

Youth Policy Papers

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Civic Education Corps

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Gaza - Palestine

Introduction

As part of its primary role of promoting the values of democracy, justice, human rights, and dialogue among Palestinian youth, Pal-Think for Strategic Studies has conducted the "Civic Education 2" project funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) for the second consecutive year. The project's goal is to amplify Palestinian young men and women's skills and background on democracy and human rights issues.

This book marks the conclusion of the theoretical and practical training program that empowered 25 youth to conduct awareness-raising meetings and discuss their issues in radio interviews. Afterward, the participants prepared five research papers that addressed various issues from a youth perspective in an analytical way and in line with the IMRaD format.

Finally, Pal-Think would like to thank everyone who contributed to producing this youth-centered, informative effort, whether through reading or discussing the papers. Pal-Think affirms its determination to continue its work, plans, and programs that aim at improving youth's access to policy-making centers and promoting their social role.

Omar Shaban
Director of Pal-Think for Strategic Studies

Avenues for youth political engagement despite the impediments of the elections

By: Leen Al Zinati, Ahmad Abu Salah, Abdalla Hasaneen, and Zainab Al Astal

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, in mid-2020, Palestinian youth (18-29 years) numbered 1.14 million in Palestine, accounting for about a fifth (22%) of the Palestinian society. Meanwhile, the gender ratio in Palestine is 105 males per 100 females. Youth are the core of human wealth, as they are the most capable of work and productivity. However, youth have been clearly and intentionally marginalized on the political level, and their involvement in public life has declined.

Through political engagement, youth express their aspirations and desire to serve their community. Yet, given the Palestinian reality, many challenges stand in the way of scaling up youth's engagement in social and political life. The delay—or disruption—of the elections is one of the most pressing. As well as, the Palestinian political division, whose first victim was the youth, added to their suffering and undercut their political and unionist contribution.

In this context, this paper explores the possibilities and means of improving youth political engagement and how to utilize their energies:

First: Youth contribution in political decision-making

The Palestinian elections: If we are to have an effective youth contribution and advance their involvement in decision-making, which does not exceed 1% in the meantime, we must conduct elections. Hence, Palestinian youth should keep demanding elections through advocacy and pressure campaigns to influence policymakers.

Activating the youth parliament: To a large extent, neither the Youth Law nor its articles relating to organizing a youth parliament, in particular, have been activated, and it remained a dead letter. Passed in 2011, the law has not yet come with any results nor achieved its intended purposes. Forming a youth parliament is particularly important because of its ability to unite the Palestinian youth under an

organization that guarantees full representation of youth so that their ambitions are satisfied and their needs and priorities are identified.

Second: Youth political engagement in unions

Associations and unions in Palestine suffer disunity and poor performance due to several factors, including political division. A number of reasons have contributed to the poor unionist work in Palestine, most importantly, the disruption of elections, which are the only means to reform the current situation and improve the low youth contribution.

To advance youth contribution, this paper suggests a set of recommendations: 1) Utilizing media outlets and social media platforms, given their powerful influence in spreading human rights issues and mobilizing public opinion. Media is also a means to pressure policymakers, convey youth voices, and communicate their message to as many audiences as possible. Therefore, Palestinian youth must use these platforms in a smart way to serve their issues.

2) Launching advocacy and pressure campaigns, which have proven to be effective in reforming policies and current situations. Such campaigns can influence policymakers in unions to conduct elections and push toward a youthful leadership in all ways possible.

Raising the minimum wage of workers in the Gaza Strip: between recognition and implementation

By: Almaza Oudeh, Sami Shaquora, Maison Al Aaseh, and Anas Al Azazi

Since its emergence, the Palestinian economy has faced a number of interrelated and overlapping challenges, mainly the continuous Israeli occupation; the Palestinian division, which ultimately resulted in deteriorating the economic and living conditions; the soaring unemployment and poverty rates; the declining median income; and the decreasing wages. However, since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994, there have been attempts to build a Palestinian economy and end dependence on the Israeli economy, which has had dire implications on the Palestinian economy. In turn, the Palestinian Authority had to raise the minimum wage more than once to help workers secure their basic needs given the general rise in prices.

The Council of Ministers' decision No. 11 of 2012 was the first decision to adopt a minimum wage throughout the Palestinian territories. The council also issued decision No. 121 of 2021 to improve the wages of workers, but its implementation was hindered by the Palestinian economy's dependence on the Israeli economy, suffocating financial crises, political complications, and low wages (especially in the Gaza Strip), and serious price hikes.

This paper also explored activating minimum wage mechanisms in Gaza, which are:

National harmony and complementary contribution of all sectors: Creating a comprehensive national plan for improving workers' conditions and economic sectors affected by the occupation and the COVID-19 is a necessity.

Supporting economic structures: If the government were to activate the minimum wage decision, it should also support the private sector, not financially, but by creating an investment-friendly environment for the private sector.

Economic and investment facilitations: Some companies and organizations in the Gaza Strip can implement the decision, so they should.

Towards effective policies that promote women's rights in the Gaza Strip

By: Soha Sukkar, Haneen Lulu, Saeed Daheek, Maisson Oudeh, and Nedal Abu Sharbi

The decades-long political conflict has had serious effects on the social and economic levels of Palestinians. Women, in particular, have been increasingly facing social and economic insecurity as well as violence. With limited job opportunities and the difficult conditions for opening businesses, many Palestinian women had to join the informal working forces, at risk of economic and other types of exploitation.

It goes without saying that women are neglected in our country and do not enjoy the same rights as men. The most common view of women remains that they are nothing but human-producing machines. This was referred to by the UN, whose reports and conventions—including the CEDAW convention—called for promoting women's role and status. However, on the local level, there are many laws and decisions that called for supporting and empowering women such as the "women's 30% quota". Although might still be unfair, women do not enjoy this quota on the economic, social, and political levels. This painful reality shines a light on the lack of women representation. If any, women representation is always formal rather than actual and effective.

As a crucial element of the Palestinian society, a primary pillar in its construction, and its actual half, it is necessary to explore policies that can promote and support women's contribution in all Palestinian domains and frameworks. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, women represent 49% of the Palestinian population.

This paper is particularly of significance as it examines avenues for promoting women's political, social, and economic rights in the Gaza Strip and highlights the important presence of women in policy-making and genuine contribution to society. The objective of this paper is to deliver effective policies that promote women's participation in Palestinian political life. Accordingly, the paper is primarily divided into three topics that address women's status in Palestinian society on the "political and economic" levels.

This paper also presents policies that would improve and reform this reality:

On the political level: 1) Implementing the women's 30% quota system. Palestinian Minister of Women's Affairs, Amal Hamad, has pointed to the Palestinian Central Council's decision to adopt the women's 30% quota in all government structures and organizations. She noted that part of the decision was implemented, that change will come, and that the second phase of elections will see more commitment to raising the representation of women to 30%. She also said that there are attempts to make unions raise women's quota in their councils and associations to 30%.

2) Enforcing women's contribution through legislation. A good example of this is enforcing the elections law of raising women's quota to 26% in each electoral list. Yet, this requires pressure from women and institutional effort.

On the economic level: The Palestinian government is obliged to provide a decent life for its citizens, especially women. There is also an urgent need for government intervention in light of the high unemployment rates, the spread of COVID-19, and the occupation's assaults and violations. This can be achieved by:

- establishing development plans that include female breadwinners in programs aiming at improving their skills and capabilities to enable them to manage their own projects;
- providing mini and micro projects for women;
- continuous monitoring and evaluation by the Ministry of Labor of women's conditions in the labor market; and
- dispel our society's misconceptions about women's labor.

On the social level: Women's political and economic reality cannot be separated from their social reality. If we support women's political and social contribution to the Palestinian political system, women's social status will be improved and our society's patriarchal culture will diminish.

Mechanisms for improving student involvement in social work

By: Tasneem Abu Maghseeb, Jomana Senger, and Maha Mousa

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, youth make up about 22% of the Palestinian society. Because of the complicated social and political reality, youth involvement and contribution on various levels have declined, especially in terms of social work—the work of administrative (governmental and non-governmental) entities to achieve social welfare. While universities are supposed to be at the forefront when it comes to involving youth in social work, recently, we have seen a decline in their efforts, especially in terms of the extracurricular activities, which are carried out outside the classroom and a crucial part of the social work.

This decline is referred to several causes, mainly:

1) the lack of understanding of youth's needs, which hindered their involvement in social work; 2) the disbelief in the influence of extracurricular activities, as there is no time dedicated for extracurricular activities in university students' schedule; and 3) the political division and its ramifications on limiting such activities, which to many students are linked to political parties, so they deprioritized them.

This paper also explores the obstacles responsible for the reduction of extracurricular activities in universities, as an important means for the development and improvement of students' involvement in social work. It also proposes work mechanisms to enhance high education institutions' capabilities and connections with civil society organizations to promote the civic engagement of students.

This paper came with several results, mainly:

1) there is a clear and evident weakness in the culture of social work among university students, since it is difficult to cover all its fields and types; 2) networking operations between universities and civil society organizations, which are an important basis for advancing the culture of social activity in all of its forms, are poor; and 3) the competent authorities do not allocate proper budgets to improving and supporting social work. This has led many civil society organizations to seek support from external donors, and then, consequently, they started to prioritize their donors' goals over the youth's actual needs.

Recommended mechanisms

- One of the most important means of improving social work in universities is the use of extracurricular activities to discover students' talents and abilities so that they use them to serve society. Expanding collaboration between civil society organizations and universities contributes to integrating students into society and helps them develop a deeper understanding of their reality. But the most important mechanism is using various activities to add practice to the theoretical education. All of this cannot be achieved without supporting activities that complement theoretical education.
- Activating extracurricular activities in Palestinian universities by promoting their role under proper supervision and wise management that monitors their planning and execution; encouraging students to participate in all activities announced by the deanship of student affairs; and dedicating an entire department for extracurricular activities in university to enable students to choose the activities that suit them and free their hidden talents.
- True and effective networking between universities and civil society organizations to encourage youth in universities for social contribution.
- Amending civil society organizations' strategic plans to include supporting voluntary work that does not waste volunteers' energies, capabilities, and time. Implementing such plans is a necessity.
- Allocating a governmental contribution in a national fund to finance national civil society organizations' programs that serve all sectors of society.

Restricting Palestinian Youth's Freedom of Movement and Travel

By: Osama Naeem, Nivine Lubbad, Hadeel Ahil, and Farah Zaquot

This paper focuses primarily on the restrictions imposed on Palestinian youth's freedom of movement and travel in comparison with youth in other countries and the minimum requirements for preserving their human dignity. However, Palestinians' freedom movement is still facing many challenges and complications.

The political division has had an impact on the Palestinian youth's freedom of movement, whether directly (the difficulty and expansiveness of obtaining passports) or indirectly (the closure of the Rafah crossing border due to the lack of an agreed-upon Palestinian administration).

This paper presents a set of policy suggestions, most importantly, using innovative methods with the help of peers from other countries to reduce restrictions imposed on freedom of movement by mobilizing youth capabilities through digital diplomacy.