



The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), and the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) Issue a joint Press Release on the World Water Day

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) and the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) issue a joint press release on the World Water Day, on March 22 of each year. This year's statement highlights the relationship between water and gender, emphasizing that challenges related to water resource management are not limited to environmental or technical aspects only, but also extend to social and developmental dimensions related to equity and equality in access to water and related services.

This theme was selected based on the fact that women and girls around the world bear the largest share of responsibilities related to water management at the household and community levels, while their participation in water sector institutions and water-related decision-making processes remains limited. In this context, the statement aims to shed light on the reality of both women and the water sector in Palestine, highlighting the vital roles women play in managing water resources and in adapting to the challenges. It also analyzes the gaps in their institutional participation and explores opportunities to strengthen their role in planning, decision-making, and the development of water services, to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation services for all.

Women Make Up 49% of Palestinian Society, and more than Two Million Women are Affected by the Water Crisis Resulting from the Israeli Occupation's Control over Palestinian Water Resources

The water reality in Palestine cannot be understood merely as a crisis of natural scarcity; rather, at its core, it is a crisis of sovereignty and control over resources. Since 1967, Israel has established effective control over the Palestinian water resource system, both groundwater and surface water, leading to a fundamental violation of the principle of "equitable and reasonable use" stipulated in

international water law governing shared watercourses.

Official data indicate that the Israeli occupation controls more than 85% of Palestinian groundwater resources in the three main aquifers in the West Bank (Western, Eastern, and North-Eastern), through controlling well drilling, preventing the development of new wells, and imposing strict restrictions on the rehabilitation of existing wells. This occurs in parallel with the intensive exploitation of these aquifers for the benefit of illegal Israeli settlements. As a result, Palestinians still do not receive the quantities stipulated in the Interim Agreement 1995, even though three decades have passed since its signing.

This control does not only involve the unequal sharing of water quantities; it also extends to control over production, transport, and distribution systems, including obliging the Palestinian side to purchase increasing quantities of water from the Israeli company "Mekorot", bearing water losses in pipelines located in Area C, and deducting various costs from clearance revenues. This effectively transforms water from a natural resource into a financial and political pressure tool.

Regarding surface water, Palestinians are almost completely deprived of their right to the Jordan River, despite being a riparian state. Israel has exclusively controlled the river and its economic resources, as well as the Dead Sea, preventing any actual Palestinian access since 1967. Israel also imposes systematic obstacles to the utilization of rainwater in the West Bank, which is estimated at more than 165 million cubic meters annually, by preventing the construction of dams or collection ponds in many areas classified as Area C. Consequently, a large portion of this water flows toward the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River without the Palestinian being able to benefit from it.

This reality has created a water crisis experienced by the Palestinian people in general. Data show a clear numerical convergence between males and females, with females making up approximately half of Palestinian society (49%). Despite this numerical parity, the effects of water scarcity and the deterioration of water services are not distributed



equally between the sexes. Social and economic roles play a decisive role in determining who bears the greatest burden of managing water resources within the household and community, placing women at the forefront of dealing with the effects of water scarcity and the irregularity of its services. Furthermore, the geographical disparity between regions and the relative dependence of some local communities on agricultural activities are all factors that amplify the gender impact of the water crisis.

61.5% of Women in the West Bank Do Not Reach the Minimum Recommended Daily Water Share

Data indicate that the number of females living in governorates, where the minimum globally recommended daily water share of 100 liters per person per day is not met, amounts to 1,014,000 females, representing 61.5% of the total female population in the West Bank. If the conditions of displaced persons from camps were taken into consideration, this percentage would be even higher.

Women traditionally bear responsibilities for household management, including securing water, storing it, rationalizing its use, and ensuring the continuity of activities related to cooking, hygiene, and the health care of children and the elderly. When water becomes scarce, intermittent, or expensive, these responsibilities become a compound daily burden, combining physical, psychological, and economic pressure.

Control over water resources and restrictions on agricultural development do not only affect the macro-economy but also directly impact women farmers, employment opportunities, and household production. This deepens income gaps and increases the vulnerability of households headed by women. In marginalized areas and Area C, where residents rely on water tankers, the financial burden on households increases significantly. Women are often forced to reduce water consumption allocated for their personal needs in order to preserve the minimum requirements of the household.

The Young Population Structure in the West Bank Increases Demand for Water and Sanitation Services

An analysis of the age composition of the population reveals that the society in the West Bank is characterized by being a relatively young community. This age structure means that the demand for water services is not only linked to population size, but also to the nature of needs associated with health, education, and household care. The high proportion of children increases the need for safe water in homes, schools, and health facilities, and also raises the community's vulnerability to water and sanitation-related diseases. This makes the regularity and quality of water services a fundamental matter for public health and social development.

Social Group	Estimated %	Estimated Number (End of 2025)	Water Significance
Children (under 15)	34.5%	1,183,370	High vulnerability to water-borne diseases; need for water in schools
Women of reproductive age	24%	823,215	Special hygiene and sanitation needs
People with disabilities	5.8%*	198,943	Difficulty accessing alternative water sources (tankers)
Female farmers & rural women	13%*	445,908	Direct link between water availability, food security, and economic empowerment
Elderly (65+)	3.7%	126,912	Home-based healthcare dependent on water availability

Displacement in the Northern West Bank and the Escalating Burdens on Women

Estimates indicate that by September 2025, at least 31,919 Palestinian refugees had been displaced from the camps of Jenin, Tulkarm, and Nur Shams as a result of the Israeli military operations and



infrastructure damage. International reports clarify that the effects of forced displacement are not distributed equally between men and women, as women often bear the responsibility of managing household water needs. With water and sanitation networks destroyed or disrupted, many women are forced to search for alternative water sources under difficult and unsafe conditions. Furthermore, overcrowding in temporary shelters limits the availability of adequate sanitation facilities, increasing health risks and affecting the dignity and privacy of residents, particularly women and girls.

Severe Decline in Water Availability below the Humanitarian Minimum in Gaza Strip

In Gaza Strip, the water reality takes on a sharper and more complex dimension. Estimates indicate that the average water supply in some areas of Gaza dropped to 3–5 liters per person per day during periods of conflict, a level far below the emergency humanitarian minimum, 15 liters per person per day, according to the international humanitarian standards. As water supply quantities deteriorated to survival-threatening levels and sanitation networks were damaged, the gender dimension became increasingly apparent. Following sustained governmental interventions in Gaza, the per capita share rose to an average of 21 liters per person per day, yet it remains low due to the exceptionally difficult circumstances, including border crossing closures and fuel shortages.

This acute water shortage restricts women's ability to maintain personal hygiene, affects reproductive health, undermines privacy in shelter centers, and increases the risks of exposure to violence while searching for water or using unsafe facilities. This reality has affected all segments of society in varying degrees. Water scarcity, irregular supply, rising costs, and deteriorating sanitation services are all factors that intersect with social structures and gender roles, doubling the impact of the water crisis on women and girls.

Population Distribution and Water Quantities — Widespread Displacement in Gaza Strip Exacerbates Water Supply Challenges

The demographic distribution in Gaza Strip has undergone radical transformations since the outbreak of the Israeli aggression, having previously been characterized by a degree of relative stability and balanced population distribution across different governorates. Evacuation orders and large-scale military operations led to the near-complete displacement of Gaza Strip's population of approximately 2.1 million people, of whom women make up nearly half. As a result, population density became concentrated in an unprecedented manner in the southern areas, particularly in Rafah, before subsequently shifting to the central region and parts of Khan Yunis. These transformations led to emergency and overcrowded settlement patterns, such as shelter centers, temporary camps, and damaged housing, causing severe pressure on essential services, most notably water and sanitation services, amid the continued population instability linked to security developments, with signs of relative stabilization in some areas following the ceasefire in October 2025.

Governorate	Population	Average period between October 2025 and February 2026 (after ceasefire)		
		Quantities of water produced from various sources (m ³ /day)	Quantities of water reaching the population (m ³ /day)	Average per capita consumption (liters/person/day)
North Gaza	93,933	3,040	992	10.6
Gaza	673,824	25,760.5	10,120	15.0
Central / Deir al-Balah	609,355	45,639.7	18,934.9	31.1
Khan Yunis and Northwest Rafah	740,503	37,257.2	14,897.1	20.1
Total	2,117,615	111,697	44,944	21.2

The Joint Water Sector Assessment for Gaza 2025 revealed that 15% of households rely on children as primary water collectors, and that 77% of households depend on water trucking as their main source of water. This reflects clear gender burdens,



as women and girls bear the primary responsibility for managing household water.

The Near-Complete Collapse of Sanitation Services in Gaza Constitutes a Severe Daily Struggle

Estimates indicate that more than 85% of water and sanitation facilities in Gaza Strip have suffered total or partial destruction since the beginning of the Israeli aggression, leading to a near-complete collapse of the wastewater management system. This has resulted in the spread of wastewater in residential areas, rising environmental contamination risks, and an increase in waterborne diseases. Sectoral assessments also reveal the absence of any actual access to safely managed sanitation services, with approximately 57% of the population exposed to wastewater or human waste within 10 meters of their homes. This situation has been reflected in a notable rise in illnesses, including a multiplication of acute watery diarrhea cases and an increase in skin diseases and parasitic infections, particularly given that children under the age of 15 make up approximately 39% of Gaza's population. This further increases the health and social burdens on households, especially mothers. The collapse of public water networks is also driving many households to rely on purchasing water from tankers, which exacerbates the economic burdens on displaced households, particularly those headed by women. Adding to this suffering, humanitarian reports indicate that approximately 700,000 women and girls in Gaza Strip face significant difficulties in managing menstrual hygiene due to water shortages and lack of hygiene supplies.

The Role of Palestinian Women in Water Sector Institutions: Between Lack of Representation and Crisis Management

While Palestinian women constitute 49% of the total population and provide vital community services in managing the household water crisis, their representation in official water sector institutions remains extremely limited, reflecting deep structural gaps. Data from a World Bank survey covering 64 water institutions in 28 entities operating in the water sector indicate that the average representation of women in the workforce of these institutions does

not exceed 18%, compared to approximately 40% globally.

This percentage reflects a more complex reality. In the West Bank, women working in the Palestinian Water Authority and municipalities face multiple barriers, including being concentrated in administrative and financial roles (traditionally considered “female” positions) rather than technical or field roles (such as operations and maintenance departments, where men constitute the overwhelming majority). This is largely due to prevailing social norms that view fieldwork in water services as unsuitable for women.

This absence does not only deprive women of decent and sustainable employment opportunities, but also deprives water institutions of half of their innovative capacity and their ability to understand the needs of half of society (women) who are the primary users of water within households.

Note: Data mentioned in this press release exclude those parts of Jerusalem, which were annexed by the Israeli occupation in 1967.

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