

# OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY PROTECTION ANALYSIS UPDATE August 2021



## REPORT SUMMARY

The most serious escalation of hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza since the 2014 conflict took place between 10 and 21 May 2021. Armed groups fired more than 4,300 rockets towards cities and towns across southern and central Israel, while Israeli forces carried out over 1,500 strikes from air, land and sea across Gaza<sup>1</sup>. In parallel, there was a significant rise in protests, clashes and arrests across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as well as in some communities in Israel. These events have resulted in significant loss of life, human suffering and destruction of property including civilian infrastructure. The protracted protection crisis means that around 2.45 million Palestinians across the oPt, 64 per cent of whom are in the Gaza Strip and 36 per cent in the West Bank, experience or are at risk of conflict, violence and forcible displacement/transfer.<sup>2</sup> The most recent confrontation has exacerbated the already severe protection needs throughout the oPt and in particular in Gaza. **This protection analysis is focused on the recent escalation of violence across the oPt with a specific focus on Gaza.** Additional future in-depth protection analysis will be carried out separately for the West Bank including East Jerusalem. The priority protection risks for Gaza have been identified as follows: psychological distress amongst children and vulnerable groups; specific risks facing women and girls including GBV; and explosive remnants of war. For the West Bank including East Jerusalem, the main risk identified is the deterioration in mental and physical well-being, caused by the threat of arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention, excessive use of force and settler violence. These risks and their inherent threats are mutually reinforcing with specific groups such as women and persons with disabilities suffering from multiple vulnerabilities.

<sup>1</sup> Security Council Briefing 27 May

<sup>2</sup> OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021, occupied Palestinian territory

### Key Protection Figures

**Civilian casualties in Gaza:** 260 Palestinians, including 66 children and 64 women killed, of whom 129 were believed to be civilians (10 May - 17 August).

### **Damage to civilian infrastructure Gaza:**

2,000 housing units are assumed totally destroyed or severely damaged. 9 hospitals and 19 health clinics damaged.

**Displacement trends:** 8,220 people remain internally displaced due to damaged housing as of July 28

**Protection PIN / AoR PIN** People in need 1,319,339 (Gaza), 675,615 children are in need (Gaza)

### **Methodology**

- *The analysis is guided by the Global Protection Cluster's Protection Analytical Framework, which seeks to identify threats, their impact on the population and capacities available to mitigate these.*
- *Use of secondary data and analysis from e.g. situational reports from OCHA and UN Human Rights Office, and based on inputs from the Protection Cluster's Areas of Responsibility (AoRs) and partners*

### **Limitations**

- *Pending results of ongoing needs assessments, updated analysis of threats, impact and capacity, as well as responses to address these, will be provided on a regular basis.*

## 1. CONTEXT OVERVIEW

Humanitarian needs in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) continue to be driven by a protracted protection crisis that leaves many Palestinians struggling to live a life with dignity. This crisis is characterised by more than 54 years of Israeli military occupation, a lack of respect for international humanitarian and human rights law, a lack of accountability for the continuous violations, internal Palestinian political divisions, and recurrent escalations of hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed groups.

**Gaza:** In Gaza, the humanitarian consequences of the latest escalation have been devastating, exacerbating the impact of almost 14 years of the Israeli blockade<sup>3</sup>, the internal Palestinian political division and recurrent escalations of conflict and several major rounds of hostilities, the first of which took place in December 2008. The long-standing restrictions on the movement of people and goods to and from Gaza have degraded living conditions. Access through the main crossing for goods (Kerem Shalom) remains restricted and unpredictable, and the longstanding import restrictions, as well as lack of agreement and coordination between the PA and Israel, continue to impede economic recovery and increase in employment. Furthermore, the divisions between Hamas and the Fatah-led PA remain unresolved, undermining development, and providing for the needs of the Gaza's population in general.

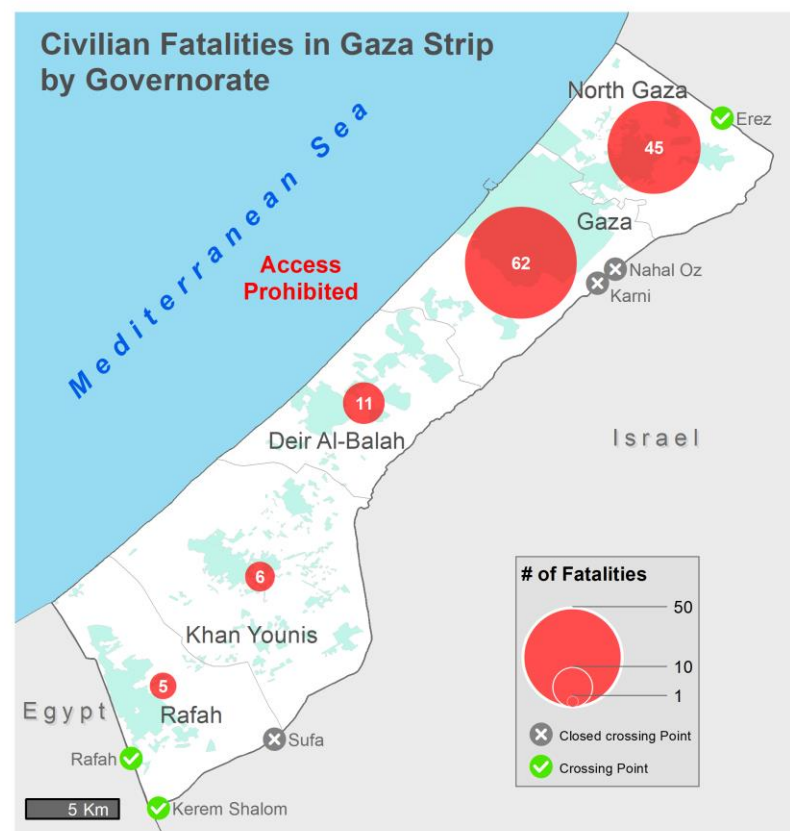
The result of the above listed factors is the near collapse of Gaza's economy, as well as its separation from the rest of the Palestinian economy. Gaza has one of the world's highest unemployment rates, and more than half of its population lives below the poverty line.<sup>4</sup> The majority of the population has no access to safe water, or a proper sewage system. Prolonged electricity blackouts, of about 12 hours a day throughout 2020, and internet disconnection continue to disrupt all aspects of life, and the delivery of essential services.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/PS/A\\_75\\_532\\_AUV.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/PS/A_75_532_AUV.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/a75d310\\_en\\_1.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/a75d310_en_1.pdf)

The health system in Gaza, already overwhelmed by years of blockade, under-development, and the ongoing COVID-19 emergency, is significantly overstretched.

The recent escalation has further deteriorated the situation and resulted in severe damages to civilian infrastructure and a high number of civilian fatalities as illustrated in the overview of fatalities by Governorate in Gaza as of 3 June.



**West Bank incl. East Jerusalem:** In the West Bank, Palestinian households and communities in Area C, East Jerusalem and the H2 area of Hebron city continue to face a coercive living environment

placing Palestinian individuals and communities at risk of forcible transfer due to a range of longstanding Israeli policies and practices. The restrictive and discriminatory planning regime applied in Area C and in East Jerusalem prevents Palestinians from accessing basic housing, livelihood and service needs. Other major concerns are excessive use of force, widespread arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention, in particular those arrested in connection with taking part in or organising protests, or otherwise exercising civil and political rights. A steep rise in conflict-related violence, including settler attacks, has further eroded public safety and increased fear and stress among the population. Across the oPt, ongoing insecurity is hampering efforts to implement COVID-19 responses, including the vaccination programme.

## 2. PRIORITY PROTECTION RISKS

### Protection risk: psychological distress amongst children and vulnerable groups in Gaza

The impact of the conflict in Gaza on the mental health situation is severe and has further deteriorated the existing mental health crisis. The fear for life, loss of loved ones, physical injuries and wide-spread damage and destruction have significantly increased the risk of psychological distress and mental disorders. Vulnerable groups such as those who have suffered from (forced) internal displacement, children, persons with disabilities and GBV survivors are exposed to increased threats of psychological distress. Furthermore, those with pre-existing mental health and psychological trauma and illness risk relapsing, compounding stress on frontline workers, staff and carers responding to the intense levels of need. Without rapid provision of psychosocial support, many will develop mental health disorders or suffer from further deterioration.

At the height of the conflict escalation in May, more than 113,000 displaced persons sought shelter and protection at UNRWA schools and hosting communities. This number has decreased to around

8,220 persons as of 28 July<sup>5</sup>, primarily those whose houses were destroyed or so damaged as to be uninhabitable. According to local authorities, over 2,000 housing units were totally destroyed or severely damaged, and an estimated 15,000 housing units sustained some degree of damage.<sup>6</sup> In May, SAWA registered 1,228 calls for counselling sessions, double the number compared to May 2020. Eighty-two per cent of all the calls were by Gazans who suffered from fear and anxiety caused by the ongoing bombardment.<sup>7</sup>

Children are particularly vulnerable, experiencing high rates of mental distress, including significant risks of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, behavioral problems, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, as well as functional impairment. In conflict environments, good parenting, relationships

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*Injured persons and persons with disabilities require a range of multi sectorial services including rehabilitation sessions, assistive devices, wound dressing kits, and inclusive access to information, counselling, psychosocial support and specialized mental health services. Inclusion of the persons with disabilities, disability representative bodies and disability organizations is extremely essential in the roll out of needs assessment and design of humanitarian responses.*

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with teachers, social networks, and healthcare systems are also affected by trauma and toxic stress, and may become less protective

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/response-escalation-opt-situation-report-no-8-8-28-july-2021>

<sup>6</sup> OCHA situational report 27 May

<sup>7</sup> SAWA Factsheet #25 May, 2021

or even harmful. Children also become at higher risk of developing learning disabilities leading to higher risks of school dropout<sup>8</sup>.

In Gaza an estimated 675,615 children are in need of mental health and psychosocial support, and 15,784 in the West Bank<sup>9</sup>. As a result of the heavy conflict, by 16 June, 68 Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip were reportedly killed. Prior to the escalation there was already a mental health crisis in Gaza and widespread psychological distress among children. During COVID-19 there was a reported quadrupling of suicide rates especially amongst adolescent girls.<sup>10</sup>

Mass scale-up of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) is needed to prevent a further deterioration of the mental health crisis: from psychological first aid, structured psychosocial support, suicide prevention, case management, clinical mental health services, including a blend of remote and face-to-face methods. Scale up requires inter-sectoral mobilisation across different sectors.

The capacity to respond to the increased psychological distress is limited and was already adversely affected by major shortages in specialised personnel and drugs. In Gaza, there are currently 92 trained PSS counsellors, but these are not sufficient to meet the need.<sup>11</sup> A social welfare mapping assessment in 2020 identified 503 social welfare staff in the Ministry of Education, 601 in UNRWA, 238

<sup>88</sup> Samara M, Hammuda S, Vostanis P, El-Khodary B, Al-Dewik N. Children's prolonged exposure to the toxic stress of war trauma in the Middle East *BMJ* 2020; 371 :m3155 doi:10.1136/bmj.m3155

<sup>9</sup> Based on Global MHPSS Cluster estimate based on MHPSS pyramid needs as a proportion of population in Gaza, and # of incidences of grave violations documents in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

<sup>10</sup> According to SAWA helpline calls reporting suicide attempts increased under COVID-19 (+42 cases, or 420%) mainly in Gaza, which on its own counted 33 cases of girls (NIAF 2021).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/escalation-gaza-strip-west-bank-and-israel-flash-update-9-covering-1200-18-may-1200-19-may>

in the Ministry of Social Development and 34 in the Ministry of Health.

During the hostilities, the majority of community-based protection interventions, rehabilitation and other community service delivery activities were temporarily suspended. The 12 UNICEF supported Family Centres and 30 outreach sites are physically operational, and services are being provided to vulnerable children and their caregivers. Service providers and partners report significant mental health distress. Frontline workers who are also directly affected are being pushed to the limits, leaving some unable to resume work or at risk of being overloaded. There remains a need for scale-up of all in person and remote MHPSS services for children, families and service, with partners reporting a large volume of calls to partner hotlines (between 23-28 May, one partner Helpline received 33,653 calls).

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*WHO reported at least 91 attacks against health care facilities in the oPt between 13 April and 17 May of which 70 occurred in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, and 21 in the Gaza Strip, resulting in injuries, damaged vehicles, and the destruction of health clinics.*

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### Protection risk: Specific risks facing women and girls – Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Gaza

The conflict in Gaza exacerbates the already existing risks of violence and discrimination that women face in Palestine, including domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual abuse and child marriage. The combination of decades of Israeli occupation and the prevailing patriarchal culture in Palestinian society configures a very high

gender inequality and any development in this area has already been set back by the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>12</sup>

The recent conflict and following stressful and uncertain situation has had a negative impact on caregivers' ability to meet basic needs of the family, which may exacerbate the risk of domestic violence, GBV and violence against children.<sup>13</sup> (Forced) internal displacement of people further increases the threat of GBV as women and girls outside of their homes are more vulnerable. Furthermore, both GBV shelters in Gaza were closed due to the bombardment and survivors were sent home.

During the hostilities, 41 women were killed, 23 of these were girls, and 398 women were wounded - it is expected that at least 10% will suffer long term disabilities. Furthermore, 101 women were widowed. An estimated 17,700 women and girls were internally displaced and exposed to increased GBV risks and psychological violence during the escalation the following weeks<sup>14</sup>. There has been a rise in calls related to GBV incidents and three gender related killings were reported in the span of one month directly following the end of the escalation. Women and girls with disabilities are particularly vulnerable and at risk from all forms of violence and abuse, including sexual assault.<sup>15</sup> The temporary closure of clinics and health centers resulted in vulnerable groups of women experiencing a deterioration of their physical and mental health conditions due to lack of treatments and access to necessary medication - specifically women with disabilities, cancer patients, women with chronic diseases and pregnant and lactating women.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://palestine.unfpa.org/en/gender-based-violence>

<sup>13</sup> Terre des hommes Foundation 2021: Rapid Needs Assessment in the Gaza Strip and West Bank including East Jerusalem

<sup>14</sup> Assessing the urgent needs of women and girls after the May 2021 offensive in Gaza, UNFPA 2021

<sup>15</sup> Zakaria Alsallout and Abeer Joma'a 2021: Gender based violence and disability inclusion

The capacity to respond to the threats has been weakened by the conflict. During the hostilities, GBV in-person services, such as legal aid, PSS, GBV case management, and other community education/awareness raising activities were suspended. All governmental institutions were closed, including the safe shelter facility and the women's detention facility. The shelter and female detention facility have subsequently reopened, but in the meantime, GBV survivors have been exposed to further harm whilst being forced to remain at home and in precarious domestic situations. Several GBV service providers, including frontline workers, have been directly affected by the bombardments, some have lost family members, and others have been displaced. For girls under 18 years of age who are still displaced there is a continued need to facilitate their access to psychosocial support services, to feel safe and have access to private spaces. There is a high need for legal aid for GBV survivors. Furthermore, widowed women need free representation, consultation and legal assistance in obtaining identity documents that were lost due to destruction of houses or while taking refuge, in addition to support with issues related to inheritance and the custody of children.

### Protection risk: Explosive Remnants of War in Gaza

The recent escalation in Gaza has left severe contamination of explosive remnants of war (ERW), explosive ordnance and exacerbated an already volatile living space in Gaza due to ERW from past escalations. Unexploded ordnance and now lies buried in the rubble of damaged buildings or in farmland, posing risks to the population. This has given rise to an urgent need for additional life saving mine action intervention, including emergency ERW risk assessments, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) responses, and ERW risk and Conflict Preparedness and Protection (CPP) messaging.

Men are more vulnerable to life loss and injuries due to their larger engagement in the public sphere, including participation in the provision of first response services, construction work and scrap metal collection, and children out playing are also particularly

vulnerable. Internal displaced persons are more vulnerable because they are situated in locations that are less familiar to them. Furthermore, they may not have the same access to the normal lines of communication within the community, which might share ERW locations when they are identified.



UNMAS risk assessment at Beit Hanoun Elementary School – photo credit UNMAS/Ahmed Joha

A child and two Palestinian militants were killed in two separate explosions of ERW in June. There is an urgent need to ensure humanitarian actors and the general population receive risk education to reduce the risk from ERW if/when it is encountered. Mine action partners noted before the recent escalation in Gaza a marked decrease in sensitization towards ERW contamination highlighting the need for intervention.

The capacity for mine action remains a major challenge, and there are access restrictions on EOD equipment and provision of training to the local EOD responders. Prior to the conflict UNMAS was operating at a minimal capacity but rapidly surged to deliver

clearance liaison and rendering safe and excavation of Deep Buried Bombs (DBB), as well as support for future rubble removal and reconstruction projects.

UNMAS has completed risk assessments of all UN facilities and has started assessments on the sites identified for the rubble removal project. Sixteen deep buried bombs have been identified. The EOD Police of the de facto authorities, who carry out the majority of EOD tasks in Gaza, have had their offices destroyed and are carrying on with limited personnel and inadequate equipment. EOD risk assessments and clearances were undertaken, while delivery of ERW risk messaging to vulnerable populations, particularly IDPs, have been provided through online platforms and social media.

#### Protection risk: Deterioration in mental and physical well-being – West Bank incl. East Jerusalem.

From the beginning of Ramadan 13 April weeks of unrest in East Jerusalem followed exacerbating the already existing protection threats as a result of the occupation. The threat of imminent eviction of four extended Palestinian refugee families from their homes in the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem intensified protests and hostilities across the West Bank. The increased use of live ammunition in response to Palestinian protests, and ISF statements indicating an intention to “target main rioters” raise significant concerns with regard to excessive use of force and poses risks to men and boys in particular. Furthermore, protection partners have raised concerns of an increase in widespread arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention, in particular for those arrested in connection to taking part in or organising protests, or otherwise exercising their civil and political rights. The threat of settler violence remains high with above average attacks recorded in April through June. In addition to the direct threat of violence, arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention have a negative impact on the mental wellbeing in particular amongst children, which can lead to e.g. increased school dropout and child labor, reinforcing other child protection threats and mental well-being, leading to further deterioration.

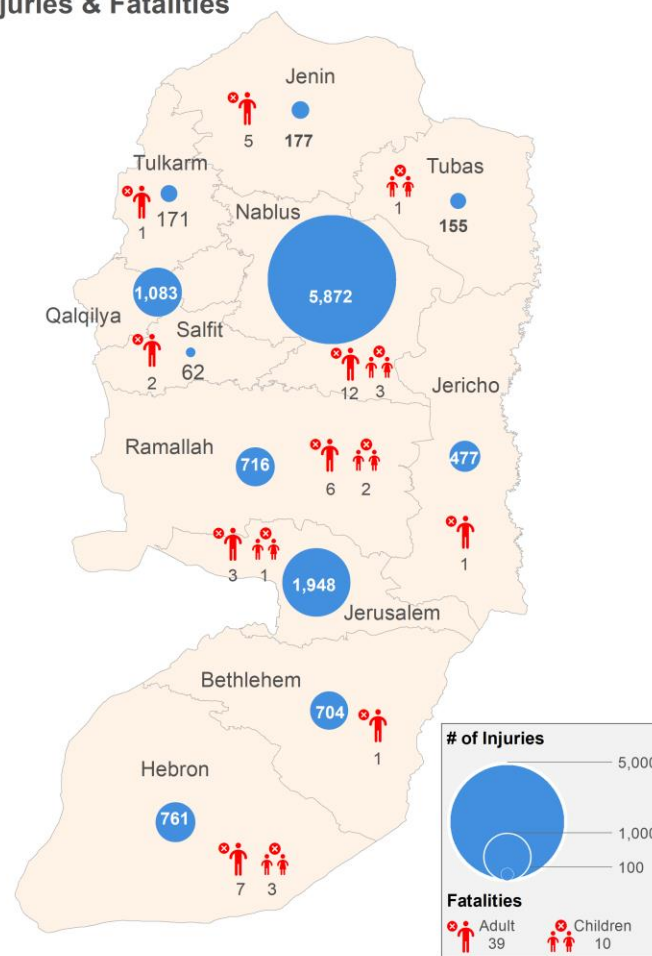
Particularly worrying is the ongoing harassment by police and authorities in Sheikh Jarrah against those most active in protests, including police arriving at night to their houses, and in some cases using violence, arresting family members or imposing movement restrictions. Harassment and arrests of human rights defenders have been reported, with at least 50 human rights defenders, including 7 women, arrested between mid-April to mid-May, in relation to peaceful protests or informal religious gatherings<sup>16</sup>. In the same period ISF have carried out arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention, including of women and children, with at least 71 Palestinian children arrested in East Jerusalem since the start of the escalations. As a result, there was a 50% increase in the number of tracing requests to locate Palestinian children detained by ISF.

From 13 April to 17 August, the apparent excessive use of force by ISF resulted in 60 civilian Palestinians killed and more than 12,000 injured in the West Bank, including over 700 by live ammunition. In the same period the threat of settler violence resulted in 436 incidents resulting in killing or injury or property damage<sup>17</sup>, and partners are reporting a growing number of unmet needs concerning legal aid for victims of Israeli settler violence in East Jerusalem. Children and youth have been particularly affected. Cluster partners providing remote MHPSS services have registered a near double increase in calls from East Jerusalem to its national helpline, compared with the same period in the previous month.

The capacity of the family and community to address threats is limited. Partners are also recording an increasing demand for legal aid as the frequency of suspected violations related to arrests and detentions, excessive use of force and access restrictions increased. Legal support and consultation is provided to Palestinian children, youth, families/caregivers and human rights defenders detained. In

the West Bank, access restrictions remains a key challenge to provide child protection and psycho-social services. Many CP/MHPSS partners face constraints reaching targeted areas due to closures of village entrances by ISF, checkpoints, settler demonstrations and clashes.

### West Bank Injuries & Fatalities



Snapshot, West Bank: Escalation of Violence 13 April – 17 August

<sup>16</sup> Majority (27) protesting in Sheikh Jarrah. All have been released from detention, on bail and after signing conditions banning them from protesting for 30-60 days.

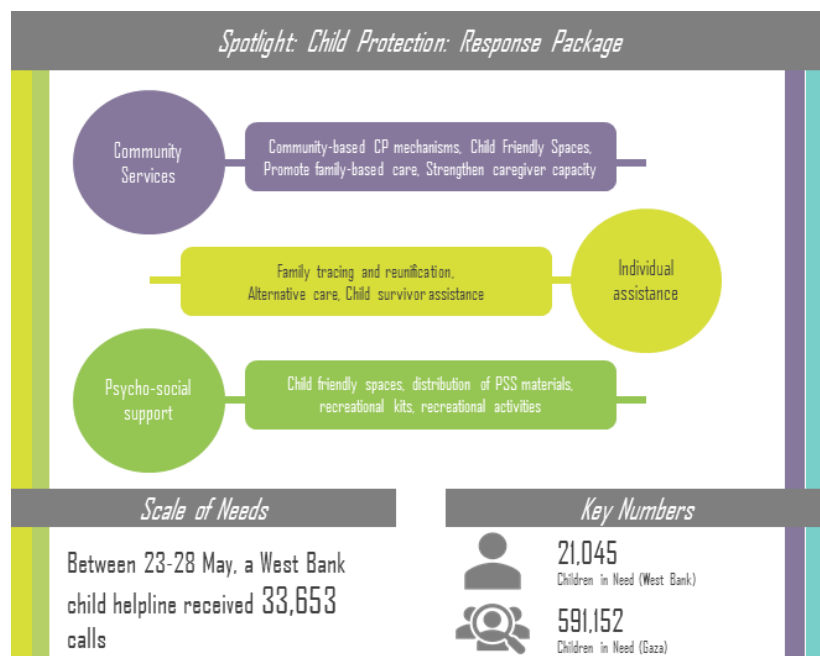
<sup>17</sup> OHCA Protection of civilian database



### 3. RESPONSE

#### 3.1 Operational context including access issues

In Gaza, infrastructure damage and service and power outages remain a major challenge. Recurrent electricity cuts and internet disconnection across Gaza is impacting outreach and remote service modalities. In the West Bank, access remains a key challenge as many CP/MHPSS partners face constraints reaching targeted areas due to closures of village entrances by ISF, checkpoints, settler demonstrations and clashes.



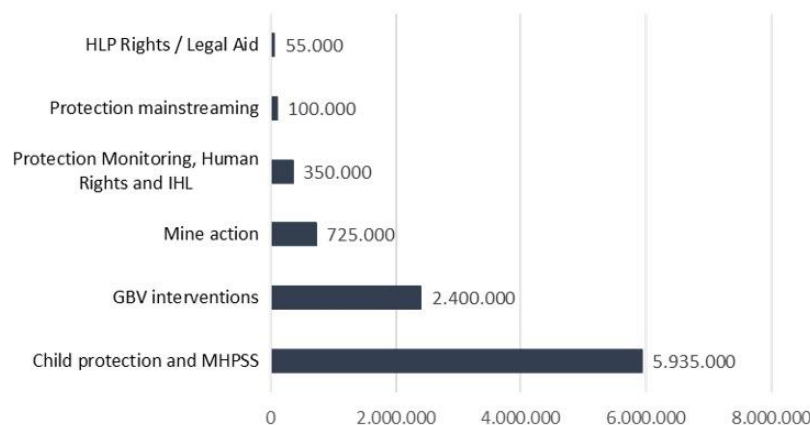
The focus of emergency response in place to mitigate effects of violence, especially for children and vulnerable groups including persons with disabilities are: Reduce deaths and injuries caused by ERW and EOD; Prevent and respond to incidents of GBV that have occurred amidst the recent hostilities especially among IDPs and ensure continued life-saving GBV services; provision of legal

assistance and counselling to IDPs and legal representation of people injured; Ensure ability to maintain advocacy, monitoring and documentation capacities of partners.

#### 3.2 Funding data (Flash Appeal requirements vs. funding; breakdown cluster/AoRs)

An oPt-wide Flash Appeal was launched on 27 May. It is aligned with individual agency appeals of UNRWA, WFP, UNICEF, WHO and various NGOs. The appeal will complement ongoing operations outlined in the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2021, as well as longer-term recovery and reconstruction efforts. Some protection partners have launched separate appeals for fundraising and are discussing plans to reprogram activities.

Flash funding appeal by area:



An initial CERF allocation of US\$ 4.5 million has been committed. The HC announced the release of almost US\$18 million from the oPt Humanitarian Fund to emergency response and the Emergency Relief Coordinator has allocated an additional US\$4 million to restore people’s access to basic services in Gaza.

## 4. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

### Humanitarian needs

- Urgent need for increased case management for particularly vulnerable children in Gaza, including those at increased risk of child labor, children at risk of school dropout, and children with disabilities. In West Bank, noticeable increase in legal services requested for children detained by ISF.
- Support for IDPs, women and girls in situation of vulnerability, such as women with disabilities, elderly and breast cancer patients. Provision of dignity kits containing essential hygiene and menstrual management items, GBV protection information, PPE, cash and voucher assistance for women at risk of GBV, updated referral pathways and GBV detection and referrals through multi-sectoral GBV services.
- In the West Bank, there is a growing need for protective presence as community members report harassment at checkpoints and other spots, by ISF and armed settlers, which has often resulted in violent attacks causing casualties and damage to property.
- Technical support for humanitarian partners on disability inclusion, specialised responses for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and inclusive messaging and awareness raising materials.

### Advocacy messages

- Both Israeli and Palestinian authorities have a responsibility to calm the violence, both in words and actions.
- The Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip, by land, air and sea is especially concerning. Reports indicate high-frequency attacks; government and civilian buildings bombed, some without warning, generating high numbers of fatalities and injured, mass panic and chaos and, psycho-social impacts that will continue long after the fighting stops.
- In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, there are serious concerns over the use of force against people exercising their rights, over the potential forced eviction of Palestinians from their homes, restrictions on their movement, and settler violence (including in apparent coordination with Israeli Security Forces), among other serious human rights concerns.
- Children are bearing the brunt of these massive hostilities. Everyone has a responsibility to protect children from violence.
- Health workers, health facilities and transport must be respected and protected at all times. Health care is not a target.