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**The Impact of the
COVID-19 Pandemic on the
Sustainable Development Goals
in the State of Palestine**



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This report was launched and overseen by the Prime Minister's Office, in coordination with the National Team for the Implementation and Follow-up on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study was carried out by a research team from the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS), with funding from the United Nations Development Programme / Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP).

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Acronyms

ACC	Anti-Corruption Commission
ANERA	American Near East Refugee Aid
APLA	Association of Palestinian Local Authorities
AWRAD	Arab World for Research and Development
COMCEC	Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
DFATD	Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (Canada)
EQA	Environmental Quality Authority
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICHR	Independent Commission for Human Rights in Palestine
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ICU	Intensive Care Unit
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
MAS	Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute
MDLF	Municipal Development and Lending Fund
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoLG	Ministry of Local Government
MoNE	Ministry of National Economy
MoSD	Ministry of Social Development
MSME	Micro, small and medium-size enterprise
NGO	non-governmental organization
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PA	Palestinian Authority

PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PGFTU	Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions
PMA	Palestine Monetary Authority
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PWA	Palestinian Water Authority
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UAWC	Union of Agricultural Work Committees
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction



The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in September 2015, provides a common blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet. At the heart of the Agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an urgent call to action by all countries to join forces in a global partnership to positively change our world, leaving no one behind. The 17 SDGs include 169 targets and 247 statistical indicators for measuring and evaluating progress, as well as allowing for comparisons among countries in achieving these goals. The SDGs cover four primary areas: environmental affairs, social and economic themes, and partnerships; and provide targets for all countries to adopt in accordance with their national priorities and plans. The SDGs seek to end poverty, hunger and other types of deprivation, and aspire to improve healthcare, education, equality, economic growth and other basic services.

The Palestinian Government responded positively to localizing the SDGs and indicators, and integrated these within the work-plans and programmes of the concerned authorities. Further efforts were made to organize partnerships that would put the State of Palestine on the list of advanced countries in terms

of monitoring and achieving the SDGs. A national SDG team was established to coordinate and monitor national efforts, and the government has established a national statistical monitoring system, led by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), to monitor progress across all SDGs. Moreover, in the National Policy Agenda (2017-2021), the government committed to integrating the SDGs into three primary national pillars: the road to independence, reform and improving the quality of public services, and sustainable development.



Economic growth
declined by
10%
during 2020 as a result of
the COVID-19 pandemic

However, COVID-19 has impacted this progress. The repercussions of the pandemic not only constitute a public health crisis, but also a human development crisis, leading to numerous social and economic consequences including a severe economic downturn combined with rising rates of unemployment and poverty. Palestine's situation is unique in that it is a state lacking sovereignty, subject to a prolonged Israeli military occupation. The politics of dispossession and displacement are manifested by the uninterrupted encroachment on Palestinian land and rights through sustained settlement expansion, consequent restrictions on access to and control over national resources, geographic fragmentation and severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods. Against this backdrop of structural constraints to Palestinian socio-economic development, PCBS estimates that economic growth declined by 10 percent during 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This negatively affected per capita output, increased unemployment and poverty rates, and had a profound social impact on vulnerable and marginal groups.

Given the multidimensionality of social and economic repercussions, there is no doubt that the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic put at risk – and are likely to erode – progress made to date in achieving SDGs in the State of Palestine. This is especially true due to the increasing severity of negative outcomes on economic and social life that resulted from partial and total closures implemented by the government in an attempt to contain the disease. It is anticipated that such measures will be expanded, given the increasing severity of the pandemic's spread.

This report aims to document and analyse COVID-19's impact on the progress made towards achieving the SDGs, focusing on the monitoring of the progress made before the pandemic, followed by current and anticipated effects of the pandemic in the medium to long term. The report sheds light on government interventions undertaken during the pandemic to reduce the negative impacts on progress made towards achieving the SDGs, and presents a set of recommendations and proposals to help decision-makers and relevant authorities deal effectively with the challenges created by the pandemic. These are presented to guide the formulation of appropriate and effective response plans for continued progress in achieving the SDGs.



To analyse the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on the SDGs, the methodology adopted for this study included the following key elements:



Literature reviews of material, from both local and international sources, that has been issued since the beginning of the pandemic. These reviews were used to develop and build the study's tools, interview questions and themes.



Review of national reports on the progress made in achieving the SDGs. This material includes the Palestinian Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and the progress report on the implementation of the SDGs during 2018-2019, which was prepared by the national SDG team under the supervision of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).



Use of relevant and available statistics, both local and international, to monitor and evaluate progress in achieving the SDGs before the pandemic.



Use of a qualitative approach to monitor the effects of the pandemic on the SDGs, which relied on in-depth interviews. This approach allowed for detailed answers to research questions. It is difficult to monitor and analyse the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to identify required policies and interventions without developing field-based research tools. Thirteen in-depth dialogue sessions were held with members of the national SDG team, with the help from the national team's coordinators at the PMO, who represent Palestinian ministries and official bodies. These interviews aimed to obtain information and clarifications on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SDGs to help better understand what interventions may be required to counter these effects. Through these interviews, the research team was also able to obtain a set of important reports and studies carried out by ministries or other agencies cooperating with the national SDG team on monitoring the effects of the pandemic. This made it easier for the research team to have accurate and detailed data, which was used in compiling this report.



Key Findings on the Impact of COVID-19 on SDGs and Proposed Mitigating Interventions

This study resulted in several important findings that highlight the extent of the pandemic's impact on various SDGs in the State of Palestine, as well as the impact of government measures adopted so far to limit these repercussions. Sustainable development is closely related to political and economic independence. Therefore, it is difficult to achieve long-term economic sustainability given Israel's control and exploitation of Palestinian lands and natural resources through prolonged occupation. There were discrepancies in the progress made towards achieving the SDGs by Palestinian institutions and authorities before the COVID-19 pandemic, with remarkable progress made for some goals and indicators being offset by either stagnation or deterioration for other indicators. For example, SDG 1 and SDG 2, which relate to poverty and food security, witnessed a sharp decline due to high rates of poverty and food insecurity. However, goals related to education, health, water and energy had made progress across numerous indicators.

The SDGs were affected by the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic to different degrees. Such repercussions were significant and direct across the first five SDGs, which address poverty, hunger, health, education and equality, and SDG 8, which addresses economic growth and decent work. The complete closure of the economy led to a reduction in job opportunities in the local market and a decline in the business sector, especially for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). This greatly increased levels of poverty and food insecurity, with a spread in gender-based violence and high levels of gender inequality in the labour market. The closure of schools and other educational institutions deprived large sections of poor and marginalized groups from enrolling in e-learning, given that they lacked the necessary financial means to access these

courses, which led to a deterioration in the quality of education. The results of interviews conducted with competent authorities indicated that there are short-term effects that can be addressed speedily if the pandemic recedes. This includes health effects and effects related to education. However, there are other impacts that need a longer duration to address, including levels of poverty, food security, inequality and unemployment.

This study proposes a set of interventions covering both the medium term (2021-2023) and long term (post-2023) to reduce the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SDGs. The proposals for required interventions are based, for the most part, on the recommendations of members of the national SDG team. These were collated during interviews by the research team, in addition to plausible recommendations extracted from local/international reports.





SDG 1

End poverty in all its forms everywhere

With the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the State of Palestine, the Palestinian government resorted to strict measures, including total closure, in the hope of containing the spread of the virus. It is clear that poverty reduction efforts were disrupted significantly, while the government’s containment measures resulted in serious consequences for employment, livelihoods and household income. In a PCBS survey (2020), 71 percent of respondents indicated that they lost their family income (completely or partially) due to the crisis. It was expected that gross domestic product (GDP) per capita would decrease by 12.8 percent in 2020 (PMA, 2020), while the percentage of poor families would increase to 30 percent in the West Bank and 64 percent in Gaza during 2020 (World Bank, 2020). These figures are consistent with the estimates of the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), which confirmed that more than 100,000 families across the occupied Palestinian the State of Palestine had fallen into the cycle of poverty after

losing their source of income during the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact on poverty rates in the West Bank is greater due to significant reductions in wage-income for workers who could no longer access Israel for work. In addition, the percentage of families with public sector employees in the West Bank (where income should not be affected) is lower than in Gaza. Finally, the West Bank has a lower share of non-working income, especially aid, among the poorest.



71% of respondents indicated they lost their family income due to the crisis



12.8% Decrease in GDP per Capita

Poor Families



100,000 more families fallen into the cycle of poverty

The targets of SDG 1, such as building the resilience of poor and vulnerable groups, while reducing their exposure and vulnerability to economic, social and environmental setbacks, will be affected by the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic increased pressure on the social protection system, which is mainly organized and operated by MoSD. Securing wider coverage to accommodate the increasing number of 'new' poor (those who fell into poverty due to the pandemic) places pressure on the financial capabilities of MoSD, leading to a decline in its ability to cover all poor and marginalized groups (especially in light of the lack of national legislation for comprehensive protection, including unemployment insurance). Representatives of the MoSD emphasized that the pandemic deepened the ministry's financial challenges. Including the new poor in poverty eradication programmes requires reconfiguring the public budget, and redefining the government's social and economic priorities.



MoSD implemented a set of interventions to reduce the impact of the pandemic on the rates of poverty in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, most notably:



MoSD formed emergency committees at its headquarters, assigning field teams to register groups affected by the COVID-19 pandemic on the unified portal for social assistance, an electronic platform designed for this purpose.



MoSD provided cash assistance to about 32,115 poor families affected by the pandemic, who were not previously registered with MoSD, to receive regular assistance. Total assistance amounted to about NIS15,690,000.



MoSD supported persons with disabilities registered on the unified portal for social assistance, providing basic hygiene tools to protect them from COVID-19 and to safeguard their health in general.



Cash assistance to
32,115
poor families

Total Amount
NIS15,690,000



Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 1

This study outlines a set of recommendations to reduce the impact of the pandemic on poverty rates in the medium and long term. In the medium term, MoSD needs to activate and approve the Social Security Law in order to provide a protection system for workers in the State of Palestine. MoSD should also support institutions working in the field of social protection, boosting their ability to respond immediately (and in the future) to disasters and crises, while improving levels of coordination between agents of social protection. This supports the transition process from the phase of seasonal, emergency and scattered 'coordination' between institutions to the stage of real 'partnership' in confronting the enormous negative effects of the pandemic. This requires a preliminary identification of sectors, groups and target areas, as well as the identification of priorities and the most pressing tasks. As for the long term, there is a need to build an emergency national plan for the social protection sector to respond to the pandemic and its effects. This needs to be a comprehensive plan for all sectors and ministries, with direct partnerships fostering the creation of a minimum level of social protection to counter the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan should focus on the most-affected groups and sectors, as well as marginalized and poor groups, such as the elderly, people with disabilities and residents of marginalized areas.



SDG 2

End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Eliminating hunger and achieving food security represents a major challenge in the State of Palestine, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused a state of economic stagnation and a decline in most economic and social indicators. The general trend of SDG 2 is linked to efforts of SDG 1 in eradicating poverty, given that food insecurity is closely related to poverty (MAS, 2017).

The pandemic has had an impact on a large percentage of MSMEs, which constitute the vast majority of business establishments in the State of Palestine. The decline in demand for their products was accompanied by unprecedented challenges in securing production inputs and access to credit and markets. This heralded an unprecedented increase in acute and chronic food insecurity, as well as malnutrition for workers at these enterprises, resulting from the loss of or significant decrease in their income.

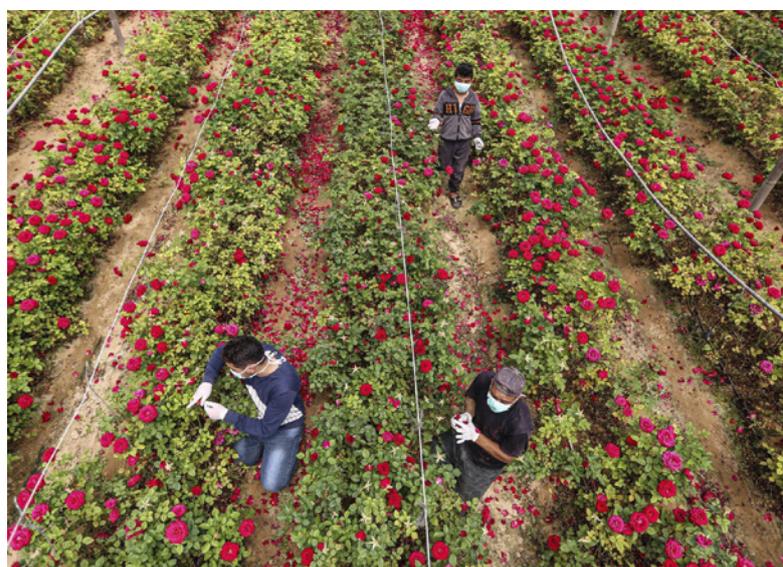
Figures indicate that an additional 65,000 people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in the West Bank have been receiving cash-based assistance since May 2020, compared to an additional 30,000 newly affected people in the Gaza Strip, who have received such assistance since November 2020 from the World Food Programme (WFP, 2020). In this context, household food consumption levels have been affected, as many have reduced the number of meals and the quality of food that they consume.

Households have become dependent on less-expensive and less-preferred food (WFP, 2020). The results of a weekly survey conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in the State of Palestine on agricultural productivity (incomes of small-scale food producers and household consumption levels of their products) indicate that farmers in the State of Palestine face great difficulties in maintaining productivity and income (FAO-EU Partnership Programme, 2020). The agricultural sector faces difficulties in accessing production inputs due to restrictions on movement, especially during the period of comprehensive closure that extended from March to June 2020. This affected production levels, leading to a decrease in income and profits compared to the same period in the previous year.

The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) indicated that there are multiple negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on efforts made by MoA and other relevant bodies in achieving SDG 2, most notably:

- The inability of farmers to access their lands and agricultural facilities due to movement restrictions.
- Partial cessation of work on existing agricultural projects, such as the project for land and water reclamation to increase the area of agricultural lands funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).
- The weak participation of the private sector and civil society institutions in the meeting of the Committee on Agriculture and Food Security, which formed a gap in the matrix of agreed interventions to counter the effects of COVID-19 on SDG 2.

There has been an increase in the proportion of families suffering from hunger due to low income and rising child malnutrition with the interruption of school meals, as well as a change in patterns of food consumption, a decrease in agricultural productivity and a lack of investment opportunities in the agricultural sector.



Government agencies have undertaken a set of interventions to reduce the impact of the pandemic on food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture, most notably:



MoA facilitated the movement of agricultural products between various Palestinian regions, granting movement permits to farmers during periods of closure; providing farmers and their families with production inputs such as seedlings; and assisting farmers in marketing their products during the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to reduce their losses.



MoSD provided food and health parcels to families affected by the pandemic. Their number is estimated at 112,180 families, with a total amount of NIS 28,991,520.



MoSD provided beneficiaries of the “Essential Nutrition” Project (served by institutions that stopped working due to the COVID-19 pandemic) with food vouchers. The number of beneficiaries reached 2,759 affiliated with 26 institutions, for a period of three months starting from September 2020.



Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 2

The study presents a set of recommendations to reduce the impact of the pandemic on SDG 2. MoA should provide financial assistance (either in the form of grants or interest-free loans) in order to compensate and support small farmers for losses caused by price fluctuations, the high cost of production inputs and marketing difficulties. Such initiatives should focus on the rain-fed agricultural sector, helping farmers to prepare for the next season. Furthermore, there is a need to develop a plan to finance and support livelihoods and home-based food production by providing tools and seeds for home-based farming. Other requirements are to ensure food security and alternative sources of income, while providing sustainable support to the agricultural sector, with clear and effective compensation mechanisms for disasters and crises. In order to enhance the food security of poor and vulnerable families, MoSD should provide support to income-generating projects such as home gardens, revive current economic empowerment projects for poor families affected by the pandemic, and develop a strategic plan for confronting food insecurity that outlines the required actions and mechanisms to reduce its rates in a sustainable manner.



SDG 3

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Despite efforts made by the Palestinian government to confront and contain the disease, the COVID-19 pandemic has put great pressure on the Palestinian health system due to the limited availability of respirators and beds at hospitals, especially in intensive care units (ICUs). This posed major difficulties in pandemic control efforts (ANERA, 2020). In late May 2020, WHO reported that there were only 343 respirators in the State of Palestine (87 in Gaza and 256 in the West Bank), for about 5.2 million people. Another report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), issued at the end of December 2020 (OCHA oPt, 2020b), states that the total occupancy rate of beds allocated to treat people infected with COVID-19 at health facilities reached 70 percent. The occupancy rate in ICUs was about 62 percent. Healthcare services at government hospitals also witnessed a clear decline, as detailed below (MoH, 2020):

- Closure of outpatient clinics to prevent patient overcrowding. The number of outpatient visits decreased from 37,130 in February 2020 to 11,700 in April 2020.

The number of
outpatient visits
 decreased from
37,130
 to
11,700
 between February and April 2020

- Cancelling scheduled surgeries, with the exception of emergency surgery. This led to a decrease in the number of operations from 4,151 in February 2020, to 2,845 in April 2020.
- The number of pregnancy care visits to government primary healthcare centres decreased from 6,610 in February 2020 to 2,055 in April 2020.

As indicated by the Ministry of Health (MoH), the lack of specialized and trained human resources has created a major crisis in the healthcare system and severely hindered its capacity to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The weak financial resources of the government have resulted in an inability to employ and train additional human resources required to successfully counter the pandemic. Added to this is the increasing frequency of illness among medical personnel, which amounted to 4,460 cases as of February 22, 2021. Primary healthcare services were also affected, especially in the Gaza Strip, where MoH announced on 6 December 2020 that it had resumed providing non-urgent services through primary healthcare centres and NGOs. However, it suspended all non-urgent services again on 19 December, indicating that only emergency services (urgent medical surgeries and baby deliveries) would be provided during closure. This included health institutions affiliated with NGOs and private organizations (OCHA oPt, 2020b). MoH also confirmed that its health strategy covers the high incidence of domestic and gender-based violence (MoH, 2020).



MoH implemented a set of interventions to reduce the impact of the pandemic on SDG 3, most notably:



Declaring a state of emergency and subsequently adopting national measures in order to limit the spread of COVID-19.



Preparing, issuing and circulating technical instructions for medical staff to manage cases, including those in contact with – and those recovering from – COVID-19.



Preparing and issuing approved national protocols for treating people infected with the virus, while providing approved medicines and treatments.



Placing health services for victims of social violence within the list of emergency and basic health services, in order to mitigate negative impacts on achieving SDG 3 and ensuring the enjoyment of healthy lifestyles.



Developing a protocol for safe return to school, in partnership with the Ministry of Education. This includes mechanisms for following-up with students and school staff, in addition to organizing laboratory tests for suspected and contact cases, as well as mechanisms for epidemic prevention, social distancing and safe educational environments.

In addition, MoSD secured support to provide remote psychological and social support services to children and their families, in coordination with partner organizations in the field of child protection. It has continued to maintain some development programmes, such as those concerning violence against women and domestic violence, in addition to the implementation of awareness and education campaigns in the field of mental health during the crisis.





Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 3

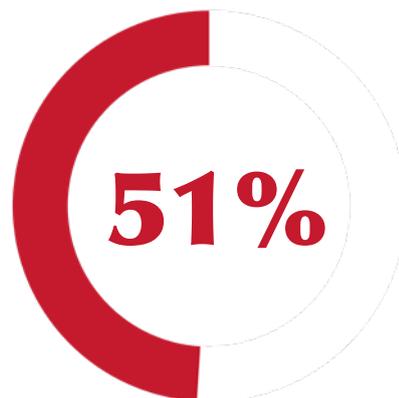
The study presents a set of recommendations for reducing the impact of the pandemic on SDG 3. MoH should provide urgent financial and non-financial resources to healthcare centres in marginalized areas to confront the pandemic, ensuring the continuity of basic healthcare services and facilitating access to all citizens, especially vulnerable and marginalized groups. The services provided at healthcare centres in villages and remote/marginalized areas should be expanded as required, with attention paid to basic healthcare needs. Concerning women's primary healthcare and care for mothers and children, there is a need to strengthen human resources in the field of mental health, especially in remote and marginalized areas, providing healthcare personnel with periodic training on working with sensitive and key issues for women. MoH should develop a comprehensive health insurance/coverage system, strengthening baseline data on health services while adding certain indicators related to women, especially in marginalized areas. These need to be updated periodically and analysed in order to better define priorities and improve planning at the local level. It is necessary for MoSD to provide emergency financial assistance to relevant associations and shelters threatened with closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to help them survive and continue to provide their vital, non-profit services during the crisis. Moreover, fees owed by some of these associations should be waived by the Palestinian Authority (PA), such as registration fees. The transfer of female workers at shelters and associations providing vital services to children with disabilities to the public sector's payroll, at least during the COVID-19 crisis period, should be considered. The provision of additional healthcare services and psychosocial support for women, the elderly and persons with disabilities (especially those with mental disabilities or autism) should also be prioritized, along with the provision of financial and in-kind assistance to their families, in order to ensure a comprehensive and multi-dimensional support system. It is also important to establish shelters nationwide to care for people with mental disabilities and autism, especially children, in order to respond to the great challenges created by the pandemic.



SDG 4

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the State of Palestine led to the closure of schools for long periods throughout 2020. The transition towards e-learning and online education was not equally accessible to all members of society for various reasons, most notably the lack of necessary tools, such as computers and internet connectivity, compounded by the government's lack of financial capabilities to provide these means to a large proportion of the Palestinian population. Many families lack the necessary infrastructure for distance education, especially in remote and marginalized rural and peri-urban areas. Moreover, there is a lack of knowledge and experience among a large number of household heads concerning the means and tools for distance learning. A PCBS survey indicated a discrepancy in the participation of students in distance education, highlighting that only 51 percent of families (53 percent in the West Bank and 49 percent in the Gaza Strip) with children (6-18 years old) enrolled in education before the closure were able to participate in distance education activities during the closure period (PCBS, 2020).



Only 51% families with children enrolled in education could access distance education



In the same context, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research confirmed the lack of readiness for new educational patterns. The Ministry faced many obstacles in using available electronic platforms to complete the educational process, most notably:

- Poor participation of or interaction by students in the distance education process.
- Weak ability of teachers in successfully using this educational method, and their need for technical and pedagogical training.
- Inability of many families to provide the requirements for distance learning.
- Alternative education methods (e.g. online learning) have affected the quality of education, as the information and communication technology in the State of Palestine is not fully ready yet for successfully accommodating this type of education, with relevant ICT tools not being equally accessible by the population.
- Non-formal and vocational training programmes, lifelong learning programmes and non-educational activities for students have also been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, despite attempts made by many educational institutions in using new methods, most of which relied on distance education and the use of various educational platforms. For example, in vocational training programmes that rely heavily on practical activities, distance education continued for theoretical issues only, while the practical training aspect stopped almost completely in order to limit social contact. The same applies to teacher training programmes, which are now almost entirely performed through electronic educational platforms, with negative impact on their quality and effectiveness.

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research undertook several interventions to ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all:



Preparing a “back-to-school” plan in light of the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, aiming to develop special procedures to ensure safety in the continuity of the educational process.



Preparing the “National Plan for the Use of Technology in Education, as a Supportive Learning Environment for Facilitating Education in Light of the Corona Pandemic” for the academic year 2020-2021.



Schools, universities and higher education institutions worked to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and maintain the continuity of the educational process by adopting distance teaching and learning methods.



Implementation of a comprehensive national survey on school facilities and learning environment in December 2020, with the aim of verifying the readiness of schools for the safe return of students and teachers, and ensuring the harmonization of school facilities with COVID-19 health standards and safety protocols.



Providing technical and financial support to enable about 100,000 children to access the e-learning platforms sponsored by the Ministry of Education.



Providing an educational TV channel teaching school curricula, and providing lessons through this channel across several educational stages.



Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 4

The study presents a set of recommendations to reduce the impact of the pandemic on SDG 4. Cooperation must be activated between relevant line ministries and private-sector companies, aiming to facilitate inclusive and affordable access to distance education for students and teachers by improving the quality of Internet services and reducing the cost of subscription fees. The Ministry of Education should also expand and intensify training programmes and courses related to improving the distance education process for teachers, including the development of a guide for teachers and supervisors to use visual communication techniques, blended learning and self-learning. Building interactive worksheets and electronic assessment tools should also be prioritized. Adequate financial resources should be mobilized, whether from ministries' budgets and/or through external support from organizations concerned with education and childcare, in order to purchase needed electronic devices for schools in marginalized areas. Further support should be directed towards ensuring safe learning environments for students and teachers at all educational institutions, including through provision of masks, and hand and surface sanitizers, as well as through adequate awareness-raising to ensure compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures. It is also necessary for the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to find an appropriate and urgent solution to the inability of a large number of poor and marginalized families to pay university tuition fees as a result of the COVID-19 crisis (in light of the failure of most universities to reduce or postpone fees, despite the economic and social conditions of affected families).



SDG 5

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Features of gender inequality and gender-related challenges witnessed a significant increase (Humanitarian Country Team, 2020) during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was confirmed by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, with thousands of women losing their jobs, as well as the closure of a number of small women-led businesses. Women also face difficulties in securing new jobs or entrepreneurial opportunities for their economic recovery. The Ministry of Women's Affairs also confirmed that the rate of violence and discrimination against women tripled during the outbreak of COVID-19. Domestic violence rates significantly increased, especially gender-based violence, mainly in the poorest communities. This includes the Gaza Strip, refugee camps and Area C in the West Bank (UN Women, Palestine Office, 2020).



A study by UN Women in the State of Palestine (2020) found that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the adoption of some negative coping mechanisms amid male, patriarchal structures, as well as the deepening of gender inequality at different levels. For example, the needs of pregnant women were not duly considered in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic at the institutional level in the State of Palestine. Household burdens significantly increased for a large proportion of women, especially those related to the education and care of children, while the closure of schools led to an increase in "unpaid care work" carried out by women and girls (UN Women, Palestine Office, 2020). The results of a research study by the UN in cooperation with Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD) on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Palestinian women confirmed that the pandemic created great pressure on working women (AWRAD, 2020). Some women had to leave work to take care of children, especially with the closure of schools, kindergartens and nurseries. As for those who were asked to work from home, they faced challenges in performing work responsibilities while taking care of home/family affairs at the same time. In this context, a study issued by the Ministry of Labour (2020) indicated that during the pandemic, working women were more likely to be dismissed from work without any kind of compensation, or guarantees that they could return to their jobs.



Government agencies and some NGOs have carried out interventions to empower women and girls during the pandemic period. These interventions were:



The Ministry of National Economy (MoNE) established a fund to support and empower women through the GROW project, with \$50,000, to purchase products from farmers and provide them to women, to encourage home-based, food-processing projects.



Staff at the Ministry of Women’s Affairs actively followed-up on complaints submitted by women regarding their inability to access services such as protection, especially during the period of complete closure and the suspension of public transportation.



The Ministry of Women’s Affairs formed 300 “support, guidance and direction” committees in cooperation with the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) across numerous residential communities, especially marginalized ones, with the aim of providing psychological and social support to women in these communities.



The Council of Ministers enacted a decision allowing women who have children under the age of ten to work from home on a remote basis, without obligating them to attend workplaces. In addition, the decision obligated employers in the private sector to pay 50 percent of wages as a minimum to female workers during the closure period.



Launching the National Observatory of Violence against Women, and training about 100 data-entry personnel, with the aim of extracting national indicators to measure violence against women.



Some local and international NGOs, such as the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) and Oxfam, provided various forms of support to projects, particularly agricultural projects, owned and run by women in several Palestinian villages.



Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 5

This study presents a set of recommendations to reduce the impact of the pandemic on the SDG 5 targets. There is a need to expand social protection services, including cash assistance and economic empowerment programmes, targeting both the poor and the new poor, taking into account the specific needs and challenges faced by women. There is a need for cooperation between the Ministry of Women's Affairs, NGOs, local government and social development directorates in order to provide safe shelter for women survivors of domestic violence, equipped with the basic and necessary needs for residence in these shelters. Priority should be given to enhancing the provision of psychological support and protection services to survivors of gender-based violence (including domestic violence), while creating specialized programmes to provide psychosocial counselling services through means that are available in most homes, such as TV and Internet (social networking platforms). Moreover, the development of a long-term and sustainable strategy for addressing gender-based violence (including domestic violence), tackling its root causes and protecting survivors should be prioritized. Training opportunities must also be offered to women affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on providing them with market-relevant skills to develop their existing businesses or open new ones. Efforts should also be dedicated towards challenging patriarchal gender roles and stereotypes, and changing the predominant culture related to the distribution of family and household burdens – including through intensive awareness campaigns and community engagement. Importantly, there is a need for developing and strengthening comprehensive legislation that supports and facilitates the process towards achieving gender equality across all sectors and at all levels.



SDG 6

Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

A study by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) estimated that the demand for water for handwashing in households across the Arab region increased by 9 to 12 litres per capita per day, which represents a 5 percent increase in the average household demand for water. This is a result of measures to limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, without taking into account other water needs, such as for washing clothes, food and cleaning (ESCWA, 2020). It was anticipated that average domestic demand for water in the State of Palestine would range between 97 to 100 litres per person per day, according to the same study, given that the per capita consumption rate before the pandemic was 88 litres per capita per day, according to data from the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA, 2019). This represents a 20 percent increase in the demand for water (aggregate demand, i.e. demand for other water uses such as washing clothes, food, cleaning, etc.). All this exacerbated the water crisis in the State of Palestine, given the insufficient supply of piped water to homes, and frequent interruptions in supply due to the Israeli occupation's control over Palestinian water sources and supplies. The increase in demand was not matched by an increase in supply; therefore, SDG 6 was negatively affected, impeding efforts made at the national level to achieve the targets within this goal.

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the access capabilities of PWA and municipalities to financing, whether from governmental agencies or donors, to establish and activate new water desalination plants and build interventions that support citizens' ability to access clean water. In addition, all projects planned for implementation by PWA and municipalities in 2020 were transferred to the emergency plan, irrespective of whether these included partnerships with the government, or with external funders and donor countries.

This will negatively affect the water supply for the population in the coming years. In the same context, the revenues of local government units (LGUs) in the State of Palestine, which are the main providers of water and sanitation services in most areas, were negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, as was confirmed by the Association of Palestinian Local Authorities in its position paper (APLA, 2020). The negative impacts were characterized by an increase in operating expenses and burdens for LGUs due to the COVID-19 emergency response, affecting the ability of local authorities to pay their employees' salaries, and to pay their dues to suppliers and contractors, thus preventing the completion of their projects.



PWA implemented a set of interventions to ensure the availability of water and sanitation services for all, most notably:



Refining agricultural water in order to use it for drinking (after extensive testing and complete sterilization). This led to the creation of additional water sources for areas where supply is insufficient, especially in light of the increased demand for water due to the pandemic.



In response to the increasing demand for water due to the pandemic and its unavailability in some locations, a group of water transport tankers were rehabilitated, and measures adopted to ensure water quality during transport.



Intensifying periodic visits to water sources to follow-up on water sterilization mechanisms, and to ensure the availability of necessary tools to allow for continuity in the quality of water provided to citizens.





Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 6

Support the poor and needy with water storage and pumping equipment in areas that do not have stable access to drinking water, in order to ensure that water reaches their homes as soon as is feasible, until more lasting and viable solutions are found.

Address sewage problems in affected areas speedily and support projects and programmes that work to rehabilitate the overall sewage system in the State of Palestine, in order to avoid further public health hazards.

Prepare crisis management plans that include governmental and national interventions to counter the effects of COVID-19 on SDG 6 indicators.

Implement sustainable development and integrated management of available water resources through a combined approach based on the structure of the water sector, and the integration of various actors, including cooperation with neighbouring countries.

Work to establish new water networks and rehabilitate damaged ones to ensure that reliable and quality water services are available, thereby mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SDG 6.

Further develop and expand infrastructure in the water and sanitation sector. This requires a sustainable budget in order for PWA to achieve SDG 6, and to ensure the availability of reliable and affordable water services for all.

Exert pressure on Israel through international institutions to counter its control over Palestinian water sources, especially in light of the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Exert pressure on Israel to lift the siege on Gaza, and to facilitate the entry of tools required for water desalination plants.



SDG 7

Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

A United Nations report (2020) indicates that efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic may be affected by a lack of access to energy, which is essential to prevent the spread of disease and combat epidemics. Energy plays a critical role in operating healthcare facilities and providing clean water; and for enabling ICT services that connect people while maintaining social distancing. Therefore, any shortage in energy supplies negatively affects the efforts made to combat the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic constituted a new challenge, as energy consumption and bill payments decreased by 12 percent and 23 percent, respectively, during the full closure in 2020, compared to the same period in 2019, given the halt in commercial and industrial activities (Palestinian Energy and Natural Resources Authority, 2020). The closure also hindered the implementation of some projects related to the development of the energy

sector. In the same context, the Director General of the North Electricity Distribution Company confirmed that the settlement of outstanding debts and instalments by subscribers has been postponed, and electricity has been provided with deferred payment to some subscribers who are not able to pay (payment deferred until after the end of the emergency).





A number of other challenges also emerged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (North Electricity Distribution Company, 2020). The most notable are listed below:

- Transferring the budgets originally allocated by the Public Treasury to the Energy Authority's projects to an emergency budget. As a result, no financial allocations were made to implement these projects. This includes the project to rehabilitate electricity networks in Area C in the West Bank, in addition to rehabilitating these networks in cities to accommodate renewable energy technology.
- Increasing expenditure in certain areas, with the aim of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as providing permanent electricity connections for hospitals and quarantine centres, as well as purchasing and delivering generators to these hospitals, installing medium-pressure lines, and installing transformers. This led to the depletion of all available resources at the Energy Authority, which hindered the implementation of new projects, especially those related to renewable energy.
- A severe shortage of distribution companies' stocks, especially cables, (prepaid) meters, and light bulbs, due to the closure of border points.
- Difficulties in accessing some areas to repair malfunctions, especially in the northern Jordan Valley.
- The distribution companies were unable to issue new subscriptions, and their work was limited to emergency maintenance during this period.
- Postponing the scheduled debt of subscribers until the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of bounced checks increased due to the state of emergency.
- Several local authorities did not pay their financial dues to the Energy Authority and distribution companies.

Given the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to job/income losses for tens of thousands of workers, the public's ability to access affordable energy service has been further constrained. Purchasing power has declined, while electricity prices have not. This has resulted in a decline in the ability of citizens to pay their electricity bills, which has further led to an accumulation of debt. At the same time, distribution companies confirmed that they have continued the provision of electricity services (North Electricity Distribution Company, 2020).

The Energy Authority has implemented a set of interventions in order to ensure that all can access reliable and sustainable, modern energy services at an affordable cost, most notably:



During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Energy Authority intensified its efforts in permanent communications with donor countries and the Ministry of Finance (MoF) in order to secure financial allocations to counter the effects of the pandemic on the energy sector. These efforts culminated in the World Bank's approval on 7 April 2020 of the "Promoting Sustainability in Energy Sector Performance, Infrastructure and Reliability" Program, with a budget of \$63 million for Phase 1. The project will be implemented in five phases, with a total budget of more than \$150 million.



Distribution companies, under the supervision of the Energy Authority, provided forward charging operations for citizens with limited income, provided that payment is made after the COVID-19 pandemic ends.



Issuing instructions to electricity distribution companies to operate with a minimum number of employees, but in a manner that does not negatively affect the provision of services to citizens, in addition to adhering to public safety procedures.



Informing electricity distribution companies that they can provide bill payment services to citizens through the payment service companies licensed by the Palestine Monetary Authority (PMA) on 2 June 2020.



With regard to the agricultural sector, the Energy Authority has undertaken a number of interventions, including providing financial allocations for the establishment of renewable solar energy plants that generate electricity for farmers in marginalized areas, helping to support their resilience on their land, especially given Israeli annexation plans that coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic.



Continuing work on building energy feeders, and preparing for the activation of three substations in Ramallah, Nablus and Hebron. Completing all technical requirements for their operation, given their positive impact on improving service delivery to citizens.

Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 7

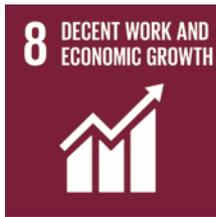
Intensify coordination between electricity distribution companies, municipalities, emergency committees and popular committees in the governorates to ensure that electricity reaches all areas by providing distribution outlets and electrical transformers to areas that suffer from power outages.

Address the low rate of collection for consumed electric energy by using appropriate incentives to urge citizens to pay their bills, such as discounts on total bills upon commitment to pay.

Develop the skills of workers in the electricity sector through effective training, especially with regard to crisis management.

Intensify investment in renewable energy projects, especially in areas where it is difficult to extend the national electricity network, as well as in agricultural areas.

Support the provision of alternatives to Israel, the supplier that controls the provision of electricity. With the COVID-19 pandemic, Israel has reduced currents that it supplies to the Palestinian side. This led to an increase in power outages in some major cities, such as Tulkarem.



SDG 8

Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

The Palestinian economy has been greatly affected by public measures adopted to limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a negative effect on various economic indicators. Employment rates declined, thousands of workers lost their source of income, GDP declined, and production was disrupted across most sectors. Government revenues declined significantly as a result of the suspension of most economic activities, which exacerbated the PA's financial crisis, especially as it coincided with Israel's withholding of clearance funds.

Economic growth for 2020 decreased by 12 percent compared to 2019, according to PCBS estimates (PCBS, 2020a). Most economic activities witnessed a noticeable decline in their value added during 2020 compared to 2019, while activity levels in services decreased by 10 percent. Activity in the construction sector decreased by 35 percent, due to the sharp decline in the level of demand for construction services during that period. Industrial activity also declined by 12 percent, and agriculture by 11 percent. This decline is reflected in GDP per capita, which fell by 13.7 percent, from \$3,378.4 in 2019 to \$2,915.5 in 2020 (PMA and PCBS, 2020). This affects the achievement of the first target within SDG 8, which is to boost the annual growth rate of real GDP per capita.

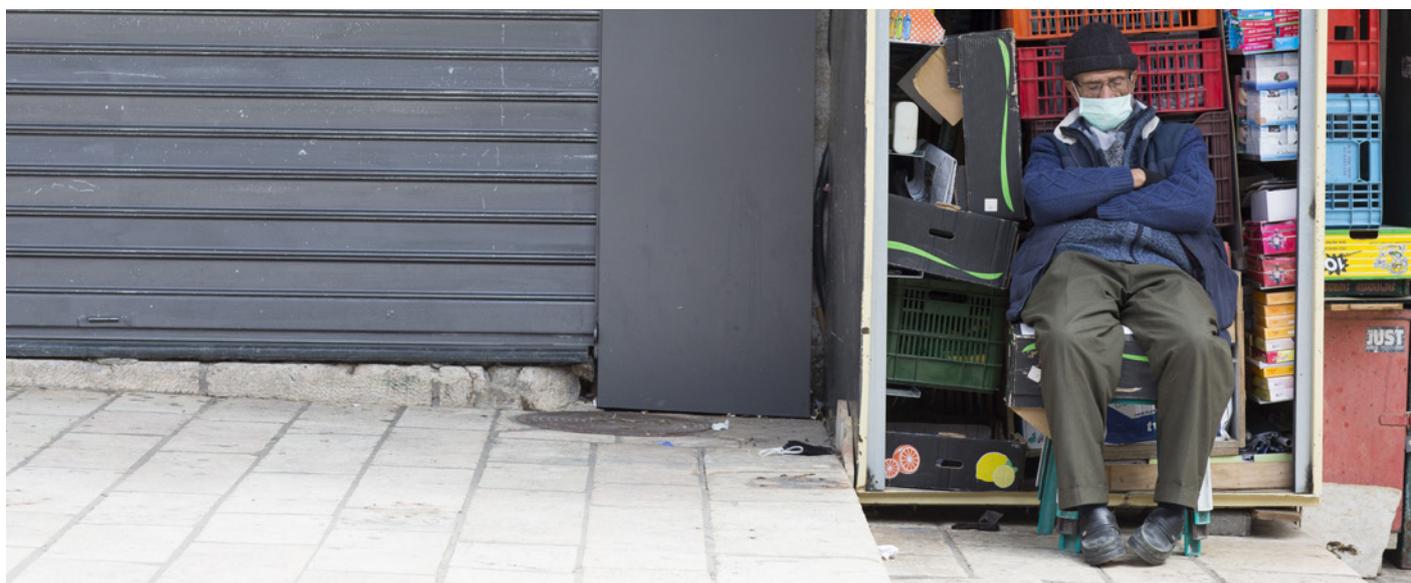
The same applies to the second target within SDG 8, which stipulates achieving higher levels of economic productivity through diversification and upgrading the level of technology/innovation. The second target includes one indicator for measurement: the annual growth rate of real GDP per capita. This indicator decreased in the State of Palestine as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, from 12.8 percent in 2019 to -5.4 percent in 2020, based on national accounts' data (PCBS, 2020b).



Repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic also apply to the fifth target within SDG 8, which is related to achieving full and productive employment and providing decent work for all women and men. The total number of workers in the labour market decreased from 993,000 workers in 2019 to 943,000 workers in 2020 (PCBS, 2020c). Unemployment rates varied throughout 2020. It rose from 25.5 percent in the first quarter of the year to 26.5 percent in the second quarter, then to 28.3 percent in the third quarter. It then dropped to 23.4 percent in the fourth quarter, as a result of the easing of restrictions taken by the government to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. It seems that this decline in the fourth quarter contributed to unemployment rates remaining stable in 2020 at 25.9 percent, only slightly higher than in 2019, when the unemployment rate was 25.3 percent (PCBS, 2020c).

The ninth target under SDG 8 focuses on the development and implementation of policies that aim to promote sustainable tourism, while providing job opportunities and enhancing local culture and products. It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has made the achievement of this target particularly difficult, for at least the next few years. The tourism sector, including hotels and restaurants, is considered the most affected by the pandemic, as most tourism facilities were completely closed, and the flow of foreign tourism was entirely halted due to the closure of borders and airports. This led to the loss of more than 10,000 workers in this sector (PCBS, 2020a). Moreover, value added in the tourism sector decreased to \$105 million during the first three quarters of 2020, compared to about \$196 million for the same period in 2019. This led to a decrease in the tourism sector's contribution to GDP, falling from 1.5 percent in 2019 to 1 percent after the COVID-19 pandemic (PCBS, 2020d).

A study by the Ministry of Tourism (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and Paltrade, 2020) estimated that the total size of expected losses for this sector during the months from March to December 2020 was about \$1.5 billion, including direct costs and expenditures related to incoming/local tourism activities and workers in this sector. Its distribution covered the manufacture and sale of wooden antiques and souvenirs, accommodation activities, catering and beverage activities, travel agencies, tour operators, reservation services and related activities, and creative/leisure activities and the arts.



Concerned government agencies carried out a set of interventions in order to promote steady, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, and full and productive employment, most notably:



At the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, an agreement was signed between the Ministry of Labour, the Coordinating Council of the Private Sector and the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), to pay at least 50 percent of salaries to workers during the first few months of closure, with a minimum of NIS1,000. Remaining wages are to be paid after the end of the crisis.



A tripartite agreement was concluded between the government, workers and employers to create a financial portfolio in the Employment Fund that grants soft loans to MSMEs. About 200 enterprises benefited from this agreement.



The Ministry of Labour cooperated with PGFTU to establish and manage an emergency aid programme for workers who lost their jobs, providing financial and in-kind assistance and temporary employment opportunities. The programme was allocated \$1 million, with services starting at the beginning of May 2021.



Supporting the tourism sector, as it was one of the most affected sectors, especially during the first few months of the pandemic. Work is in process to exempt licensed projects, such as tourism professions, from licensing fees for 2020.



During the emergency closure period from March to May 2020, PMA issued several decisions to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on economic establishments. The most prominent of these decisions included extending the financial right of checks and monthly/periodic loan repayments for a period of four months (and six months for tourism facilities). PMA granted the issuers of the checks the right not to honour it, even if she/he has the available liquidity. It also prohibited the collection of fees, commissions or any additional interest on deferred payments. PMA recommended that banks and lending institutions suspend the credit rating system for bounced checks for individuals and projects affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.



PMA, in coordination with commercial banks and specialized lending institutions, developed the \$300 million "Istidama" programme to provide soft loans to support SMEs.



At the start of the pandemic, MoF implemented enabling measures with regard to taxes, such as cancelling fines for late submission of tax returns.



The government disbursed aid to about 40,000 affected workers through the "Waqfet Ezz" Fund, in cooperation with partners from the private sector.



At the beginning of the pandemic, the Palestine 8 Investment Fund launched the "Isnad" emergency lending programme to support projects that are not eligible for banking finance through microfinance institutions. This aimed to provide the necessary liquidity for this segment to enable them to remain operational and retain their workforce.



Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 8

Conduct an assessment and analysis of the damages and losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on MSMEs. Determine priorities for intervention in order to strengthen the resilience of these enterprises.

Continue to introduce official programmes that provide loans and soft credit facilities (with soft guarantees and zero/reduced interest) for micro-enterprises. Cancel interest charged on deferred loans for the most-affected sectors, and postpone loan repayment by these sectors and projects through agreements between the PMA, private lenders and government.

Mobilize financial resources through cooperation amongst concerned government agencies, such as the ministries of labour and national economy, donors, and executive agencies such as the Employment and Social Protection Fund. Provide material support and assistance to projects and facilities that have incurred losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic, provided that such support results in these projects retaining their workforce and not to laying them off. This should focus on weak sectors such as nurseries/kindergartens, and sectors in which employment facilities have been closed, such as the tourism and services sectors.

Foster the early recovery and revival of the tourism sector during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, including by promoting and encouraging domestic tourism, while ensuring compliance with public health and safety measures. This is especially important given the protracted halt in foreign tourism.

Develop mechanisms, contingency plans and work strategies adapted to the current crisis, or any future health, economic and political shocks, to ensure the preparedness and sustainability of value chains for MSMEs.

Provide social protection programmes for workers in the informal sector, especially women, while working on developing and approving a comprehensive social security law.

Protect the rights of workers in Israel, who number approximately 200,000. Use Israeli or international courts to ensure that workers' rights during the COVID-19 pandemic are upheld and protected, especially given the Israeli government's disavowal of paying unemployment benefits to Palestinian workers, unlike their Israeli counterparts.

Develop a strategy to enhance growth rates in the digital economy and information technology. This contributes to achieving remarkable progress in SDG 8 indicators, especially with regard to growth and employment rates.

Strengthen long-term lending policies, especially for productive sectors and digital-economy projects.



SDG 9

Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Efforts to achieve SDG 9 in the State of Palestine suffered a setback due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a large number of industrial establishments ceasing work. This is consistent with the findings of MoNE, which indicated that the activities of the national SDG team – in terms of following-up on progress made in achieving planned SDGs – were also halted. It also put a stop to a large number of the MoNE's planned programmes and projects in the fields of local economic development and enhancing productivity, as the government's budget was transformed into an emergency one.

The second target within SDG 9 aims to promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization for all, and to achieve a significant increase in the share of industry in employment and GDP. This target includes three indicators to measure progress: value added from manufacturing industry as a percentage of GDP; value added from manufacturing industry as a percentage of GDP per capita; and industrial employment as a percentage of total employment. In the PA areas, industrial activity declined by 12 percent in 2020 (PCBS, 2020a) and the value added of the manufacturing industry decreased from \$1,779 million in 2019 to \$1,564.5 million in 2020, a decrease of 12 percent. However, the contribution of the manufacturing industry to the local economy's output was not significantly affected, reaching 11 percent in 2020 compared to 11.2 percent in 2019 (PCBS, 2020d). In the same context, the manufacturing industry's contribution to labour absorption increased from 12.1 percent in 2019 to 13 percent in 2020 (PCBS, 2020c).

It is clear that the decline in the number of workers in most sectors, especially tourism, services and industrial facilities, did not significantly affect the relative distribution of workers across various sectors during the COVID-19 pandemic.



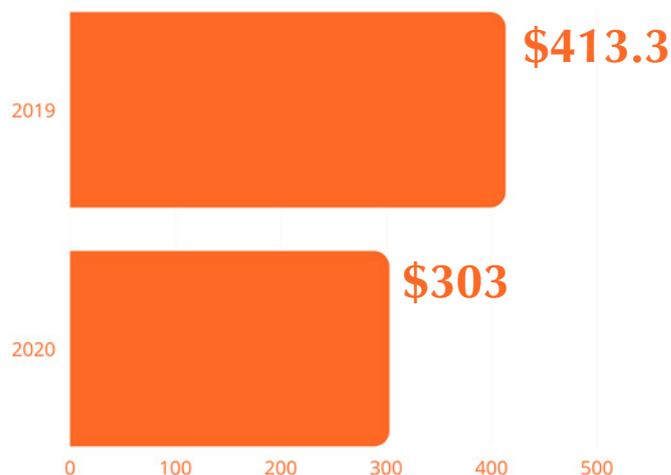
The third target within SDG 9 focuses on creating opportunities for small-scale industrial enterprises in accessing financial services and integrating them into value chains and markets. Small-scale industrial projects in the State of Palestine were directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, evidenced by the results of the PCBS survey on the COVID-19 crisis' impact on economic institutions (PCBS, 2020). More than two thirds of economic establishments were closed, with MSMEs in the manufacturing sector greatly affected by containment measures during the closure period. This includes small-scale stone and marble projects, furniture stores, shoes and leather, and handicraft projects, all of which were forced to shut down during the first closure period. They have reduced their activities due to the significant decrease in demand, cancellation of orders, shortage of supply and raw materials, and restricted means of transportation along local and global value chains (MAS, 2020). MSMEs in the services' sector were the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, as economic activities in tourism and related sectors (hospitality and catering), as well as in transportation services, stopped abruptly. The continued closure of borders is expected to pose a serious threat to this sector, as hotels and accommodation services depend on an influx of tourists (Hinn and Shams, 2020).

The fifth target within SDG 9 focuses on the per capita growth of value added in the manufacturing sector. In Palestine, this value decreased by 26.6 percent between 2019 and 2020 (from \$413.3 in 2019 to \$303 in 2020) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This reflects the decline in the value added of manufacturing in general.



-26.6%
 growth on
 manufacturing sector
 from 2019-2020

**per capita growth
 of value added in the
 manufacturing sector**



MoNE – the official body responsible for following-up on the implementation of SDG 9 – adopted the following measures to promote industry and innovation:



The completion of the new Companies' Law was expedited, with the Law being submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval. If adopted, this Law is expected to contribute to improving the enabling investment and business environment.



Activating electronic commercial transactions to comply with the requirements of social distancing and closure.



Intensifying regulation and control of production and raw materials, especially with regard to industries producing sterilization materials, masks and cleaning materials.



Alcohol was exempted from tax, if its intended use was for the manufacturing of sterilizers.



Working with PMA to amend procedures related to checks, especially for mature companies.



Inviting companies to hold public meetings in accordance with the requirements of health procedures, with the aim of distributing profits to shareholders. Total distributed profits amounted to \$130 million, which contributed positively to generating cash flow in light of the pandemic. The number of beneficiaries reached about 46,000.



Granting approvals for non-profit companies to receive funding, amounting to more than \$15 million, mostly focused on development projects in agriculture, media, human rights and gender.



Commencing the first phase of implementing a project to support the tourism sector in Jerusalem, with a value of \$590,000 from COMCEC.





Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 9

Direct a large share of loans, which were made by new funds established to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, to the industrial sector in order to support the sector's ability to continue operations.

In order to save the industrial sector, which was badly hit during the pandemic, the necessary funding must be made available (about \$1 billion, according to MoNE estimates) to start the industrial clusters' plan. This will contribute significantly to the development of the industrial sector.

Activate sectoral networking in production levels, resources, services and infrastructure to help realize the necessary, strategic transformation towards strengthened national capabilities and expanded opportunities in the post-pandemic era.

Continue to provide a mechanism for accessing funding sources through specialized funds with loan guarantees to meet economic objectives and contribute to employment.

Provide incentives to encourage innovation within business sectors, including by supporting joint projects between universities and productive sectors.

Develop the legal environment for regulating business, providing an integrated system that responds to production shifts and potential market opportunities created by the pandemic.

Enhance the innovation ecosystem in the State of Palestine by supporting and encouraging market-relevant scientific research, developing the legal environment, and protecting intellectual property.

Strengthen the electronic infrastructure, especially that which is geared towards the automation of industrial and commercial services, at MoNE and partner ministries.



SDG 10

Reduce inequality within and among countries

The pandemic deepened inequalities between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Despite rising rates of poverty and unemployment in the West Bank as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the discrepancy with poverty rates in the Gaza Strip was still significant. The World Bank anticipated that poverty rates in the Gaza Strip would increase to become 34 percent higher than the West Bank (World Bank, 2020). The same applies to the gap in wages, with salaries of workers in the private sector in the West Bank being 3.5 times higher than those in the Gaza Strip: NIS 118 in the West Bank, and NIS 34 in the Gaza Strip for 2020 (PCBS, 2020c).

Pre-pandemic data indicated that existing inequalities in the State of Palestine are on the rise, with the richest 20 percent of the population currently accounting for about 43 percent of national wealth, compared to the poorest 20 percent who can claim only 7 percent (PMO, 2018). These percentages will likely rise as a result of increasing poverty rates and the loss of jobs and incomes after the COVID-19 pandemic. This also applies to the second target under SDG 10, which measures the proportion of the population living below 50 percent of average income (PCBS uses an indicator that represents the proportion of the population whose average monthly consumption is less than half of median consumption). In the State of Palestine in 2017, this reached 17.3 percent, with 3.7 percent in the West Bank and 50 percent in the Gaza Strip (PCBS, 2020e).

Indicators also confirm that the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced gender inequality, as the rate of women's participation in the labour force decreased from 18.1 percent in 2019 to 15.9 percent in 2020 (PCBS, 2020c). The pandemic has also reinforced the persistence of disparities and inequality between urban areas and refugee camps. Urban unemployment rates reached 26.6 percent, while in the camps it reached 37.3 percent in 2020, compared to 25 percent and 36.2 percent respectively for 2019 (PCBS, 2020c).

The fourth target within SDG 10 concerns the adoption of fiscal, wage and social protection policies, gradually achieving greater equality, measured by an indicator on the share of work in GDP, including wages and social security payments. This indicator is not covered by the PCBS website content on SDGs in the State of Palestine. Other indicators relating to poverty, food insecurity and female employment are reviewed, within the context of previously stated goals. They emphasize the varying impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on numerous social groups, and not only in terms of health impact – with COVID-19 disproportionately affecting the elderly and those suffering from chronic diseases. People's ability to withstand the economic, social, political and psychological effects of the pandemic; and their ability to adapt, recover and live in a post-pandemic world were also affected (MoSD, 2020).



MoSD undertook a set of interventions to reduce the widening inequality gap, most notably:



2019

Helping poor and marginalized families by providing financial support alongside food parcels and cleaning materials.



Providing financial aid/income support to all nursery-school workers who stopped working due to COVID-19 restrictions and preventive measures.



2020

Providing financial aid/income support to female workers in kindergartens who stopped working and lost their income due to COVID-19 restrictions and preventive measures.



Providing financial aid/income support, through the Waqfet Ezz Fund, to daily labourers in the local market who lost their income due to preventive measures taken by the government.



Supporting accommodation services for the elderly and persons with disabilities by providing hygiene and food items.



250
200
150
100

Helping and protecting the health and well-being of persons with disabilities (registered on the unified portal for social assistance) by providing basic COVID-19 safety and hygiene supplies.

Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 10

Allocate emergency budgets to provide needy and marginalized groups with appropriate aid and services during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Expand face-to-face and electronic psychosocial support services targeting women, as they have been disproportionately affected by the increased household chores and unpaid care burden during the pandemic.

Expand social protection services, including cash assistance and economic empowerment programmes, targeting the poor and new poor, and taking into account the specific roles and needs of women.

Work proactively on building an emergency national plan for the social protection sector, to respond to the pandemic and its effects. This is a comprehensive plan for all related sectors and ministries based on strategic sectoral priorities, and those detailed in response plans (after their review and set-up). This should be based on unified national mechanisms/standards, using local tools that are organized and strengthened speedily.

Identify institutions specializing in women's and workers' affairs to assist the Palestinian government in formulating policies to protect families from conditions created by the pandemic, while helping families adapt to changes in education and work conditions. Include gender experts specialized within the working group or committees that define policies, programmes and interventions targeting poor and marginalized families to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment are duly streamlined in these interventions. Develop legislation that reduces inequality, coupled with regulations and mechanisms to facilitate their implementation and monitoring.



SDG 11

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Most of the indicators for SDG 11 are not available for the Palestinian context. The indicators presented by PCBS through its SDG platform are limited to losses that occur due to disasters, including water-related disasters (PCBS, 2020e). It is clear that there are many challenges facing sustainable urbanization as a positive force in the development of the State of Palestine, most notably the direct control of the Israeli occupation over 60 percent of the West Bank land area, known as Area C. The result is extensive restrictions on the urban planning and development process. The same applies to the Gaza Strip, where Israel destroyed parts of the urban landscape through recurrent wars over the past two decades (Kloss and Juan, 2015).

In Jerusalem, inequalities in urban planning are growing between Palestinian areas under Israeli occupation and areas inhabited by Israel's Jewish population, with Palestinians being confined in overcrowded and poorly serviced neighbourhoods in occupied East Jerusalem. The occupation authorities deliberately deprive Palestinian citizens of urban development or proper planning, in addition to exercising continuous threats of forced displacement by issuing home demolition and/or eviction orders to a number of Palestinian families in occupied East Jerusalem. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected urbanization and the sustainability of cities and infrastructure in the State of Palestine in indirect ways through impacting the availability of financing, water, electricity, and solid and wastewater treatment services.

The COVID-19 pandemic coincided with an escalation in settlement expansion by the Israeli occupation in the West Bank, and its intention to annex about 30 percent of the Palestinian territories in what is known as the "Annexation Plan". If implemented, its logical result would be to stifle the space available for enacting development policies, besieging the Palestinian population and curbing any economic national development planning prospect for the Palestinian people (MAS, 2020). The Plan would further deprive Palestinians of access to their lands, 'tightening the

noose' and restricting Palestinian urban expansion (PCBS, 2020d). So far, the Israeli settlement expansion policies have already led to a scarcity of land available for construction, a significant increase in land prices, and consequently the inability of Palestinians to meet housing needs associated with their natural demographic growth (PMO, 2018). This affected all targets associated with SDG 11, especially the provision of safe and affordable housing. Construction obstacles and costs are increasing in areas slated for annexation, which are de facto controlled by Israel's occupation authorities, preventing construction in these areas. The Annexation Plan also affects the possibility of providing affordable and sustainable transportation systems, in light of the siege of Palestinian towns and cities by Israeli settlements and bypass roads. This also negatively affects the achievement of modern urbanization and the protection of cultural and natural heritage.

The Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic led to numerous negative effects on SDG 11, most notably the complete cessation of capacity-building interventions. There was also a delay in the implementation of some related projects, as activities were merged and reduced in proportion to the challenging conditions and restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Awareness workshops related to achieving SDG 11 were also disrupted. In general the COVID-19 pandemic revealed weaknesses in the methodologies used to respond to the crisis. Due to the nature of the pandemic, the government's interventions coincided with – and resulted in – periods of closure, consequent repercussions and changing priorities accordingly. There has been greater focus on green areas, crisis and disaster management, and environmental and climate impact.

MoLG undertook a set of interventions in order to achieve the targets within SDG 11, most notably:



Forming emergency committees by governorates and local government units (LGUs) at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the aim of following-up on the needs of citizens, ensuring their access to basic services, and ensuring their compliance with the COVID-19 containment and prevention measures taken by the government.



Mobilizing financial resources and local/external support, working to provide sterilizers and safety tools, especially in marginalized areas such as Area C and Bedouin communities.



Preparing contingency plans by local authorities to ensure the continuation of basic service provisions, such as water, sanitation, electricity, public hygiene and public health.



Working through local bodies, the MoLG, in cooperation with other agencies such as MoH, sterilized public facilities and increased public cleaning services. It also intensified waste collection efforts, in addition to ensuring the safe transportation of waste from quarantine centres.



Facilitating coordination between MoLG and MoF to transfer the collection of road transport fees to local bodies to assist them in overcoming problems resulting from their lack of financial resources due to low collection rates during the pandemic period.



Ensuring citizens' ability to access basic services, as MoLG temporarily stopped some local authorities from collecting service fees during the closure period.



Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 11

Promote cooperation between MoLG and the Municipal Development and Lending Fund (MDLF), to mobilize financial resources and provide grants to cover the increasing operating expenses of local authorities. Provide protection and sterilization equipment to reduce local bodies' expenses, provided that this is done on a large scale to include the largest possible number of LGUs.

Take urgent measures to alleviate the budget deficit of local authorities, in light of increases in operating expenses. Expedite the transfer of local bodies' allocations accumulated by MoF. Allocate emergency operational budgets to LGUs from the general budget to help them recover from the COVID-19 crisis. Postpone payments and invoices owed for a set period in order to reduce financial burdens. Provide technical and financial support for the rational management of debts and expenses by local authorities, arranging expenses according to priority.

Set standards for coordination and cooperation amongst the various agencies responsible for providing basic services to the population. This will ensure synergies and complementarities in providing a rapid and effective response to emerging needs. Through proper emergency preparedness and contingency planning, ensure that all have access to basic services in future crises, especially marginalized areas such as Area C and refugee camps.

Develop clear plans and strategies for aid disbursement and distribution mechanisms for future crises, through cooperation and coordination amongst MoSD, MoLG, the Ministry of Labour and local bodies. Identify the most vulnerable and marginalized groups within the scope of each local authority, and provide necessary services to them. Ensure that the largest possible segment of the population receives immediate relief, and that no one is left behind.

Develop standard operating procedures for emergency preparedness and crisis management, and adopt them as basic rules to guide emergency responses during crises, including the management of financial and human resources, and coordination between authorities responsible for crisis management.

Prepare authorities responsible for crisis management financially for future crises, by increasing the efficiency of collection from current sources of funding, as well as by securing new sources of funding for local bodies, including through public-private partnership (PPP) projects.

Conclude agreements with commercial banks to finance local authorities with soft loans, as well as supporting and diversifying income-generating projects for local authorities, through MDLF and APLA, and the establishment of an emergency fund for future crises.

Develop technological means to provide e-services and foster digital communication between citizens and local authorities. Automate transactions and services provided by local authorities to citizens in order to enhance fee-collection mechanisms.

Develop a strategic plan to strengthen the role of local government units during emergencies, and devise mechanisms and sources of financial support to enhance the financial sustainability of these entities.

Plan the process of building and establishing public spaces and green areas in the future, taking into account the need to ensure the application of preventive measures, such as social distancing, in the design of facilities.



SDG 12

Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

There are important challenges in measuring progress made towards the achievement of SDG 12. The lack of sufficient local or international databases for indicators related to this goal, in addition to the presence of non-statistical indicators on legal (and other) frameworks, means it is difficult to measure these indicators in the Palestinian context. Statistics on most of the indicators of SDG 12 are not available on the PCBS online SDG platform (PCBS, 2020e). This reality reflects the importance of developing national indicators to measure basic interventions in fields related to the targets of this goal, in addition to integrating relevant international indicators.

Nevertheless, it is expected that the targets and indicators within SDG 12 will be indirectly affected by the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, and challenges facing the achievement of this goal will remain, especially with regard to consumption patterns. The report of the Palestinian National Voluntary Review of the Sustainable Development Goals (PMO, 2018) states that patterns of unsustainable resource consumption are spreading throughout the State of Palestine, resulting in social, environmental and economic problems that will be further exacerbated by the continuation of these patterns.

The unsustainable use of water is a serious threat to life in the State of Palestine, especially in Gaza, where a huge amount of both water and electricity is lost due to its transportation through old, dilapidated and unfixable infrastructure in the agricultural sector. The pressure on farmers to compete with cheap Israeli agricultural products flooding the Palestinian market has also resulted in unsustainable agricultural practices, including the excessive use of pesticides and fertilizers. In terms of waste, the State of Palestine still needs to promote effective and sustainable waste management, and an optimal approach to waste disposal, as less than 0.5 percent of waste is recycled on an annual basis (PMO, 2018).



The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the targets of SDG 12 can be discerned through the in-depth interview that was conducted with the Environmental Quality Authority (EQA). Among the tasks of EQA, given its competence on environmental issues, is to follow-up on progress made in this goal and to overcome obstacles that prevent progress. EQA's purpose intersects with the indicators for SDG 12:

- The Ministry of Environment has detected a significant increase in hazardous (medical) waste, emanating from quarantine centres and hospitals. The increase in the quantities of citizens' daily waste, due to health and safety measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic (detergent packages, disinfectant wipes, plastic packages, face-masks) constituted an additional burden on workers in the field of waste management, particularly due to the widespread tendency of citizens to dump such waste in public places (for example, face-masks thrown in the street for disposal).
- Citizens' tendency to over-stock and buy large quantities of food and beverages, due to the closure of local markets, which often resulted in spoilage and waste of accumulated food at the household level.
- Safety measures imposed by the government in light of the COVID-19 pandemic have led to citizens spending more time at home. This has resulted in increased energy and water consumption (by approximately 30 percent) at the household level, putting increased pressure on limited water resources. This prompted some citizens to buy and use more bottled water, which has turned into an environmental burden

EQA is the official body responsible for SDG 12. It adopted the following measures to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns:



Preparing health and legal guidelines, in partnership with MoH and local government units, on how to safely manage medical and non-medical waste from healthcare facilities, as well as from hospitals, primary healthcare centres and quarantine facilities.



Carrying out several joint operations with MoH and municipalities in order to collect and dispose of medical waste, either by burning it or burying it. In addition, EQA guiding health and municipal workers on mechanisms for dealing with medical waste to avoid this coming in contact with the general public.



Raising citizens' awareness of sustainable production and consumption, including its positive impact on society and the behavioural changes that can be easily adopted by citizens in their daily lives to promote sustainability, especially considering that consumption increased due to closure and quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic.





Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 12

Develop and expand efforts to promote sustainable production and consumption patterns, given that SDG 12 has been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Improve and expand solid waste management, especially through the establishment of a central health waste site that serves population centres in each region. This will help eliminate random waste dumping, which increased during the pandemic due to the increased volume of waste produced, especially from healthcare facilities and quarantine centres.

Support the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources, in cooperation with relevant ministries and institutions, especially the Ministry of Agriculture, PWA and local government units.

Provide sufficient funding to implement EQA's plans in various fields, and enhance its ability to implement actions towards SDGs that fall under its responsibility.

Develop a long-term strategy to reduce waste production and promote circular economy principles, including through mechanisms for waste prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse. This supports and enhances the implementation of the objectives of SDG 12.



SDG 13

Take urgent action to address climate change and its impacts

In the State of Palestine, closures and movement restrictions adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to have led to reduced emissions, especially since road transport usually accounts for 47 percent of these emissions (PCBS, 2020f). The EQA representative, confirmed positive results given the reduction in the production of industrial facilities, and the limited functioning of petroleum-based vehicles, which led to a reduction in fuel combustion and gas emissions.

The first target within SDG 13 relates to strengthening resilience in the face of climate-related risks and disasters. Indicators for this target include the number of deaths, the number of missing persons and number of persons affected by disasters. These number are all very low in the State of Palestine, according to PCBS, indicating that the pandemic has had no impact on this target, as natural disasters in the State of Palestine do not constitute a key component of societal suffering.

EQA is the official body responsible for SDG 13. It adopted the following measures to address the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on climate change:



Completing the preparation of a programme and action plan for implementing projects in the field of climate change, especially the Green Fund.



Finalizing the preparation of a roadmap to identify the technologies to be used in implementing climate change adaptation plans.



Activating an emergency plan, in partnership with other relevant institutions, in order to effectively withstand flooding during the winter season.

Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 13

Regardless of the pandemic, efforts to address climate change require that EQA, in cooperation with relevant international institutions and neighbouring countries, finds common solutions to contain climate change impacts in the State of Palestine.

In order to withstand the effects of climate change on the water sector, which faced increasing demand during the COVID-19 pandemic period, it is necessary to cooperate with PWA to provide alternatives, such as desalination or maintenance work on water networks, in order to reduce the water leakage and loss.

Encourage the private sector to invest in the green economy by providing financial and legal incentives to preserve the environment and reduce pollution. This is especially urgent given the increase in medical waste due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



SDG 14

Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

In the Palestinian context, the purpose and indicators of SDG 14 do not necessarily fit with the topography, where the length of the coast in the Gaza Strip does not exceed 45 km. PCBS data on its SDG online platform show that all indicators for this goal are not available (PCBS, 2020e).

Nevertheless, it is relevant to note that the coast in the Gaza Strip is heavily polluted with sewage water, as 58 percent of untreated or partially treated sewage water flows into coastal waters, at a rate of 46 million cubic meters annually (out of a total 80 million cubic meters) (World Bank, 2018). In addition, the Israeli occupation authorities, as part of their siege policy, reduced the size of the permitted area for fishing, from 20 nautical miles (about 37 km) according to the Oslo Agreement, to 12 nautical miles. Over the years, Israel further reduced the area to only 3 nautical miles. Today the permitted area for fishing ranges between 6 and 9 nautical miles. This has led to over-fishing in a small area and depletion of fish stocks, which is often not suitable for catching sufficient quantities of fish.

In the same context, the Ministry of Environment indicated that, as a result of the lack of job opportunities in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, an increasing number of citizens in the Gaza Strip resorted to fishing. This resulted in a significant increase in fishing activities, which in turn further threatened fish stocks in the Gaza Sea. Continuous power cuts in the Gaza Strip have also seriously affected sewage treatment operations. Sewage is dumped into the sea, directly threatening marine life and ecosystems of plants and fish.

EQA is the official body responsible for SDG 14. It adopted the following measures in order to achieve the targets within this goal:



After the completion of trials, opening a new wastewater treatment plant in Khan Yunis to tackle the increasing pollution of sea water in the Gaza Strip during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Completing the construction of a transmission line for treated wastewater and activating a plan for an irrigation network serving about 5,000 dunums of agricultural land in northern Gaza.



Maintaining and further developing a wastewater treatment plant in Rafah.



Working to manage the increase in fishing activities, which were a result of job losses in other sectors. Supporting the development of fishermen's capabilities in the field of boat rehabilitation, as well as providing new fishing nets, with the support of Oxfam and DFATD Canada, and in cooperation with UAWC. Continuing support for fisheries and fish farming, with funding from the Islamic Development Bank.

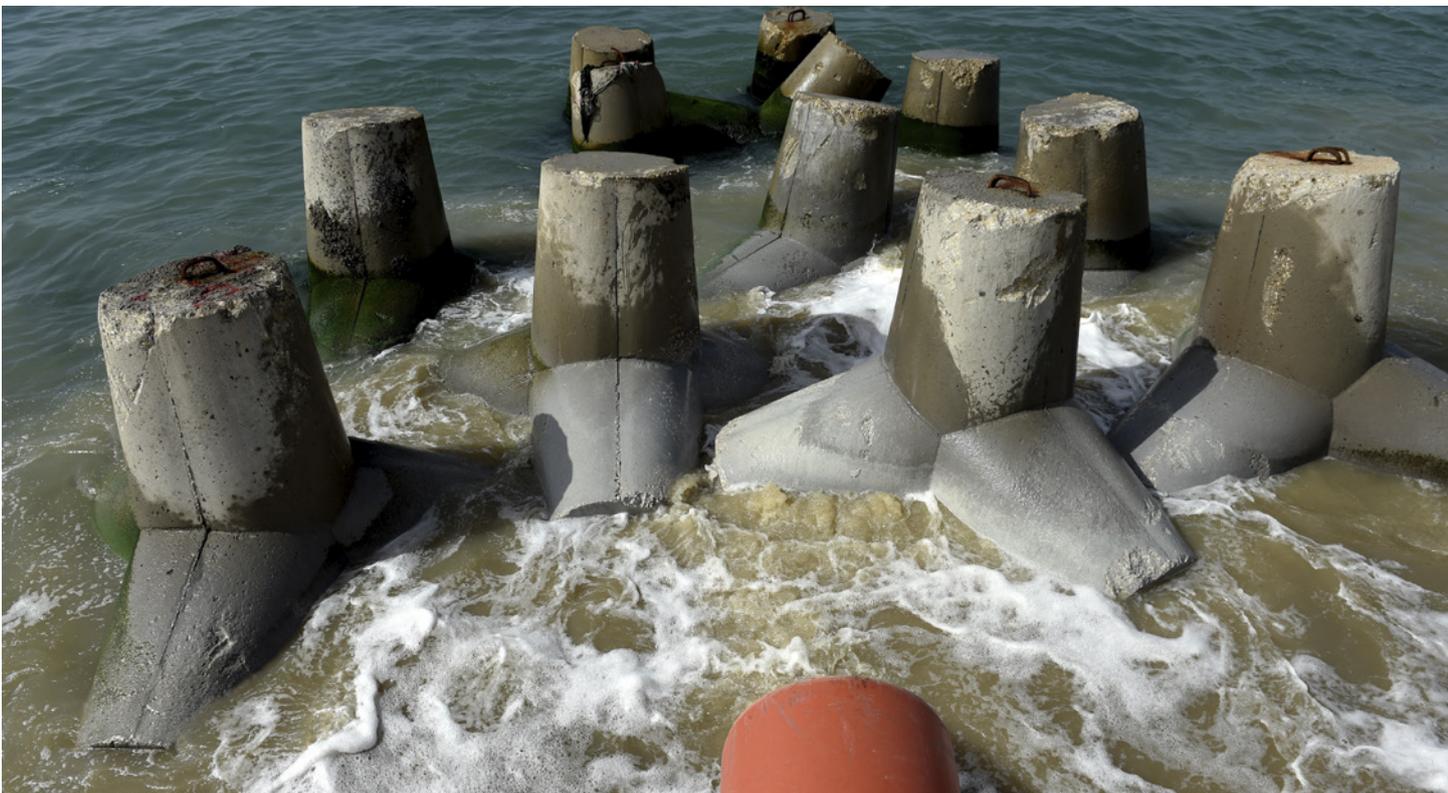
Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 14

Confront the drastic increase in wastewater discharge into the sea, by completing the construction of necessary wastewater treatment plants and expanding existing ones, in order to support the preservation of marine ecosystems.

Provide the necessary electricity to operate existing sewage plants through alternative sources, such as solar energy or generators, in the event that electricity is not available from their main source. This helps to address the increasing demand for electricity, and resultant decrease in supply to sewage treatment plants due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Apply political pressure on Israel to expand the fishing area in accordance with the Oslo Agreement to 20 nautical miles, which would contribute to halting the depletion of fish stocks and preserving marine ecosystems.

Work to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on fishermen's livelihoods through sustainable solutions for the development of fishing facilities and activities. Develop fishermen's capabilities and fishing tools, as many fishermen suffer from difficult living standards, given their inability to modernize their tools and the ban on fishing by occupation authorities.





SDG 15

Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

The EQA stated that the incidence of poaching wild animals increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. With closures and job loss, citizens had more spare time to practice hunting, and did so without adhering to prohibitive instructions and laws. This harmed numerous types of animals including deer and birds. An additional behaviour affecting land resources was cutting down wild trees to use for heating and cooking, especially in rural areas. Often, hunting and/or logging was performed by citizens who lost their incomes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and who were looking for alternative livelihoods that did not require capital.

At the same time, one positive effect of the COVID-19 pandemic was the activation of eco-tourism, and the spread of the culture of walking and hiking. Citizens became increasingly acquainted with nature reserves, plants, animals and historical sites that possess natural and cultural heritage. This led to increased public awareness of the essential inter-connectedness and inter-

In the context of its responsibility for SDG 15, EQA took the following actions:



Monitoring the dramatic rise in poaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with complaints submitted by citizens in this regard, and working to enforce the law by prosecuting those who poached. For example, in 2020, about 230 illegally traded birds, and about 20-30 gazelles were seized and released back into the wild.



Supporting the rehabilitation and preservation of natural pastures, along with the protection and management of natural reserves, while meeting the increased demand from citizens for domestic eco-tourism during the pandemic period.



Planting new forests, in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, over an area of 1,500 dunums. This has become particularly relevant given the increase in citizens' demand for hiking and visiting nature reserves.



Continuing efforts to prepare the national framework for biosafety to benefit from the positive effects – or minimize the negative impacts – of the COVID-19 pandemic on wildlife, and to ensure the achievement of sustainability efforts to meet SDG 15.

Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 15

Seek partnerships with experienced international institutions concerning wildlife and biodiversity protection. Develop strategies for promoting and protecting biodiversity in the State of Palestine, which has been negatively impacted by the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mobilize international support for implementing development projects in the environmental sector, especially with citizens switching to domestic and eco-tourism, given the suspension of outbound and inbound travel during the pandemic. This led in some cases to environmental deterioration and the depletion of natural resources.

Develop and expand nature reserves, in order to preserve biodiversity in the State of Palestine.

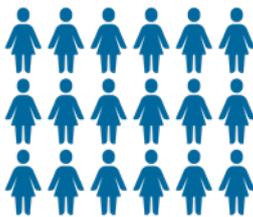
Develop a long-term plan to increase areas allocated to forests, as well as to protect land ecosystems from urban encroachment.





SDG 16

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels



778 women



481 were found to be subject to more than one type of violence



24 cases of murder of women recorded

during the first half of 2020

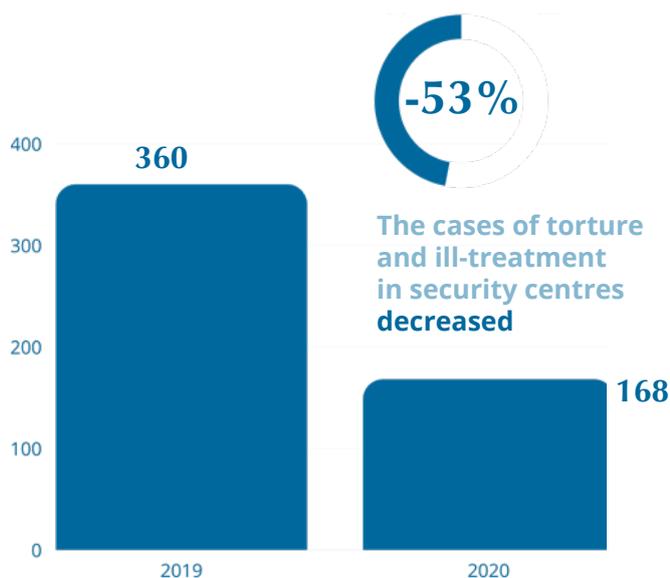
The first target within SDG 16 focuses on reducing, to a significant extent, all forms of violence and related mortality rates. Monthly reports issued by the Independent Commission for Human Rights in the State of Palestine (ICHR, 2020) show an increase in the number of unnatural deaths in the State of Palestine from 132 in 2019 to 209 in 2020. Although the report does not link the increase in the number of deaths to the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of violence and psychological distress have risen significantly as a result of long periods of closure, quarantine and job loss. An indirect relationship may exist between this dynamic and the increase in the number of unnatural deaths.

Studies also show that women were vulnerable to violence and psychological distress during the COVID-19 pandemic. One statistic indicates that of 778 women who received counselling during the pandemic period, 481 were found to be subject to more than one type of violence (physical, psychological, verbal, sexual) during this period (Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development, 2020). Twenty-four cases of murder of women were recorded. This is an indication of the increase in violence against women, as a result of the current situation (MAS, 2020).

With regard to strengthening the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice for all, there has been a decrease in cases of torture and ill-treatment, as well as in the number of violations of the right to a fair legal process. The number of cases of torture and ill-treatment in security centres decreased from 360 cases in 2019 to 168 cases in 2020 (ICHR, 2020), a decrease of 53 percent. Moreover, cases of violations of the right to fair legal procedures decreased from 360 to 284 cases (ICHR, 2020), a decrease of 21 percent. It seems that the closure and curfew measures adopted to confront the COVID-19 pandemic played a major role in this decline, as the movement of people decreased and economic activities stopped, while security services focused most of their efforts on implementing and monitoring the measures taken to contain the pandemic.

Statistics related to the fifth target within SDG 16, which is to significantly reduce corruption and bribery in all its forms, indicate an increase in the number of complaints against forms of corruption submitted to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in 2020. This reached 1,183 complaints/reports, compared to 904 complaints and contacts in 2019 (ACC, 2019). It should be noted that reports of abuse of power increased from 34 percent in 2019 to 67 percent in 2020, while reports of 'wasta' and nepotism decreased from 9 percent in 2019 to 7.7 percent in 2020 (ACC, 2019).

On the level of public administration and institution-building, an MoF report indicates that the proportion of the budget for the social services' sector decreased from 40.7 percent during January-October 2019, to 39 percent for the same period of 2020 (MoF, 2020). The percentage allocated to the infrastructure budget also decreased from 3 percent to 2 percent over the same period. The percentage allocated to security and public order increased from 22.4 percent to 25 percent. Overall, public spending decreased from 75.7 percent of the original budget for 2019, to 73.2 percent in 2020 (MoF, 2020).



1,183 corruption complaints/reports in 2020

904 complaints/reports in 2019 against corruption

The Ministry of Justice took the following measures in the context of facing the repercussions of COVID-19 on SDG 16:



Providing a range of electronic services to citizens to counter challenges associated with mobility and face-to-face communications, in light of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Supporting senior officials at the Ministry of Justice with the necessary electronic tools and devices to ensure the proper functioning of their work, especially in light of the movement restrictions adopted to counter the spread of COVID-19.



In order to confront the increasing demand for legal services due to the increase in violence against women and children, and due to the difficulty for citizens in villages to reach city centres, work progressed on setting-up a mobile legal clinic project to reach remote places where violations occurred.



Setting up an international electronic encyclopaedia, allowing citizens to follow developments in international resolutions/recommendations, in addition to speeches by heads of state. The encyclopaedia is of a legal/political nature.

Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 16

Restructure the work plans of the Ministry of Justice, with the aim of combining the various activities on the implementation of the rule of law and justice, and the intention of measuring progress made in achieving SDG 16.

The lack of official indicators and statistics that measure the effects of the pandemic on SDG 16 requires the Ministry of Justice, with the participation of members of the national SDG team, to formulate the necessary indicators, especially since this goal has broad objectives.

Build partnerships among the Ministry of Justice, civil-society institutions and relevant donors in order to further develop the Ministry's capacities to ensure inclusive access to justice and strengthen the rule of law. The pandemic showed the urgent need for these partnerships, knowledge exchanges and capacity development efforts in order to sustain adequate service provision to communities.



SDG 17

Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

The first target of SDG 17 focuses on promoting the mobilization of domestic resources (including international support to developing countries) for the purpose of improving local capacities in tax collection and other revenues. In this regard, MoF's efforts to mobilize local resources were affected by the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was caused by the decrease in the ratio of total public revenues to GDP, from 21 percent in 2019 to 14.3 percent in 2020. The contribution of taxes to the budget decreased from 23.3 percent in 2019 to 21 percent in 2020 (MoF, 2020), as a result of the decline in production activities across most sectors. External support directed to the general budget also declined by 17.7 percent, from \$538 million in 2019 to \$443 million in 2020 (MoF, 2020).

With regard to foreign investment in the State of Palestine, the results of preliminary PCBS estimates indicate the existence of a large gap between the balance of Palestinian investments outside Palestine and the balance of foreign investment in the Palestinian economy, from \$2,098 million in 2019 to \$2,432 million in 2020 (PCBS and PMA, 2020). This reflects the negative impact on foreign investments by the pandemic. Foreign remittances also decreased by 8.3 percent, from \$1,971 million in 2019 to \$1,807 million in 2020 (PCBS and PMA, 2020), affected by the instability caused by the pandemic and its repercussions.

Technology plays a major role in enhancing the ability of countries to achieve the SDGs. It seems that closure and precautionary measures taken by the Palestinian government to confront the pandemic have contributed to an increase in the demand for the use of the Internet for work and education purposes. The results of the PCBS survey on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on economic institutions indicates that 12 percent of institutions started using the Internet, or increased their use of the Internet, online social media, niche applications or digital platforms in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Moreover, e-commerce in the State of Palestine was positively affected after total closure measures were adopted starting in March (Marar and Al-Khalidi, 2020). More individuals in the State of Palestine followed health instructions to stay at home and not go out, with a large number of them switching to online shopping (internal and external) via the Internet, in order to meet their needs for goods and services.

Foreign investments in the Palestinian economy decreased



Relevant government agencies have undertaken a set of interventions to strengthen partnerships for sustainable development, most notably:



During the COVID-19 pandemic, MoF mobilized as many local resources as possible, especially in light of the withholding of clearance revenues combined with the effects of the pandemic. It concluded agreements with banks to provide quick loans to finance government spending, in addition to mobilizing international support to cover the cost of facing the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.



In cooperation with internal and external parties, governmental institutions devoted efforts to enhance their use of technology and e-communications to ensure continuity of work by switching to remote working methods.



Government institutions, through the efforts of the Council of Ministers, benefitted from the State of Palestine's partnerships with many regional and international institutions and agencies to mobilize support and expertise to face the repercussions of the pandemic.



Governmental institutions have expressed commitment to work with partners to strengthen the institutional capacities for COVID-19 emergency response, including through the support of relevant international organizations such as WHO, UNDP, OCHA and others.



Recommendations for mitigating the COVID-19 impact on SDG 17

Raise public funding levels and mobilize resources to implement government interventions needed to counter the negative socio-economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

Strengthen information technology services and provide them at an affordable cost to all citizens. The pandemic has clearly shown the urgent need for this support – particularly for vulnerable and marginalized groups, and especially in the field of education and remote work.

Adopt urgent action to mobilize and redirect public and private sector resources to accelerate progress towards the SDGs, and mobilize the necessary international support for this. Establish international partnerships to benefit from relevant experiences, best practices and lessons learned from other countries in the area of SDG implementation and monitoring.

Mobilize financial and technical support for the State of Palestine, especially with the emerging priorities and needs in the sphere of public health.

There is a need for long-term investments through stimulating and encouraging foreign direct investment in priority areas for Palestinian society. This includes sustainable energy, infrastructure and transportation, as well as ICT.

Recommendations

The study outlines a set of recommendations based on the nature of the results and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on affected groups and sectors. These recommendations contribute to addressing the pandemic's negative effects on most SDGs and halting the erosion of SDG progress for both the goals and their associated targets.

1. Promote responsive governance and enhanced institutional capacities for accelerating and monitoring SDG progress

- Strengthen the capacities of institutions concerned with follow-up and monitoring of progress towards the SDGs. This includes harmonizing SDG targets and indicators according to the Palestinian context and its conditions.
- Operationalize communication and coordination mechanisms among members of the national SDG team, and between this team and civil society institutions (as well as other relevant parties) in order to monitor the effects that the pandemic has had on various SDG goals, and limit any deterioration.
- Improve and further develop the emergency system for dealing with the pandemic and health crises in general across national and local levels, and according to the specialization and authority of the various public entities. This requires effective and responsive governance capabilities to ensure the sustainability of the emergency system's functioning.
- Establish an emergency fund for crises in order to respond quickly to emerging needs, especially related to poverty, food security and health, which have deteriorated significantly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is reflected in the progress toward relevant SDGs.
- Activate the process of linking the SDGs with national plans, whether sectoral strategies or others, and formulating sectoral and cross-sectoral interventions that directly address relevant SDGs.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of the institutional framework regulating the relationship between governmental and non-governmental entities to ensure the exchange of information, cooperation and partnership on a regular basis on sustainable development issues. Activate partnerships and cooperation with scientific and research institutions on sustainable development issues.



2. Recommendations related to the most affected SDGs, especially SDGs 1 through 5 and SDG 8

- Develop economic and social empowerment programmes for poor and marginalized groups. Focus on economic and social policies that duly take into account the needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups, including women, the elderly and persons with disabilities.
- Develop appropriate and integrated social protection systems that cover all affected groups, with special emphasis paid to the developmental dimension of these systems.
- Address the needs of small-scale producers in different sectors in order to help them withstand the pandemic and overcome access barriers related to markets, financial services, inputs and expertise. The burden of malnutrition must be eradicated to ensure that no-one is left behind on the road to ending hunger.
- Extend wage subsidies on a sustainable basis (not just a one-off payment), and ensure the inclusion of the most-affected groups (especially workers in the tourism sector, street vendors, taxi drivers, workers in kindergartens, day sellers at popular markets, women-led MSMEs, and youth).
- Strengthen healthcare systems across the West Bank and Gaza, enhance public health preparedness and improve the healthcare systems' capacity to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Support the capacity of the healthcare systems to ensure continuity in the provision of basic health services, and facilitate access for all citizens, especially vulnerable groups.
- Develop an action plan for the education sector in order to enhance its ability to withstand new challenges created by the pandemic. This requires the participation of all relevant parties (government agencies, universities, civil society institutions, donors, etc.), with a focus on strengthening capacities for the development of distance education and e-learning systems.
- Adopt effective and sustainable policies and procedures that address the structural obstacles and root causes of discrimination against women in the labour market and various other fields, provided that they are backed by adequate resources. Strengthen accountability for commitments that have already been made concerning women's rights.
- Promote and support women's participation and leadership in policy-making and decision-making processes during crises and beyond, in conformity with women's rights and in response to their needs. This should include the most marginalized groups (such as female-headed households, poor, working women, women with disabilities and rural women). Ensure that plans for economic recovery are gender responsive and gender transformative, thus acknowledging and valuing women's capabilities, as well as identifying solutions to tackle gender barriers that constrain women's economic empowerment.
- Direct financial and technical support to data and statistical systems in the short term, to ensure the continuity of statistical operations in monitoring emergency response efforts, and to prepare mitigation/recovery strategies. In the medium to long term, it is necessary to increase investment in national data and statistical systems, and mobilize additional international and domestic resources to 'build back better' after the COVID-19 crisis and accelerate progress towards the SDGs.
- Ensure broader reliance on data sources within administrative records, artificial intelligence, open-source data, and non-traditional data sources.

3. General recommendations for realizing progress across all SDGs

Strengthen community awareness

- Develop advocacy and public awareness initiatives on the SDGs, including all age groups and covering all geographical regions.
- Spread awareness on the importance of promoting and achieving the SDGs through the education system, for example in secondary schools or technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes.
- Establish mechanisms to raise citizens' awareness of the importance of SDGs and increase their participation and contribution towards achieving these goals through their daily practices.

Increase investment in infrastructure and public utilities

- More effort is required to increase access to water and sanitation services, enhance wastewater treatment, improve the efficiency of water usage, expand cooperation across transboundary water basins, and protect and restore freshwater ecosystems.
- Intensify investments in renewable energy projects, especially in areas where it is difficult to extend the national electricity grid, as well as in agricultural areas.

4. Recommendations to the international community (including United Nations agencies and donors)

- Increase aid to the State of Palestine, whether related to budget support or allocated to vital projects and infrastructure, such as improving water networks, sanitation, health, energy, and infrastructure for public services and agriculture, especially in the Gaza Strip and Area C.
- Pay special attention to creating job opportunities in the State of Palestine, and expanding the scope of existing job-creation programmes.
- Support SMEs, accelerating plans to renew and improve services at industrial zones and crossings, while building capacities and supporting access to finance and markets.



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