



EuroMed Youth III Programme



## STUDIES ON YOUTH POLICIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN PARTNER COUNTRIES

# PALESTINIAN OCCUPIED TERRITORIES



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The third phase of the **Euromed Youth Programme\*** (Euro-Med Youth III), funded by the European Commission (DG EuropeAid) and launched in October 2005, is a regional Programme set up within the framework of the third chapter of the Barcelona Process '*Partnership on Social, Cultural and Human Affairs*'. The overall objectives of the Euro-Med Youth Programme are to promote intercultural dialogue among young people within the Euro-Mediterranean region, motivate active citizenship as well as to contribute to the development of youth policy.

The overall aim of the studies undertaken in **Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey** on Youth Policies, was to be a reference tool which would give all stakeholders in the field of youth, as well as youth project organisers, an overview of the situation of young people and of provisions available for them in the 10 partner countries. The objectives were to identify whether there was a Youth Policy, legislation or any other national strategy addressing the needs of youth and what kind of provision was made through non-formal education and youth work in the relevant partner countries.

Research for the studies was carried out by 7 experts and involved gathering of information, during a 5-month period, on basis of available written materials and resources, and as a result of missions to the studied countries to interview relevant youth authorities, organisations and young people individually or through focus groups.

The outcomes of the studies, each produced in a report format following a common structure for all the ten studies, give an enlightening overview of the definition and situation of youth in the Mediterranean partner countries. The studies focused on young people's rights and entitlements as active citizens, such as opportunities to vote, get elected and contribute to the decision-making process; the challenges faced by youth such as unemployment, immigration, housing, marriage, generational and cultural conflict, young women's place in society; young people's reactions in response to such challenges and description of provision for leisure-time activities and non-formal education through governmental and/or non-governmental youth institutions and organisations.

A reading of all the studies shows that a national youth policy is not yet fully implemented in any of the partner countries. However, each of them has a number of national directives, legislations, policies and/or strategies to address youth issues, usually at cross-sector level, even if youth are not, in some cases, recognised as a priority. The definition of youth varies from country to country, sometimes even within the same country depending on the responsible national authority. Non-formal education has no, or limited, place in most of the studied countries, formal education being the main priority of national authorities. The Euromed Youth Programme is assessed positively and considered to be an essential tool for the promotion of youth work and non-formal education.

Each report, published individually, provides a factual background on youth issues on basis of information collated by the relevant researchers. In addition, one document bringing together the executive summaries from each of the ten studies has been also produced to highlight an overview on the situation of youth within the Mediterranean region.

\* [www.euromedyouth.net](http://www.euromedyouth.net)



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt, which covers the three regions of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem) is relatively young. The Palestinian Ministry for Youth and Sports defines youth as the part of the population between 15 and 30 years of age. However, several NGOs employ their own definitions which often cover a wider age bracket. The age pyramid shows a youth growth with 71.7% of a total population of 3.7 million being under the age of 24. Youth in the age bracket of 15 to 24 make up for 19.3% of this. The Gaza Strip population is even younger than that of the other two regions.

The situation of young people in the oPt is to an extremely high degree dominated by the political situation. This refers to both the ongoing conflict with Israel and the domestic situation. Here the rift between Hamas and Fatah and its result, i.e. two political entities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, produces an unstable setting for youth, youth work and youth policy. Young people in the oPt are forced to struggle with a situation which hinders their freedom of movement, security, education and employment. Youth unemployment and the dire prospects of finding an adequate job after graduation are among the biggest problems for young people. Youth unemployment rates are at a 37% high in the oPt leading to high levels of poverty with regional differences ranging from the Gaza Strip, where the situation is worst, to East Jerusalem, where it is best. While educational levels are high in general in regard to enrolment rates, especially the tertiary sector faces problems in terms of quality.

As employment and, in consequence, income is unavailable to a large percentage of youth, their chances to become fully independent from their parents are limited. Costly marriages and the setting up of an own household is more and more delayed to a later time of life. This puts young people into a prolonged period of dependency termed as 'waithood'. This does not only cause frustration among the young but also affects their chances to make relevant changes to their society.

The possibilities for youth to take part in decision-making processes on issues concerning themselves are limited. It seems that the importance of young people in this respect has decreased in recent years. A major possibility of participation is maintained in the students' councils which continue to play an important political role. Several municipalities in the West Bank have also begun to establish proper youth councils to increase the possibilities of action for young people. They themselves however complained that the general political culture, also in youth NGOs, is not open for a broader participation of young people. The subject is not covered in formal education, though partly in the universities, where several hours of community service are obligatory.

Youth in the oPt falls into the portfolio of two different ministries: the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education also incorporates the former Ministry of Higher Education that deals with the university sector.

The Palestinian government, with the support of UNICEF and other actors from the academic field and the civil society, has already started to develop a youth policy in the year 2000. It was finalized in 2005 and now awaits implementation. A wide consultation process has taken place in setting up the policy which included various ministries, the civil society, and also a large number of young people. However, several of the youth NGOs interviewed raised criticism towards the process, especially as the policy until now fails to be met by a dedicated budget or an appropriate plan of action. Regarding the content of the youth policy, it aims to strengthen the involvement of youth in all youth related policy fields, however it is more a framework than a concrete action plan.

About 507 youth clubs and centers and about 250 other organisations dealing with young people are active, 42 of which working exclusively with youth are found in the Gaza Strip. In addition, there are the international NGOs and organisations which offer youth activities. Furthermore a number of youth movements, such as the youth organisations of the big political fractions, are not only existent but also often have high numbers of members, although they lack constant activities. While youth clubs deal mostly with sports and receive partial funding from the government, the majority of youth organizations are dependent on foreign funds. Due to this many interviewees remarked that the majority of youth projects are donor-driven in matters of the priority areas they cover, and which often shift quickly. In order to establish a NGO, a minimum age of 18 years is required. However, in reality only very few of the organisations are actually youth-led. And it is difficult for young people to really advance to a leading position in an organization.

The role of the Euromed Youth Programme is twofold: on the one hand, the majority of actors praised its role in exposing young people to foreign cultures and countries; on the other hand, all actors regarded its impact as limited due to the small number of projects which could be financed. Also the role that the EMYU played was discussed by various interviewees both from governmental and civil society levels. The political situation prevents a number of young people especially from the Gaza Strip from taking part in the Programme.

The major source of support to the Palestinian youth sector lies in the international donor community. Other support from the private sector or on a regional level (e.g. from the Arab League, ALECSO) was found existent but very limited. For the development of the National Youth and Adolescents Policy, UNICEF played a major role in funding the process and the distribution of the results.

It can be concluded that the Palestinian Authority with the support of UNICEF, NGOs and youth has made a decisive step in creating the national youth policy. This is even more impressive taking into account the political realities which the government has to face. However it remains a challenge to continue the implementation process of the policy while really meeting the demands of young people.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Objectives

The following study covers the situation of youth and youth policy in the signatory party of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt)<sup>(1)</sup>.

The objective of this study was to compile information on the state of the development of national youth policies and strategies and especially to:

- Identify to what extent (if at all) the national youth strategy / policy addresses the various needs of young people
- Understand the role of youth NGOs and their importance for young people's role as citizens, as well as the role of other relevant actors.

In more specific terms, the research team focused on answering the following guiding questions:

- Is there any youth policy or strategy?
- Who are its actors and by what regulations is it implemented?
- Does the policy meet the needs of youth?

This was done with special regard to the issue of youth participation. Supporting young people in creating the environments they consider fit to fulfill their needs is one of the major aims of any policy or action designed for young people (European Youth Forum 1998). For this reason the study team put an emphasis on investigating how the policies already in effect and their actors work on the goal of enabling young people to actively participate in local matters socially, economically and politically.

Furthermore, data gathered from field research through interviews and focus group discussions has been taken into account. The study covers all three regions of the oPt: West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. However, due to the restricted access to the Gaza Strip most of the interviews were conducted in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

(1) In the following the signatory party's territory referred to includes the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem following the EC's definition as given under: [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/occupied\\_palestinian\\_territory/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/occupied_palestinian_territory/index_en.htm); 22.06.2008.



## 1.2 Methodology

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The findings of this study are based on the existing material, collected mainly from local and international donor organisations. To add to this information the authors have interviewed different actors from the field of youth policy during the months of May and June 2008. In total 17 interviews were conducted with representatives of a number of ministries, youth NGOs, international organisations, the EMYU and youth movements. Furthermore a focus group discussion, with 15 young people (eight male, seven female) aged between 18 and 23 from various rural and urban regions in the West Bank, was held in Ramallah, While the research team was mainly based in the West Bank, a field visit to the Gaza Strip allowed an important insight into the situation of young people there.

## 1.3 Challenges of the study

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In contrast to most of the Arab countries in the region, the situation of Palestinian youth has been in the focus of research for quite some time. Both quantitative and qualitative data is available, mostly through studies conducted by local NGOs or international donors. The Palestinian Bureau of Statistics also maintains high quality data on households in the oPt that were used for this study.

Due to the closure of the Gaza Strip at the time of research, the team faced certain limitations in accessing this part of the country and in contacting relevant actors there. Nevertheless the study comprises all three regions of the oPt but most interviews were conducted in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

# 2. SITUATION OF YOUTH

## 2.1 Definition of Youth

The speaking of youth in a Palestinian context demands answers to at least two questions: “what is Palestinian?” and “what is youth?”.

The concept of youth, distinguished from childhood and adulthood alike, has emerged during the time of industrialisation in Western Europe. While before this point youth and adult life were closely interconnected within the house, industrialisation transferred the location of work away from the house for the majority of adults and thus separated the two spheres. Today youth as a category describes a time-limited, transitional complementation of social roles, a cultural intermediate zone between defined roles (childhood and adulthood), and a period of liminality (Dar 1990). It marks the time when individuals become economically, biologically, and psychologically independent from their guardians. The end of youth is therefore logically marked by the point when full independency has been reached and the young person is able to reproduce society not only in biological but also in economic terms (Hurrelmann 2004). In traditional Arab culture however, this independence was only achieved through marriage, which until today is the time when most of the young people are for the first time allowed to establish their own household (Brakel 2007). To apply the concept of “youth” to a non-European surrounding will therefore produce several difficulties with the definition of the term. Is a Palestinian street kid who sells chewing gum at the checkpoint to support his family in the Qalandiya refugee camp considered to be an adult when he is economically maybe more independent from his parents than they are from him? Is a 40-year-old, unmarried, unemployed woman, who has to live with her parents, still a young person? These contradictions cannot be completely avoided in a study like this. The research team has therefore applied a twofold approach: when speaking about youth in general, the definition as given by the Palestinian Ministry of Youth and Sports (Wizārah Al-Shabāb wa Al-Riyāḥ - MoYS), which limits the concept to the persons in the age bracket between 15 and 30 years of age, and when referring to international statistics or documents, the UN age definition of 15-24 are applied.

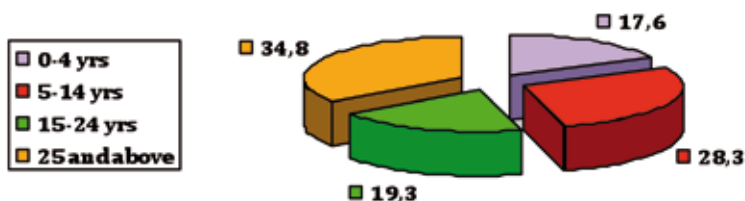
The role of youth in the Palestinian society has been quite different from that in the neighbouring countries during the last few decades. Young people have played a decisive part in mobilizing and leading the first Intifada, which started in 1987. For want of a central authority such as a government, the youth was then the most important group in organizing the social and political sphere and in leading the intellectual debate concerning questions of self-determination. The circles of students' groups inside and outside the country brought forth the future leaders of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (Munazamat Al-Tahrīr Al-Filastīniyah - PLO) and later of the Palestinian Authority (Al-Sulṭah Al-Waḥāniyah Al-Filasṭīniyah – PA), such as Yassir Arafat, Mahmud Abbas and Ahmad Qureia. The groundwork for the high importance of volunteer work in local communities was also laid in this time, when the international assistance to the oPt was still relatively

small money-wise. The same applies to the students' unions, which until today continue to play an important role as a mini-barometer of the national political sphere. Most of this changed, when the Oslo Accords came into being and subsequently the Palestinian Authority was established as a quasi-government. The majority of government posts were assigned to the exiled leaders of the PLO who then returned home, most of them being far over 50 years of age. The role youth were given then did not correspond to the part they had played on the national stage since at least 1987. While the PA, until today the largest employer in the oPt, incorporated many young people, mainly through jobs in the security apparatus, their power to influence political decisions was limited (Interviews with PYU and MoYS).

## 2.2 General Statistics: Demography, young people's rights and conditions

In all three areas of oPt, 19.3% of the total population of 3.7 million people are aged between 15 and 24. The rate is projected to be slightly rising to 21.2% until 2020 (UN 2007)<sup>(2)</sup>. The median age of 16.2 years in the Gaza Strip and 18.7 years in the West Bank (CIA 2008) demonstrates the important role young people play in Palestinian society by sheer numbers. People under the age of 25 make up for 65.2 % of the total population. The number of young men is slightly higher than that of young women with a sex ratio of 104 to 100 (PCBS 2007).

**Table 2.1.: Palestinian population 2005; distribution by age**  
(Own compilation from data in UN 2006)



With no Palestinian state in existence until now, the territories covered within this study are those under full or partial administration of the Palestinian Authority, which fall into the boundaries of the defined territory. However, due to the territorial segregation, the lives of young people in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and/or the Gaza Strip differ greatly from each other. Diverse economic, political and cultural factors shape the lives of the average Palestinian young person in each of the three regions. While the West Bank, for example, is characterized by rural areas and a dominant agricultural sector, the Gaza Strip is a semi-arid region where, due to the political situation, high poverty rates prevail (UNDP 2008). In comparison, poverty rates in the West Bank are lower, while East Jerusalem features the lowest (ibid.). Those young people living in refugee camps are more prone to poverty, and girls more than boys (ibid.). This differentiation of the regions is characteristic not only with respect to poverty, but it accounts for the huge differences in the lives

(2) All numbers as of 2005.

of young people in general. The place where a young person lives – in which of the three regions, in an urban or in a rural area, in a city, village or in a refugee camp – affects most of the other aspects of his daily life: his mobility, his opportunities for education and employment, his possibility to participate in the society in political, cultural or social terms. Gender also plays a role here, but all interviewees remarked that in this respect the situation has changed for the better over the last years, which is also highlighted by statistical data available (World Bank 2008).

While statistically the oPt is a lower-middle income country with a GDP per capita of 1.100 \$ (CIA 2008), the political situation hinders investment, the freedom of movement of goods and people as well as the access to foreign labour markets. This all has a tremendously negative effect on the economic outlook for the oPt as a whole and for young people in particular (Sabella 2002). The oPt is therefore highly dependent on foreign aid to meet budgeted commitments for young people (*ibid.*).

Youth literacy rate is as high as 99% (among females with 98.8% only slightly lower), and overall enrolment for all three educational sectors is 82.4%. (UNDP 2007/8). The public investment in education in relation to the GDP has been the highest in the region, while compared to the overall budget it has been only around 18%<sup>(3)</sup> (World Bank 2008). Primary and secondary education is free of charge. However the good quality of public schools was largely doubted by most of the interviewees and official reports (AHDR 2002; World Bank 2008) support this view. Tertiary education is not free, but a high percentage of Palestinians enrol anyhow, producing the second highest enrolment rate in the region (World Bank 2008). Again the quality was questioned by some of those interviewed and mainly the youth themselves, who felt that they did not learn job relevant skills (see also Sharek 2008). Gender parity rates in education are quite good compared to the rest of the region. Private education plays but a minor role for primary and secondary education but a huge one for the tertiary sector (*ibid.*).

Youth mobility is limited due to the prevailing political situation. This applies especially to youth in the Gaza strip, but also to youth travelling between cities in the West Bank due to the restrictions imposed by Israeli security forces. These restrictions limit also the access to education which is especially felt by girls from rural areas. One third of the youth in general think about migrating to another country either in the region or the U.S. or an European country (PCBS 2007). Asked for possible changes which could make them stay in the country, the youth named an improved employment situation (34%), the end of the occupation (25%) or an improved situation of freedom and democracy (22%); while this feature was more important to the respondents from the Gaza Strip) (Sharek 2008).

Major challenges to youth health can be believed to result from psychological stress especially in Gaza. In a recent poll among 1220 Palestinian youth 42% answered they felt depressed, another 39% stated that they felt extremely depressed (*ibid.*). A high feeling of insecurity<sup>(4)</sup> (i.e. related to the conflict situation) among 54% (*ibid.*) of those youth highlights part of the psychological effects of the ongoing political situation on young people.

(3) From 1999 to 2003

(4) One example for this situation is the high number of minors who have served one or several prison terms after arrest through the IDF and/or the Israeli police. According to the Israeli human rights organization B'tselem the number of minors in arrest or "administrative detention" in May 2008 was 319 ([http://www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Minors\\_in\\_Custody.asp](http://www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Minors_in_Custody.asp); 28.06.2008).

Other health hazards like from smoking, alcohol or substance abuse are existent. All but the first are not common risk behaviour. Smoking however is widely practiced and in a 2007 survey 17% of unmarried youth stated to maintain a smoking habit (28% male; 1% female) (PCBS 2007). In the same survey 13% of the youth rated their health status as average to poor (12% male; 14% female).

## 2.3 Youth culture and trends

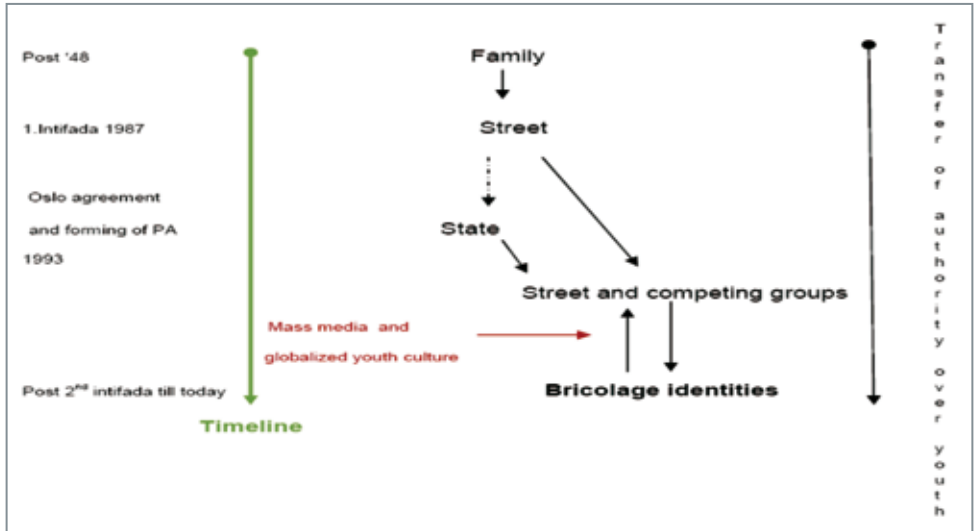
When looking at contemporary Palestinian youth culture, among various trends (socialistic, nationalistic, religious, westernised etc.) we find a strong unifying narrative. This is caused by the political situation young people grow up in. The occupation, and likewise the resistance to it, is a reference point for almost all parts of Palestinian youth (Kreuer 2008)<sup>(5)</sup>. Youth in general are highly affected by the unstable political situation which influences almost all parts of their life. This relates not only to the conflict with Israel but also to the split in the political sphere caused by the violent inter-fractional battles which took place in the Gaza Strip in 2007 among followers of Hamas<sup>(6)</sup> and Fatah<sup>(7/8)</sup>.

Taking into account the model of disintegration of authority over youth in the Arab world that Roel Meijer (2000)<sup>(9)</sup> has brought forward, and which has been further developed by Brakel (2007), it can be assumed that the socialisation of generations of Palestinian youth has to a large extent been formed by the street. It can also be assumed that autonomy from the parents has influenced Palestinian youth more than young people in other Arab countries. While the authority of the family remains strong (Sabella 2002), the influence of peers has also been very high (Sharek 2008). Most youth state in polls that the media (esp. satellite TV) (ibid.) and friends are more important in forging their political opinion today than their parents are. A majority also states that their views on politics differ highly from those of their parents (Awrad 2008).

The Palestinian exposure to global and foreign influences has been historically inherited, due to the confrontation with the Israeli culture but also because of the large groups of people migrating to other Arab states, the U.S., Europe, and back again. Palestinian youth today displays a high level of disillusionment towards all kind of political ideas. All recent opinion polls among youth show that the majority of young people do not trust any of the political fractions (Sharek 2008; Sabella 2002).

- (5) However which form of resistance – passive, active, armed, unarmed - is acceptable to youth is a point of ongoing debate among pollsters. While Kreuer (2008) found that at least 50% of youth opt for the necessity of armed struggle, 69% in a poll by the Sharek Youth Forum (2008) found that applying a minimum level of force was rarely important and even 90% opposed the carrying of arms in official or non official function.
- (6) Hamas (Harakat Al-Muqawama Al-Islamiyya – Islamic Resistance Movement) is an Islamist political, religious and social organisation which is one of the major political parties in oPt. The Council of the European Union has listed Hamas as a terrorist organization due to its involvement into various armed assaults against Israeli civilians both inside and outside the '67 green line.
- (7) Fatah (Harakat Al-Tahrir al-Watani al-Filastini – Movement for the National Liberation of Palestine) is a political movement in the oPt. It is one of the major political parties. It has been the key partner both before and after the Oslo Accords in the Palestinian political arena for the European Union.
- (8) After the unity government of Fatah and Hamas failed the oPt has been effectively split into two entities. While Hamas is reigning the Gaza Strip, President Abbas put a caretaker government in place to govern the oPt until a new government could be formed. This government headed by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad since 15 June 2007 rules through presidential decrees rather than through parliamentary vote in the Palestinian Legislative Council which has not been assembled since. The legality of this structure is still disputed (Brown 2007).
- (9) Meijer concludes that the traditional authority that the family maintained over youth eroded in the time of Pan-Arabism due to the fact that the Arab governments created national youth organisations loyal to the state and due to the mass schooling provided. After the disintegration of Pan-Arabism after '67 this authority transferred from the family to the state, and then went to the street where youth sought free spaces. It was met there by different youth cultures such as the ones the Islamist groups provided. Brakel further explains that with the emergence of a globalised youth culture and the rising influence of mass media youth then started to construct their own bricolage identities which allowed them to integrate both traditional and modern identity aspects.

**Table 2.2.: Patterns of authority transfer over Palestinian youth (Own compilation)**



While national identity plays a decisive role for most of the youth (Sharek 2008; Kreuer 2008), it is notable that the regional trend of increasing religious identification patterns also is found in the oPt. While interviewees had different opinions about the role of religion, and especially the influence of Islamist groups<sup>(10)</sup> on young people, polls show that many youth identify themselves firstly and foremostly as “Muslim” (47%) before being “Palestinian” (28%) or “Arab” (10%) (Sharek 2008). Likewise, when asked about idols, even if a number of youth admire quite worldly persons, such as stars from Turkish soap operas or pop singers (Interview with PYALARA), a majority answered differently in polls. Here most of the youth named the prophet Muhammad before Amr Khaled<sup>(11)</sup> and only then religious and political leaders like Yussuf Qaradawi<sup>(12)</sup> or Hassan Nasrallah<sup>(13)</sup> (ibid.). In the same poll 33% of the youth answered that the preferred system of government would be an Islamic caliphate, more than the 29% who opted for the model of an Arab country. Only 12% wished for a political system that resembled that of a European country (ibid.). Similar patterns can be found in other recent polls among youth (Awrad 2008). The fact that those patterns do not transmit into direct support for a specific political party, gives evidence that this religious development is not necessarily connected with a rising of extremist mindsets. As Brakel (2007) has pointed out, religion here serves rather as a vehicle for joining different aspects of identity both from a traditional-Arab sphere and from a globalized youth culture. The wish for a caliphate is more the wish for – as Leveau has termed it - an “imagined elsewhere” (Leveau 1995).

(10) Who maintain large social and educational networks which benefit youth.

(11) Amr Khaled is a famous Egyptian TV preacher who runs a show called „Suna Al-Hayat“ (Lifemakers), which addresses daily problems of young people through religious guidance. While being quite conservative Amr Khaled has a huge success in preaching for non-violent community involvement of young people.

(12) Qaradawi is an Islamic Sheikh who, like Amr Khaled is running a religious show over satellite TV which addresses mainly young people. Unlike Khaled he has in the past also advocated the use of violence.

(13) The secretary general of the Libanese Shiite Hizb'Allah party.

Like in other (Arab) countries of the region, and even maybe with a little stronger current, the trend of global popular youth culture (TV, music, computer etc.) melting with traditional Palestinian one can be witnessed. While social places for young people are spare, their possibilities to spend their free time like their peers in Western Europe are more limited. Recreational activities are often limited to sports and sometime traditional cultural activities. Due to the limits in mobility, the internet is used by many to create artificial spaces for connecting with “the world outside”.

## 2.4 Young people's needs and challenges

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When asked about the most pressing problems they face in their daily lives, almost all the young people interviewed stated that the political situation of the occupation was in one way or another affecting them. The unstable domestic political situation also affected most of them.

The problems named the most often were:

- Unemployment and the limited chances to get an appropriate job after graduation. Youth unemployment rates are as high as 37% (36% male, 45% female) (PCBS 2007).
- The limits of full participation in the public sphere, which is hindered by the inclination of adults to cling to their offices (in NGOs, parties, government, youth organisations) without leaving a chance for young people.
- The educational system which, especially in the tertiary sector, fails to adequately provide the skills relevant for the labour market such as foreign language or IT skills.

Young people have to cope with the problems of the political and economic situation and added to that with the rift between the often heavy demands by their families and traditional society and the challenges of a more and more globalised youth culture.

# 3. STRUCTURAL, INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE ASPECTS OF YOUTH POLICY

## 3.1 Provisions

In the Palestinian constitution, which has been revised in 2003, youth, adolescents and children living in oPt are given a legal base for their rights. The named source for the rights of children is the “Charter of Rights of the Arab Child”. While legal concerns regarding the bringing up of children are more explicitly named, youth and adolescent issues are spoken of more generally.

To be involved in the political decision-making as a voter at elections, one needs to be 18 years of age. To become an eligible candidate in a political party, the age restriction excludes people younger than 30 from PLC<sup>(14)</sup> elections (younger than 35 years from the post of president).

As the legal system in the oPt is not a unified one as in other countries but draws from such different law systems like the Ottoman one, the Jordanian one, the Egyptian law, Islamic and Christian religious law, British Mandate law, Israeli military orders and PA regulations, several judiciary aspects related to youth are not clear. No own juvenile courts exist nor any specific education for judges on this topic or special prisons. Few detention facilities exist only for juvenile perpetrators. Several laws which touch on personal status issues of youth (such as the Juvenile law) are administered differently in the West Bank (following Jordanian Personal Status law) and the Gaza Strip (following Egyptian one). In general all status law is, following Basic law art. 101, connected to religious courts that maintain legal authority over the members of their respective denomination. This brings upon youth the situation that issues like the legal marriage age are regulated completely different from person to person and from place to place. For example in the West Bank the Personal Status Law of 1976 No. 61, art. 5 declares that boys must be at least 16 and girls 15 years old to marry. In the Gaza Strip the Family Rights Law of 1954, art. 5 stipulates a minimum age of 18 for boys and 17 for girls. The latter has been amended by the head of Sharia courts in 1995 lowering the age to 15 years for girls and 16 years for boys. Usually the consent of the guardians is necessary.

Youth as such is not a legal category in Palestinian law. Again both West Bank and Gaza Strip make use of different categorizations under the law. In the West Bank Reformation of Juvenile Law No. 16 of 1954 art. 2 sets four different age stages: Child: any person between the ages of nine and 13 or who appears to be so; Juvenile: any person between the ages of nine and 18 or who appears to be so; Adolescent: any person between the ages of 13 and 15; Older adolescent: any person between the ages of 15 and 18 or who appears to be so. In the Gaza Strip the Law of Juvenile Criminals of 1937 regulates that a “Walad” is under the age of 14; a “Hadath” between 14 and 16 and a “Fata” between 16 and 18 years of age.



The age of criminal liability is not set in the Gaza strip only stating that a person under the age of 14 may not be imprisoned and a person younger than 16 should only be imprisoned, if no other punishment is possible. The age of criminal liability in the West Bank is unclear. Child Law No. 7 of 2004 art. 67 sets the penal liability to 9 years, a current reform tries to higher this age to 12 years. No person under the age of 14 may be imprisoned.

Schooling is compulsory until the end of higher basic education - i.e. the completion of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, which is usually at the age of 16. Employment is legal starting at the age of 15 but may be earlier (with no boundaries), if the employer is a first degree relative and the employment does not negatively influence the personal development and education of the youth.

## 3.2 Institutional approach to the Youth Sector

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The *Ministry of Youth and Sports* is one of the two ministries explicitly concerned with youth. Their work focuses on youth from 15 to 30 (Interview with MoYS). The ministry's main activities include summer camps for Palestinian youth as well as the provision of sports facilities, e.g. for youth clubs. The MoYS is represented with a second office in the Gaza Strip. While the two offices were originally working simultaneously and under the lead of the head office in Ramallah, political events now show their influences. After the splitting of the unity government in June 2007, some people assigned to the ministries in Gaza resigned or even left the Gaza Strip. Due to the inner political situation, the ministers were changed several times in short intervals. This and the political inactiveness of the PLC prevent constructive actions (Interview with EMYU, various).

Summer camps offer short-term leisure activities for children, youth and adolescents. While they are quite common in the West Bank, according to a Gaza Strip inhabitant, youth activities are now no longer conducted through the Ministry of Youth and Sport.

In 2000 the first Intifada had stopped the first attempt of the development of a youth policy, which had been initiated by the MoYS. In 2003 the creation of the *National Youth and Adolescent Policy* (Al-Siyāsah Al-WaŌaniyah li Al-Ōalāi' wa Al-Shabāb; hereafter NYAP) (NYAP draft; 2001) was taken up again, and was concluded in 2005. The National Youth and Adolescent Policy had been inspired by examples from Arab countries, namely Bahrain and Jordan, as well as from European countries, e.g. Sweden. Its development consisted of various steps taken in cooperation with different entities.

During the development process of the NYAP, the situation of youth had actively been taken into account. To actually produce a policy adequate for young people in Palestine, a survey, officially involving 20,000 youth from West Bank as well as the Gaza Strip, had been conducted, though critics doubt the involvement of such a high number of youth (Interview with Sharek). The construction and planning of the survey had been assigned to the Development Studies Program of the Birzeit University in Ramallah. It had also been their responsibility to construct

the outline of the policy, based on the principles of sustainable development, the overall national aims and Human Rights principles. To assure the involvement of youth and adolescents, UNICEF was monitoring the overall process. Also, UNICEF together with the UNFPA was one of the main donors for the process. The Ministry formed the link between the people involved and the ministerial cabinet, thus preparing and assuring the implementation of the NYAP.

PYALARA, a registered Palestinian non-governmental organisation, worked on promoting the process together with its volunteers, who were also assigned to tasks such as data collection. PYALARA was chosen from several non-governmental organisations from the civil society. Another criterion of choice was their activity in various districts.

All of the entities named above formed the Steering Committee of the NYAP. The Steering Committee was later supposed to be integrated as a fixed institution into the National Youth Council, which until today does not exist.

To cover the demand for youth participating in this development process, the Youth Committee had been set up. The role of the Youth Committee in the frame of the NYAP covers three areas. First of all, they have taken over the function of representing youth in Palestine. The information collected in workshops, questionnaire evaluations and the “youth to youth” campaign was formed into an agenda for the development of the NYAP, based on self-identified needs of youth.

Secondly, they have been actors in the conduct of the NYAP, as well as in the planning of related activities and programmes and their implementation.

Their third, and quite meaningful role, is their position as an institutionalized Youth Committee. Through this position, youth can be given direct influence on the implementation of the NYAP and related topics. But still this possibility only exists within the framework of the NYAP and has not yet been raised to a higher level. Youth included in this committee have been chosen or recommended by various organisations.

As a result of the survey and other methods of cooperation, seven main sectors were featured to improve the situation of youth in:

1. Education and training
2. Health and environment
3. Poverty, labour and unemployment
4. Family relations
5. Participation (in political, social, economical, cultural and spiritual life)
6. Culture, arts and media
7. Entertainment and spending pastime

Due to various complications in the process the conclusion of NYAP was extended to two and a half years.

In addition to that, the NYAP still has not been implemented but instead, maybe for the exception of summer camps, been filed. (Interview with EMYU, PYU, various). According to the interviewees, this is due to two facts: Firstly, the NYAP lacks a connection to the overall national policy. Secondly, the NYAP does not contain concrete plans for implementation.

The original plan was to consolidate the NYAP in every ministry in oPt. For the supervision of its implementation, the creation of teams inside each ministry had been planned. This had been determined by presidential decree (Interview with MoYS). The informants added that youth policy seemed to be an important subject to the president and the ministers but that other topics received more attention right now. The ministry brought up the point of the wide distribution of the principles of the NYAP via various media to inform youth as widely as possible about its existence.

The European Youth Forum - EYF (2002) defined a set of eleven indicators to determine the common elements each youth policy should have. Not all of these indicators are clearly measurable and therefore were only used as a wider reference framework for this study. Following these indicators in comparison the Palestinian National Youth and Adolescent Policy is a mixed picture. The policy sets out various options for actions which would fulfill the criteria of the EYF especially in the fields of non-formal education (as a cross-cutting issue), youth training (with being a priority area of the policy but lacking the implementation of a strategy in this regard), youth information policy and a multi-level and inter-ministry approach both to the development of the policy and its implementation. Other criteria remain to be fulfilled yet. For example a youth legislation has been planned with the development of youth law. Prior to the development of the National Youth Policy, the effort was undertaken to develop a "Youth Welfare Law" (Qānūn R'āyah Ash-Shabāb) in 2007. The law passed already two of the necessary three readings in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Due to the current freeze in all PLC proceedings the final reading has not been held yet and the law is not put into effect. Some youth NGOs opposed the law due to the patronizing character which they say already implied in the name of "a welfare law, which sees youth as passive recipients rather than as active creators in society". Also the establishment of a youth advisory body is foreseen in the policy but has not been realized yet. The same applies to more concrete legal actions to actively remove obstacles for youth participation. The gravest point however is the absence of a dedicated budget which would support the implementation of the national policy. The policy as such entails an overarching multi-sectoral strategy but is not specific on its implementation and on which level (local, regional, national) it is prioritised.

Another ministry that deals with young peoples' affairs is the *Ministry of Education and Higher Education* (Wizarah Al-Tarbiyah wa Al-T'ālim Al-'āly – MoE/ MoHE)<sup>(15)</sup>. Their target group consists of youth from 15 to 24 years. Communication and cooperation with the office in Gaza is being held up via regular videoconferences. All actions are being synchronized (Interview with MoHE). The MoHE cooperates with the student councils as well as with the youth councils. In the Ministry of Higher Education there is a department dedicated only to this area. Their relation to each other features control and support equally. A law regulates the financing by the ministry through the governmental budget. The MoHE/MoE supports universities as well as basic education. Education up to 12<sup>th</sup> grade is free for everybody. For studying beyond that point, students need to pay fees.

(15) Previously the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education had not been combined. Still, after their combination parts of their autonomy are preserved.

Still, the government funds studying, and loans are available for students with inadequate economic resources. From the year 2000 until now the government has spent about 1,000,000 \$ on this purpose. Since the economic situation has not improved in Palestine in recent years, the government has not pressed students for refunds (ibid.).

The oPt is divided into 16 governorates, each being headed by a governor. They are subordinate to the Ministry of Local Government. Their major task is to cooperate with mayors and heads of municipal and village councils in their governorates. The power of municipalities and village councils covers administrative responsibilities such as control over the local schools. In 2005, 521 local authorities have been counted, including 107 municipalities, 11 local councils, 374 village councils or project committees and 29 refugee camps. In a small number of those municipalities in the West Bank an initiative has been started to integrate youth councils into the municipalities. Those youth councils consist of pupils that have been elected in their schools to represent their age group at municipality level. After the election they act independently from schools or parties. They are supposed to have a right to speak in the municipality and thus give young people a voice. Donors, including the World Bank and the German Technical Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit - GTZ), support this initiative. But from municipality to municipality the additional donors vary and the municipalities themselves finance a great part of it. As for now there is no national youth council but several attempts by donors and NGOs to establish structures of their own. Youth can also be elected into the regular local councils, as anybody can be elected into them. These councils function as mediators between the villages and the municipality.

Student councils exist in every university and in every college in Palestine. The Ministry of Higher Education monitors the elections of Student Councils. According to an employee of the Ministry, representatives of the Student Councils are involved in the decision-making process (Interview with MoHE). Together they discuss issues such as fees, loans or violence problems, to name only a few of them. As a member of the Shabibah Fatah (Fatah youth movement) stated, student councils are highly politicized due to the number of student party factions, and often reflect the political situation at national level. Elections often spur violent clashes. According to the MoHE the number of politically active students counts up to 35 to 40% of a total of 200,000 students in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, which also do not show a difference in proportion.

### **3.3 Non-formal education and youth work**

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Youth participation in Palestine declined after the appointment of the Palestinian Authority (Interview with EMYU). Today young people are less ready for commitment in this sector. This is also due to the critical economic situation but also because of many other factors.

The topic of active participation is no part of the regular education. Teachers are not encouraged to familiarize students with this topic. The promotion of active participation can mostly be found in the non-formal education sector. The same applies mostly to other aspects of youth information on their rights and opportunities. The offer from local and foreign NGOs is large but it possibly does not reach all youth. Especially those in rural areas are often not well informed.

In the villages a number of youth initiatives are coming into existence. But even when the will to participate is there, the situation is far from easy. The opinions on the opportunities for youth to start their own initiative differ. For some it seems now more complicated due to the conflict between Hamas and Fatah and the increasing importance of the political affiliations of such initiatives. For others it seems less so. Looking at the situation of youth in the Gaza Strip a representative of a non-governmental organisation described the political situation as forcing them to be interested in politics.

A fact complicating the active participation is the lack of institutions offering assistance or guidance to planning, fundraising or the like for young citizens. Nor are there Palestinian degree programmes in the field of youth or social work. People who have been studying related subjects abroad bring knowledge on this subject into the country (Interview with PYU). A youth-NGO entertains plans to institutionalize a resource centre to make those skills available to more people.

The limits to youth participation are partly reflected in the statement made by a NGO representative from the Gaza Strip, who said that a youth initiative will be supported by the community, if it is for the good of the whole society and in line with local customs. Anyhow, difficulties are being enhanced by the restricted possibilities in the Gaza Strip in combination with fewer accessible resources in the rural region (Interview with Al-Ruwad).

To give young people a feeling for participation in their society, university students are obliged to perform community services of 60 hours during their studies. This is done independently from the NYAP. Another method tried by international donors has been the offering of small wages for short-term projects (Interview with EMYU).

Youth work training is provided but not through the government. However, the existent large variety of international NGOs as well as Palestinian organizations is active in this field. There is no formal education for youth workers.

## 4. THE YOUTH ASSOCIATIONS AND NGOs DEALING WITH YOUTH

The oPt boasts a huge variety of youth organisations (including also youth clubs, youth projects, youth structures and youth unions)<sup>(16)</sup> with different objectives, target groups and approaches. According to Rahhal (2006) there are 507 youth clubs and centres and about 250 other youth organisations or organisations which offer youth programmes in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip<sup>(17)</sup>. Most of them are geographically concentrated in the Ramallah district. In order to establish an organisation the group must consist of at least 13 people at least 18 years of age. Youth then apply to the Ministry of Interior. The applications are subject to examination concerning their mission, vision, objectives and the financial structure and they also undergo a security check<sup>(18)</sup> (Interviews with EMYU). Youth clubs and movements are generally open to everyone (both male and female youth). The movements differ from the clubs as they have certain conditions for membership in regard to the targeted age group (14-35), not being member of another youth movement, payment of membership fees and the requirement of a record of good conduct. Youth unions are only accessible for certain youth groups, e.g. to join the General Union of Palestine Students is only possible for students. Other youth organisations often encourage young people first to participate in their activities and projects before they are accepted as a member. There are also organisations with a limited number of members which very often focus on members from the social elite, e.g. the Palestinian Council for Young Political Leadership (Rahhal 2006).

These youth organisations differ in their regulations concerning membership and also with regard to the possibilities for young people to participate in the decision-making processes. The bylaws of the organisations contain regulations concerning the participation of youth in decision-making. "In spite of the idealistic statements included in these bylaws, they are often just words that have no practical implications" (Rahhal 2006). As representatives of youth organisations mentioned in interviews, leading positions are often, contradicting the bylaws, not elected but appointed or nominated and thereby in many cases deprive young people of the chance to reach such a position (Interview with Wasil). But it must be taken into consideration that these positions mean a reliable salary for a family and voluntarily leaving this job may also be problematic due to the bad economic situation. Their goals are something many youth organisations share: supporting the implementation of Palestinian national rights, empowering young Palestinians in areas of citizenship, human rights and democracy education, awareness raising within the society in order to shelter youth from social threats and problems, encouraging young people to take interest in cultural and intellectual issues, providing sports and arts activities, increasing the willingness of

(16) These terms refer to the following definitions based on Rahhal (2006): Youth organisations are in general "non-profit organisations that provide youth with cultural, awareness-raising, sports, arts or other types of services and activities. (...) Institutions that work specifically for, and with youth. "The term youth clubs refers to "clubs that do not have any partisan or sectarian goals and which provide services to all members and citizens on an equal basis." Youth projects are "[u]nits or departments within NGOs that are concerned with youth". Youth structures are considered "popular structures focused on youth, which are affiliated to national factions and usually adhere to the political agenda of their respective factions."

And youth unions are unions mainly aiming at youth members.

(17) According to one NGO representative, there are, at the moment, 42 organisations in the Gaza Strip which exclusively deal with youth (Interview with Al-Ruwwad).

(18) The organisations and also experts do not really know what the exact security criteria are for such an application. Several interviewees stated that in many cases an adequate political affiliation makes it easier to pass the security check. Without any regulations regarding specific criteria it is easy to dismiss applications from politically disagreeable groups and persons.

youth to volunteer in their communities and dealing with issues and problems related to the unsatisfactory economic situation. These goals apply more or less to all kinds of youth organisations in the oPt. Non-governmental youth organisations often focus especially on the field of democracy and human rights education (Rahhal 2006).

The major activities offered by youth organisations include especially summer camps, training courses and workshops, work camps concentrating on voluntary work, youth exchange programmes and other activities, e.g. sport clubs (Rahhal 2006). There is also an informal cooperation between different youth organisations on different levels, e.g. the Shābibah Fatah (the youth movement of Fatah) use facilities of clubs to train their members (Interview with Shābibah Fatah). Asked for the most important youth organisations, many representatives of youth organisations and youth experts named the Palestinian Youth Union (PYU), Sharek, PYALARA (Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation), Ma'ān, Tamer Institute and the youth movements of the big political parties. (Interviews with PYU, UNICEF and PYALARA).

Many youth organisations share similar problems and challenges. In general, according to the estimation of a representative of a big youth organisation, the work of these cover only fragments of the real needs of young people and a relatively low number of youth organisations are really led by young people. "Most youth programmes in Palestine are designed by adults on behalf of young people under the assumption that adults know what is best for young people" (Hammad / Albakri 2007). In the board of the Palestinian Youth Union there are, for example, people over the age of 30 (Interview with PYU). Most of the organisations are dominated by male youth and directed by relatively old people. According to Hart (2007) this happens very often due to the reference to "the values of Palestinian society, younger people should respect their seniors". Most of the youth organisations also struggle with their dependence on the agenda and the priorities of national and international donors and thus often cannot fully respond to the needs of their target group, namely youth. Because most of the donors have analogue priorities, many programmes and projects offered by youth organisations do often coincide (Hart 2007; Rahhal 2006). Also many interviewees emphasized their impression that many youth projects and programmes are donor-driven and do not really reflect and meet the needs of Palestinian youth. For example, many youth organisations cannot and do not want to cooperate with USAID – which is the biggest donor organisation in the oPt – because of their anti-terror agreement which the organisations are not willing to sign. Regarding the situation of the whole oPt, one must also consider that the situation of youth organisations in the Gaza Strip differs from the West Bank. A Gazan NGO stated that the situation has become more difficult since June 2007 due to the fact that Hamas is controlling the activities of the Ministry of Youth and Sports (Interviews with Life and Hope and Al-Ruwad).

In 2004 the Palestinian Youth Organisations Network (PYON), the first organisation which can be called a kind of umbrella organisation, was founded by 30 youth organisations from all over the West Bank. The board is elected by all the members and consists of the heads of some of the youth organisations, the chairman is the deputy minister of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The coordinator of the network summarized the underlying idea of this organisation as to overcome the marginalization and financial problems of youth organisations in the oPt.

Additionally, the positive outcomes of the PYON for its members are the exchange of information, capacity building and the creation of websites for each member organisation. The network does not receive regular funding but is dependent on project funding (Interview with PYON). Other youth organisations who are not members of this network expressed themselves not sure concerning the effectiveness of the PYON.

A similar network of 28-30 NGOs, Sirāj, exists in the Gaza Strip, where it acts as an umbrella organisation. The aim of this network is to bring more funding into the Gaza Strip and help the local people. It was also established to coordinate the different organisations and their activities. (Interview with Al-Ruwwad).

The support youth organisations receive from the government and other donors depends, according to representatives of UNICEF, on the type of activity they offer. Before they receive any financial support they have to be registered as NGOs and even then financial support is difficult to receive when working only with youth. If young people want to become active by themselves and do not want to enter an existing NGO, they often do not know where to turn to because of the lack of an official support structure. Neither are there legal regulations concerning who receives what kind of support from the government (Interview with UNICEF).

In the end there is the question of importance of participation to youth itself. Active participation can lead a young citizen only as far as it can. It remains difficult to obtain a job in higher positions of policy-making or NGO-leadership. Most youth organisations consist of many young people, but it is very experienced people who hold most of the posts that are paid and have decision-making power. Many of them exceed the age of 35.



# 5. THE EUROMED YOUTH PROGRAMME

The Euromed Youth Programme, according to the majority of the interviewed youth organisations and experts, plays a very important role with regard to several factors. Firstly, the intercultural experience for Palestinian youth of meeting young people from other countries and exchange their own experiences with others (Interviews with Wasil and Birzeit). Secondly, it was praised by a Ministry official and a representative of a huge Palestinian youth organisation as an important factor balancing US-American funding because the cooperation with local NGOs is much more intense (Interviews with MoYS2 and PYU). Thirdly, through participation in the Euromed Youth Programme Palestinian youth NGOs and individuals can create networks around the world which can play a significant part in the follow-up of trainings and workshops (Interview with PYU). Fourthly, one youth expert also mentioned that through different training activities and workshops young people become empowered to participate in their local environment (Interview with Birzeit).

Due to the limited financial and infrastructural capacities of the Programme only few projects are financially supported and get the chance to benefit from the Programme. Therefore many youth organisations feel that the impact of the Euromed Programme is somewhat limited because they can often not participate in the activities, which also narrows the encouragement of youth participation in the oPt through the Programme and the number of involved youth organisations for whom the Programme actually plays a role (Interview with PYU). One of the interviewed youth organisation's representatives criticized the image of a Euro-Med community which he presumed does not exist and also the fact that the aspired cultural dialogue only goes in one direction, from the European Union to the MEDA countries. Other youth experts criticized that the selection of participants would not guarantee any sustainability, in other words the link to local structures would be too weak. Especially organisations in the Gaza Strip do not have a vital access to the structures of the Programme due to the political situation; therefore the option to host a project is severely limited due to the restricted access for international youth. The possibility to participate in projects is likewise hampered as travel permits are hard to obtain as long as the Rafah border crossing to Egypt remains closed.

Another problem mentioned by many youth organisations but also from ministry officials is the issue of a too small budget, and resulting from that a hardly sustainable impact. The institution of the EMYU is also a highly disputed issue mainly because it is directly connected to the President's office and not to the MoYS, following the 2006 elections (Interviews with Sharek, Birzeit and MoYS). Other interviewees complained about the missing checks and balances on the EMYU.

During the third phase of the Euromed Youth Programme, 11 projects out of a total of 50 submitted proposals (as a result of 3 calls for proposals in 2007) were approved for financial support.

With regard to the development of the "National Youth and Adolescent Policy", the coordinator of the Euromed Youth Unit was involved in the creation of the strategy as an expert (Interview with EMYU).

## 6. OTHER YOUTH SUPPORT MECHANISMS

Because of the political situation in the oPt, support from regional and international organisations is crucial to the funding of youth programmes and projects. There are different sorts of institutions that play an integral part in Palestinian project planning and implementation. Above all different European and US-American organisations, like USAID for example, and institutions of the United Nations such as UNDP and UNICEF were named as the most important international partners by several youth organisations and experts during the interviews. This is the case especially because youth organisations have an enormous funding problem due to the economical problems of the region and to the fact that they do not receive (enough) money from the Palestinian Authority. For example, Al-Ruwwad, a youth organisation from Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip, stated that fundraising was – apart from the political situation – the most serious problem they had to face. They receive money from international institutions like the UNDP or the German Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) but it is never sufficient to meet the needs of young people in Gaza (Interview with Al-Ruwwad). For youth movements, relations with, for example, European youth parties are of a great importance too, as well as other bilateral cooperation. Regional support from associations such as the Arab League, or governments and NGOs from neighbouring countries, was only rarely mentioned by some of the interviewees but not in regard to the cooperation of local Palestinian organisations and regional associations. For example, UNICEF works together on different topics with the Youth Unit at the Population and Migration Department (POPLAS) of the Arab League but these projects are hardly implemented (Interview with UNICEF). The Arab League does not directly financially support the PA but some NGOs from member countries cooperate with Palestinian NGOs (Interview with MoYS). International aid seems much more important to Palestinian youth organisations.

Foreign financial and infrastructural support is given to many different organisations in very diverse ways. There are very few donations from the private sector or private persons compared to the amount of money coming from outside donor organisations (Interview with PYU). By some youth associations it is considered a very positive by-product that cooperation and contacts with international partners sometimes also provide the possibility for young Palestinians to meet other youth from other countries and make themselves heard in the international community. Sometimes Palestinian youth organisations are even founded as a part of the strategy of international organisations; for example, the Sharek Youth Forum was founded as an UNDP project in 1996 and is now considered one of the most important youth organisations in the oPt (Interview with PYALARA). As Hart (2007: 8-10) and many of the interviewed youth experts and representatives of youth organisations stated, the reliance on foreign funding is also a critical issue due to the fact that donor organisations often change their priorities in funding, mostly support short-term projects and only fund certain projects and programmes that first of all fit into their own agenda, and that do not necessarily meet the needs of youth in the oPt.

For example, according to youth experts encounter programmes between young Palestinians and young Israelis are one of the main projects supported by international organisations. However, their impact on the prevailing political situation is limited (Hart 2000; Interview with Sabella). This sometimes leads to the refusal of some Palestinian youth organisations to accept support from certain foreign institutions (Interview with Wasil). The “absence of common vision and strategy” (Hart 2007:8) in the field of youth programmes and projects was seen as one of the reasons why donor organisations do not commit to long-term projects and do not consult each other to prevent overlapping of projects.

According to representatives of a youth NGO active in Khan Yunis the Euromed Youth Programme was very well known and appreciated in the Gaza Strip, but since the coming into power of Hamas nobody has applied for the Programme because nobody can leave the region, especially not young people (Interview with Al-Ruwwad).

International organisations were also integrated in the creation process of the “National Youth and Adolescent Policy”. As staff members of UNICEF indicated, the organisation played a major role in funding the development of the strategy and, as it is stated in the policy paper: “UNICEF participated in this process as part of its ongoing efforts to enhance the rights of children and adolescents and to ensure their participation in making decisions affecting their life.” (NYAP Draft 2006).

## 7. PERCEPTION OF THE ACTORS

According to Ministry officials at the Ministry of Youth and Sports the three major challenges to the situation of young people are: 1. the missing opportunities for young people to contribute to decision-making processes on the political, economic and social level; 2. the great percentage of unemployment among youth; and 3. the occupation which makes further improvement of daily life and the development of society impossible. In order to respond to these challenges the Ministry of Youth and Sports developed together with other organisations the “National Youth and Adolescent Policy” in order to integrate youth into the development process, to enlarge their possibilities of active participation in social, political and economic change and to provide project guidelines for young people and youth organisations (Interview with MoYS). The not yet accomplished implementation of this policy was ascribed to the lack of experts for implementing the strategy. The cooperation between official bodies (ministries etc.) and NGOs is considered too weak to achieve a major breakthrough for the benefit of youth. An important point emphasized by the Ministry official at the Ministry of Higher Education is the missing link between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and its effects on youth (Interview with MoHE).

Many youth organisation paint a rather alarming picture of the state of youth in the oPt. Poverty, unemployment, lack of real democracy, disenchantment, domestic violence, problems in the educational system due to school and university closures during the first and second Intifada by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), restrictions of movement and psychological and physiological effects of the occupation limit and affect youth in their daily life and, thereby, also regarding their future opportunities and aspirations. Regarding the situation in Gaza young people face an even worse situation: there is no economic, political and social stability at all and no possibility to attain a future. The economic situation is much worse than in the West Bank; even marriage is too expensive for many young people. Youth organisations working in the Gaza Strip emphasized the importance of offering them a space where they can spend their free time – which is, of course, also important in the West Bank. The possibilities of change seem to depend on what youth want to change and if their ideas tackle traditional points of view. Youth organisations all over the oPt welcome the “National Youth and Adolescent Policy” but criticize the lack of implementation strategies and the missing overall vision. They feel that it is important for young people to become active in their communities, but see also the limits young people face in their attempts to do so. The role of UNICEF in the formulation process of the youth policy was also criticized by youth organisations in two respects: the first being, that UNICEF had treated the policy paper as one of many projects and had not pushed the government towards the implementation but abandoned it after the approval of the cabinet; the second, that UNICEF did interfere and not just support the process strategically and financially (Interview with MoYS). The interviewees stated that UNICEF, for example, tried to influence the age definition in the policy to fit its own mandate which does not cover youth but only adolescents up to the age of 18

(Interviews with PYU and Sharek). In regard to the difficulties of their own work, a lack of funding (connected with donor orientation towards priorities not all NGOs share) was named, as were restrictions imposed by the authorities since the end of the national unity government.

In the focus group discussion with youth active in the Palestinian Youth Union, it became clear that the most pressing problems young people face in the oPt arise in the area of education and employment. Many school and university graduates are unable to find an adequate employment opportunity due to the bad economic situation. The young people also stressed that education in school and university does not focus on issues important to youth and that a broader qualification is needed. For women there are still problems concerning the compatibility of education with employment and their assigned role as a mother and housewife. The female participants in the discussion emphasized that there are some opportunities for women to work but these are limited by society, husbands and family. In regard to young people's possibilities to become active in change, the interviewees stated that it would not be easy for them to stand up in front of their family and declare that there is something wrong and they would like to change it. On the other hand, most of them emphasized that it is the young people who have to stand up to change their own issues because they are the only ones who have the ability to change it. Considered also a big problem is the fact that society does not know anything about the real needs and problems of young people, and is, due to that, not able to change anything for the better. The youth criticize that most of the youth organisations are led by older people who do not really understand the problems and issues of young people. Young people also find it difficult that there are many youth organisations but that these wait until young people approach them. Regarding the issue of founding their own organisation most of them emphasized the difficulty in receiving financial support because most of the donors would not trust young people and prefer funding projects and organisations with older persons in charge and the missing self-esteem of many young people to start such a project (Interview with PYU Focus Group).

## 8. CONCLUSION

It is apparent that a national youth policy exists in the oPt. The efforts taken so far have produced a policy that addresses the needs of young people in the country. As other political fields seem to be considered more important at the moment and for the future of the country, the implementation process of the policy is still not completed. Taking the indicators set by UNESCO (2004) which steps should be followed in the implementation of a national youth policy, these are:

1. Promote the policy
2. Formulate a national youth action plan and develop specific projects
3. Create appropriate mechanisms for implementation and coordination of the policy
4. Ensure youth participation in the implementation of the projects
5. Create multiple spaces for youth participation

It is obvious that some of the points have not been executed by the authorities yet. The major issue in this is that the policy, which exists in the concerted efforts of youth, NGOs, the government and international donors, is not met by an implementation strategy. Such strategy would spell out time frames, coordinating bodies being responsible and, most importantly, a dedicated budget. As the financial situation of the government remains difficult and most of the money in the national budget is provided through international donors, youth is not the major issue on the financial agenda.

As the creation of the policy was highly participatory, it is fit to reflect the needs of young people and answer to their aspirations. However some of the main issues young people are concerned with, such as a high unemployment rate and a lack of peace, freedom and security, are partially out of reach for the youth authorities and other internal actors due to the ongoing occupation and the conflict with Israel. The possibility of young people to make direct changes to their society is existent but remains under the heavy burden of the overall political situation.

Participation of young people is a major concern of the national youth policy. However the situation of young people today is shaped by an adult generation which only in parts provides the space for such participation. Young people feel that they are consulted and have a say in some decisions which concern their life, but they also report a heavy involvement by their families and sometimes they face restrictions by social norms embodied by the society. This is especially true for young women. The political and economic situation makes it difficult for young people to make their voices heard in more official political processes. While all political parties seem to rely on youth for their election campaigns, they provide a relatively small area for the direct participation in decision making. As holding an official office (also that of a youth

NGO) is often the only prospect for secured employment and political influence adults rarely are willing to move aside for the younger generation. This limits the possibilities for young people to get more active themselves.

While actors in the youth sector coordinate themselves with others, civil society organisations, which have a different access to international funding than the government, remain the main implementers of activities in the youth sector. Direct governmental activities are limited and found mostly in sports. NGOs however face the challenge that they must adapt to the priorities of donors when fundraising for activities. The fact that no formal education for youth workers is available and most NGO personnel comes from different fields should also be noticed as a hindrance to enhancing capacities.

The role the Euromed Youth Programme plays in the national arena is both decisive and negligible, due to the fact that the funding remains low and only allows for a small number of projects to be hosted each year. However, all actors agreed on the great possibilities the Programme holds for young people in general.

It can be concluded that the Palestinian Authority with the support of UNICEF, NGOs and youth has made a decisive step in creating the national youth policy. This is even more impressive taking into account the political realities which the government has to face. However it remains a challenge to continue the implementation process of the policy while really meeting the demands of young people. To do so cannot be considered independent from the other political developments at national level especially when it comes to the government exercising one approach towards young people both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. But to go on with the implementation despite the difficult conditions will help to prepare a better future for young people, even if the parameters in the political arena are not about to change.

# ANNEXES

## Annex 1: Acknowledgements

This report would not have been realised without the support of many people both in the oPt and abroad.

The research team would especially like to thank all our interviewees who were willing to share with us their time and information even sometimes under difficult circumstances. The European Commission's Technical Assistance Office for the West Bank and Gaza and here especially Ms. Judith Johannes, Ms. Fabienne Bessonne and Mr. Ayman Fteiha were crucial in facilitating our visit to the Gaza Strip. While Mr. Saher Zbaih was the most welcoming host and guide during this visit and made us feel regret that we could not stay longer. PYALARA was so kind to have us print their "Youth Policy Comics" to better illustrate the campaign around the National Youth Policy.

Ms. Dua'a Qurie of the Euromed Youth Unit supported the team with priceless information and facilitated important contacts.

Our most important support person who also introduced us to the pleasures of coconut milk and Macademia cake, supported all our efforts and managed our schedule through all the ups and downs was Ms. Heba Taibi. We want to thank her again for the hospitality and all the help provided.

## Annex 2: Country profile (part 1)

<b>Full name of the Country</b>	Occupied Palestinian Territory (West Bank and Gaza)
<b>Government Type</b>	Semi-presidential democracy (parliamentary activity currently suspended)
<b>Area</b>	Middle East
<b>Capital City</b>	Ramallah (Temporary seat of government), East Jerusalem demanded as capital of a future Palestinian state.
<b>Other main cities</b>	Gaza City, Hebron, Nablus
<b>Population</b>	3,87 Mio. (incl. East Jerusalem), plus 364.000 Israel settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem (figures disputed).
<b>Gender Ratio (F/M)</b>	1.05 (Gaza); 1.06 (West Bank) (at birth)
<b>Ethnic composition</b>	West Bank: 83.3% Arab, 17% Jewish (Israeli settlers and Palestinian Samarian minority); Gaza: 99.4% Arab



## Annex 2: Country profile (part 2)

Age Structure		
0-14	45,9%	
15-24	19,3%	
25-30	—	
Median age	16,2 (Gaza); 18,7 (West Bank)	
Educational background (F/M ratio)		
Primary	F: 98%	M: 97%
Secondary	F: 83%	M: 78%
Tertiary	F: 30%	M: 31%
Literacy rate	Youth: 99,2%	Adult: 92,8%
Unemployment rate		
	Youth: 37%	Adult: 23%
Summary of age related regulations and rights		
Compulsory education (up to.....)	Until the completion of basic higher education (10th grade -mostly at the age of 16-); other legal regulations stipulate the age of 15.	
Compulsory military service	No Palestinian army exists.	
Legally employable (from...)	15; there is no minimum age of employability when working for a first degree relative.	
Marriage without parental consent	No unified legal regulation exists. West Bank regulations follow Jordanian personal status law, while Gaza follows Egyptian law. In both cases such regulations are tied to religious law making the outcome dependent on the denomination.	
Minimum voting age	18	
Minimum age to be elected	30 (for PLC); 35 (for office of president)	
Driving licence	18	
Local Currency/ Exchange rate (Euro)	No own Palestinian currency exists. New Israel Shekel (NIS) (0.19 €) are widely used, as are Jordanian Dinar (JD) (0.97 €) mostly for business transactions	

## Annex 3: List of Abbreviations

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<b>AHDR</b>	Arab Human Development Report
<b>ALESCO</b>	Arab League Educational Cultural and Scientific Organization
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product.
<b>GTZ</b>	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, German Technical Cooperation.
<b>HDI</b>	Human Development Index
<b>IDF</b>	Israeli Defense Forces
<b>KfW</b>	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
<b>MoE</b>	Palestinian Ministry of Education
<b>MoHE</b>	Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education
<b>MoYS</b>	Palestinian Ministry of Youth and Sport
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>NYAP</b>	National Youth and Adolescent Policy
<b>oPt</b>	Occupied Palestinian Territories
<b>PA</b>	Palestinian Authority
<b>PLC</b>	Palestinian Legislative Council, the Palestinian parliament
<b>PLO</b>	Palestinian Liberation Organization
<b>POPLAS</b>	Population and Migration Department of the Arab League
<b>PYON</b>	Palestinian Youth Organisation Network
<b>PYU</b>	Palestinian Youth Union
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development

## Annex 4: Glossary

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**Arab League:** A regional organization of (currently 22) Arab states in North and Northeast Africa and Southwest Asia, formed in Cairo in 1945, aims at intensifying the relations between its member states, supporting their sovereignty and independence and representing their interests.

**Caliphate:** A historic Islamic form of government in which the worldly and religious leadership is combined in the position and person of the Caliph. He is said to follow the prophet Muhammad in ruling the realm of the Caliphate.

**Intifada:** Arabic: « to shake sth. off, to arise », the two uprisings of the Palestinian population against the Israeli occupation (1987-1993, 2000-2005).

**Non-formal education:** Mostly understood as structured – and often non-obligatory - education outside the formal education system, e.g. in youth clubs, youth movements.

**Pan-Arabism:** Movement to unify all Arab peoples and countries and a form of nationalism emphasizing cultural aspects, in opposition to colonialism and European and US-American involvement in politics of the region, mostly socialist and secular.

**PYALARA:** Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation, Palestinian youth non-governmental organisation, founded in 1999, involved in the development process of the “National Youth and Adolescent Policy”.

**Waitthood:** A period in the life of young people in the Middle East and North Africa which is characterised by unemployment, dependence and stagnating development, a phase of expanded adolescence.

**Youth:** In general a period between childhood and adulthood where young people are still economically, biologically and psychologically dependent on their guardians, UN definition: between 15 and 24 years of age, definition of the Palestinian MoYS: between 15 and 30 years of age.

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## Annex 6: Additional statistical tables/charts

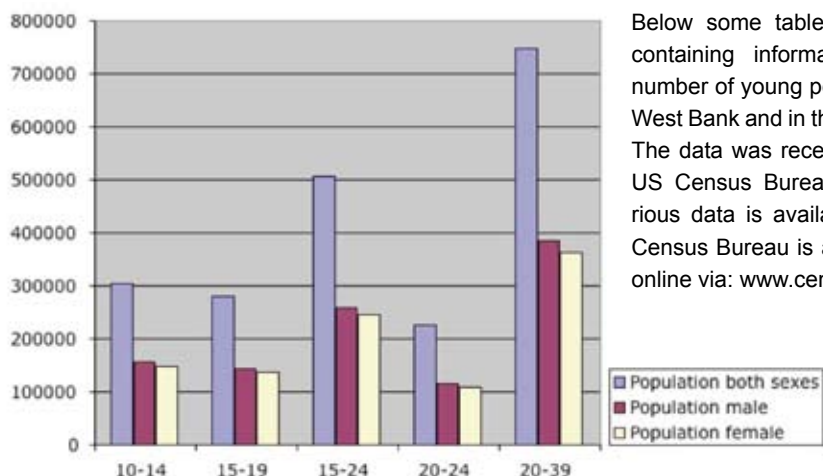
### 6.1: Demography

Selected Indicators by Region, 2007			
Indicator	Palestinian	West Bank	Gaza Strip
Total Area (sq.km)	6,020	5,655	365
Population Density (Capita/sq.km)	625	415	3,881
Sex Ratio	103.0	103.0	103.0
Crude Birth Rate 2006	36.7	33.7	41.7
Crude Death Rate 2006	3.9	4.0	3.8
Percentage of Population Less than 15 End 2006	45.7	43.9	48.8
Percentage of Population 65 and above End 2006	3.0	3.3	2.6
Life Expectancy at Birth for Males End 2006	71.7	71.9	71.4
Life Expectancy at Birth for Females End 2006	73.2	73.6	72.5
Natural Increase Rate End 2006	3.3	3.0	3.8
Average of Household Size	5.8	5.5	6.5
Unemployment Rate 15 Years and over	21.5	17.7	29.7
Percentage of Person 10 Years and over Who use The Internet	51.0	51.8	49.5
Students Rates per Teacher in The Schools	25.2	23.8	27.5
Students Rate per Class in Basic Stage	33.3	30.7	38.1
Students Rate per Class in Secondary Stage	30.4	26.3	29.3
Adult literacy for persons 15 years and over	93.9	93.6	94.4
Rate of Beds in Hospitals per 1,000 of Population 2006	1.4	1.3	1.6
Percentage of Health insured 2005	76.1	65.8	93.8

Source: Palestine in figures. Palestinian central bureau of statistics 2007

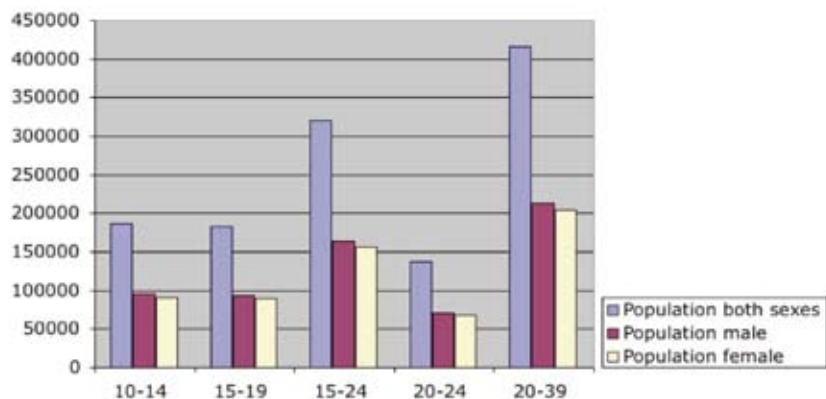
Demographic Trends														
HDI rank	Total population (millions)			Annual population growth rate (%)		Urban population (% of total)			Population under age 15 (% of total)		Population aged 65 and older (% of total)		Total fertility rate (births per woman)	
	1975	2005	2015 (b)	1975-2005	2005-2015 (b)	1975	2005	2015 (b)	2005	2015 (b)	2005	2015 (b)	1970-1975 (c)	2000-2005 (c)
106	1.3	3.8	5.1	3.7	3.0	59.6	71.6	72.9	45.9	41.9	3.1	3.0	7.7	5.6

#### Number of Youth in different ages in West Bank



Below some tables are shown containing information on the number of young people living in West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. The data was received from the US Census Bureau, where various data is available. The US Census Bureau is also available online via: [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

## Number of Youth in different ages in Gaza Strip



## 6.2: Economy

Economically Active Population Rate (Total)(a)				
Country	Year	Age 15-19	Age 20-24	Age 25-29
Syrian Arab Republic	2002	42.9	65.1	58.3 (b)
West Bank & Gaza Strip	2002	12.7	38.4	50.4
United Kingdom	2002	59.7 (c)	75.9	84.3 (d)
United States	2002	47.4 (c)	76.4	83.5

Notes:

a. ILO defines the economically active population as "...all persons of either sex who furnish the supply of labour for the production of goods and services during a specific time-reference period...[I]n general, the data on economically active population do not include students, persons occupied solely in domestic duties in their own households, members of collective households, inmates of institutions, retired persons, persons living entirely on their own means, and persons wholly dependent upon others." This table shows the ratio of economically active populations to the total population of a specific age group:

- b. 25-44 age group
- c. 15-24 age group
- d. 16-19 age group

Source: Youth in numbers: Middle East and North Africa (DRAFT). The World Bank 2007.

[http://www.unesco.org/ccivs/New-SiteCCSVI/institutions/jpc-youth/youth-open-forum/Section\\_for\\_Youth/Resources\\_and\\_tools/Other\\_documents\\_on\\_youth/YIN-MENA.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/ccivs/New-SiteCCSVI/institutions/jpc-youth/youth-open-forum/Section_for_Youth/Resources_and_tools/Other_documents_on_youth/YIN-MENA.pdf)

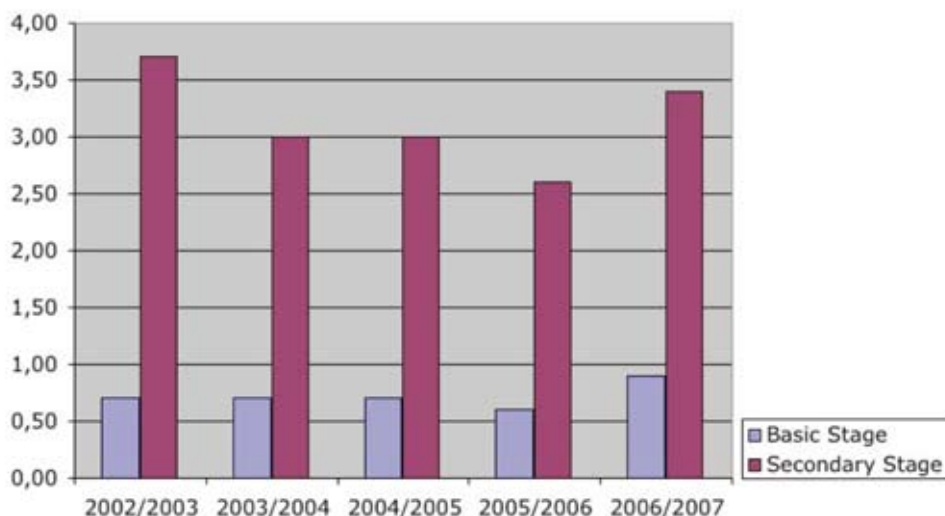
This table has been slightly adapted to better serve the information needed in this context.

### 6.3: Education

Distribution of Schools, Students, Teachers and Classes in all Schools by Supervising Authority in 2004-2005					
Type of School	Number of Schools	Number of Students	Number of Classes	Number of Teachers	Average number of Students/Class
<b>Governmental</b>	322	224,460	5,473	7,855	41
<b>UNRWA</b>	180	192,735	4,330	5,620	44.5
<b>Private</b>	25	8,230	332	514	24.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>425,425</b>	<b>10,135</b>	<b>13,989</b>	<b>42</b>

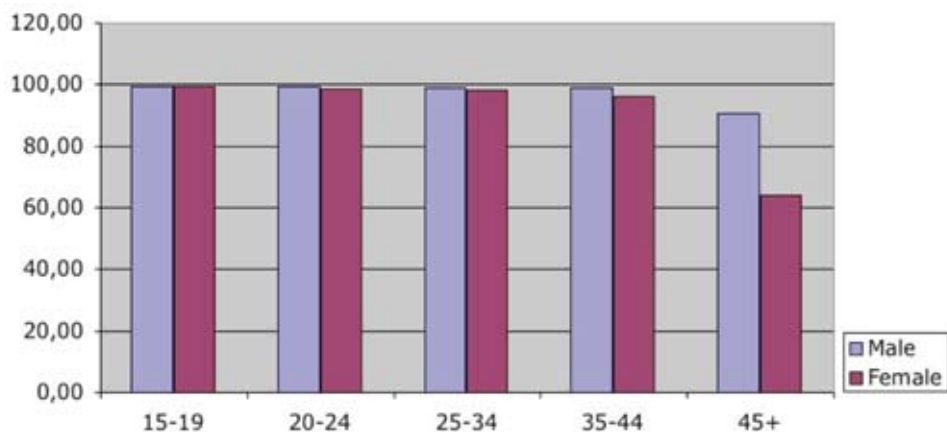
Source: Analysis of urban trends and land use changes in the Gaza Strip between 2001-2005. The Applied Research Institute. Jerusalem 2006

#### Drop-Out Rates from Schools by Stage and Years





## Literacy Rate for Palestinian Population 15 Years and Over by Sex and Age Groups, 2006



Source: Palestine in figures. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2007.

## 6.4: Culture and Access to Media

### Possibilities and Participation:

Culture - Selected Indicators 2002-2006					
Indicator	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Number of Newspapers in Operation	8	12	13	12	13
Number of Magazines in Operation	16	17	16	7	5
Number of Domestic Radio Stations	19	29	29	23	39
Number of Domestic Television Stations	31	33	33	24	33
Number of Cultural Centers in Operation	50	62	62	86	161
Number of Theaters in Operation	4	6	5	5	9
Number of Cinemas in Operation	2	2	2	2	2
Number of Museums in Operation	5	7	6	5	8
Number of Cultural Centers Visitors	111,848	116,967	181,328	245,694	173,637
Number of Theaters Visitors	24,119	40,494	49,379	24,126	134,087
Number of Cinema Visitors	23,932	52,458	33,393	39,559	50,731
Number of Museum Visitors	9,512	19,83	5,343	5,687	6,661

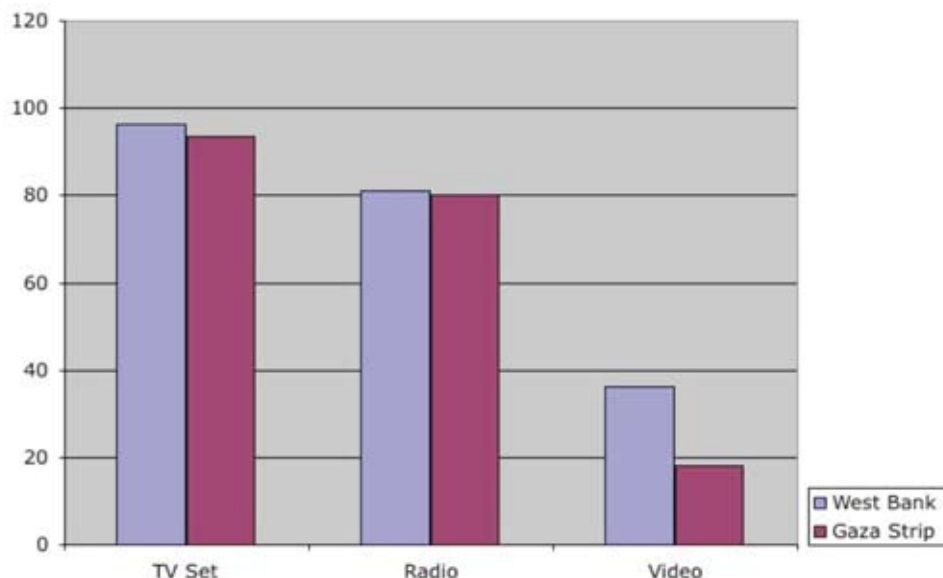
Source: Palestine in figures. Palestinian central bureau of statistics 2007.

## Percentage of Persons 10 Years and Over Who are Member in Cultural Institutions by Type of Cultural Institution and Region, 2006

Cultural Institution	Palestinian Territory	West Bank	Gaza Strip
Sport Club	6.2	6.9	5.0
Cultural Club	3.1	3.1	3.1
Public Library	3.9	4.0	3.7
Charitable Society	6.0	4.6	8.5
Union	7.6	5.9	10.7
Other	1.3	0.9	2.0

Source: Palestine in figures. Palestinian central bureau of statistics 2007.

## Availability of Mass Media for the Households and Region, 2006



Source: Palestine in figures. Palestinian central bureau of statistics 2007.





## EuroMed Youth III Programme

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