



بذور للإتماء الصءى والائئماعى  
Juzoor for Health & Social Development



# **The Palestinian Network for Early Childhood Development (PNECD) Report**

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## **1.1 Introduction**

The Arab Network for Early Childhood Development (ANECD) is an Arab institution that works to develop, raise, and protect early childhood by providing support and networking with institutions concerned with childhood by producing knowledge, advocacy, and influencing policies. The Palestinian Network for Early Childhood Development (PNECD) emerged from the broader ANECD, and has been continuously advocating and providing support for early childhood development in Palestine through carrying out initiatives, encouraging partnership, and supporting information exchange. In light of the ongoing genocide in Gaza, it is imperative that we prioritize and adapt early childhood development initiatives, taking into consideration the ever-evolving situation and challenges. This report will highlight the activities of some PNECD members and their work in Gaza and the West Bank.

## **1.2 Background of the Emergency Situation**

The situation in Gaza has long been characterized by complex political, social, and economic challenges, with a significant impact on childhood. The region has faced ongoing conflict, including periods of intense violence and military operations, leading to widespread destruction of infrastructure and displacement of families. Children in Gaza bear a heavy burden, as they are often exposed to trauma, violence, and psychological distress from a very young age. The lack of access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and clean water further exacerbates their vulnerability. Limited opportunities for recreational activities and play, coupled with high rates of poverty and food insecurity, contribute to a challenging environment for childhood development. International organizations and humanitarian efforts continue to work towards addressing these critical issues and providing support for the children of Gaza, but the situation remains precarious and in urgent need of sustainable solutions.

### *Effects of trauma and crisis on ECD*

The effects of the ongoing war in Gaza are particularly challenging in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) stage. ECD refers to the rapid emotional, psychosocial, and physical changes that occur through the early years of a child's life, focusing on their wellbeing from birth to 8 years.

Trauma and crisis can have a significant and long-term impact on the early development of children. Factors such as stress, fear, and anxiety during traumatic events can affect a child's sense of safety and security. This can cause profound psychological and emotional challenges, manifesting in many ways, including increased anxiety levels, difficulty regulating and expressing emotions, and impaired social development. Additionally, cognitive development will be impaired as a result of trauma exposure, affecting brain development in areas responsible for memory, language, learning, emotional processing, and other functions. Without the proper support and help, these effects can have devastating long-term consequences on the wellbeing and future of children. As a result, this period is critical for laying the foundation of their lifelong physical and

psychological health. It is therefore vital to target services for children at this vulnerable developmental stage, to mitigate and prevent the long-term impacts of this war.

### **1.3 Joint Response between PNECD and ANECD**

ANECD works with national early childhood networks in a number of Arab countries that it initiated or contributed to establishing. It is one of four regional early childhood networks that deal with issues of the rights of young children globally.

PNECD, in collaboration with ANECD, are dedicated to upholding children's rights, happiness, and well-being in Arab societies marked by freedom, justice, and equality. ANECD network supports and advocates for the PNECD members. They work to amplify their voice and work, by sharing PNECD's stories and successes on their various platforms. ANECD also work to organize and provide support for PNECD to conduct their ECD activities.

PNECD's core goals include elevating early childhood issues on the national agenda, advocating for national ECD programs aligned with global development goals, advanced theories, and the National Strategic Plan for Early Childhood. Notably, PNECD uniquely addresses Early Childhood Development in Palestine by merging developmental and humanitarian interventions. Palestinian children, born into the realities of Israeli occupation, conflict, violence, and displacement, face immense challenges that impact their mental, physical, and emotional well-being. PNECD's approach integrates comprehensive, multi-dimensional, and multi-sectoral strategies, combining development programs with humanitarian inputs to address immediate and long-term needs, promote stability, and enhance children's conditions and development.

#### *Formation of Emergency Task Force*

PNECD consists of various members, such as Juzoor, Masader Society for Early Childhood in Palestine, Al Tufula - Pedagogical and Multipurpose Women's Center, and the Palestinian Childhood Institute, and more. The members have contributed in various activities since the war on Gaza till present, as part of a Emergency Joint Response. Their activities are diverse and include psychosocial support, managing psychological stress, entertaining activities for children, storytelling, as well as education for kindergarten teachers, parents, principals and more. This surely had a high impact mentally and psychologically on children, kindergarten teachers and parents. It also raised awareness for parents and teachers and helped children become interactive in their surrounding environment especially in stressful situations.

#### *Activation of Website and Facebook for Advocacy*

PNECD members have agreed to use multiple media platforms to disseminate messages and reach a wide coverage to achieve a positive change in family and community behaviors so that the unified message is disseminated through multiple channels that contribute to reinforcing and

consolidating the message. Accordingly, a set of stations and channels were developed, including:

1. TV channels (Interviews).
2. Social media (Facebook Page).
3. Producing innovative and focused educational media (Videos).

On 8/10/2023, an awareness-raising approach was adopted to cope with the high level of stress among children and their parents as a result of repeated traumatic exposure. Accordingly, through the Crisis Psychological Support Unit, messages on social media platforms were shifted to those related to educating parents about dealing with their child during difficult times, in addition to the initiative of the Psychological Intervention Unit in contacting parents in the Gaza Strip and Jenin to provide psychological counseling and support

## **1.4 Progress and Achievements from PNECD members**

### **Juzoor for Health and Social Development**

Juzoor's efforts in Gaza to protect and support these children vary from psychosocial to medical. One of the most important services provided starts at the birth of the child, providing midwives and other health professionals with midwifery and delivery kits designed to equip them to carry out safe deliveries and regular check-ups to ensure the safety of both mothers and their infants. Juzoor distributed 600 clean delivery kits to 35,000 expectant mothers, as well as pregnant hygiene kits to the 500 pregnant women in Juzoor's shelters. Regular follow-ups are conducted by Juzoor's health teams for both mother and child, and neonatal hygiene products and postnatal medical care are offered. Juzoor's team have also established a partnership with Al-Awda and Kamal Odwan Hospitals in Northern Gaza to streamline the process of referring high-risk pregnancies, C-sections, and newborns/babies with medical issues from Juzoor's shelters when necessary.

Furthermore, to ensure the babies are well-fed and nourished, Juzoor's health teams are guiding new mothers on breastfeeding, and children are regularly screened for malnutrition by measuring their mid upper arm circumference (MUAC). Volunteers and health care professionals were trained by Juzoor on hands-on training for the measurement of MUAC and use of ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF). Those that are identified as malnourished are referred to a pediatrician and provided with the needed supplements or RUTF. Other efforts to ensure nourished children include distributing 151,200 cans of 200mL ready-to-use milk, which have been distributed to 6 hospitals and clinics across the Gaza Strip. To further ensure well-nourished children and breastfeeding mothers, water bottles and nutrition kits are also distributed to shelters throughout the Gaza Strip, which include oral rehydration solutions (for cases of diarrhea), micronutrient powders, zinc tablets, biscuits, food cans, and multivitamins, as well as pregnancy and lactation supplements.

In addition to nutrition kits, other types of kits have been distributed as part of supporting child health; in February, 165 pregnancy kits, 135 new born kits, 1,800 winterization kits for children under 5,600 mother and child kits, and 680 hygiene kits were distributed.

Juzoor has also prioritized vaccination initiatives. A vaccine program was designed with the aim of providing around 20,000 children under the age of 2 years with the required vaccinations according to the Palestinian Immunization Program. In the first week of the program's launch, more than 2,500 children in the north of Gaza were vaccinated with BCG, MMR, OVP, and pentavalent vaccines, among others. To complement these efforts, Juzoor conducted a comprehensive vaccine education and training sessions, which covered topics such as vaccine-preventable diseases and techniques for administering vaccines.

Focus on infants' and children's health is also a part of the supportive emergency care Juzoor's teams provide in Gaza shelters. In addition to health counseling, children in shelters are screened for various health concerns, such as malnutrition, communicable diseases (gastroenteritis, diarrhea, respiratory diseases, scabies, and meningitis), and non-communicable diseases (diabetes, hypertension, and asthma). They also receive first-aid and emergency care services that tend to injuries such as burns, accidents, wound dressing, or injections.

To further ensure child safety, a concept for daycare centers was recently proposed. A center that can simultaneously allow women to give birth in a safe and controlled space, as well as provide a daycare center for children. It can also act as a one-stop shop for children to receive health care, vaccinations, and psychological support. This concept is currently under trial in Jabalia.

Psychosocial health is also a vital aspect of Juzoor's response. Efforts have expanded to target 700 children daily, mainly in the south of Gaza, emphasizing referrals and ensuring children that require specialized support and care are directed to the appropriate resources. This approach aims to support the psychological and mental well-being of children in Gaza and encourage early child development. Following psychosocial support (PSS) training provided by Juzoor, volunteers created psychosocial support groups in each shelter, consisting of 30-40 children. They conducted psychosocial support sessions and activities for children, such as hide and seek. Five sessions were conducted in each shelter for a total of 65 sessions.

Juzoor also partnered with the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) to implement psychosocial interventions. These interventions include Psychological First Aid (PFA) for children immediately after the bombing to stabilize their emotions, connect them with support, as well as offer them a sense of safety. PFA activities include expressive art therapy such as drawing, painting, and other creative activities, to encourage non-verbal expression of emotion and processing of trauma. Juzoor and AICS also worked together to provide PFA kits which include toys, games, and other activities that promote a sense of control and mastery. Play intervention was also used, which utilizes play therapy techniques to allow children to play out and make sense of their experiences in a safe environment.

### *Collaboration with Nafs for Empowerment*

Nafs for Empowerment has also partnered with PNECD through Juzoor to provide psychosocial support in the southern region of Gaza. The team has resumed its recreational activities for the children sheltering in UN schools in Rafah City. The recreational activities carried out by the team have varied to include Tele-Match games, which help the children release their psychological distress resulting from the ongoing Israeli aggression, face-painting, and folk singing and dancing, which affirm the Palestinian identity. The team has focused on providing an opportunity for all children without exception, in order to create an inclusive environment where respect is shown for all and none are left behind.

On the other hand, it was painful to notice some children not participating in the activities as they had to wait in an endless queue to get water. In other words, the war has rearranged the priorities of Palestinian children to prioritize food and water over play. Therefore, some team members left the main circle to engage them in the activity.

### **Masader Society for Early Childhood in Palestine**

Masader has been actively involved in supporting pre-school children and their caregivers during the war in Gaza and the West Bank from October 2023 to March 2024. Key activities include:

- 1. Training Meetings with Kindergarten Principals and Teachers:** Masader conducted training sessions for 60 kindergarten principals and teachers across different regions in the West Bank. These sessions involved interactive activities like motor skills exercises, expressive arts, rhythmic movements with music, and drama activities. The training also covered working with parents in stressful situations and planning activities for children.
- 2. Open Days for Children:** Six open days were organized in kindergartens across the West Bank, engaging around 400 children. Activities included face painting, balloon activities, drama performances, soap bubble fun, dancing to traditional songs, competitions, drawing, storytelling, and using materials like playdough and parachutes. Mothers of the children actively participated in implementing these activities.
- 3. Training Meetings with Children's Families:** Masader conducted training sessions for about 80 mothers from five kindergartens. The focus was on interactive activities like drawing to express feelings, storytelling, movement exercises, and creating educational materials at home. Mothers were trained to spend quality time with their children, alleviate psychological pressures, and support their growth and learning through engaging activities.
- 4. Training of Trainers (TOT) Program:** Ten female trainers from different areas of the West Bank participated in a TOT program focusing on early childhood care and education. The goal was to increase the number of qualified personnel for training and supervision in this field.

Overall, Masader's activities aimed to provide support and alleviate psychological pressures for pre-school children and their caregivers during challenging times in the Gaza and West Bank regions.

### **Al Tufula - Pedagogical and Multipurpose Women's Center**

During the specified period, the focus was on enhancing community solidarity by supporting marginalized groups, particularly those in derecognized villages, which were severely affected by the war. The efforts included providing psychological support, collaborating with civil society institutions, and advocating for the rights of marginalized communities. Specific actions undertaken during this time included:

1. Holding meetings for parents to address psychological pressures for themselves and their children.
2. Meeting with nursery educators to address psychological stress among staff, children, and families.
3. Developing crisis policies and implementing them with staff and children in nurseries.
4. Meeting with "Al-Nashmiyyat volunteers" for bag distribution preparation.
5. Distributing 400 enrichment bags in Nazareth hospitals with educational materials for mothers and children.
6. Redesigning and printing activity booklets for children to express feelings and relieve stress
7. Designing and printing various games for psychosocial support.
8. Writing information papers for parents about managing psychological stress, distributing 3,000 copies and sharing them online and with relevant networks.

Overall, Al Tufula's work focuses on psychological support, education, and advocacy for marginalized groups, especially during crises like the recent war.

Additionally, for psychosocial support in derecognized villages, Al Tufula developed family bags that were prepared in Nazareth by both male and female volunteers from the "Nashmiyyat group", which were distributed in derecognized villages. To date, Al Tufula has reached the distribution of 3,000 bags.

These bags include:

1. 5 brochures containing information about psychological stress, its manifestations, and ways to deal with it by parents.
2. The booklet, "Tell me what is in your heart", which includes activities and worksheets to relieve psychological pressure and self-expression for children.
3. The story of the dark, which is about the fear of the dark.
4. The story of "Washousha", which is used to express feelings.
5. A third story that varied between the story "On the Roof," "How Sweet I Eat," "Sunflowers," or other stories.

6. My calendar or book from the AlNakab to Bessan, a bag of plants and their toys.
7. Several multi-use family games, including plant games, 4 card games, games and other materials
8. Colors
9. Paste

The campaign and preparation for it were an opportunity for many male and female volunteers to integrate into the community and get out of the state of helplessness that controlled many people. It also provided an opportunity to reach the most marginalized groups in our society and gave them the feeling that they are part of a society that cares for all its sons and daughters and promotes social solidarity. Many of the families who received the bags expressed their joy and happiness with this gift.

### **The Palestinian Childhood Institute**

During times of wars and crises, the Palestinian Institute for Childhood Interventions prioritizes caring for children and addressing their psychological and social needs. They integrate programs to provide psychological interventions and entertaining activities for children, especially during the war on Gaza. Their initiatives aim to create a supportive environment, promote mental health and well-being, and build resilience skills. The Institute conducts psychological interventions and recreational activities in crucial locations like the Jenin camp area, Al-Najah Teaching Hospital, the Jordan Valley area, and the Old City of Nablus to alleviate children's psychological pressures and enhance their stability.

The Palestinian Childhood Institute organized several events and initiatives to provide psychological support and purposeful entertainment for children during challenging times:

1. An event at Al-Najah National University Hospital targeted children of cancer patients from Gaza, offering purposeful recreational activities and distributing symbolic gifts. Despite difficulties, children enthusiastically participated.
2. A similar event in Ras al-Auja included activities like drawing, singing, and playing football, which improved mood and communication among children and mothers in a marginalized area facing various challenges.
3. Another event in Haret al-Habla involved drawing the Palestinian flag, balloon shaping, art workshops, storytelling, and gift distribution to strengthen identity and creativity among children affected by Israeli incursions.
4. An awareness campaign on Facebook provided practical guidelines and psychological care advice for families during wars and crises, including specific guidance for children with autism spectrum disorder.
5. The Palestinian Institute also sent a psychological support team to the Jenin camp area regularly to conduct guidance sessions and relieve psychological pressures for children and families affected by conflict and occupation forces.

Overall, these efforts aimed to create a supportive environment, promote mental well-being, and build resilience among children facing challenging circumstances.

### **1.5 Challenges**

PNECD members face various challenges in implementing their ECD activities including:

- Not all activities can be implemented due limited resources and restrictions from the Israeli Occupation
- Access to Gaza has also been prohibited due to damaged infrastructure and transportation. More specifically, some members have access to their offices in Gaza, while others cannot access or do not have local offices.
- Finding appropriate interventions within the activities to help children cope, accounting for the way the war has built and changed their minds, their psychological stability, and even their bodies.
- Destruction of consistent and stable care-giving environments, which make it difficult to provide psychological and emotional support.
- Difficulty in delivering effective support and interventions, due to the shortage of trained professionals in ECD.

### **1.6 Recommendations**

The following recommendations are suggested based on current PNECD activities and challenges:

- Develop ECD guide and activities to use in times of crises and emergencies.
- Prioritize investments in ECD initiatives as well as capacity building programs specializing in ECD for teachers, health care workers, community workers, and volunteers.
- Strengthening coordination and cooperation between PNECD and local organizations.
- Incorporating community-based interventions to empower care-givers and families.
- Conduct regular assessments to monitor the effectiveness of the interventions, and account for the evolving situation needs and update interventions accordingly.

### **1.7 Conclusion**

In summary, the collaborative efforts of ANECD and PNECD, have made significant efforts in an attempt to mitigate the impact of war on children and caregivers, in both Gaza and the West Bank. These initiatives ranged from medical care, nutrition, and psychosocial interventions, aiming to build resilience and promoting the early development of children in these challenging circumstances. Continued collaboration and support are essential to ensure their well-being and safety.