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Restoring Household Access to Essential Social Services in Post-War Gaza: Health and Education

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Foreword

This research-policy paper, the first in a series addressing access to essential services in the Gaza Strip, is prepared in a highly complex humanitarian and policy context imposed by the genocidal war that Israel has been waging against the Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023. The war has resulted in large-scale and systematic devastation of the social and service infrastructure and plunged Gazan society into one of the gravest humanitarian crises in modern history. Nearly two years into the war, its ramifications have not been restricted to human losses and material destruction, but have undermined the very foundations of social life, most notably health and education services, thereby threatening both the humanitarian present and the future of development for entire generations to come.

Given this exceptional reality, the paper analyzes access to basic social services in the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of the October 2023 War, with particular focus on the health and education sectors as two central pillars of human resilience and social recovery. It also furnishes an in-depth analytical examination not only of the scale of destruction inflicted on the institutions that provide such services, but also of the structural gaps that have hindered families' access. In addition, it reviews the temporary adaptation mechanisms of households and local communities. It further addresses the role of humanitarian aid and community support networks in crisis mitigation.

Drawing on a combination of official national data, United Nations and international organizations' reports, and sector damage and needs assessments, the paper aims to provide evidence-based analysis that links socio-humanitarian diagnosis to the policy dimension. It also aims to move beyond descriptive approaches by formulating a package of practical interventions and policies distributed across key stakeholders, including the Palestinian government, UN organizations, the international community and donors, the private sector, and the local community. These interventions are geared towards ensuring the gradual restoration of basic social services on fair, inclusive, and sustainable foundations.

This paper falls within the broader framework of examining urgent socio-economic recovery needs in Palestine for the period 2025–2026. It complements the analytical groundwork for the basic infrastructure and

services paper by focusing on the social and humanitarian dimensions of recovery, and by linking the right to education and health to pathways for reconstruction and building community resilience within an extremely fragile political and economic context.

We would like to express our gratitude to the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) for its generous support of this series, conducted as part of a research project aimed at producing evidence-based knowledge to reinforce the steadfastness of the Palestinian society. Additionally, it seeks to provide decision-makers and national and international institutions with analytical and policy tools that assist them in the post-war period. We also wish to thank Dr. Rabeh Morrar, the Main Researcher, Fadi Daraghmeh, Assistant Researcher, and Ahmad Allawneh, Data Analyst, for their efforts in developing this policy analysis.

Feras Milhem
Director General

Summary

Since the outbreak of the war in October 2023, the Gaza Strip has suffered extensive destruction on an unprecedented scale, affecting all aspects of life and infrastructure. This has aggravated the already abysmal humanitarian crisis, which has directly impacted the ability of Gaza's population to access basic social services, particularly in the fields of education and health. Estimates indicate that approximately 90% of the infrastructure in the Gaza Strip has been destroyed or considerably damaged, with economic losses exceeding USD \$68 billion. The war has caused the displacement of around 1.9 million people, accounting for nearly 90% of the population, in addition to tens of thousands of casualties and fatalities. These conditions have directly contributed to the degradation of essential services, the spread of diseases, and increased rates of poverty and food insecurity, thereby threatening social stability and compromising the future of generations to come in Gaza.

The education sector in Gaza has experienced an almost complete collapse as a result of the targeting of educational institutions on a large scale. Most schools and universities have been bombed or partially destroyed, with approximately 93% of the educational infrastructure damaged or destroyed, resulting in an almost complete disruption of the educational process. Estimates indicate that over 650,000 children have been deprived of formal education, threatening to cause a long-term learning gap that could affect an entire generation of students. In an effort to adapt to these conditions, educational institutions and humanitarian organizations have opted to set up Temporary Learning Spaces (TLS) in tents or damaged buildings. They have developed initiatives in support of e-learning and distance education. However, these alternatives face significant challenges, including with regard to power outages, breakdowns in Internet connectivity, a lack of educational resources, and the difficulty of providing a safe and stable learning environment for students.

As for the health sector, the healthcare system in the Gaza Strip is witnessing an almost total collapse due to the direct targeting of medical facilities, as well as severe shortages of medical supplies, fuel, and clean water. International organizations have documented hundreds of attacks on hospitals and healthcare centers since the onset of the war, causing a large number of medical facilities to be out of service. The health sector is also suffering from a severe shortage of medical personnel due to overcrowding, fatalities, and displacement, in addition to the overwhelming strain caused by the upsurge in the number of casualties and patients. The situation is further aggravated by the spread of infectious diseases, driven by overcrowding in displacement areas, the deterioration of water and sanitation services, as well as the difficulty faced by chronically ill patients in accessing necessary treatment.

This crisis has had catastrophic impacts on the most vulnerable groups in society, most notably children, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Children have undergone profound psychological and social impacts due to the loss of family members, repeated displacement, or prolonged disruption of education, in addition to the spread of mental health disorders such as anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Women, particularly pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, face increased health risks due to the collapse of reproductive healthcare services and malnutrition. The elderly struggle to access medications and healthcare because of limited mobility and the destruction of health facilities. Persons with disabilities face compounded challenges owing to the difficulty of mobility and limited access to essential services, exacerbated by the lack of suitable infrastructure.

In light of these circumstances, the paper stresses the need to adopt a set of urgent policies and interventions to foster access to essential social services in Gaza. In the education sector, there is a pressing need to develop emergency education programs, establish temporary schools, and provide psychosocial support for students and teachers. In the health sector, it is important to set up field hospitals, strengthen primary healthcare services, and ensure the provision of essential medicines and medical supplies. The paper also highlights the necessity of reinforcing the role of the international community and humanitarian organizations in supporting reconstruction efforts, improving food security, and providing social protection networks for the most affected groups. Addressing these challenges requires an integrated humanitarian and development response that ensures the restoration of essential services. It also requires bolstering the Palestinian community's ability to remain steadfast and recover in Gaza in the post-war period.