



► Providing care through the social and solidarity economy

June 2024

Occupied Palestinian Territory: An assessment summary

Key points

- Affordable, quality early childhood education and care services are crucial for the Palestinian society. They support **children's development, improve labour market conditions for women** by increasing their workforce participation, **and address challenges like high unemployment rates**, despite the current lack of accessible and safe childcare options.
- A study by the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS), commissioned by the ILO, recommends improving early childcare services and working conditions in nurseries to **empower women** in the labour market, strengthening policies for workplace nurseries, and encouraging the creation of **social and solidarity economy entities to provide childcare services, promote workers' rights, deliver training, and create job opportunities**.

Background

In the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), the provision of childcare is deeply entwined with socio-economic challenges that significantly impact women's participation in the workforce and broader economic development. The region's complex socio-political environment, coupled with high unemployment rates, particularly among women, underscores a pressing need for structured, reliable, and accessible childcare services. Childcare responsibilities predominantly fall on women, greatly limiting their employment opportunities and perpetuating existing gender disparities. This situation is exacerbated by the fragmented and informal nature of current childcare solutions, which are often unregulated and vary widely in quality.

► People tend to rely on family members for childcare when the mother is working, but this is not available in the city context and therefore parents look for nurseries

► **Parent** / Attended focus group in Nablus

Recognizing the critical role of childcare in enabling women's economic empowerment and contributing to societal well-being, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has initiated the ["Promoting Productive Employment and Decent Work for Women in Egypt, Jordan, and the occupied Palestinian territory"](#) project which targets challenges in the care economy by aiming to develop sustainable models that can provide quality childcare while fostering economic opportunities for women. It is within this context, that the ILO's Gender, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Branch (GEDI) and Cooperatives, Social and Solidarity Economy Unit (COOP/SSE), initiated ["Cooperative Care Provision as a Gender Transformative Decent Work Solution"](#), an initiative which seeks to explore the viability of cooperative and other social and solidarity economy (SSE) entities as a model to deliver affordable, accessible, and quality childcare services in the OPT. The approach leverages the social and solidarity economy's potential for democratic governance and equitable distribution of benefits by promoting care that is affordable, accessible, sustainable, high-quality, and serves the needs of women and their children. The assessment aligns with broader efforts for women's economic empowerment in the region.

Key findings

The assessment undertaken for the research on early childhood care and cooperatives in Palestine has provided valuable insights into the challenges, opportunities, and complexities inherent in the sector. Through a comprehensive approach involving both primary and secondary data collection methods, the research encompassed diverse institutional and community contexts, ranging from urban to rural settings across different regions of the country. The research team, while working under extreme security conditions, were able to collect quality data from a variety of stakeholders, including policy makers, childcare providers, and parents:

- **Informal and fragmented market:** Current childcare services were found to be highly fragmented, often informal, and inadequately regulated, leading to significant disparities in access and quality, particularly in rural areas.
- **Low enrolment and access barriers:** Only 25% of children aged 3 to 5 years attend early childhood education (ECE) programmes, with significant challenges in accessibility due to movement restrictions, military checkpoints, and ongoing violence.
- **High cost and financial burden:** With 90% of childcare facilities being private, the high cost of childcare poses a significant financial burden on families, particularly given the high poverty rate of 27.3%, affecting approximately 1.5 million people.
- **Quality and safety concerns:** There are significant issues with the quality and safety of childcare services, especially in unregulated home nurseries. Many facilities lack adequate supervision, trained staff, and appropriate developmental activities for children.
- **Inadequate support for children with disabilities:** There is a lack of trained staff to support children with disabilities, insufficient awareness among caregivers to detect and address developmental delays, and limited inclusive services, leading to unmet needs for these children.

The assessment suggests the development of a childcare cooperative or other SSE entity within an institutional and community setting, and offers a proposed model with features designed specifically for the OPT. These features include governance structure to be adopted, the financing arrangements for service provision, the services provided (including type, quality and availability), the location of services, the target population, and the vision and purpose of the cooperative.

Recommendations

Building on the assessment's findings, an analysis was conducted regarding the cooperative/SSE model for childcare provision and strategic recommendations were identified:

- **Regulatory framework enhancement:** Adapt the legal framework to better support the establishment and operation of childcare cooperatives, ensuring they can function effectively and expand their reach.
- **Capacity building:** Invest in training and development programmes for cooperatives, focusing on governance and business management for childcare cooperatives including early childhood care and education to ensure high-quality service delivery. ILO Think.CareCoop & Start.CareCoop have been developed to help establish and manage a care cooperative.
- **Community engagement and awareness:** Launch targeted campaigns to shift cultural perceptions about gender roles in childcare, emphasizing the economic and social benefits of shared childcare responsibilities and cooperative models.
- **Economic incentives:** Establish financial incentives such as subsidies or tax benefits for families and businesses that invest in or utilize cooperative childcare services, making it an economically attractive option.
- **Pilot projects and scalability:** Initiate pilot cooperative childcare projects in diverse geographic and socio-economic settings within the OPT to test and refine the model before broader implementation.

Next steps

Based on the insights gained from the assessment, the project team is testing the applicability of care provision through cooperative and other SSE models in the OPT. A pilot initiative is currently underway in Nablus governorate team.



ILO capacity building tools
Think.CareCoop & Start.CareCoop were developed in 2023 and are ready for translation and roll-out in pilot-countries.

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