

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

State of play

The West Bank faces a burgeoning solid waste crisis. In 2018, the occupied Palestinian territories generated 1,59 million tons of solid waste, amounting to 4356 tons per day. Despite the efforts of the Palestinian Authority pertaining to the protection of the environment since the transfer of responsibilities enacted by the Oslo II Accord, the situation in the West Bank is alarming. In fact, two of the four sanitary landfills have reached their full capacities. The lack of disposal sites has been compensated by the creation of dumpsites often managed without appropriate sanitary measures. It is estimated that only 65% of the collected waste is disposed in controlled landfills, less than 3% is recycled, while the remaining 32% is disposed in random dumpsites.

Oslo II has proven to be a failure, providing the illusory perception that it would lead to the joint management of environmental matters. The context of occupation has created, and continuously deepens, structural deficiencies by increasing the quantity of waste while impeding the Palestinians' ability to create a sustainable solid waste management system. In the West Bank, 80% of the waste generated by Israeli settlements is illegally sent to landfills or randomly dumped. In addition, Israeli industries have used the West Bank as a "sacrifice zone" due to the high cost of waste treatment combined with stringent environmental laws. This increase in waste production is compounded by the lack of continuity required for waste management, resulting from the lack of control over borders, the necessity to pass through checkpoints, and the risk of unexpected road closures. Furthermore, solid waste management is in a deadlock as its improvement relies on Israeli approval to expand or construct a new landfill.

In addition to the complex political situation, the establishment of a comprehensive solid waste management also faces legal, organizational, technical, and cultural challenges. The fees for waste services collected by municipalities do not cover further investments to expand and improve the solid waste system in the West Bank. Overall, only 40% of the fee is collected. Furthermore, governorates located farther away from the landfills are only able to cover 20% through tax collection due to the high transportation cost. As a result, these governorates send their waste to random dumpsites. The fee only covers operational costs but does not allow for long-term investments. Thus, equipment deteriorates rapidly and the landfills cannot benefit from upgraded technology without the support of external funding.

Meanwhile, solid waste management in the West Bank has disastrous implications on the environment and public health. The inappropriate management is contributing to the deterioration of the Palestinian nature and biodiversity, and poses a severe threat to air quality and public health. Concerns revolve around increased risks of cancer, congenital malformation, low birthweight, hepatitis, and respiratory diseases. As a consequence, the current management is driving significant negative externalities resulting in economic losses.

EU and EUMS policy

Waste management in the West Bank relies on donors' support in terms of investments. The European Union has funded the main Palestinian landfill, Zahrat-al-Finjan, and provided the equipment needed for waste services. Nonetheless, the aid only provides short-term benefits. In fact, contract durations are often overestimated, especially in the context of an increase in waste quantities resulting from economic development, population increase, and rapid urbanization rate.

The EU and the EUMS have also failed to deal with the main issue that results from occupation, namely access to land. The geographical division of the oPt prevents the development of adequate waste facilities. The construction or expansion of landfills is dependent on permit approval by the Israeli authorities. This process has put on hold the construction of a new landfill for a decade. Moreover, the restriction over the land and the inability to construct in Area C have led to an increase in housing prices of around 24 percent. The future of solid waste is thus put into question as infrastructure and land acquisition to expand or build facilities will be more costly.

Furthermore, aid has not fostered capacity-building. In fact, the experts and equipment required to execute the projects have frequently been provided by the donor countries. This has limited opportunities for Palestinian companies to bid on projects and develop technical and strategic expertise.

Finally, and despite the EU's major role in the establishment of a waste facility in Gaza, the Joint Strategy 2017-2020 does not mention the solid waste urgency. The absence of reference to solid waste is a pitfall considering the cross-cutting impacts that improper management has on both health and environment. European aid towards agricultural, economic, and medical development could prove to be inefficient if it does not integrate solid waste considerations.

Policy recommendations

In light of the above, this paper suggests a number of recommendations for steps that may be taken with a view to establishing effective management of solid waste in the West Bank:

- Re-directing the Joint Strategy for 2022 towards a coherent foreign policy that aligns with the EU's commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda. A guideline should be created with the objective to ensure that each action maximizes co-benefits and responds to the specificities of social and environmental transition within the Palestinian context.
- Improving solid waste management by: drafting a national strategy and action plan to tackle recycling; funding pilot projects to develop composting; supporting the PA in data collection; drafting standards and result indicators for hazardous waste based on European guidelines; ensuring the appropriate training and equipment for workers at risk in landfills; developing awareness campaigns and educational programs.
- Working towards the viability of electronic waste flows by supporting the capacities of informal businesses; by supporting the PA in subsidizing this sector to upgrade the current informal facilities; by exerting diplomatic pressure, with the approval of the PA, to amend the Israeli E-waste law.
- Creating a waste-to-energy plant also corresponds to a window of improvement. The EU or its member states could help in funding and establishing a plant. This would directly serve the EU's ambitions of providing affordable and sustainable access to energy.
- Exerting diplomatic pressure on Israel's Ministry of Environmental Protection regarding the illegal disposal of industrial and settlement waste, while also pressuring the Israeli government to uphold international laws that are currently violated.