



Australian Government

PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES COVID-19 DEVELOPMENT RESPONSE PLAN

- Australia is partnering with multilateral organisations and NGOs to support economic, human development and humanitarian priorities for Palestinians in the Palestinian Territories and in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria.
- COVID-19 threatens to overwhelm health systems and exacerbate humanitarian needs in the Palestinian Territories. Economic decline will have long-term impacts on livelihoods, employment and food security.
- Australian support focuses on improving core health and social protection services and fostering economic recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic is occurring in the context of unresolved conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and has exacerbated the humanitarian needs of Palestinians across the West Bank and Gaza. Australia will contribute to addressing the widespread economic and social impacts of the pandemic and lay foundations for long-term recovery, while continuing to support a two-state solution.

COVID-19 SITUATION ANALYSIS

In the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority declared a state of emergency on 5 March 2020, affecting its more than 3.2 million people. The Palestinian Authority also applied restrictions on foreign visitors and business hours, and attendance at schools, universities and places of worship. These were lifted when the numbers of COVID infections stabilised but re-imposed in July with a significant upswing in cases in the PTs and Israel.

In Gaza, cases have increased significantly since mid-June. The de facto authority (Hamas) established its own COVID-19 response, which differs from the state of emergency imposed on the West Bank. It has effectively prevented entry for all except returning Gazans and implemented strict quarantine for those who do enter, given acute limitations of the health system.

As at 21 September 2020, there were 45,446 confirmed cases and 300 COVID-19 deaths in the Palestinian Territories (PTs). At its peak, (anticipated to be late-2020 to early-2021) the pandemic threatens to overwhelm the health-care system. The World Health Organization has emphasised the fragility of the PTs' health architecture. The Palestinian Authority Ministry of Health is the main provider of health services in the PTs and receives significant medical and logistic support from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). There are significant gaps in health system preparedness and the challenges are particularly significant in Gaza.

UNRWA runs 141 primary health centres to cater for Palestinians across its five fields of operations (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Gaza and the West Bank) as well as one hospital in the West Bank.

The economic impacts of COVID-19 will be severe. The Palestinian Authority estimates that GDP will decrease by 20 per cent (USD3.2 billion) in 2020, while the World Bank estimated in June 2020 that 30 per cent of West Bank households were under the poverty line, compared to 14 per cent before COVID-19. In Gaza, the World Bank estimates as many as 64 per cent of households now live below the poverty line.

The Palestinian Authority Ministry of Finance is projecting a budget deficit of USD1.8 billion to USD2.4 billion for the 2020 fiscal year. A June 2020 report by the Office of the Quartet projects that the economic slowdown will nearly double unemployment levels in the West Bank to 30 per cent, the highest it has been in 10 years. It is likely that the Palestinian Authority will need to severely cut expenditure on service delivery such as education, with long-term ramifications for economic growth.

The pandemic has heightened levels of distress for Palestinian families as the frail economy threatens livelihoods. The World Food Programme states that nearly a third of the population is food insecure (32.7 per cent). Women, women-headed households (11 per cent of all households) and children are the most affected by food insecurity. Around 7.4 per cent of children aged from six months to five years suffer from chronic malnutrition. UNRWA has reported an increase in violence against women and children during the COVID-19 lockdown. The crisis is affecting women's livelihoods particularly badly, since most women work in the informal sector and small businesses. A survey conducted by Arab World for Research and Development shows 76 per cent of women had lost income due to the impacts of COVID-19, compared to 65 per cent of men.



AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSE

Australia's assistance to the PTs is delivered in the context of Australia's long-standing support for a two-state solution, where Israel and a future Palestinian state co-exist in peace and security. Gender equality is a cross-cutting feature of this plan. Australia will continue to monitor the implementation of gender- and disability-inclusive activities, and consider supporting direct activities in these areas.

Health Security

We are providing funding to UNRWA and the ICRC. These partners are key to delivering adequate health services to vulnerable Palestinians, and are frontline responders to the immediate impacts of COVID-19 in the PTs. Australian support to these partners has been flexible, enabling them to respond to the emerging needs and priorities created by the pandemic. Australia's multi-year Partnership Framework with UNRWA (2016-2020) provides funding and planning certainty for UNRWA at this crucial time. With its frontline staff of doctors, nurses, teachers and sanitation workers, UNRWA has been vital to limiting the spread of the virus in the PTs and across the region. For example, it shifted to telemedicine and remote education quickly, contributing to early containment of the virus in crowded refugee camps.

The ICRC's response to COVID-19 includes providing PPE equipment and supplies for quarantine centres and hospital intensive care units. With Australian support, the UN Office for Project Services' (UNOPS) Project Management Unit and Access Coordination Unit provide crucial logistics expertise to ensure efficient entry of goods (including COVID-19 medical supplies) and critical international personnel into Gaza. The Australian Government, through DFAT and the Department of Health, supported Australian NGO Project Rozana to dispatch 20 ventilators to the PTs.

Stability

Australia is working with a range of partners to ensure food security, social protection mechanisms for refugees, appropriate referral systems for survivors of domestic violence during the pandemic, and access to clean water and sanitation to at-risk populations in Gaza.

Economic Recovery

While there is limited business engagement between Australia and the PTs, Australia is an important source of

imported food (such as rice and frozen meat). These imported goods contribute to food security, particularly in the West Bank.

Australia's support through the Australia Middle East NGO Cooperation Agreement Phase 3 (AMENCA 3) market systems development program is assisting Palestinian farmers to ensure food security in the wake of lockdown and combat the pandemic's economic fallout. The program is pivoting approximately 27 per cent of its resources to addressing COVID-19 this calendar year.

The Australia Awards program will contribute to the education of future leaders in areas of economic recovery and long-term resilience (including the agriculture, public policy and water sectors). We continue to support a number of scholars who remain in Australia completing their studies.

HOW WE WILL WORK

While links between the Australian and Palestinian communities are not large, they are well established: there is a history of long-term engagement between Australian and Palestinian NGOs and education institutions – sponsored Palestinian students have been studying at Australian universities for over a decade.

While much Australian support is delivered through multilateral organisations, Australian and Palestinian NGOs remain important development and humanitarian partners. Through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), we will support health security (including eye health) and stability. The Australian government-funded NGOs working in the PTs include CARE, Oxfam, APHEDA, the Fred Hollows Foundation, Anglican Overseas Aid, ActionAid and Act for Peace. Their inclusive practices ensure response activities address the needs of women, children and people with disability.

We will continue to participate in the biannual meetings of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC), the Ministerial/Senior Official level mechanism coordinating development assistance to the PTs and promoting dialogue between donors, the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel. This meeting - involving Israel and the Palestinians - provides an ongoing forum for Australia to advocate for and promote stability and economic growth, particularly during COVID-19. As we program future funding, we will assess other agencies as potential partners in the ongoing joint effort to respond to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The PTs is a complex operating environment, with a commensurate high-risk profile. DFAT will continue to



prioritise maintaining appropriate oversight of all activities. This includes regularly monitoring and evaluating DFAT's own systems and processes to assure that risk is effectively managed, and building strong accountability measures into the systems and process of implementing partners. DFAT works to ensure that none of its resources are used, directly or indirectly, to support individuals or organisations associated with terrorism. Our implementing partners are required to ensure resources are not diverted to support terrorism.



TABLE 1: COVID-19 RESPONSE PLAN PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

Response Plan	Health Security	Stability	Economic Recovery
Expected Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Palestinian refugees (women, men and children) access health services, including social protection services during the COVID-19 pandemic, (SDG3) - Strengthen UNRWA's preparedness and response capacity to COVID-19 (SDG3) <p>Palestinians in Gaza access water and sanitation (SDG6)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Palestinian children receive education in emergency during the pandemic (SDG 4) - Vulnerable Palestinians receive social protection during pandemic (SDG1 and SDG2) - Survivors of domestic violence access vital referral services during the pandemic (SDG5, SDG16) <p>Emerging Palestinian leaders trained with Australia Awards Scholarships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Palestinian farmers maintain access and connections to markets during the pandemic and recovery (SDG 2) <p>Private sector agribusinesses connect farming communities to markets and increased economic productivity and participation. (SDG8,SDG2)</p>
Key Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eligible Palestinians are treated at UNRWA medical centres. - Provision of school-based mental health and psychosocial support to distressed refugees. - Provision of technical support and training to medical staff (including PPE and other medical material). - Palestinians are provided water and sanitation during the pandemic. <p>Movement of goods and people to support adequate supply of equipment and medications and to support economic recovery.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Palestinian refugee children have safe access to educational and protection services. - Teachers are provided with increased professional development opportunities to enhance remote education. - Lower student dropout rates due to better student engagement and improved teaching practices. - Palestinian refugees victims of violence are referred to protection service providers - Vulnerable women, men, girls and boys provided with emergency assistance in conflict and crisis situations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Farmers report sustained or increased income during the pandemic. - Examples of improved livelihoods for women and men working in agriculture during the pandemic. - Farmers maintaining connection to partners in agribusiness and cooperatives, during the outbreak and through the recovery period
Supporting Investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UNRWA - ICRC - UNOPS <p>ANCP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UNRWA - ICRC - Australia Awards <p>ANCP</p>	<p>Private Sector Engagement through AMENCA 3</p>