# "DANGER IS OUR REALITY"

The impact of conflict and the occupation on education in the West Bank of the occupied Palestinian territory



Save the Children

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## Attacks on education: a note on terminology

For the purpose of this report, we will be using the definition of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA): 'Attacks on education are any intentional threat or use of force – carried out for political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic, religious, or criminal reasons – against students, educators and education institutions.'

Save the Children acknowledges that many of the incidents that children reported to us fall outside this definition, for example incidents relating to heavily armed military or settlers that make them feel unsafe in the classroom, or on their way to and from school. However, we give them equal weight and representation in this report as the children do not make a distinction between these incidents and attacks that fall within the GCPEA definition, and identified them as a barrier to a quality education or feeling safe at school.

*All the the children's names have been changed to protect their identity



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Palestinian children have lived the entirety of their lives under military occupation and conflict. This has impacted every aspect of their lives, from their safety and development to their wellbeing and mental health. Not only must children's right to education be guaranteed but also schools, in this context, should be their place of safety and source of hope. Instead, many Palestinian children are exposed to dangers on their way to and from school and in the classroom. They are too often denied their right to learn due to attacks on education[1] and other threats to safe access to schools including checkpoints and the conduct of the military around schools.

Globally, attacks on education are increasing, according to a coalition of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). [2] Today, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory[3] (oPt) are some of the riskiest places for children to go to school, with at least 1,147 incidents in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Israel between 2013 and 2017, which affected tens of thousands of students.[4] With the Israeli military fulfilling law enforcement functions in large areas of the West Bank, bringing the military into close proximity with children and their schools, and Gaza being so densely populated, it is no surprise that the vast majority of these incidents occurred in the oPt.

According to the Education Cluster,[5] threats to children's education in the oPt are also on the rise, with the number of recorded education-related incidents increasing by almost 60% between 2018 and 2019.[6] Overall, it's estimated by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs that more than half a million children across the oPt face challenges in accessing quality education in a safe, child-friendly environment.[7]

Children's right to education is threatened when schools, students or teachers come under attack. Furthermore, children, teachers and parents that we surveyed for this report told us that military conduct during 'law enforcement' activities feels deeply threatening and prevents them from feeling safe at school– this is therefore included in the scope of this report.

During armed conflict, such as the ongoing military occupation of the oPt, military attacks on education violate international humanitarian and criminal laws.[8] Attacks on schools and hospitals are also one of the six grave violations against children in conflict that are identified and condemned in the UN Security Council's Children and Armed Conflict agenda.[9]

The scale of attacks on children's education in the oPt is well-documented thanks to a robust, UN-led monitoring system. Commendable work by the Education Cluster and the wider humanitarian community records all the protection threats children feel in order to strengthen a targeted response. However, there has been a distinct lack

[1] For the purpose of this report, we will be using the definition of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack GCPEA: Attacks on education are any intentional threat or use of force – carried out for political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic, religious, or criminal reasons – against students, educators and education institutions. For more background, see protectingeducation.org/what-attack-education

[2] GCPEA (2018), Education Under Attack 2018, protectingeducation.org/news/attacks-education-worsening-globally-education-under-attack-2018-shows

[3] This is how the GCPEA describes the context, see – protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/eua2018_israel-palestine.pdf

[4] GCPEA (2018), Education Under Attack 2018: Country Profiles – Israel/Palestine, protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/eua2018_israel-palestine.pdf

[5] The Education Cluster is a forum for coordination and collaboration on education, bringing together NGOs, UN agencies, and other partners under the shared goal of ensuring well-coordinated and equitable provision of education

[6] In 2019, the Education Cluster recorded 328 education – related incidents affecting 19,913 students – compared to 206 documented incidents in 2018.

[7] Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, see ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/humanitarian_needs_overview_2019.pdf

[8] See protectingeducation.org/what-international-laws-are-violated

[9] See childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations/attacks-against-schools

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

of research on the broader impact of attacks on education on children, identified and articulated by children themselves.

In recognition of this, Save the Children surveyed more than 400 children across the West Bank, to understand their perception of the reverberating impact of these attacks on their right to education. Save the Children recognises that is not a statistically significant or representative sample as it is drawn from schools that have experienced the highest numbers of education-related violations. However, it is felt that the findings will contribute to a dialogue on how best to advance the education of Palestinian children in the region and overcome the barriers many of them face.

Children identified many incidents that make them feel unsafe at school and deny them their right to an education. These include military and settler presence or intimidation on routes to and from school, military raids and attacks on schools, settler violence and vandalism in and around schools, intimidation and harassment at checkpoints, arrests and detention, and a lack of safe and accessible transportation to school.

The children shed new light on how these threats affect their emotional wellbeing, sense of security, ability to learn, relationships with family and teachers, and how they feel about their future. They described feelings of fear, anxiety and stress on their way to and from school and at school, with physical and emotional symptoms including uncontrollable shaking, fainting, loss of self-confidence, and despair.

Many also reported difficulty concentrating in class, troubled either by what had happened to them on the way to school or in anticipation of another raid or attack as they sit in their classroom. Children acutely recognise that this affects their ability to learn, and that the problem is compounded by the number of school days – and sometimes important examinations – they miss due to military presence around schools, checkpoints, and attacks on education. Children also emphasised that military presence, intimidation, and attacks on education put certain groups, such as children living with disabilities and those who have been in detention, at even higher risk.

Despite the myriad dangers, children in the West Bank overwhelmingly like school and strongly believe in the importance of education. But they want to come to school without fear and feel safe while in their classrooms. They also want their schools to improve. They want more child-friendly and accessible classrooms, better facilities, and more opportunities to play and go on school trips.

**THE MESSAGE FROM PALESTINIAN CHILDREN IS CLEAR:**
**stop attacking our education, and make our schools safe, accessible, inclusive and fun.**

The Israeli and Palestinian authorities, international community, and donors must answer this call and take urgent steps to ensure that Palestinian children's vision becomes a reality, as it should be for children all around the world. Save the Children is calling on all parties to the conflict, and duty bearers, to protect all children's uninhibited access to education in line with their obligations under international law.







Photo: Jonathan Hyams / Save the Children

# WEST BANK CONTEXT

The research presented in this report arises in the context of an ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians that began in the early 20th century. A protracted protection crisis persists in the oPt, with pervasive humanitarian consequences. This is largely attributable to Israel's ongoing occupation of the West Bank for more than 50 years[10] and the illegal blockade, according to the United Nations, of the Gaza strip for more than a decade.[11]

The West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is the key focus of this research. The Oslo II Accord divided the West Bank into three administrative divisions – Areas A, B and C – which are each governed differently. Area A is exclusively administered by the Palestinian Authority; Area B is administered by both the Palestinian Authority and Israel; and Area C (which makes up 60% of the West Bank) is administered by Israel and contains Israeli settlements. 2.6 million Palestinians live in Areas A and B and 300,000 live in Area C.[12]

The research areas – Bethlehem, Nablus and Hebron – are divided across both Areas A and C. The children that were consulted in East Jerusalem live in the Old City, Al Thori, Abu Dis, and Abu Nawar, which fall within Areas B and C, as well as the Israeli E1 plan.

Palestinian children and their families face a range of challenges living in these areas of the West Bank. Under the weight of the occupation, expanding settlements, and an increase in demolitions and displacement, living conditions have deteriorated for an ever more disenfranchised population. The situation of children living in the West Bank is characterised by violence and harassment by Israeli military and settlers[13], arrests and detention, the loss of their homes and schools, and restricted movement and access to essential services.[14]

## EDUCATION IN GAZA

**The blockade imposed by Israel and sporadic violent clashes and conflicts, have severely disrupted Palestinian children's education in the Gaza Strip, and in the area along its perimeter with Israel.**

The deterioration in the humanitarian situation has pushed more families into poverty, making basic education supplies and transportation costs unaffordable for many and increasing the risk of school dropouts.

An insufficient number of classrooms has forced two-thirds of schools to operate on double or triple shifts, with learning hours reduced to just 4.5 hours a day. It is estimated that 86 new school buildings and 1,081 new classrooms need to be built in Gaza over the next five years.

In 2019, 12 schools were damaged in Israeli forces air strikes, impacting almost 9,000 children. Every escalation of conflict leads to lost education for children – schools in both Gaza and Israel have had to close their doors in the past during escalations in conflict.

Children with disabilities, including children injured during the Great March of Return demonstrations, are the most affected by the deteriorating situation, as many of them lack basic mobility or other assistive devices that would facilitate their learning in the classroom. They also lack adequate transportation means, adapted school facilities, and staff capacity to accommodate for their needs.



Alongside this, there are chronic shortfalls in funding for education[15] and increasing restrictions on humanitarian actors, leading to an increasingly diminished operational space. For the children of Palestine, who make up almost half the population, growing up in this context is having a profoundly negative impact on their childhood and future prospects.

In the West Bank, Palestinian children's education is undermined in a myriad of ways. Children have told us that key barriers to their education include military operations, settler-related incidents and movement restrictions, which put them at risk of injury, detention or disruption to their learning. According to estimates by the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE), there are currently more than 8,000 children and 400 teachers in need of a protective presence, or observer groups, in order to safely access school in the West Bank.[16] Palestinian children's education in the West Bank is also compromised by a chronic shortage in education infrastructure due to lack of funding, building restrictions and school demolitions.

In the areas where this research was undertaken, violations of the right to education and key barriers to education[17] include:

- In **East Jerusalem**, Palestinian school children are affected by a significant shortage of classrooms (an estimated 2,000[18] more are needed). This is because of heavy restrictions on Palestinian construction, which have forced many Palestinians to build illegal school structures, if at all, and have led to stop-work orders and demolition of school buildings. At the time of writing, 50 schools are under threat of full or partial demolition in East Jerusalem and Area C, due to Israeli-issued demolition orders.[19]

  In addition, students who attend Israeli-run or Israeli-funded schools must follow a curriculum that only recognises Palestinians as a minority group. Their textbooks and lessons therefore undermine Palestinian students' cultural and national identities.[20]

- In **Nablus**, Palestinian school children are at serious risk of settler violence on their way to and from school, with more than half of all settler-related incidents occurring in the governorate. These settlement activities have led to the deployment of Israeli military and police forces. Over the past two years, Nablus school children reported the highest number of attacks on schools across the oPt. [21]

- In **Hebron**, Palestinian children are at increased risk of military harassment and detention as a result of the high number of checkpoints they have to cross to get to school. In the H2 area of Hebron, approximately 2,200 students have their journey to school obstructed by checkpoints every day and frequently face harassment, intimidation and delays that result in lost school time.[22] According to a UN assessment, 85% of people in the H2 area identify harassment by Israeli soldiers and settlers as major concerns affecting children's access to education.[23]

- In **Bethlehem**, there are 18 Israeli settlements with more than 100,000 settlers who pose protection risks, according to the United Nations. This results in an increased military presence in the area. Students must use dangerous roads with heavy and fast-moving settlement traffic to reach school, in a city where the Separation Wall[24] divides main roads, separating people from their land and preventing children from accessing direct routes to school.

[10] United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 of 2016 states that Israel's settlement activity constitutes a "flagrant violation" of international law and has "no legal validity". It demands that Israel stop such activity and fulfil its obligations as an occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention. See https://www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/SRES2334-2016.pdf

[11] The blockade has been deemed by the UN and ICRC to be illegal under international law as it constitutes 'collective punishment' and prevents civilians from securing their basic rights. See https://newsarchive.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13455&LangID=E

[12] OCHA (2018), Humanitarian Facts and Figures, see https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/factsheet_booklet_final_21_12_2017.pdf

[13] 'Settlers' refers to Israeli citizens who live in settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, outside their country's recognized borders

[14] Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, see https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/humanitarian_needs_overview_2019.pdf

[15] According to the Financial Tracking Service, Education was only 40% funded in 2019






When Palestinian children are exposed to occupation-related violence and protection concerns on the way to and from school, this can lead to increased school dropouts and negatively affects both children's and teachers' wellbeing. Education in the West Bank is also deeply affected by a chronic lack of funding, leading to a significant shortfall of teachers – especially teachers who are trained and equipped to support children with complex learning and wellbeing needs as a result of the occupation.[25] In 2020, the UN is appealing for US$15.3M to meet the education needs of children across the oPt.[26] Yet by March 2020, only US$2M had been received.

[16] UNICEF (2018), Children in the state of Palestine, see https://www.unicef.org/sop/media/341/file/Children%20in%20the%20State%20of%20Palestine.pdf

[17] The various types of attacks and undermining of cultural and national identities in the curriculum, as listed in this section, are violations of the right to education. Shortage of classrooms, lack of transport are 'supply-side barriers' and inability of parents to afford school supplies, due to the economic blockade and household poverty under occupation (well noted elsewhere in the report) are examples of 'demand-side barriers'

[18] UNICEF (2017), Right of Education, see https://www.unicef.org/sop/press-releases/right-education-1-million-palestinian-children-risk

[19] Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020, see https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/hno_2020-final.pdf

[20] UNCRC Article 29 states that 'the education of a child should be directed to the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own'

[21] According to the recorded education-related incidents by the Education Cluster

[22] Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020, see https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/hno_2020-final.pdf

[23] The Humanitarian situation in the H2 area of Hebron City, see https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-h2-area-hebron-city-findings-needs-assessment-april-2019

[24] The separation wall is a 712 km wall in the West Bank that separates Palestinians that live in the "closed area" from the rest of the West Bank land and people. Family ties have been disturbed, farmers separated from their families, children from their schools and movement has become more difficult. The International Court of Justice stated that the Wall built on West Bank land including East Jerusalem, is in violation of international law. See – https://www.diakonia.se/en/IHL/where-we-work/Occupied-Palestinian-Territory/Administration-of-Occupation/The-Separation-Wall

[25] UNICEF (2017), Right of Education, see https://www.unicef.org/sop/press-releases/right-education-1-million-palestinian-children-risk

[26] 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan, see https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/hrp_2020.pdf

# METHODOLOGY

In the context of escalating attacks on and threats to Palestinian students, teachers and schools, Save the Children identified a need to consult with children and young people to get a clearer understanding of the nature and impact of these attacks, to inform our advocacy and policy work and our programme design.

Questionnaires, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted with 414 children (288 boys, 126 girls) aged 10-17 in four districts across the West Bank (Hebron, Bethlehem, Nablus and East Jerusalem) in September and October 2019. Children were also asked to draw pictures of their experiences at school, many of which are included in this report.

The children we consulted attend the 17 schools that experienced the highest number of reported education-related incidents over the past two years.[27] These include nine mixed-gender schools, five schools for boys and three schools for girls, which accounts for the gender imbalance in interviewees. Our sample included eight children who have previously been detained, for periods ranging from eight days to five months, in order to better understand their specific experience.

To assess the impact of attacks on education in the wider community, 41 teachers participated in focus group discussions and 31 parents or caregivers took part in in-depth Interviews. In order to get a more detailed understanding of the wellbeing issues that students face, Key Informant Interviews were also conducted with experts including a Mental Health and Psychosocial Support specialist from an international NGO working in the oPt, and the General Director of Counselling and Special Education at the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE).

This report focuses on the impact of conflict and the occupation on education in the West Bank, as described by children, parents, teachers and mental health experts.. There was occasional mention of further issues such as strained relations between schools and parents, bullying and violence – either at home or at school. While these fall outside the primary focus of this report, we nevertheless recognise that for many children in the West Bank, these issues are of equal importance and are deserving of attention.

It is also important to note that this research provides insight based on a specific sample of the population in the West Bank. While there are commonalities in the needs of children across the oPt, there are also likely to be differences. As the report intentionally presents children's experience from the perspective of children themselves, it is also important to note that incidents they mention have not been independently verified by Save the Children, however available data from other sources is provided to support the information that children reported.

The intention is that this survey will provide a springboard for further in-depth consultation with children and young people across other areas of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip about attacks on education and other protection issues, in order to inform policy, donor funding decisions, and the support that Save the Children and others provide for Palestinian children and their communities.

## CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO EDUCATION

**Under international humanitarian law, the rules relating to the law of occupation provide extensive and broad protections for persons living under occupation. As the Occupying Power of the oPt, Israel has legal obligations to ensure that Palestinian children can fulfil their right to an education.**

**Article 50 of the 1949 Geneva Convention IV provides:**

*'The Occupying Power shall, with the cooperation of the national and local authorities, facilitate the proper working of all institutions devoted to the care and education of children.'*

**Article 4 (3) (a) of the 1977 Additional Protocol II provides:**

*'Children… shall receive an education, including religious and moral education, in keeping with the wishes of their parents, or in the absence of parents, of those responsible for their care.'*




Khan Al Ahmar School school which was under demolition orders in July 2018. 50 schools are under threat of full or partial demolition in East Jerusalem and Area C.

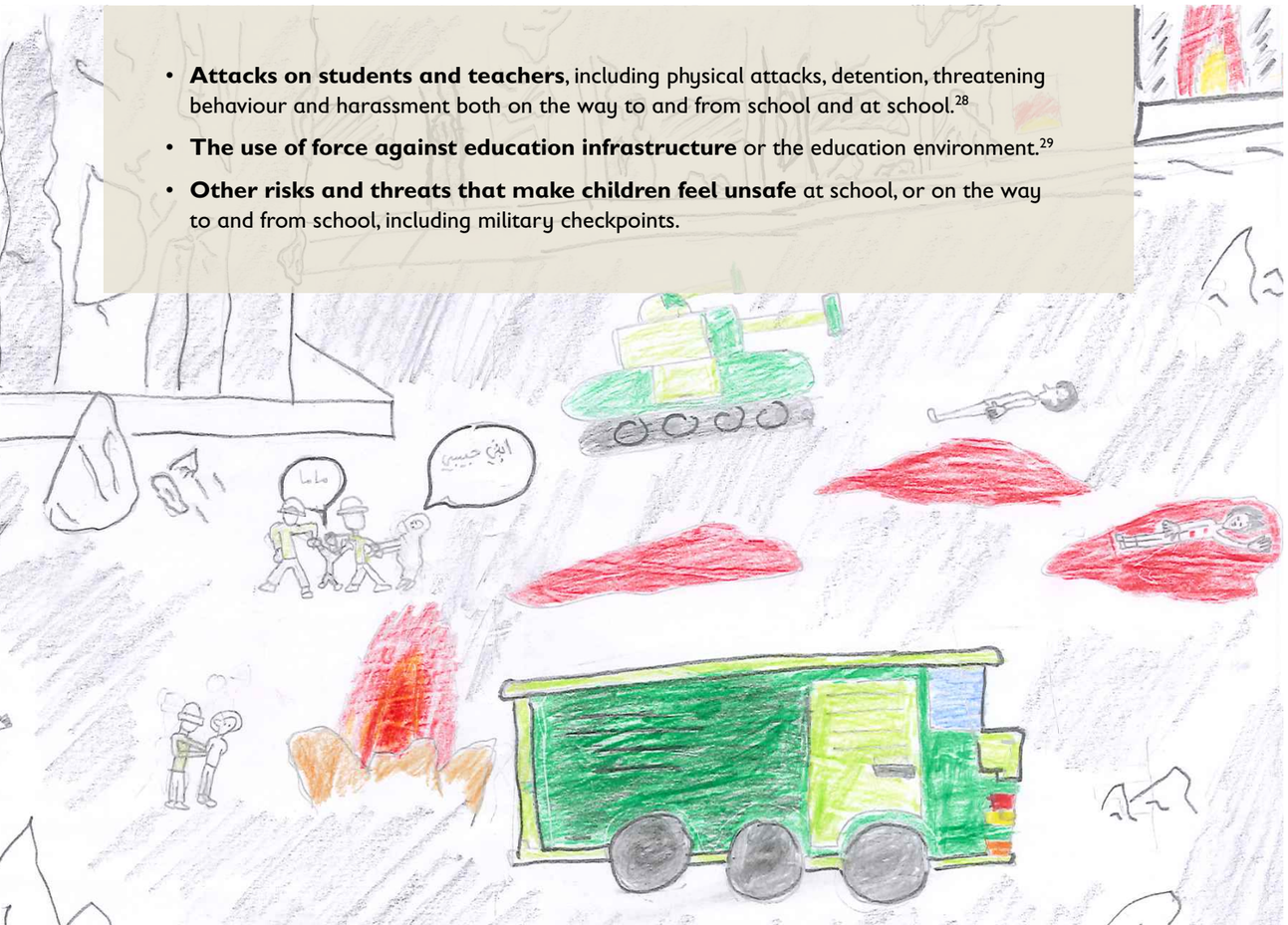
Photo: Cynthia D'Cruz / Save the Children

[27] These schools had the highest number of attacks according to the Education Cluster's education-related incidents

# ATTACKS AND THREATS TO EDUCATION

**Children in the West Bank were asked about the factors that make them feel unsafe when at school or when travelling to and from school, and anything that prevents them from enjoying a quality education. They told us that the barriers to education they experience most frequently are:**

- **Attacks on students and teachers**, including physical attacks, detention, threatening behaviour and harassment both on the way to and from school and at school.[28]
- **The use of force against education infrastructure** or the education environment.[29]
- **Other risks and threats that make children feel unsafe** at school, or on the way to and from school, including military checkpoints.




A drawing by one of the children that shows soldiers detaining a child. The mother says, 'my darling' and the child says, 'mum'.

[28] Other types of attacks on students and educators can include abduction, recruitment into armed groups, forced labour, sexual violence, and targeted killings. See protectingeducation.org/what-attack-education

[29] Military use of schools can also lead to attacks on schools. While there are verified incidents of military use of schools in the West Bank, the children interviewed for this research did not raise it as a key issue of concern.



"If I had grown up in a different place, everything would have been easy. Nothing would have scared me, nothing would have stopped me. I would have slept peacefully at night. Here, there is no safety. The soldiers could come at any time."

**Ali*, age 13, Hebron**

## The dangers facing students and teachers at school

The children consulted for this report highlighted military presence in or around schools as one of the key factors that makes them feel unsafe at school.

**More than two thirds of students (70%) reported military presence in and around school premises as a primary concern**. Students in the south Nablus district reported the highest rates of military presence on school grounds, with 99% of children saying there is a regular presence.

"I don't feel safe because even if the teachers try to protect us, the soldiers are always near and they have weapons. They can do anything they want and break into our schools whenever they want."

**Jammal*, age 14, Bethlehem**

Many schools in the West Bank are in close proximity to military or security infrastructure; more than 275 schools in the oPt are within 500 metres of an Israeli military post.[30] Children reported that military presence takes different forms, from military personnel or vehicles stationed outside the school gates to Israeli soldiers entering and patrolling school grounds or buildings and disrupting classes. Children are especially concerned about this presence in the morning, during lunch break and as they leave school. Children said that they feel like there is **'no safe space'** as soldiers could raid the school at any time, interrogate or detain them or a classmate, destroy their personal belongings, or assault a teacher.

## Risks on the way to and from school

Students in the West Bank also reported facing significant dangers on their way to and from school. Protection risks are so severe that children can be physically attacked, humiliated, or arrested on their way to or from school.

**Across the four districts, 42% of girls and 37% of boys said they had felt in danger or unsafe while commuting to and from school.** The perception of danger increased with the age of the students, a trend that parents and teachers explained by the fact that older children are more likely to be stopped at checkpoints, harassed by settlers or affected by other forms of abuse.

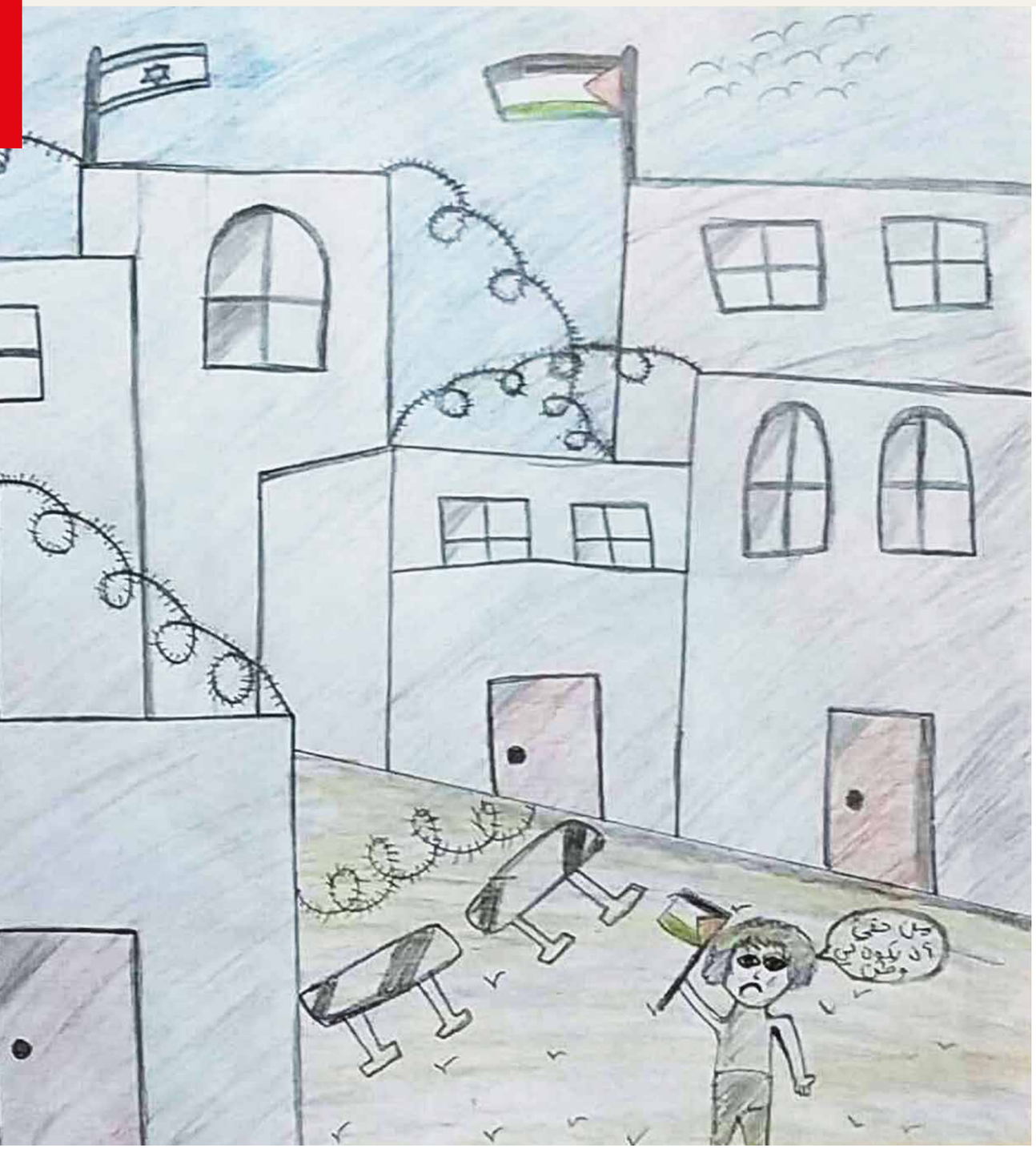
**80% of students reported regularly facing issues with the military, settlers, or at checkpoints on their journey to and from school.**

"The soldiers hold guns and point them in children's faces. If a child wants to cross the street, they are scared. They have to go through the barbed wire fence to come to school. One of our teachers attempted to rescue a child who was shot while blindfolded and handcuffed."

**School principal from Bethlehem**

**Almost three-quarters of children said that they go to school in fear of encountering military personnel or settlers**, who may verbally abuse them or threaten them with physical assault, arrest or tear gas.

[30] Nicolai, Susan (2007), Fragmented foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, see unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000150260




Speech bubble says: "I have a right to live in my country"

"The military is on the road every day, especially in the mornings and evenings, when the students come to school and when they go home."

**A teacher from Bethlehem**

Settler violence is a key concern, with the number of incidents increasing in the West Bank. During the first nine months of 2019, there were 231 reported incidents carried out by Israeli settlers resulting in casualties or in property damage. As a monthly average, this represents a 12% and 100% increase, compared with September 2018 and 2017 respectively.[31]

"The students are so scared. They return from school physically exhausted, as they run home because they are afraid of running into settlers."

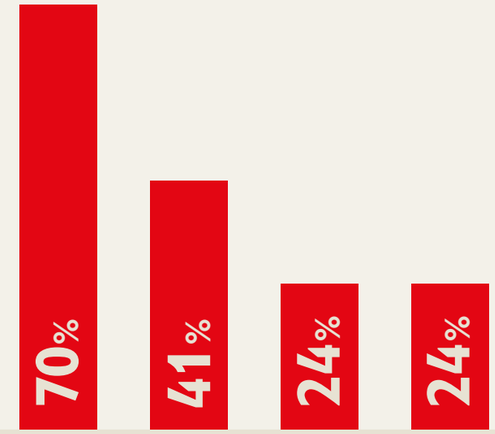
**A teacher from Nablus**

For students and teachers who live in areas without a heightened military presence, Israeli settler harassment or violence is the main source of their anxiety and fear. Children reported being the victim of intimidating and derogatory verbal abuse and being physically assaulted, for example having projectiles, bottles and food thrown at them.

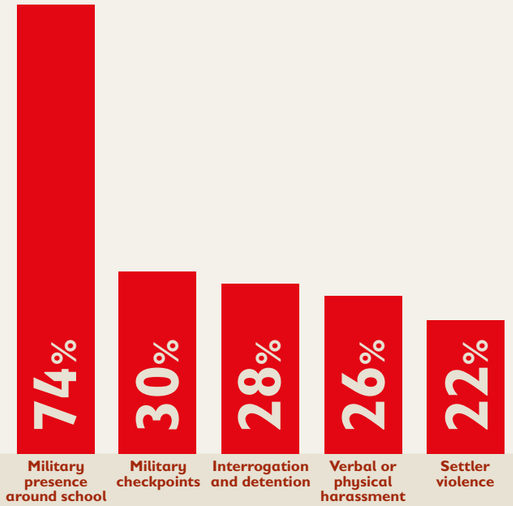
Students said that they believe settlers wait for them on their route to school and target children who are walking alone. Teachers told us they feel concerned about settler violence, as it can be hard to predict and they feel unable to protect their students.

The absence of reliable, safe and affordable public transportation options exacerbates this issue. **Almost half of children reported having to walk a long distance to school along 'dangerous roads'**, which exposes them to a greater risk of encountering Israeli military forces, settlers and other protection risks. Children said that they know many fellow students who have stopped going to school because of the lack of safe transportation, and that this particularly affects children with disabilities.

**Percentage of children who feel unsafe or in danger on the commute to school**




**Percentage of children who regularly encounter threats on the commute to school**




[31] 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan, see reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/hrp_2020.pdf

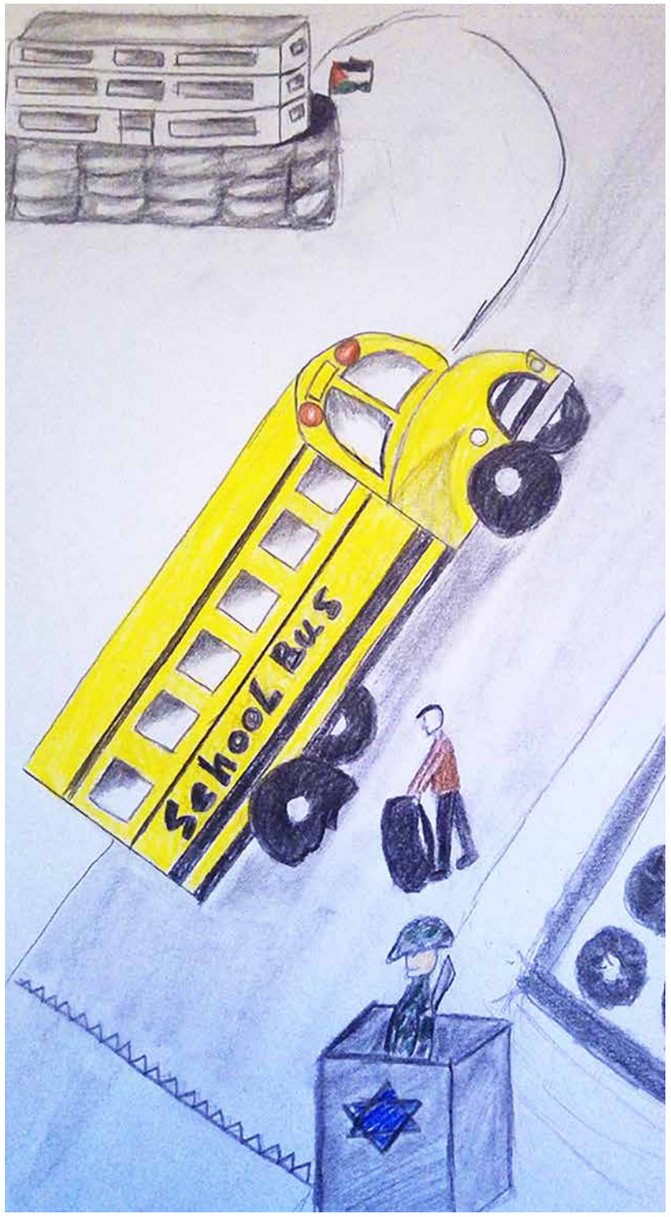
"Not having transport is a big problem. It's physically exhausting as we have long distances to get to school and sometimes, we have to run away from danger such as soldiers."
**Aladdin*, age 14, Bethlehem**

**Students, teachers and parents also emphasised the specific challenges that checkpoints present on children's journeys to school**. Students told us that they experience heightened levels of anxiety at checkpoints as they cannot predict whether they will be stopped, how long they will be delayed, or if they will be allowed through at all. Younger children described being 'scared that the soldiers might shoot me', while older students are more concerned about being interrogated, detained or arrested.

Students also stated that their schoolbags are often searched at checkpoints and essential learning equipment such as books and pencil cases can be thrown on the ground or confiscated. Some children said they found these searches humiliating, and they felt belittled and powerless after the experience.

"Every time I pass a checkpoint, I feel scared and anxious. I can never get to my destination on time. It always takes hours because they always search us and check our identity cards. People who go through this will always live in fear. Their personalities will change, and they become more and more isolated."
**Rima*, age 13, Bethlehem**

**Checkpoints can also be flashpoints for protests and clashes, resulting in high tensions that escalate quickly. Teachers reported that snipers are sometimes stationed around checkpoints, increasing the sense of danger and risk of physical harm.**




Drawing by Leila*, age 15, from Hebron

## Attacks on schools

"Soldiers attacked my school three or four times last year. They threw tear gas and shot live ammunition. Some teachers and students couldn't breathe, the ambulance came, and we all went home."
**Farea*, age 12, Hebron**

In addition to the fear experienced by children on their way to and from school, children also reported attacks on their schools as a key reason that they feel unsafe at school and unable to enjoy a quality education.

**Across the four districts, almost three-quarters of students reported that their schools have been attacked**, with 93% of children from Nablus telling us that their school had been attacked. According to the Education Cluster, more than half of verified interferences of education between January and June 2019 involved Israeli forces firing live ammunition, tear gas or sound bombs in and around schools, mostly in the context of clashes or military operations.[32]

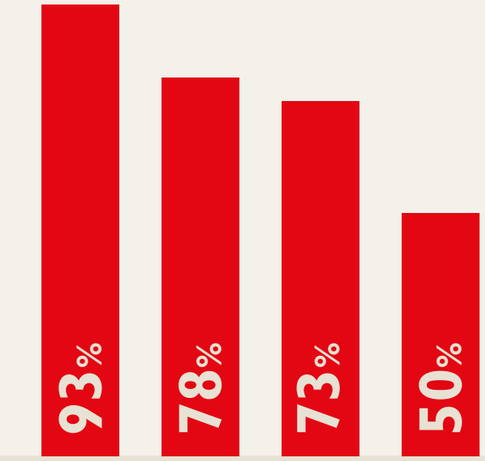
The most common types of attack reported by students in the West Bank were military raids and the use of tear gas or sound bombs.[33] Physical violence against students and teachers and their detention on school grounds were also noted as key types of attack, with children in East Jerusalem naming school demolitions as the most common threat to their school.

"Soldiers come to our schools and detain children. This is a real danger. Our school's location puts us in danger. The soldiers are always present in front of the school. They could attack us and take us away at any time. They might hit us or arrest us. Anything could happen."
**Rima*, age 13, Bethlehem**

Other less frequent forms of attacks that students and teachers described include the use of live ammunition, destruction of personal property, verbal abuse, and settler vandalism. They also noted other intimidating activities such as surveillance drones taking photos of children in the school yard.

In focus group discussions, parents and teachers said that the frequency of school attacks correlates with the proximity of schools to Israeli military and settler activity.[34] Children and parents also reported that school attacks are more likely to happen around Jewish holidays, when more settlers and military personnel are on the streets in close proximity to schools.

**Percentage of children who reported that their school has been attacked**




[32] Between January and June 2019, see ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/hno_2020-final.pdf

[33] Sound bombs (also referred to as sound grenades, stun grenades, flash grenades, flashbangs or thunder-flash) explode with a bright flash and loud noise intended to disorient the people targeted. While sound bombs are not supposed to be dangerous, they have been known to cause severe injury and even death (see propublica.org/article/flashbangs, https://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/02/04/the-flash-bangs-are-stilled) when exploding close to people.

[34] Participants defined military activity as military bases, outposts, checkpoints, and regular presence of soldiers. Participants defined settler activity as nearby settlements, therefore leading to greater chance of interactions or clashes.

Children and teachers also expressed concern for children with disabilities during attacks on education, noting they were less able to avoid attacks and at greater risk.

"He has impaired hearing, so he can't hear the sound of bombs. If other classmates have physical disabilities, then they can't escape an attack in time and could be hurt."

**Ali*, age 15, Bethlehem**

Poor education infrastructure can exacerbate the impact of attacks:

"Schools are often in poor condition, especially in areas that are often under attack or that face restrictive planning policies. This is especially dangerous when these schools are targeted by the military, as the children aren't adequately protected. For example, when the windows don't close properly, tear gas seeps into the classroom and chokes all the children."

**Education specialist, International NGO**



Photo: Jonathan Hyams / Save the Children

## WE ASKED CHILDREN IN THE FOUR AREAS WHICH TYPES OF ATTACKS THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED AT THEIR SCHOOLS.

**Students in Bethlehem told us the most common types of attacks they had experienced were:**

- **72%** MILITARY RAIDS ON THEIR SCHOOL
- **47%** TEAR GAS OR SOUND BOMBS
- **13%** PHYSICAL ASSAULT OR VIOLENCE TOWARDS STUDENTS OR TEACHERS

**Students in Nablus told us the most common types of attacks they had experienced were:**

- **69%** TEAR GAS OR SOUND BOMBS
- **41%** MILITARY RAIDS ON THEIR SCHOOL
- **35%** SETTLER HARASSMENT OR VIOLENCE

**Students in Hebron told us the most common types of attacks they had experienced were:**

- **62%** TEAR GAS OR SOUND BOMBS
- **14%** PHYSICAL ASSAULT OR VIOLENCE TOWARDS STUDENTS OR TEACHERS
- **14%** DETAINING TEACHERS OR STUDENTS ON SCHOOL PROPERTY

**Students in East Jerusalem told us the most common types of attacks they had experienced were:**

- **53%** DEMOLITION OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS
- **21%** TEAR GAS OR SOUND BOMBS
- **17%** DETAINING TEACHERS OR STUDENTS ON SCHOOL PROPERTY

A Save the Children supported school in Nablus was vandalised by settlers in January 2020, resulting in burned classrooms and graffiti on the external wall that read, "Demolishing houses? Only to the enemies!", signed by "Kumi Uri". Source: The Education Cluster.





# SPOTLIGHT: THE RISING THREAT OF TEAR GAS

Many students and teachers in the West Bank told us that they are often exposed to tear gas on their way to school, and at school. Parents voiced concern about their children's repeated exposure to tear gas, noting that their health is deteriorating and they are often ill.

According to the Education Cluster, **one third of all reported education-related incidents in 2019 involved the use of tear gas**, affecting 6,653 students. The number of incidents was double that of the year before.

The physical and psychological consequences of chronic exposure to tear gas is a significant concern. The 2019 Annual Report of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict documented **988 children in the oPt that needed medical treatment after being injured as a result of inhaling tear gas used by the Israeli military.**

Tear gas instantaneously activates specific pain receptors in the body, causing pain and inflammation to exposed body surfaces and the respiratory tract, eyes, mouth and nose.[35] Existing research suggests that systematic exposure to tear gas, and high concentrations of tear gas, pose an increased risk to children of several chronic conditions including asthma, allergic dermatitis, headaches, neurological irritability, and severe eye injuries. The effects of tear gas on a child's short and long-term health are magnified in comparison to adults because their body surface area to body weight ratio is larger, so their bodies are proportionally more exposed. Children are also more vulnerable to injury and toxic injury because their skin is more penetrable and their respiratory tracts are more sensitive than those of adults.[36]

High concentrations of tear gas exposure for children living in the oPt has also been associated with alarmingly high rates of anxiety, depression, emotional trauma, delayed cognitive development, and general poor mental health.[37]

The systematic use of tear gas by the Israeli military, including in and around school facilities, threatens the ability of children to learn, stay focused and feel safe at school.[38]



This drawing shows a class trying to escape a tear gas attack

[35] See https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5096012

[36] Anatomical and Physiological Differences and the Effect on Children's Responses to CBRNE Incidents (Colombia University)

[37] No Safe Space: Health Consequences of Tear Gas Exposure Among Palestinian Refugees (Human Rights Center, School of Law, University of California, Berkeley, January 2018) law.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NoSafeSpace_full_report22Dec2017.pdf

[38] It also likely constitutes an attack on education under the GCPEA definition (intentional threat or use of force against students, educators, institution)



Photo: Jonathan Hyams / Save the Children

## GENDER

As noted in the Methodology section, more boys (288) than girls (126) were consulted in this research. This gender imbalance is due to the fact that schools were selected based on the highest incidents of attacks, resulting in the selection of nine mixed-gender schools, five schools for boys and three schools for girls. While this analysis offers some key insights into how attacks on education may impact boys differently, further research should be conducted to better understand how attacks on education affect both girls and boys differently. Some key differences emerged from our research between how girls and boys are impacted by attacks on education. Boys reported that they have experienced more violent incidents compared with girls, for example **13% of boys experienced settler violence, compared with 5% of girls**. These findings were corroborated by teachers and parents, who expressed concern for male students' vulnerability to violent attacks. However, they also remain alert to and aware of the high levels of fear and anxiety that girls report.

Parents and teachers noted that boys were more likely than girls to clash with Israeli soldiers, as they are more frequently targeted by them. They stated that girls would also frequently get caught in the vicinity of clashes, but they are less aware than boys of safe routes to use, which raises their level of fear and anxiety for girls' ability to escape violence. It was recognised that during attacks on schools, for example with tear gas or live ammunition, both boys and girls are at a high risk of being injured.

Although most parents and teachers reported that girls show higher rates of fear and anxiety, this does not align with feedback from the students themselves. Interviews with the students found that **boys report higher levels of fear (84%) than girls (65%)**. Boys said there is a cultural stigma to admitting that they are scared, while girls are encouraged to talk about their feelings and emotions. This may explain why many parents and teachers underestimate the psychological toll on boys.

One teacher said that boys have a **'strong reaction'** to attacks, often displayed through a **'wrongly directed emotion'** such as anger or frustration, but she emphasised that it is important to give all students, both girls and boys, the chance to fully express their feelings.



Drawing of 'a good school day'




Drawing of 'a bad school day'. The sign above the door reads 'school'.

# THE IMPACT OF ATTACKS AND THREATS TO EDUCATION

## Good school day vs. bad school day

"A bad day is when the army surrounds the school. Or if someone in the neighbourhood is killed, leading to violence with the soldiers when people are shot with bullets. And then school closes, so we have to go home."
**Yasmine*, age 14, Bethlehem**

To explore the impact of attacks on education on children's learning and wellbeing, students were asked to describe what a 'good' and 'bad' day at school looks like to them.

Children in the West Bank told us a good school day is free from Israeli military or settler attacks or harassment. They have safe transport to school and do not have to pass through checkpoints, encounter military or settler violence, or endure humiliating body searches or interrogations. It is when they can finish the school day without their classes being disrupted.

"I just want to play with my friends, learn to read and write, and be treated kindly and fairly."
**Zain*, age 11, Hebron**

Many students also said that a good day is when they can live a 'normal school life, like other children around the world'. Their wishes are as simple as taking part in a gym class outside, going on a school trip or having gardening classes in schools. Children also expressed their desire to be able to have more social events, such as school parties.

On the other hand, children said that a bad school day involves enduring checkpoints, harassment or abuse on the way to school. Bad school days consist of their school being attacked by Israeli military forces or settlers, their lessons being interrupted, or being forced to go home again.

Students were very descriptive when explaining what 'bad school days' entail, reflecting all forms of violence that their communities face. Many of them emphasised that bad days can be triggered by events that took place on the previous day or night, which could lead to arrests, injuries or death. Children find days when they feel they have 'no safe space' especially challenging. One boy from Bethlehem told us, 'on a bad day, the soldiers come into our school carrying weapons – even during our break time.'

## Mental Health

### Feeling unsafe and anxious

"What do I feel at school? I feel scared, all the time, because I don't feel safe. Sometimes I think about children in other places who can learn in safety and I feel happy for them, but sad for myself."
**Malik*, age 11, Hebron**

Overall, **a quarter of all students we surveyed said that they don't feel safe at school**, with children in Nablus – where the highest incidence of verified attacks on education occur – most likely to report that they feel unsafe (70%). When students in focus groups were asked how they feel when their education comes under attack, they said that they experience a wide range of feelings and reactions when an attack occurs or when they expect that an attack may occur. The most commonly reported emotions were fear, anxiety and stress.

"We only feel safe half the time, as we expect the military to attack, assault, or throw tear gas at us at any moment… even if you are in your home, they can break into it."
**Mohammed*, age 13, Bethlehem**

Children, parents and teachers told us that emotional distress is heightened by the unpredictable nature of attacks on education. Parents noted that this unpredictability makes them constantly concerned for their children's mental wellbeing. Teachers reflected that any sense of safety they try to create for their students is undermined by the regular – yet unpredictable – nature of attacks. They said that students struggle to discern any pattern of violence, so they feel trapped in a perpetual 'emergency response mode'.

"You have to be ready for an attack and alert all the time."
**Alaa*, age 13, Nablus**

## Emotional and behavioural changes

As a consequence of their emotional distress, children are exhibiting a range of concerning behaviours and other mental health issues. Children told us they had experienced uncontrollable shaking, losing consciousness and fainting, loss of self-confidence and depression.

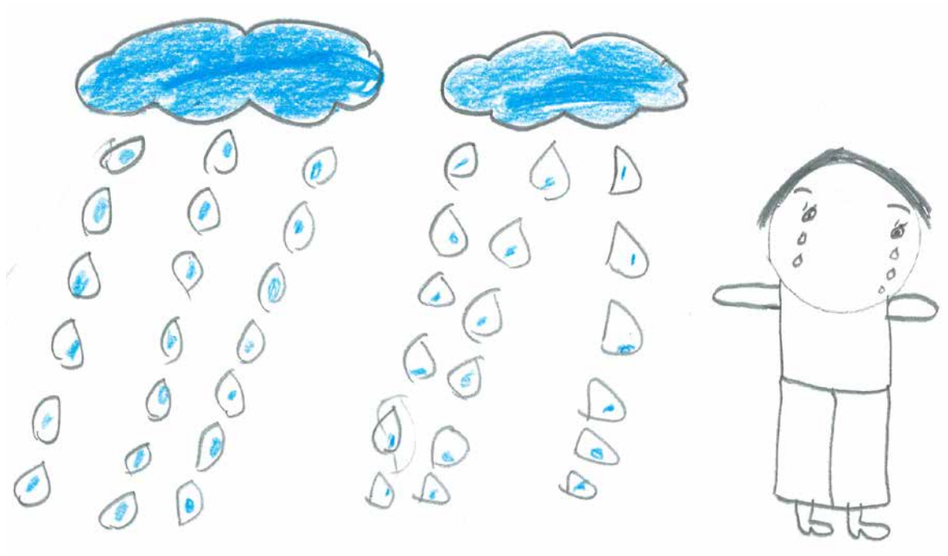
Parents reported that their children often experienced insomnia, nightmares and uncontrolled urination and that they can become aggressive, withdrawn or unable to show their emotions following an attack.

"I'm angry that I feel afraid. I'm angry that I'm made to feel like a victim."
**Munther*, age 13, East Jerusalem**

If left untreated, the long-term consequences of emotional distress are likely to be even greater, potentially affecting children's mental and physical health for the rest of their lives. The Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Specialist stressed that the diagnosis of mental health issues in children is especially difficult in the oPt because of the protracted nature of the conflict and occupation. While Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) elicits global research and can be diagnosed relatively easily, the reality for children in the oPt is that their daily stressors are ongoing; they are not yet 'post' their ordeal.[39]

[39] A 2019 Save the Children report found that children and young people in Gaza are also vulnerable to mental health risks, and if they are not already living in a state of toxic stress are at high risk of developing serious and long-term mental health issues. See opt.savethechildren.net/sites/opt.savethechildren.net/files/library/A%20Decade%20of%20Distress%20online%20-%20v3.1.pdf





A child depicts their feelings at school

**Parents and Mental Health Eexperts consulted for this report outlined the most common emotional and behavioural symptoms that children experience, according to their age group:**

### 6 – 9 YEARS OLD:

Overly dependent or more attached to their parents, refusing to leave the house or go to school without their parents

Problems with sleeping and eating

Involuntary urination

Prone to try to please others and seek rewards, thus more likely to go to school to please their parents, even when they feel very scared to do so.

### 10 – 13 YEARS OLD:

Eating disorders

Withdrawn and feeling less positive about their future

Neglecting other activities that would normally make them happy, such as sports and hobbies

'Acting out' by bullying other students, skipping classes or rebelling against teachers.

### 14 – 18 YEARS OLD:

Risk of dropping out of school increases, and girls are vulnerable to early marriage

Erosion of relationships between children and their parents and teachers

Anger and resentment towards authority.



## Ways of coping

Children reported that they have found a range of ways – both negative and positive – to cope with their situation.

Many children said that it is common for their classmates to leave school early and go home when their anxiety levels become overwhelming. Others said that they've had to adopt certain techniques to try to manage their anxiety levels, with one student saying:

"I try to calm down by telling myself over and over again that I've done nothing wrong."
**Maher*, age 11, Nablus**

Some children play a continuous reel of worst-case scenarios in their head, such as picturing themselves being arrested or shot by soldiers. Others focus constantly on how they would escape an attack or threat, identifying the nearest exits, escape routes or people to assist.

Parents said that the inevitable nature of attacks on education in the West Bank leave their children with just two choices: they are either forced to live in fear of attack and adapt to this stress, or to 'let fear overcome them and lose their education'. Teachers reported that they often feel like they're operating in 'fight or flight' mode, due to the constant threat of attacks.

Children, parents and teachers all acknowledged that teachers play a crucial role in helping children to feel safe and manage their emotional distress. Teachers said that they are aware of the psychological impact of attacks and try to comfort their students, but do not always know how to provide appropriate support or lack the time to do so. They also reflected that sometimes children do not display behavioural changes immediately after an attack, and that the real psychological toll may only become clear weeks or even months later.

"Our teachers defend us. When the soldiers attack the children to take them away, the teachers try to stop them."
**Ali*, age 13, Hebron**

Teachers recognise their role in keeping their students safe but highlighted that their power is limited, and there is significant stress and a psychological toll that accompanies this responsibility. One teacher from Hebron said, **'When there is an emergency and I am teaching a class, I feel like I am going to collapse from the stress and chaos.'**

Schools in the West Bank are well versed in emergency response, with clear reaction protocols to different incidents. **7 out of 10 students said they know their school emergency plan and 9 out of 10 students told us that teachers instruct them on how to act in emergencies**. Most schools have counsellors who provide psychosocial support to students if an incident occurs and **84% of students said that they have someone to talk to**, whether a dedicated school counsellor, a teacher, friend or family member.

Parents broadly see their own role as providing emotional support, giving practical advice on how to stay safe, and encouraging children to continue with their education. They agree that their support is important, but believe that they are not able to protect themselves, let alone protect the school .

**Ultimately, parents know that they cannot tackle the root causes that threaten their children's education. Only when attacks on schools end, and obstacles to education are removed, will students truly be able to reach their potential.**



## Salem*, age 12, Hebron

Salem's dreams are simple – he just wants an end to the violence and fear. The threat of constant military presence, checkpoints, house raids and the loss of loved ones all hang over him, to the extent that he suffers from physical symptoms including seizures.

"Usually I feel safe but when there are settlers, of course not. Sometimes people start throwing stones from rooftops and then soldiers come, and they start throwing tear gas bombs. Then I start having seizures and shivering. Soldiers question me on the way to school, 'where do you live?', 'where are you going?' I really get frightened, afraid they will take me away. They have stopped me before. My older brother, they detained him.

I can't see anything that could be done. Wherever I move, I will be inspected, they check my ID, I might even be shot. I wish for the future, just to live without the army, without soldiers.

I like learning. Education is important. I have made friends at school – to be with them makes me forget. For fun, I play with my little sister. I just dream to fly, just to get above the ground.

**Children have the right to live freely and not to be caged**. If other people learn about what life is like for children here, maybe they'll come and help us."

Photo: Jonathan Hyams/Save the Children

## Ability to Learn

"I've noticed a significant decrease in academic results. As the number of attacks increases, student performance decreases."
**A teacher from Bethlehem**

Attacks on education have a significant impact on children's learning and their academic performance. **More than 40% of children reported that Israeli military or settler violence affects their ability to learn**, with this number rising to over 80% of children in Nablus, where the highest number of attacks on education in the West Bank occur.

Teachers also told us that they struggle to focus when delivering lessons, with many reporting that they are instead worrying about how they will get home, when the next attack will happen, and whether all their students will get home safely.

"On the road, we are never safe from the occupation, settlers and other dangers. Delays at checkpoints make us feel anxious. We miss the first class, and this makes us anxious and distracted for the rest of the day"
**Noor*, age 13, Hebron**

**Almost one third of children reported difficulty concentrating in class due to the issues they regularly face**. Students in Nablus reported the highest rates of concentration problems, with 71% saying they struggle to engage with lessons. While one fifth of younger students aged 10-12, reported lack of concentration as a key barrier to their learning, older students were more likely to say they had difficulty concentrating in class. This is perhaps not surprising, as they are more frequently the target of attacks or harassment by Israeli military personnel or settlers.

"The students often struggle to grasp the material during a lesson, as they will be struggling psychologically and will only pay attention to what is happening outside the classroom."
**A teacher from Hebron**

**80% of the children who struggle to concentrate in class identified 'fear' as the main cause.** In Hebron, 94% of children identified fear as the main factor.

"It is impossible for us to concentrate in class when the army is outside, we get scared and think they will break into class any minute."
**Zain*, age 11, Hebron**

**Over 70% of children who struggle to concentrate, reported feeling like they also need more time to absorb and understand materials in class.** Research shows that children who experience trauma or regularly feel afraid often find it more difficult to process verbal information, leading to a reduced ability to remember, retain or understand what they are taught.[40] Teachers recognise this and reported using various techniques to soothe students and refocus their attention, but noted that this takes time and they often lose control of the rest of the class when providing individual care.

Research conducted by the Journal of the European Economic Association found that conflict in the oPt is reducing the probability of students passing exams and the likelihood that they will achieve the minimum test score needed for admission to university. The conflict is negatively affecting the quality of the learning environment at school. In particular, it is resulting in more school closures, increasing the number of students per classroom and increasing the likelihood of student and teacher absenteeism. [41]

[40] Journal of Trauma and Treatment (2014) Trauma Leaves Children Behind, see https://www.hilarispublisher.com/open-access/trauma-leaves-children-behind-impact-of-psychological-distress-on-childrens-learning-2167-1222.1000S4-013.pdf#10

[41] Journal of the European Economic Association, Volume 17, Issue 5, October 2019, Pages 1502–1537, see https://doi.org/10.1093/jeea/jvy051

## Interrupted school days

In addition to the significant impact that attacks on education have on children's ability to concentrate and learn, attacks also cause children to lose significant amounts of class time and miss important examinations.

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, children can face serious delays on their way to school, especially at checkpoints. Teachers reported that it is common for children to wait at checkpoints for up to two hours, meaning they often miss their first class. If there is an attack or raid at the school or an incident occurs close by, students are likely to be sent home early. As this is a regular occurrence, teachers often have to give shorter lessons and skip break time or classes such as art and physical education, to get through the curriculum. This negatively impacts children's wellbeing and removes what children have identified as a core component of a 'good day'.

Teachers also have to spend significant time teaching children how to react in an emergency, for example how to stay safe in the event of a tear gas attack. While emergency preparedness classes are critical for keeping students safe and giving them a sense of control over their situation, it is yet another factor related to attacks on education that eats away at children's learning time. Due to overcrowding and lack of school facilities, many schools are already operating a double or triple shift, which means learning time is already significantly reduced.

## The lasting impact of denial of education

Preventing children from accessing education has permanent implications for their ability to seek a productive livelihood, and places them at a higher risk of early marriage, mental health problems and social exclusion[42] from their peers. Students who drop out of education are at higher risk of exploitation and child labour and are more likely to participate in dangerous activities.[43] Research has also shown that high levels of stress associated with frequent exposure of children to traumatic situations, can impact their overall physical and mental wellbeing.[44]

[42] Rockwell MD (2014), Implications of not addressing MHPSS issues, see https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207201

[43] Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, see ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/humanitarian_needs_overview_2019.pdf

[44] K4D (2019), Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioural Health Services, see https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/582_Implications_of_not_Addressing_Mental_Health_and_Psychosocial_Support__MPHSS__Needs_in_Conflict_Settings.pdf

## Issa, age 17, Hebron

"I was 15 years old when I was detained. It was at the end of the school day and there were clashes outside the school gates. I tried to walk through the clashes quickly, but I was shot in my right leg by a soldier. It hurt so much that I collapsed to the ground. Paramedics tried to reach me to take me to hospital in an ambulance, but the soldiers wouldn't let them.

I was taken to an interrogation centre instead of hospital. I kept asking to go to hospital, to get some pain relief, but I wasn't allowed. They accused me of throwing a stone, but I hadn't, I was just trying to get home from school. I was sentenced to seven months in prison. Prison was an ugly, ugly place. I don't like to think about it.

I wanted to learn in prison so I wouldn't fall behind in class, but we were only allowed to learn Hebrew, no other subjects. I found it so strange that I was being made to learn Hebrew rather than learning maths, Arabic, and science. I used to love learning English – it was my favourite subject. But now I've forgotten all my English. I can't even count to ten. But I can count to one hundred in Hebrew.



I wanted to go back to school immediately after I was released. I think education is important so I can help my family in the future. But it was very tough going back to school, I was so behind. I felt embarrassed that I didn't understand the teacher. I started to feel lonely and isolated. Thankfully, I met YMCA [a Save the Children partner,] who helped me by providing catch-up classes. This was very helpful, and I'm determined to learn as much as I can so I can have a good future.

Going to school still isn't easy. Where I live, there are often clashes, so I feel like the same thing might happen and I'll be in prison again. Danger is our reality. I've had enough of tear gas, soldiers and violence, I just want to learn.

**Children who have been detained still have rights, and these rights should be protected**. We should be allowed an education and a future. We should be allowed to follow the normal curriculum, not just learn Hebrew. All I want is peace and a future. I will work as hard as I can to make both these things possible."



# SPOTLIGHT: CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN DETAINED

Each year, approximately 500-700 Palestinian children are detained and prosecuted in the Israeli military court system. The most common charge is stone throwing, for which the maximum sentence is 20 years.[45] [46]

It is common for children to be arrested or detained both on their way to school and at school. Nearly 60% of Palestinian child detainees are transferred from the oPt to prisons inside Israel, which is in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. [47] While in prison, child detainees have limited access to education and are taught a restricted curriculum, often at the incorrect level, leaving them ill-prepared to return to school on their release.[48]

We interviewed eight former child detainees as part of our research. They reported several challenges of returning to their education. In particular, they found their journeys to school especially dangerous. Due to their histories, they are at heightened risk of harassment, assault or re-detention and they fear being intercepted by the military or stopped at checkpoints.

For former child detainees who had traumatic experiences while in prison, fears about the journey to school could aggravate or trigger feelings of distress and anxiety. Most of these children said that they would only go to school if their parents drove them, which is often not possible, leaving them at high risk of dropping out of school.

Parents and teachers of former child detainees also reported that their behaviour changed significantly after release and they struggled to adapt to life after prison. Some children became withdrawn, anxious and overly dependent on their parents; others acted in an assertive, overly confident manner, intentionally perpetuating the perception that they were a 'hero' after experiencing detention, which is more likely a façade that children, especially boys, present to compensate for feelings of fear and insecurity.

Beyond the emotional and social impact of detention, children can struggle to reintegrate and catch up at school. Former detainees told us that they were embarrassed to fall behind their peers and would rather drop out of school than learn with younger students. Teachers also reported that former child detainees' academic performance often suffers, with slipping grades and disruptive behaviour in class. They emphasised the importance of providing former child detainees with additional education, social and psychological support.

"Mentally they are exhausted, they need psychological treatment as they suffered from extreme emotional pressure. They need help before they can reintegrate into classes."

**A school counsellor from Hebron**

[45] See dci-palestine.org/children_in_israeli_detention

[46] See dci-palestine.org/without_enshrined_protections_children_under_israeli_military_arrest_face_rampant_abuses

[47] See dci-palestine.org/palestinian_children_in_the_israeli_military_detention_system. The Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits an occupying power transferring members of the occupied civilian population outside of the occupied territory, including detainees

[48] Defence for Children in Palestine (2016), No Way to Treat a Child, nwttac.dci-palestine.org/resources



## RIMA*, age 13, BETHLEHEM

"School should have nothing to do with the conflicts happening in the country. Children here should have the right to education, just like all the children of the world.

One day, we went to school and started playing. Suddenly, the settlers came and attacked our school. We got out of class and saw settlers coming. Some students started crying and others suffocated, because the soldiers fired tear gas. We weren't able to breathe because of the tear gas and because of our fear and anxiety. There was a gas smell and it burned our eyes. We didn't have the necessary equipment at school to help ourselves. It was painful and scary.

**But I'm strong. I will defend children's rights.**

If I was in charge of my country, I would do everything I can to make every child happy. I would help reduce the occupation's dangers and the problems children face. I would support all children so they can build a society one day. I think that I'd be useful, I could save lives. When the soldiers fired tear gas, I could help teachers bring the first aid supplies to help children.

I want the world to know that we, Palestinian children, are just like all children. We should have our rights and we shouldn't be under occupation. Our dream is to go to safe schools."

Photo: Jonathan Hyams/Save the Children

# SPOTLIGHT:
## OUR RESPONSE

**Save the Children has long-standing operations and programming in the occupied Palestinian territory. We have been working for children's rights and responding to the protracted protection crisis in the oPt since 1953.**

Save the Children co-leads the Education Cluster with UNICEF, and is a member of the Child Protection, and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) working groups.

In 2019, we reached more than 54,000 girls and 46,000 boys through our **Education in Emergencies** programming. We also work with various key players and partners to strengthen child protection at the community level as well as through strengthening national child protection systems.

**The Safe Schools programme** brings school students, staff, principals and parents together to coordinate and take responsibility for acting in an emergency through the formation of 'crisis cells'. Members participate in school-wide emergency drills and training in school evacuations, how to adequately respond to weapons commonly fired by Israeli forces such as tear gas, and how to provide first aid.

The Palestinian government endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration[49] in 2015, to emphasise its commitment to protecting education. It conducted a subsequent review of its security forces, as well as laws, decrees and codes of conduct, to ensure compliance with the declaration. Save the Children has been working closely with relevant ministries to contextualise and operationalise the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict. We commit to strengthening child protection standards and supporting other related steps in the Palestinian Authority's Action Plan, as part of our global commitment to protecting children in conflict. However, it should be noted that the de-facto authorities in Gaza have not yet officially adopted the Guidelines, and the State of Israel has not yet signed the declaration.

We provide **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS)** to children who are affected by conflict-related incidents at home or school. Through individual or group counselling, children are supported to strengthen their psychological wellbeing, and those who are out of school are reintegrated into education and society.

Save the Children is also providing **vital support to children from the West Bank who are arrested or detained** by the Israeli military. In the past three years, we've given more than 900 ex-detainee children support to rehabilitate and reintegrate into society by providing psychosocial support, remedial classes to facilitate their return to school and vocational training. We also support them with legal representation.

Through structured **resilience workshops**, children gain self-confidence and skills that will help them to recover from past experiences as well as cope with future challenges. These sessions give children an opportunity to express their feelings in a safe environment and to learn coping mechanisms that will help them to deal with violence and trauma.

**Our vital work, which helps Palestinian children to safely access education, to respond when their schools are attacked or rights violated, and recover emotionally, is only possible thanks to the generous support of many donors. Particular thanks are due to UNICEF, Education Cannot Wait, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the European Union, and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.**

[49] The Safe Schools Declaration is an inter-governmental political commitment that provides countries the opportunity to express support for protecting students, teachers and schools from attack during times of armed conflict; the importance of the continuation of education in conflict; and the implementation of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools from Military Use, to deter the military use of schools. The Guidelines are intended to help parties to conflict to exercise restraint with respect to the use of schools for military purposes.



## Ali, age 13, Hebron

"Ali was always tense with fear," says his Save the Children-supported counsellor, Raji. "He was frightened to go to school."

Ali told Save the Children that he had spent much of his childhood fearing being attacked and humiliated by soldiers. He and his friends were once followed home from school by soldiers. Ali says his friends managed to get away but he didn't, and he was then beaten.

Although Ali is still afraid, he is growing in strength, thanks in part to the counselling he has received from Save the Children partner, YMCA. While he used to be quiet and withdrawn, now he can express himself with confidence. He sees himself as responsible for keeping his younger siblings safe, and his little sister Fatima describes him as a 'good big brother'.

He is determined to finish his education and harbours ambitions to become a doctor. "Now he is outspoken, and he is happy," says his dad. "He has a strong personality – he is like his mum!"

Photo: Jonathan Hyams/Save the Children





# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Palestinian children have clearly expressed their view that schools should be safe places to learn, develop and have fun. However across the West Bank, children have told Save the Children that the attacks on and threats to their education, as they travel to and from school and while they are in their classrooms, are denying them their right to a safe and quality education.

The findings of this research show that for many Palestinian girls and boys, education is becoming associated with fear, anxiety and stress. Children cannot learn when they are afraid, and no child should be made to compromise their safety and wellbeing for their learning. Yet these are calculations that students, parents and teachers are making on a daily basis in the West Bank.

**The following recommendations set out a pathway to support children's call to stop the attacks on their education, and make schools safe, accessible, inclusive and fun.**

Education is a fundamental human right that is crucial for the development of children's skills and knowledge, and for their future prospects, as well as enabling understanding and the fulfilment of

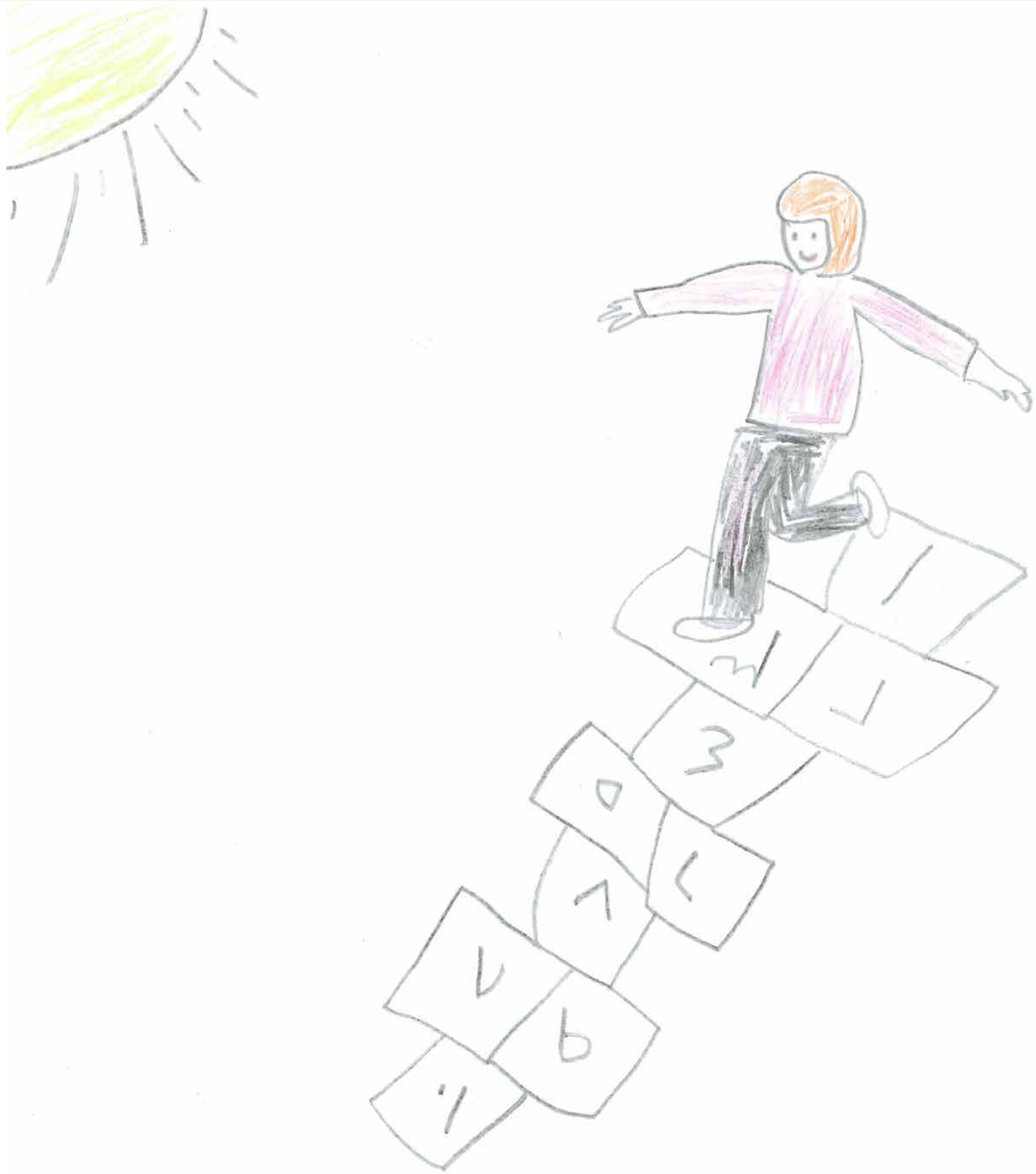
other rights. Protecting access to schools must be a priority of all duty bearers in the oPt, and every effort must be made to address all impediments to safe access to schools. Save the Children calls on the Government of Israel to take concrete and immediate steps to ensure that Palestinian children have safe access to a quality education, in line with their obligations under international law.

**Specifically, Save the Children urges the Government of Israel to:**

- Endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and implement the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.
- Cease attacks, violence or incitement to violence in or around schools, to protect and uphold children's right to education and to respect all schools and places of learning as inviolable safe spaces for children and educational staff.
- Take steps to end threats of violence and attacks from the Israeli military against Palestinian children on their commute to and from school, and make every effort to allow for the unhindered passage of students and school staff through checkpoints on their way to and from school.
- Ensure that military personnel, settlers or settlement guards are not present in or around schools and ensure that any attacks they perpetrate against schools are properly investigated and that appropriate action is taken.
- Immediately stop the use of live ammunition, rubber-coated bullets, tear gas and other chemical materials against children, including in and around school premises and in densely populated areas, and publish the chemical components of the tear gas used for medical response and decontamination purposes.
- Take all necessary measures to avoid the damage or destruction of education infrastructure, including ending administrative demolition of educational facilities and revoking demolition orders in Area C. Where there is damage, take every step to compensate the school and fix the damage.
- Ensure that children are detained only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest time possible. Children must not be arrested on school premises, or on the way to or from school, and they must be provided with educational programmes and recreational activities for the period of their detention. Children must not be subject to physical or psychological violence and must have access to legal consultation and to their parents prior to and during interrogations. Children must not be transferred out of the West Bank in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.[50]
- Collaborate with international human rights and accountability mechanisms, such as the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Israel/Palestine to address and prevent grave violations of children's rights, including attacks on schools and the killing and maiming of children.

## Save the Children urges the Palestinian Authority to:

- Establish a more regular protective presence for children and teachers on their way to and from school and within schools, including through the provision of safe, reliable and affordable transportation to and from school. Special consideration should be given to children with disabilities and those who have been previously detained.
- Provide immediate support to schools and students affected by attacks on education through strengthened school referral mechanisms, expanded counselling and psychosocial support programmes, remedial education, protective presence, and implementation of the non-violence at school policy.
- Take steps to support school-based emergency response mechanisms, including through the



[50] UNICEF (2013), Children in Military Detention see unicef.org/oPt/UNICEF_oPt_Children_in_Israeli_Military_Detention_Observations_and_Recommendations_-_6_March_2013.pdf

training of municipal staff and the provision of materials for the clean-up of tear gas affected locations, with priority given to locations used by children.

- Ensure the provision of sufficient rehabilitative and reintegration support for children who have been arrested or detained, along with support for a safe commute to school.
- Broaden and strengthen reporting on attacks on education in order to ensure robust data collection, enable better implementation of the Guidelines[51] for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict and secure increased international engagement with the protection of education in the oPt through the provision of technical and/or financial support, as required.
- Operationalise their Contingency Plan so that all schools are supported to provide informed emergency response actions and can better protect students and teachers.
- Accelerate efforts and take immediate steps to make education more inclusive to children with disabilities. This must include efforts to make school buildings, classrooms, play spaces and sanitation facilities fully accessible to children with disabilities.

## Save the Children calls on member states and donors to:

- Urge the Government of Israel to guarantee and respect the right to education for all Palestinian children, in its full expression.
- Urge the Government of Israel to immediately stop all attacks on schools and to take steps to ensure that children can go to school and learn safely, in line with its international obligations, and apply accountability measures when obligations are violated.
- Support politically and financially, and call on Israel to collaborate with, international human rights and accountability mechanisms such as the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Israel/Palestine to address and prevent grave violations of children's rights, including attacks on schools and the killing and maiming of children.
- Call on the Government of Israel to sign the Safe Schools Declaration.
- Urge the Government of Israel to end the use of live ammunition and tear gas against children in the oPt, and to stop all discriminatory measures against the education of children in East Jerusalem.
- Speak out when attacks on education happen and ask for compensation when donor-funded education infrastructures are demolished or damaged.
- Increase funding for psychosocial support for students, teachers and parents; catch-up and remedial education support; infrastructure support including response to damage caused by an attack and improvement of protection inside schools; and transportation to ensure safe commutes to schools.

## Save the Children calls on humanitarian agencies working in the oPt to:

- Support the Palestinian Authority to establish a more regular protective presence for children and teachers on their way to and from school and within schools, consistently applying age, gender and disability as a triple lens to tailor responses to various needs including the needs of the most vulnerable, and the most marginalised learners.
- Invest in the systematic monitoring of protection-related incidents from through an age and gender-lens, including attacks on schools

[51] Guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict: protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/guidelines_en.pdf



and the excessive use of tear gas use against children, and support the related referral process.

- Provide support to facilitate for the decontamination and clean-up of areas exposed to tear gas, including procurement of the requisite decontamination and clean up materials to ensure full decontamination of people – especially children – who have come into contact with tear gas, andas well as schools, homes and streets.
- Provide more coordinated efforts through the Education Cluster to ensure an effective response to the needs of the affected schools according to expertise and capacity, through the development and delivery of unified plans to support children's education and children's wellbeing.
- Support and join efforts that allow children to play a more leading role in advocating for issues around safe access to education.



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Photo: Jonathan Hyams / Save the Children

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**Front cover:** drawing by Tala from Nablus. The text at the foot of the drawing says: 'It's my right to live in a country that I would be safe in.' Many of the drawings in this report are by children living in the West Bank, provided by Save the Children partner Defence for Children International. 'Danger is our reality' is a quote by 17-year-old Issa from Hebron, whose case study is included in this report.

Survey conducted by **Alpha International**



Save the Children