians have politically motivated “criminal activities” such as stone-throwing listed on their record.

⁴³ The PA Jerusalem governorate covers some 345 km² and a total population of 426,533 including the 70 km²-area making up the Israeli municipal boundaries of East Jerusalem with its 264,937 Palestinians. PCBS, *Jerusalem Statistical Yearbook 2016*.

⁴⁴ PCBS, *Jerusalem Statistical Yearbook 2016*; *Statistical Yearbook of Palestine 2016*.

⁴⁵ JIIS, *Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem*, 2016.

⁴⁶ Awrad, *Current Protests: An Online Study of Palestinian Youth (16-35 Years Old)*, Ramallah/Gaza, Arab World for Research & Development, 2015.

⁴⁷ Efrati, Amit, “A Troubling Correlation: The Ongoing Economic Deterioration in East Jerusalem and the Current Wave of Terror”, *op.cit.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* The author identifies a “three-phase process that is common among East Jerusalem youth”, according to which they first “absorb their parents’ ongoing sense of frustration, deprivation, and neglect. Second, based on their own limited options, they consider their occupational future as similarly bleak. Third, they come to an understanding that they have nothing left to lose, an understanding that is liable to translate into a worsening of the capital’s already precarious security situation.”

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVISM

In general, Palestinian youth – while inclined to understand the difficult circumstances in which their politicians govern – have little trust in political representatives as well as an unfavorable perception of democracy, and dissatisfaction with Palestinian state institutions and political parties is widespread. A recent poll⁴⁹ found exceptionally low levels of trust in institutions among Palestinians aged 18-29, with only 30% expressing “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in state security forces, 35% in the police, and 39% for the courts. The corresponding numbers for Morocco, for example, were up to 24 percentage points higher! With regard to the central government, only 27% expressed confidence, as did only 8% regarding political parties and 12% regarding the parliament.⁵⁰

Similarly, in the Youth Development Index 2016 Palestine is with a score of 0.183 (= rank 175) one of the 10 lowest-ranked countries in “Civic Participation” (global average: 0.509) and also scores low (with 0.379 = rank 148) in “Political Participation” (global average: 0.573).⁵¹

In part, this has to do with the growing distance between the older generation, which currently holds and clings to the positions of power, and the younger generation, which see that the generations before them have failed to improve the situation on the ground, and in part with their frustration with the non-achievement of anything tangible from any of the numerous political initiatives launched to date and with what they consider “normalization of the occupation” (*tatbi’a*) as exercised by the PA.

Palestinian youth therefore believe they are marginalized with few opportunities. Thus, while they maintain a strong nationalist discourse, ‘politics’ has a negative (i.e., unsuccessful and perilous) connotation for the generation that was born into the current situation, resulting in their abandoning traditional means of participation and, instead of raising the national flag rather adopting a ‘personal benefit’ approach, focusing on more achievable goals such as finding employment, starting a family, pursuing a career, etc..

This is particular true with regard to Jerusalem, where the youth predominantly believe that time has run out for the two-state solution and an independent state is not likely to come into being. As a consequence, they increasingly tend to acknowledge and adapt to the given circumstances and make more pragmatic and individualistic choices. These processes, sometimes described as creeping “Israelization” or “normalization”, are manifested in increasing numbers of applications for Israeli citizenship⁵², more high-school students taking the *bagrut* (Israeli matriculation exams) and enrolling in Israeli academic and other educational institutions, a large and visible presence of Palestinians in West Jerusalem’s shopping malls, parks, and on the light-rail train, and a rising number of East Jerusalem youth volunteering for “national” service.⁵³

⁴⁹ Conducted as part of the EU-funded Power2Youth, which surveyed six Middle East countries, the others being Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Christophersen, Mona, “Are Young Palestinians Disengaged, or Merely Dissatisfied?”, *The Global Observatory*, 18 August 2016, available at <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2016/08/palestine-gaza-west-bank-youth>.

⁵¹ Youth Development Index 2016, available at <http://youthdevelopmentindex.org>. In total, the index includes 183 countries, of which Palestine ranked 126 in total. In comparison with neighboring countries, Palestine scored as follows:

	Overall Score/Rank	Education Score/Rank	Employment & Opportunity Score / Rank	Civic Participation Score / Rank	Political Participation Score / Rank
Palestine	0.560 / 126	0.751 / 90	0.477 / 136	0.183 / 175	0.379 / 148
Syria	0.531 / 137	0.751 / 126	0.401 / 164	0.478 / 97	0.212 / 172
Jordan	0.586 / 114	0.614 / 82	0.456 / 143	0.252 / 152	0.345 / 153
Egypt	0.530 / 138	0.735 / 96	0.354 / 174	0.337 / 134	0.234 / 169

YOUTH - VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

Although their political participation and activism is generally low, youth remain at the center of confrontations with the Israeli forces and are the main victims of the ongoing violence. Confirming findings of previous surveys, a March 2016 PCPSR poll showed that youth aged 18-22 are the most supportive of stabbing attacks, and the most likely to think that an armed intifada/struggle would help Palestinians achieve national rights in ways that negotiations could not (PCPSR, Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No 59, 17-19 March 2016). However, the majority of youth believes that only a small cross-section of society actually participates in protests and violence and were skeptical that it would achieve anything substantive (AWRAD, *Current Protests: An Online Study of Palestinian Youth*, Ramallah/Gaza, December 2015).

Recent figures on detentions, injuries, and fatalities underline the fact that young people are the most vulnerable. According to Defense for Children, at the end of 2016, a total of 1,977 children aged 12-17 had been killed since the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000 (see <http://www.dci-palestine.org> for details and updates).

As of August 2016, 330 young Palestinians aged 14-18 were held in Israeli custody (http://www.btselem.org/statistics/minors_in_custody).



While Palestinian Jerusalemites are, at least in theory, entitled under the Israeli Youth Law (2008) to more protection than West Bank youth regarding arrests, interrogations, and trials, reality draws a different picture. Especially in recent months, Jerusalem youth have been targeted rather than safeguarded by Israeli authorities, who make use of exceptions established by that same Youth Law. Among the alarming indicators of the youth's receding rights are increased night raids and arrests (often used to intimidate and scare them and extract information from them), violence and threats during questioning, collective punishment measures, the renewed use of administrative detention, banning youth from their homes or hometowns for a certain period, handing down harsh prison sentences (e.g., up to 20 years for stone throwing), imprisoning children as young as 12 years, and depriving convicts of alleged "nationalistic-motivated" offenses from social benefits (<http://www.btselem.org>; "Israel targets Palestinian children in East Jerusalem with harsh policies," DCI Palestine, 28 November 2015).

Some people see these developments as part of a new strategy by the Israeli authorities and fear they will gradually undermine the Palestinian identity in the holy city, while others see them as evidence that Jerusalem has already chosen the binational solution. The majority, however, see in the "westward orientation" a mere "survival" strategy at times where residency rights (unlike Israeli citizenship) can be revoked at any moment; where East Jerusalem is cut off its natural hinterland, making access to West Bank universities harder (and to universities in the instable and unsafe neighboring countries little appealing), and thus the *tawjihi* less useful;⁵⁴ and where employment prospects for graduates from West Bank universities are limited to PA territory and salaries on which East Jerusalemites cannot survive. For them, this form of pragmatism does not mean they want to become Israelis – some even argue with reference to the Palestinians in Israel that it instead bolsters the Jerusalem Palestinians' identity – but to secure their day-to-day existence.⁵⁵ This was reflected in a 2012 survey on identity among youth, in which Palestinians from Jerusalem clearly expressed their desire to remain connected with the larger Palestinian community despite the barriers separating them.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Asked about fostering social ties with Palestinians from the West Bank, Gaza, Israel and Lebanon/Syria/Jordan respectively, the majority of Palestinian youth in Jerusalem considered this important or extremely important, interestingly naming ties with Palestinians citizens in Israel as the least important of the four mentioned subgroups. BADIL, *One People United: A Deterritorialized Palestinian Identity*, BADIL Survey of Palestinian Youth on Identity and Social Ties - Working Paper No. 14, 2012.

Although there are many youth activists and initiatives⁵⁷ trying to mobilize for action and rights as well as some kind of a decentralized youth movement organized at universities and voting in student councils elections, the majority of young Palestinians are alienated from “organized politics” and little enthusiastic about taking part in it. A December 2015 survey revealed that 80% of youth find youth participation in national decision-making processes unsatisfactory.⁵⁸



Bab al-Shams protest village

Disillusioned, but not discontent enough to revolt, Palestinian youth have thus become onlookers rather than participants in politics and have failed so far to create themselves an alternative organization to challenge the current political institutions in Palestine (the PA and existing political groups/factions).⁵⁹ Among the reasons that hinder their efforts to play an effective role in Palestinian political life are the patriarchal society, where the elders know best and which largely excludes young females, as well as classical party politics dominated by Fatah and Hamas, neither of which seriously addresses the issue of youth nor encourages youth to raise their voices, and both of which – as representing the public sector and thus the main job provider – are linked to corruption and *wasta*, which most youth resent.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, these two main parties are, at the same time, the only ones in which membership gives at least a theoretical chance to be heard, as all other political groups or movements are rather irrelevant due to the small size of their constituencies.

Another obstacle that negatively influences youth’s attitudes towards political participation is factionalism, which is deeply rooted in Palestinian society. On the one hand, it makes young supporters affiliate themselves with a party because their parents are supporting it, and on the other it tends to label one according to his/her families’ perceived political orientation, even if it does not apply to oneself.⁶¹ Factionalism is also the underlying cause for the continued split between Fatah and Hamas, which is paralyzing Palestinian politics at large, thus further discouraging the young to get involved.

As a result of the above, the percentage of Palestinian youth who affiliate themselves with political parties is, according to one poll, the same as of those who affiliate themselves with NGOs (i.e., 27%).⁶² Dissatisfaction and lack of faith in institutions is also reason for the youth’s limited activism in community-based organizations, which they often see as not bringing about any significant change.⁶³ Today, former *collective* activism has given way to *independent* activism, whereby young people use new channels to express their political opinions, mainly via social networking.⁶⁴

Weak youth participation in Jerusalem is further linked to a change in priorities from occupation-related problems to more immediate needs such as addressing personal poverty and unemployment. However, there are also voices which believe that participation in political activism remains strong, because of the absence of any official representation in the city and a lack of trust in the role of political factions.⁶⁵

⁵⁷ Worth noting here are the creation of a national youth parliament in 2008 that was meant to give young people a voice in society, the March 15th Movement, which organized mass rallies in 2011 to call for an end to the political separation between Gaza and West Bank, and the Gaza Youth Breaks Out (GYBO) collective of young bloggers formed in 2010 to spread their frustration to the world. In Jerusalem, initiatives included the erection of the Bab Al-Shams protest tent village in January 2013 in the E-1 area near Maale Adumim settlement, and the human reading chain around the walls of the Old City, which the Jabal Al-Mukabber youth organized on 16 March 2014, not only to foster a love of reading among local youth but also to make a political statement that Palestinians can reclaim the area as a part of their national identity.

⁵⁸ Awrad, *Current Protests: An Online Study of Palestinian Youth (16-35 Years Old)*, Ramallah/Gaza, Arab World for Research & Development, December 2015.

⁵⁹ Atallah, A., H. el-Dada & J. Høigilt, *Palestinian youth activism: new actors, new possibilities?* Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center (NOREF), June 2013, available at http://noref.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/b0c26f885911e090b61db9089ed8040a.pdf.

⁶⁰ *Youth Work in Palestine and Surrounding Challenges*, EuroMed Youth Programme, 2013, available at https://www.euromedyouth.net/IMG/pdf/work_in_palestine_site_.pdf.

⁶¹ Atallah, A., H. el-Dada & J. Høigilt, *Palestinian youth activism*, op.cit.

⁶² Sharek Youth Forum, *The Status of Youth in Palestine 2013*.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION:

Palestinian youth, constituting about one-third of the Palestinian population in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem, are the foundation for developing Palestinian society. From this alone the importance of investment in youth in order to benefit rather than suffer from the demographic dividend is evident.

However, reality draws a rather bleak picture, with especially youth unemployment or underemployment pose a serious challenge, if not threat, to both socioeconomic development and political stability. This must be countered as soon as possible with sufficient measures in the fields of education, training and labor market.

Young Palestinians must be persuaded that they have a stake in a more hopeful future against all odds (whether stemming from their own leadership, the occupation or international apathy). They must therefore become a cross-cutting priority throughout all sectors of society and in all strategic and national planning. Taking into consideration their future role, it is imperative to support youth development programs – independent from foreign agendas – and encourage participation of young people in both the civic and official spheres. It is their future with which today's decision-making and strategy formulation is concerned with and it goes without saying that they need to be involved in order to ensure that their voices are heard and their needs and views are not overlooked.

This is true also with regard to Jerusalem, where the tense atmosphere of anger and despair may ebb once in a while, but quiet and peace will not prevail until the increasingly aggressive military occupation will come to an end.

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