

Palestinian Youth: Shaping the Future Despite War

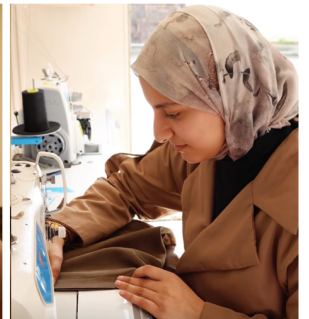
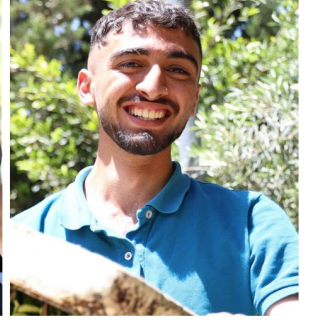


INTERNATIONAL
YOUTH DAY

2026
DIFFERENT
CONTEXTS,
COMMON
ASPIRATIONS

International Youth Day

Palestinian Youth: Shaping the Future Despite War



منتدى شارك الشبابي
SHAREK YOUTH FORUM



In 1999, through Resolution 54/120, the United Nations General Assembly designated 12th of August as the International Youth Day, reaffirming the role of young people as essential partners in development and agents of change, while raising awareness on the challenges and opportunities they face around the world.

International Youth Day 2026 is observed under the theme “Different Contexts, Common Aspirations,” conveying a clear message: despite the diversity of circumstances in which young people live, their aspirations remain fundamentally shared — a life of dignity, equality education, decent work, and meaningful participation in shaping their own future.

In Palestine, however, this theme carries exceptional significance. Palestinian youth are confronting an unprecedented reality shaped by the war on Gaza Strip, escalating Israeli occupation violations in the West Bank, and a severe economic and social deterioration affecting virtually every aspect of their lives. Yet despite these extraordinary challenges, Palestinian youth continue to hold on to hope, strengthen the resilience of their communities, and believe in their ability to build a more just and stable future.

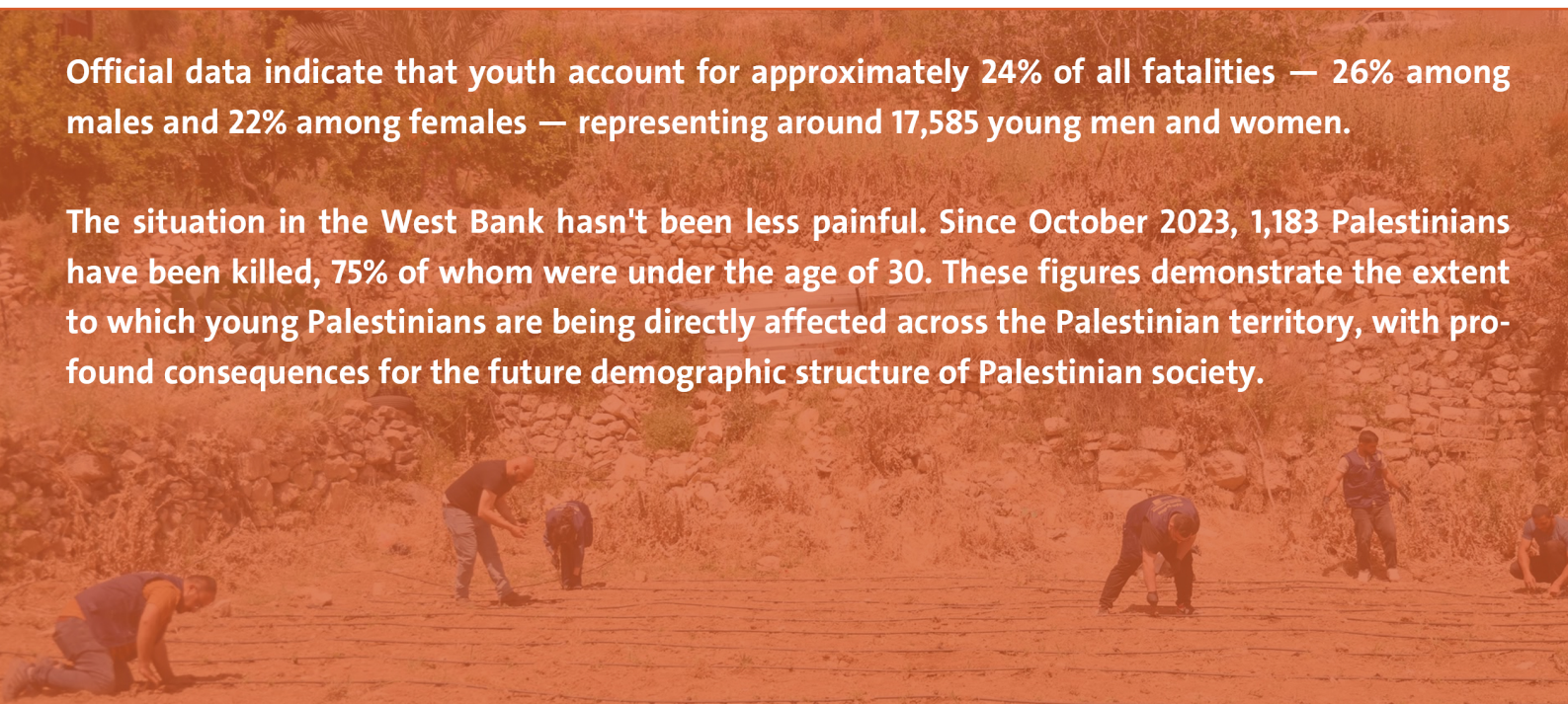
International Youth Day highlights the common aspirations of young people for dignity, education, and decent work despite the different realities they face, accompanied by global digital campaigns through official United Nations platforms to support youth-led initiatives. Yet, while communities around the world mark this day by promoting youth empowerment, expanding participation, and responding to young people’s aspirations, Palestinian youth — particularly in Gaza Strip — are enduring one of the most devastating and prolonged humanitarian crises of the modern era.

24%

From the total number of martyrs, those who are young.

Official data indicate that youth account for approximately 24% of all fatalities — 26% among males and 22% among females — representing around 17,585 young men and women.

The situation in the West Bank hasn't been less painful. Since October 2023, 1,183 Palestinians have been killed, 75% of whom were under the age of 30. These figures demonstrate the extent to which young Palestinians are being directly affected across the Palestinian territory, with profound consequences for the future demographic structure of Palestinian society.



Besides the war, the Palestinian economy is experiencing an unprecedented decline, reflected in widening poverty, rising unemployment, and a sharp contraction in Gross Domestic Product. These developments have severely restricted young people's access to education, employment, and a dignified life, while intensifying the economic and social pressures they face.

Unemployment reached an unprecedented 48% in 2026, accompanied by a sharp decline in GDP, creating an increasingly hostile environment for life and dramatically shrinking the economic, social, and intellectual space available to Palestinian youth. These pressures are placing both hope and resilience under extraordinary strain.





Youth at the Heart of Palestine's Demographic Structure

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Demographic estimates issued by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) show that Palestinian society has a distinctly young population, with people under the age of 30 accounting for approximately 65% of the total population.

There are notable geographical differences: this age group represents approximately 63% of the population in the West Bank and 68% in the Gaza Strip. This youthful demographic profile underscores the urgent importance of investing in key sectors, particularly education, health, and employment, to enable young people to contribute effectively to Palestine’s future.

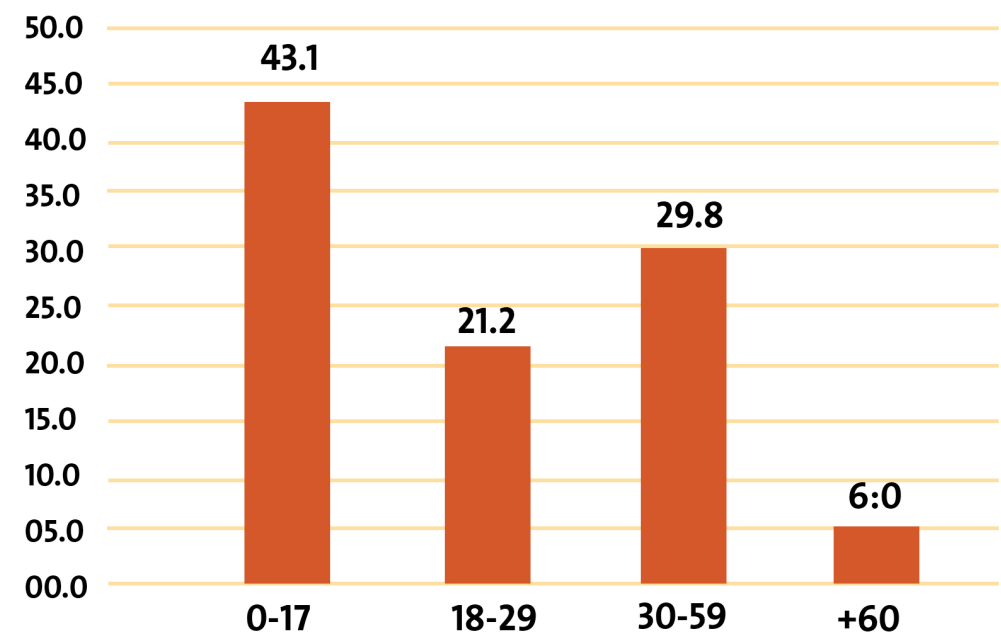
According to official data, Palestinians aged 18–29 number approximately 1.2 million young men and women, representing 21.2% of the total population of Palestine as of mid-2025 — approximately 22% in the West Bank and 21% in the Gaza Strip.

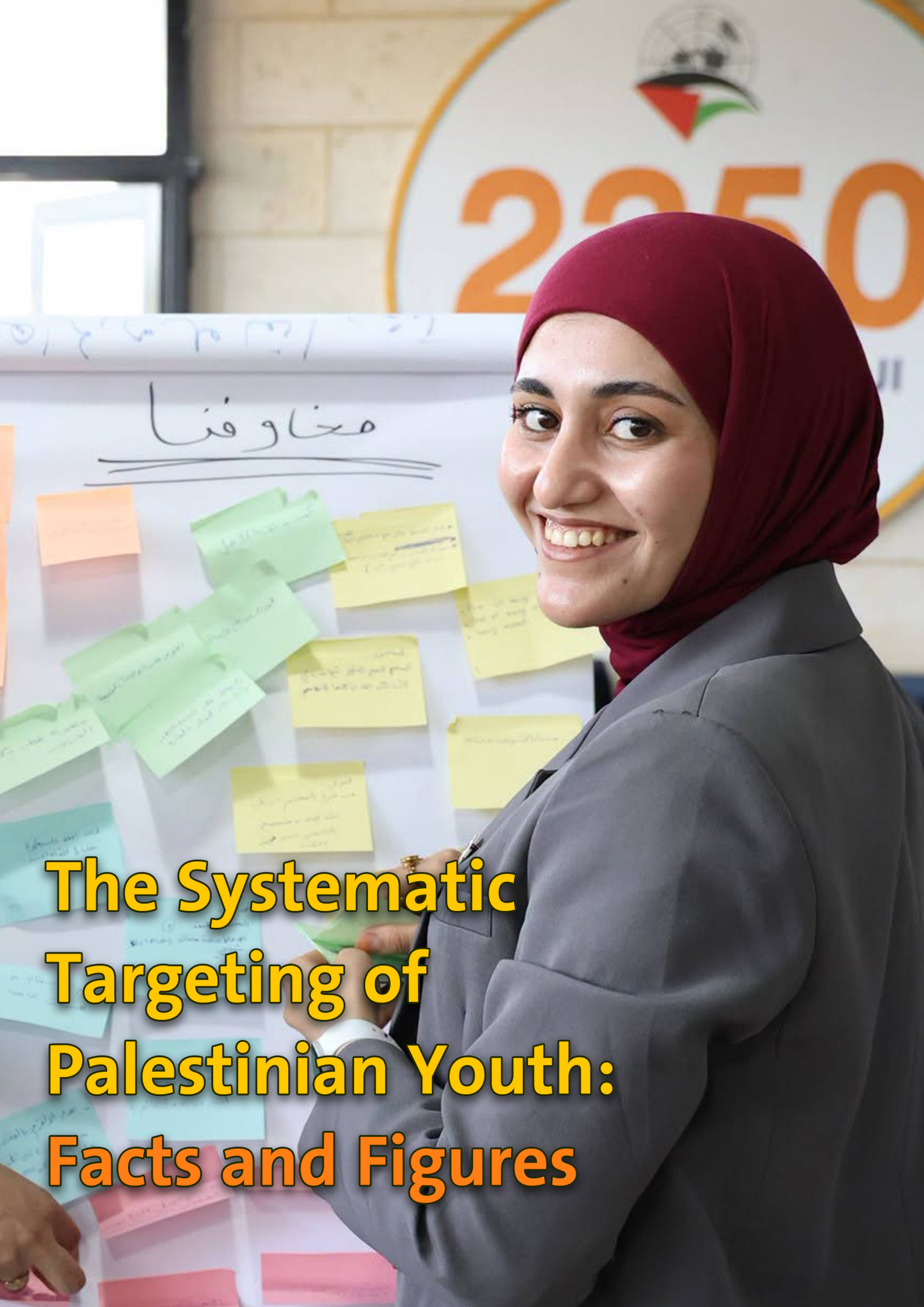
These figures demonstrate that more than one-fifth of Palestinian society consists of young people, making them indispensable to any future development strategy or national response to crisis.

The sex ratio among youth stands at approximately 104 males for every 100 females, reflecting a relatively balanced gender distribution within this age group.

These indicators confirm that Palestinian youth are not merely one of the largest demographic groups in society; they constitute Palestine’s most vital human capital. This places an even greater responsibility on national and international actors to safeguard their rights to education, employment, health, and meaningful participation. Empowering young people today is an investment in the resilience of Palestinian society, its capacity for recovery, and its ability to build a more stable and just future.

Percentage Distribution of the Population in Palestine, Mid-2025





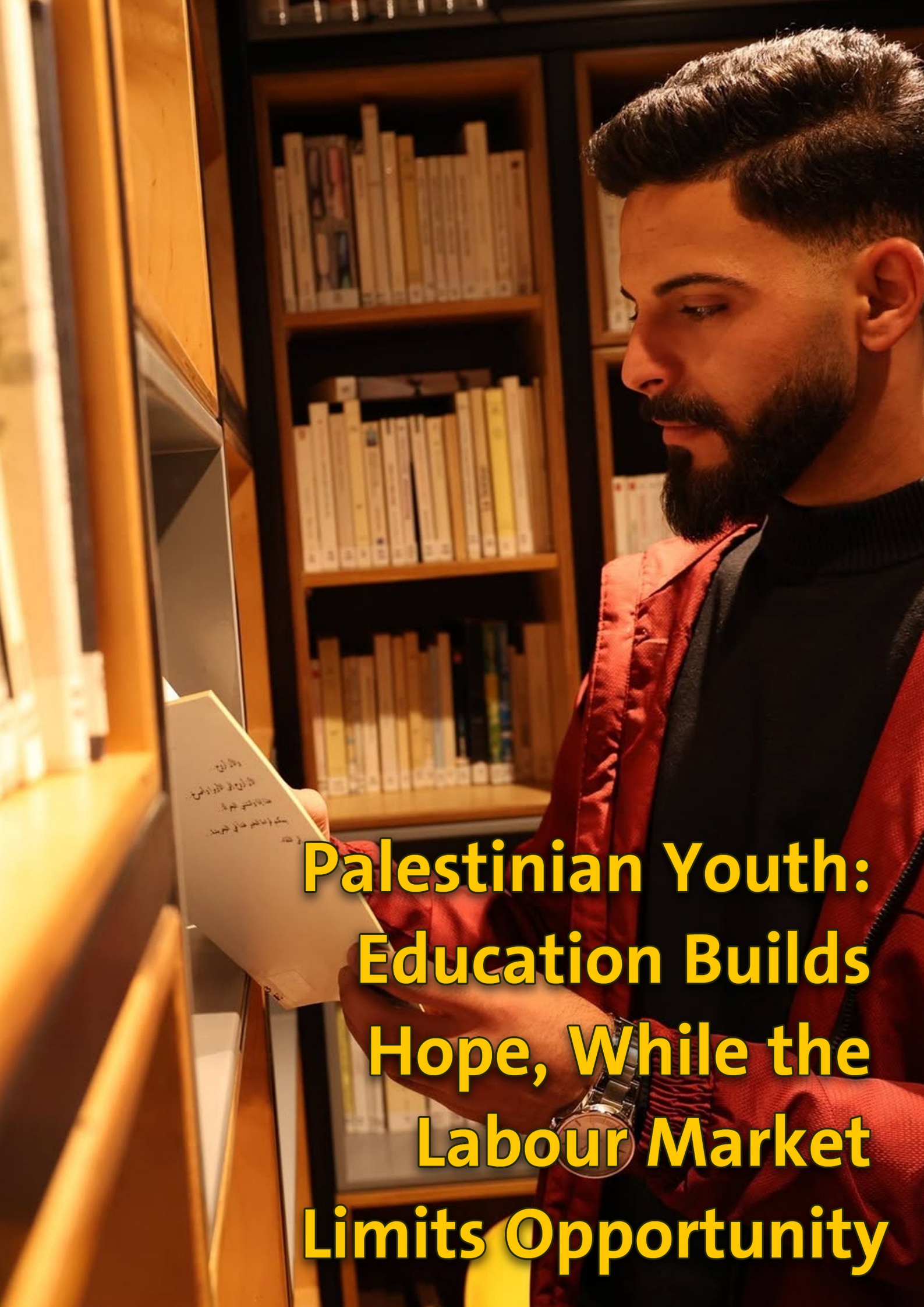
The Systematic Targeting of Palestinian Youth: Facts and Figures

The Systematic Targeting of Palestinian Youth: Facts and Figures

- * More than 17,000 school and university students have been killed, representing one of the gravest educational catastrophes in modern Palestinian history.
- * The number of school students killed across Palestine reached 16,124, including 16,019 in the Gaza Strip and 105 in the West Bank. A further 24,614 school students were injured, including 23,913 in Gaza and 701 in the West Bank.
- * In higher education institutions, 1,191 students were killed, including 1,156 in the Gaza Strip and 35 in the West Bank. Another 2,577 university students were injured, including 2,351 in Gaza and 226 in the West Bank.
- * Approximately 88,000 university students in the Gaza Strip have been deprived of their right to higher education.

These figures are far more than statistics. They illustrate the devastating impact on Palestinian young people's right to education and the resulting human, intellectual, and developmental losses that threaten the future of an entire generation. They also undermine Palestinian society's capacity to recover and rebuild, particularly given that education remains the cornerstone of human capital development and sustainable development.





**Palestinian Youth:
Education Builds
Hope, While the
Labour Market
Limits Opportunity**

Palestinian Youth: Education Builds Hope, While the Labour Market Limits Opportunity

Although education remains one of the most important investments for Palestinians, both individually and collectively, the return on that investment faces profound challenges — foremost the widespread unemployment affecting young people.

69%

Youth unemployment rate among young people aged 15–29 in Gaza.



Statistical data indicate that among every 100 young Palestinians aged 18–29 in the West Bank, 19 hold a bachelor's degree or higher.

Young women demonstrate particularly high levels of educational attainment: 25 out of every 100 young women hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with only 14 out of every 100 young men.

Yet unemployment remains one of the greatest barriers facing Palestinian youth.

In the West Bank, unemployment rates have reached approximately 49% among young women and 38% among young men. The highest unemployment levels are recorded among graduates holding an associate diploma or higher, reaching approximately 42%, with a significant gender disparity: 27% among males compared with 55% among females.

In the Gaza Strip, the crisis is even more severe. According to labour force data, the overall unemployment rate has reached approximately 69%, while unemployment among young people aged 15–29 has risen to a catastrophic 80%, amid the continuing blockade, war, and destruction of Gaza's economic infrastructure.

These figures demonstrate that the challenge facing Palestinian youth is no longer limited to accessing education. It increasingly concerns whether education can be translated into decent employment, economic independence, and a dignified life.

The persistent gap between educational attainment and employment opportunities risks wasting the enormous potential of an entire generation and limiting young people's contribution to economic and social development. Investing in youth employment and economic empowerment must therefore become a national priority equal in importance to investment in education itself.

Psychological and Social Consequences for Palestinian Youth



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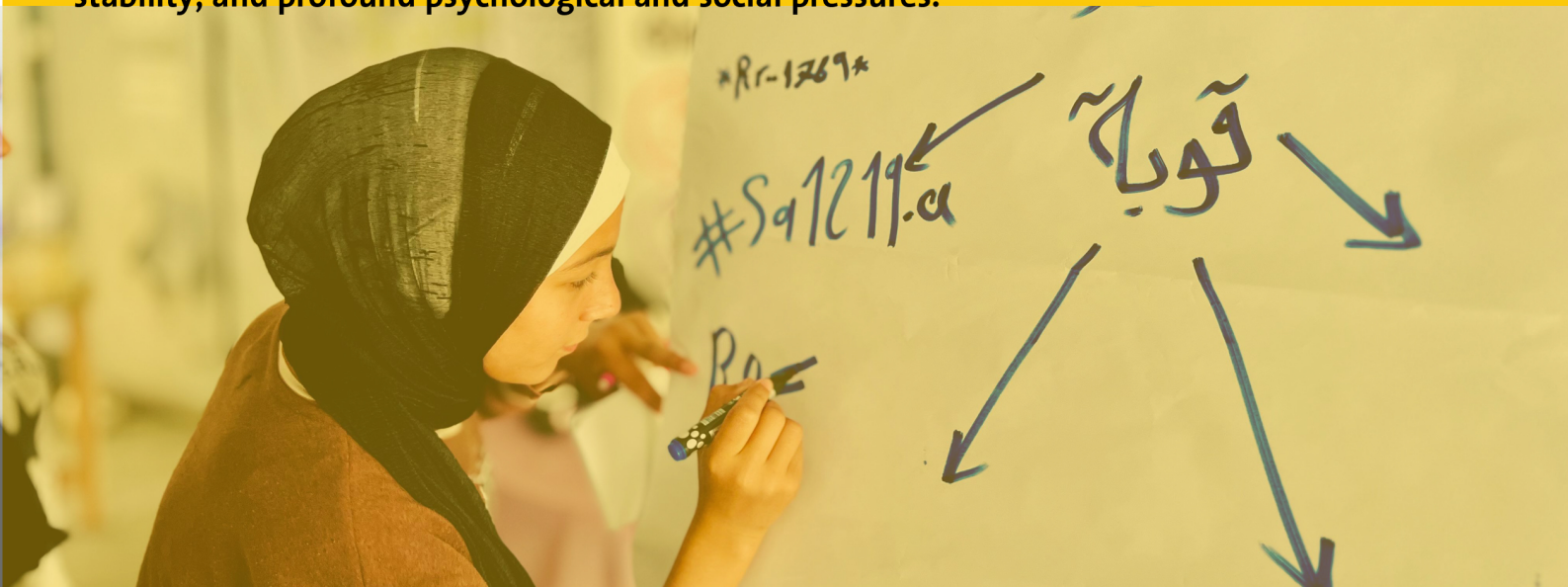
- * Reports by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and international organisations indicate unprecedented levels of psychological distress among young people as a consequence of prolonged insecurity and instability.
- * Demographic transformations: Systematic targeting, displacement, and declining marriage rates have contributed to changes in the size and structure of Gaza's youth population and pose serious risks to its future demographic balance.
- * Declining participation: Young Palestinians face significant obstacles to meaningful engagement in political and public life as a result of prevailing conditions and broader patterns of marginalisation.

These realities demonstrate that the psychological and social consequences of the current crisis are becoming among its most serious long-term impacts. This requires strengthened psychosocial support services, enhanced protection mechanisms for young people, and expanded opportunities for civic and community participation as essential components of recovery and of building a more cohesive and resilient society.

Conclusion

International Youth Day this year comes at a time when Palestinian youth are facing unprecedented challenges affecting their fundamental rights to life, education, employment, and participation — rights guaranteed under international conventions and human rights instruments.

Amid the continuing war on the Gaza Strip, escalating Israeli occupation measures in the West Bank, and worsening economic and social crises, Palestinian youth are bearing a disproportionate share of the consequences. They are affected not only by direct threats to their lives and safety, but also by the erosion of educational and employment opportunities, diminishing prospects for stability, and profound psychological and social pressures.





"تعتمد هذه الورقة على أحدث البيانات الرسمية الصادرة عن الجهاز المركزي للإحصاء الفلسطيني حتى آب/أغسطس 2026."