



ASSESSMENT

Institutional memory of Palestinian public institutions under the war: Post-October 2023

April 2025



ASSESSMENT

Institutional memory of Palestinian public institutions under the war: Post-October 2023

April 2025



Special notes

This report was prepared between June and December 2024. Its content represent the reality on the ground during this period, and due to the deterioration of the situation and the successive changes on the ground in the Gaza Strip, there may be unexpected events that occurred after this period.

DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance

DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance is dedicated to improving the security of states and their people within a framework of democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and gender equality. Since its founding in 2000, DCAF has contributed to making peace and development more sustainable by assisting partner states, and international actors supporting these states, to improve the governance of their security sector through inclusive and participatory reforms. It creates innovative knowledge products, promotes norms and good practices, provides legal and policy advice and supports capacity building of both state and non-state security sector stakeholders.

Acknowledgement

DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance would like to thank Mr. Ayman Ayoub and Jonas Geith from DCAF, and Mr. Nicholas Robson, Selim Selimi and Yasmine Khamis from the Office of the Quartet for their valuable contributions and review. We thank the Office of the Quartet for its financial support for the preparation of this report.

Editors

Eman Redwan, Imad Kahil, Johannes Sauerland, Patricia Valencia Gallego, Fateh Hamarsheh

Field researchers

Mohammad Odeh, Mohammad Nisman, Mohammad Al-Hajjar, Bilal Shaath, Jamal Shkukani

Copyright

DCAF encourages the use, translation, and dissemination of this publication. Do not alter the content of the report and provide the below citation when referencing it.

Cite as: DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, “Institutional memory of Palestinian public institutions under the war: Post- October 2023” (Ramallah: DCAF, 2025).

Translation

Yaseen Nor Eddin Al Sayyed

Design

Jack Rabah

Publishing

Published in 2025 by DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
DCAF Geneva

ISBN: 9789292227869

Disclaimer

This report was funded by the Office of the Quartet via UNOPS. The contents of this report do not reflect the views of the Office of the Quartet.

CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION	5
KEY INSTITUTIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR MAINTAINING PUBLIC RECORDS AND ISSUING OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS	9
THE SECURITY SECTOR	10
THE JUSTICE SECTOR	14
THE EDUCATION SECTOR	19
THE LOCAL GOVERNANCE SECTOR	21
THE HEALTH SECTOR	23
THE ECONOMIC SECTOR	25
OVERVIEW OF THE DESTRUCTION	29
CONCLUSION	34
RECOMMENDATIONS	37

INTRODUCTION

“Institutional memory”, the archival records of institutions, is a cornerstone of effective governance, particularly for institutions providing security and justice services. These include civil and religious courts, the public prosecution, various security institutions, as well as municipalities, governorates, ministries and agencies responsible for education, health, land, and water management. Institutional memory is vital to ensure institutional continuity, informed and transparent official decisions, operational efficiency and effectiveness, and the safeguarding of public and private rights.

Following the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and its assumption of administrative responsibilities under the Oslo Accords of 1993 and subsequent agreements - such as the Gaza-Jericho Agreement of 1994 and the Interim Palestinian-Israeli Agreement (Taba Agreement) of 1995 - the PA inherited many responsibilities from Israel. Among these was the management, preservation, and updating of records and documents previously maintained by the Israeli authorities since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967.

From 1994 to 2007, the PA preserved and managed official records and issued documents in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, adhering to existing legal frameworks, including relevant Israeli military orders. On May 20, 1994, late President Yasser Arafat issued Decision No. 1 of 1994, stipulating that all laws, regulations, and orders in force before June 5, 1967, including existing Israeli military orders, would remain applicable in all areas of the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) until legal unification was achieved. The decision also affirmed the continued functioning of civil, religious, and sectarian courts under existing laws and regulations.

However, following the Fatah-Hamas political split, and Hamas’ takeover of Gaza, record keeping became fragmented. The new De-Facto Authority (DFA) in the Gaza Strip assumed control over record-keeping and document issuance in the Strip, including records related to individuals, properties, and financial assets. Meanwhile, the PA retained its authority over the West Bank. Yet, it continued managing certain Gaza-related records. This includes most notably the civil registry recording civil status matters such as births, marriages and deaths that require Israeli approval due to Hamas’ political and diplomatic isolation. Over the years, this division has continued to weaken the administrative and institutional framework.

The Gaza war that started in October 2023 has presented the most severe challenge to institutional memory to date. More than 80% of government infrastructure has been destroyed, including administrative buildings, archives, storage facilities, and server rooms. The full extent of damage to public records remains unclear, as it is uncertain whether institutions managed to secure data electronically. This raises serious concerns about the potential destruction of Palestinian institutional memory, with far-reaching implications for individual rights and broader governance structures.

This report represents the first comprehensive assessment of the loss of public records in Palestinian institutions.

The importance of institutional memory for the security and justice sectors

Institutional memory is essential for the effective functioning of security and justice institutions, ensuring continuity, accountability, and informed decision-making. Its role extends beyond record-keeping to supporting governance principles and upholding the rule of law.

- Institutional memory serves as a pillar for maintaining official records, administrative decisions, and organizational practices, ensuring institutional continuity.
- In the security sector, institutional memory is a fundamental prerequisite for good governance principles such as the rule of law, transparency, and accountability, as well as upholding human rights. It also plays a crucial role in supporting decision-making, enhancing operational efficiency, and improving resource management. By documenting knowledge and best practices, institutional memory enables security institutions to adapt to evolving challenges while maintaining continuity and legitimacy in their operations.
- In the justice sector, institutional memory is crucial for accountability and the protection of personal and property rights. It helps document legal precedents and judicial decisions, facilitating access to essential information for judges and lawyers to uphold justice.

Given the cross-sectoral importance of institutional memory, the potential destruction of documentation due to the Gaza war presents a serious challenge for security, justice, and the future governance of the Gaza Strip. This report examines the state and potential loss of official records in Palestinian institutions in the Gaza Strip. Because of the complex political and institutional situation since the political split between the West Bank and Gaza in 2007, an assessment cannot focus solely on the Gaza Strip. Instead, it necessarily includes a holistic review of the legislative and institutional framework under which Palestinian institutions recorded, managed, and issued official documents—before and after 2007, and since the outbreak of the Gaza war in October 2023.

Objectives of this paper

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the Gaza war on institutional memory by:

- Identifying key Palestinian institutions responsible for issuing official documents and the types of documents issued in both the West Bank and Gaza by the identified institutions.
- Determining the legal framework governing the issuance of these documents, as well as changes in the documentation process since the political split in 2007.
- Assessing the status of records and documents post-October 7, 2023 and the effects of the Gaza war, including in cases where institutions were targeted.

Scope of the paper

This report assesses the state and potential loss of institutional memory within Palestinian institutions in the Gaza Strip responsible for managing public records and issuing official documents related to individuals. Palestinian institutions that record public records unrelated to individuals are outside the scope of this report. While assessing the institutional memory of Palestinian institutions in the Gaza Strip, it is necessary to more broadly cover the legislative and institutional framework of Palestinian institutions.

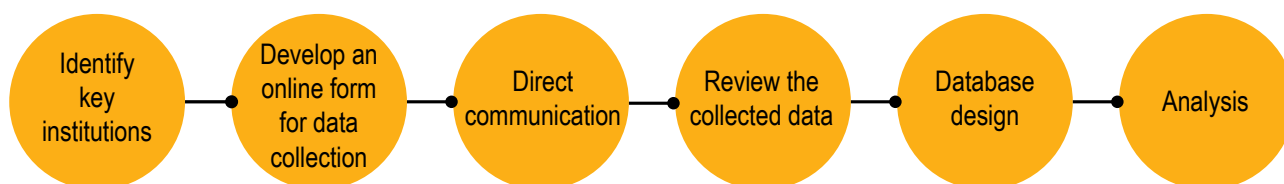
Methodology and limitations

The report is primarily based on the collection and analysis of field-based data gathered directly from 45 public Palestinian institutions in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. The data collection followed five key steps:

1. Conducted a comprehensive review of Palestinian legislation to identify key institutions responsible for gathering and maintaining public records.
2. Carried out 18 interviews with key institutional contacts in the West Bank and conducted a second round of legislative review to determine how Palestinian institutions maintained the records after the political split between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip since 2007.
3. Conducted extensive fieldwork in the Gaza Strip between August and November 2024. DCAF field researchers developed and disseminated a user-friendly electronic form for institutional contacts there. Where internet access was unreliable, researchers conducted phone or in-person interviews, ultimately gathering 40 responses from institutions across the Gaza Strip.
4. Reviewed and validated all collected data to ensure accuracy and consistency, going through an iterative process, including personal follow-up with institutional contacts at Palestinian institutions in Gaza.
5. Designed a structured database to capture and analyze the data (see full dataset for all details).
6. Analyzed the key documents published, and the extent of their destruction, distinguishing wherever possible between physical and electronic records.

The process can be represented as depicted below:

Graph 1: Data gathering and analysis methodology



The study faced three key challenges that affected the quantity and quality of data collected:

- **Institutional hesitancy:** Some institutions were reluctant to share information due to privacy and safety concerns, particularly in the context of war. DCAF engaged directly with higher administrative levels to build trust and facilitate data sharing. However, not in all cases was DCAF able to collect the necessary data.
- **Communication barriers:** Frequent internet outages and disrupted communication channels delayed data collection. In response, DCAF relied on alternative methods, such as phone and in-person interviews, to ensure data retrieval.
- **Safety risks:** The security situation posed a significant obstacle to data collection. Ensuring the safety of field researchers and respondents was a priority, making institutional visits and data verification particularly difficult, especially in northern Gaza.
- **Political considerations:** At times sources – especially political representatives - provided diverging information, potentially due to political considerations involved in the perceived sensitivity of some data.

Despite these challenges, this report provides a well-informed and reasonably accurate assessment of the current state of institutional memory within Palestinian justice and security institutions in the Gaza Strip under conditions of war.

KEY INSTITUTIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR MAINTAINING PUBLIC RECORDS AND ISSUING OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

From its formation in 1994 until 2007, the PA asserted authority over both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The institutions under the PA operated under an overarching legislative framework issued directly by it. This structure allowed ministries, such as the Ministry of Interior, to govern both territories in a unified manner. For example, despite having its main office in the West Bank and a secondary office in Gaza, record-keeping remained centralised, with key records maintained in the West Bank.

However, following the political split and Hamas' takeover of Gaza in 2007, institutional structures, including record-keeping, became fragmented. While some coordination persisted between PA institutions in the West Bank and certain institutions under the De-Facto Authority in the Gaza Strip, most of these connections broke down.

This first section of the report provides a detailed overview of Palestinian institutions responsible for maintaining public records and issuing official documents to Palestinian citizens. Institutions have been grouped by sector, covering security, justice, education, health, local governance, and the economic sector.

To clarify this complex arrangement, this section examines each institution on a case-by-case basis. Each section outlines a) the general PA legal framework governing the institutions, b) the records recorded and published by the respective institution, c) the effects of the political division on record-keeping and coordination and d) the impact of the Gaza war on these institutions, including the specific findings on the status of such records in Gaza.

THE SECURITY SECTOR

The Ministry of Interior and National Security

Since its inception in 1994, the Palestinian Ministry of Interior and National Security (Mol) plays a crucial role in managing public records and issuing official documents related to individuals' personal status. The Mol established the Directorate of Civil Status, which operates in each Palestinian governorate via local branches. These local branches are responsible for maintaining, updating, and issuing civil registry records, before reporting them back to the Mol for official inclusion in the civil registry. To streamline the process, special service offices licensed by the ministry are situated near the directorates. These offices assist citizens in completing the necessary forms for document issuance, thereby enhancing accessibility and efficiency in the process.

Documents published and recorded

The Mol has the key responsibility of maintaining the civil registry that contains comprehensive data on Palestinian citizens and records any changes affecting their status from birth to death. It publishes and records – among other less important documents – the following documents:

- **Birth certificates:** The Ministry issues birth certificates for newborns based on birth notifications directly from hospitals. The certificate includes the newborn's gender, name, father's name, grandfather's name, family name, birth date and place, and the mother's name. These records are preserved in the birth registry.
- **Personal identification card:** The Ministry is legally responsible for issuing ID cards, defined in Article 1 of the Civil Affairs Law as a legal document for personal identification purposes.
- **Marital status registration:** It registers marriage and divorce certificates, whether issued by Shari'a courts or authorized religious officiants licensed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Shari'a courts or officiants are required to report marriages to the Ministry of Interior within specified deadlines.
- **Death certificates:** It issues death certificates in coordination with hospitals and municipal councils that report these deaths to the Mol, to ensure timely documentation of deaths and the issuance of burial permits.

Laws regulating record-keeping

The Ministry operates under the Palestinian Civil Affairs Law No. 2 of 1999, enacted by the PA during the tenure of the first Palestinian Legislative Council (1996-2005). This law includes various legal provisions regulating the Mol's role in managing the Civil Registry, outlining procedures for its updates and the mechanisms for documenting changes in citizens' records. It also defines the process for issuing official documents. Article 1 of the Civil Affairs Law defines the Civil Registry as: "The paper-based and/or electronic and/or computer-stored registry and its contents, whether in electronic, magnetic, or any other form. It includes all civil status records of every Palestinian based on verified documentation, with the paper-based registry considered the primary record for civil

affairs.”

Article 2 of the law further stipulates that the Directorate of Civil Status shall be established within the Mol, which is tasked, under Article 3, with establishing and managing the Civil Registry. The law also instructs the Directorate to not only maintain the Civil Registry but also a record of each civil status change (Article 6). Moreover, Article 13 of the law establishes the evidentiary value of records, stating: “Records and their contents, including data, certificates, and extracts, shall be considered legally valid unless proven otherwise or invalidated by a judicial ruling.”

Record-keeping since the political split

Before the 2007 split, the PA's Directorate of Civil Status of the Ministry of Interior managed a unified civil registry – located at the Ministry in the West Bank – for both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. At the same time, based on the Oslo Accords, the Israeli authorities retained the right to review and approve civil registry data entry.

This arrangement continued even after the political split, creating a complex chain of data processing and storage. The PA continues to maintain a unified national registry that includes all Gaza citizens and their records through a three-step coordination mechanism:

1. Officials of the Ministry of Interior in Gaza under the DFA coordinate with institutions in Gaza, such as hospitals, to be notified of any needed changes to the civil registry, and issue the appropriate documentation, such as a birth certificates.
2. These new records are then physically relayed to the Israeli Civil Affairs Unit.
3. Records are finally sent to the PA Ministry of Interior in Ramallah, ensuring their official inclusion in the national civil registry.

Hence, the physical civil registry was never held in Gaza. Instead, data is physically held by the Israeli authorities and PA institutions in the West Bank. However, the DFA compiled an electronic copy of civil registry data for Gaza, albeit not necessarily complete as changes for Gazans in the West Bank would not be relayed to DFA in Gaza. This archive includes birth registrations that were sent to the West Bank for official entry, as well as death certificates, which were carefully managed due to their critical role in inheritance matters.

Overall, the primary responsibility for maintaining and updating civil registry records, as well as issuing official documents, remains under the jurisdiction of the PA Ministry of Interior, serving citizens in both the West Bank and Gaza, even before and after the 2007 division. Notably, until January 1, 2023, the Ministry of Interior and National Security in Gaza - under the DFA - maintained a backup electronic archive of all civil records.

Impact of the Gaza war and key findings on destruction

The destruction of Mol buildings and the mass displacement caused by the Gaza war have severely disrupted the Mol's ability in the Gaza Strip to update and issue essential civil documents, including birth and death certificates, ID cards, and marital status records. However, even during the war, the process of updating the civil registry through the outlined coordination mechanism has continued. For example, the DFA has coordinated with local institutions, such as the remaining hospitals, and with Israeli authorities to issue birth certificates and relay them to the West Bank.

Yet, given the dire situation in the Gaza Strip, data indicates that since the beginning of the war, thousands of newborns, deaths, marriages, and divorces have not been officially registered. However, at this point DCAF cannot provide an estimate of how many such cases exist. This complicates all legal verification processes. While physical records were safely transferred to the West Bank before October 2023 and remain secure, data entry has only been partially maintained since then.

Key findings:

- All data related to the civil registry is safely stored in the PA-held civil registry at the Mol in Ramallah.
- Until October 2023, civil registry data had been fully transferred from Gaza to the West Bank.
- Since October 2023, documentation has been partially incomplete, despite ongoing coordination between the DFA, Israeli authorities, and the PA to update records and enter new data.

The Palestinian Land Authority

The Palestinian Land Authority (PLA) is an independent public authority responsible for managing, maintaining, and updating land and property records mainly via its General Directorate of Land and Real Estate Registration, also colloquially known as *Tabu*, referring to the former Ottoman land registry.

Documents published and recorded

Most notably, the PLA issues:

- **Land deeds** (Qushans)
- **Ownership certificates** for apartments and buildings.

Laws regulating record-keeping

The PLA was established by Presidential Decree No. 10 of 2002. It is responsible for preserving land, property titles and other ensuing rights of citizens and government, as well as the resolution of land disputes and documentation thereof. The PLA maintains offices in every governorate where physical but not electronic records are stored decentralized.

Several legislative instruments from various eras coexist to form the legal framework governing land in the oPt, thus complicating the governance of institutions. These instruments include Ottoman, British, Jordanian and Egyptian laws, in addition to Israeli military orders. However, besides from Palestinian Presidential decree No. 10, 2002, on the establishment of the PLA, there was no comprehensive Palestinian legislation on land registration, despite the establishment of the PA in 1994 and the Israeli transfer of land records to the PA - except for records of land located in category “C” under the Oslo Accords.

Due to the complex and fragmented legal framework, land laws differ between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In Gaza, for instance, some Egyptian laws remain applicable, while in the West Bank, Jordanian law is in effect. This divergence has led to the necessity of maintaining separate land registries for each region, even before the political split in 2007.

West Bank PLA officials have confirmed that electronic archiving of land records began in 2011 to improve data accessibility. However, Gaza was excluded from this system due to the 2007 division (see below). As a result, it is currently impossible for individuals owning land in Gaza to obtain an ownership deed from the land registration offices in the West Bank, owing to the lack of coordination and missing data on Gaza-based properties.

Record-keeping since the political split

The PLA remained a unified entity overseeing land records until the 2007 political division. Officials from the West Bank PLA confirmed that since 2007, no official linkage or coordination has existed between the land registries in Gaza and the West Bank, leading to a split in land administration. The West Bank PLA has managed land records exclusively in the West Bank, while the Gaza-based PLA has handled land records solely in Gaza. As a result, each entity operates independently, updating land registries and issuing related documents without coordination. While the West Bank maintains offices in every governorate where physical records are stored in a decentralized manner (but not electronically), in Gaza, records are stored centrally.

Impact of the Gaza war and key findings on destruction

Since the beginning of the current Gaza war in 2023, the infrastructure of the PLA in Gaza has been at least partially destroyed. Our findings indicate that most of Gaza land records had been digitised prior to the war. According to the PA Ministry of Justice (MoJ), a copy of the electronic registry has been obtained by the Ministry and the West Bank PLA. However, this remains an unofficial copy at best. According to DCAF interviews, no data has been officially shared from the DFA, partly due to political reasons.

Furthermore, importantly, all records of land ownership and transactions created before 2001 were stored on paper in the old archive, which has been completely destroyed.

Key findings:

- **Loss of physical land records:** While the PLA had worked extensively to digitise its archives, all documents stored in the old archive, mainly pre-2001 records, have been lost. This includes crucial land ownership documents and transaction records that were never transferred into the digital registry.
- **Fragmentation of land administration:** The longstanding division between the West Bank and Gaza PLA offices, coupled with the absence of complete electronic records in Gaza, complicates efforts to recover and unify land registries. This fragmentation risks legal disputes over land ownership and property rights.
- **Urgent need for reconstruction and legal harmonisation:** Rebuilding Gaza's land records will require a coordinated effort between legal authorities, governmental institutions, and land administration bodies. This is essential to restoring property rights, preventing disputes, and ensuring a structured reconstruction process.

THE JUSTICE SECTOR

The regular court system: The High Judicial Council, regular courts and the Public Notary Office of the Ministry of Justice

The regular court system and its affiliated administrative departments play a pivotal role in managing public records and issuing official documents. Notary public offices, located within judicial complexes across Palestinian cities, serve as a primary mechanism for safeguarding individual rights and ensuring proper documentation. These offices issue documents related to land and property rights, including various types of powers of attorney. A significant portion of land transactions is conducted through irrevocable powers of attorney, with notary offices maintaining both paper and electronic records of these transactions.

Additionally, courts adjudicate property and financial disputes, and their rulings directly affect public records and official documents. As such, the judicial system is a crucial element in managing public records.

Documents published and recorded

As part of its legal and administrative responsibilities, the regular court system and its affiliated bodies issue and record a range of documents, including:

- **Judicial rulings and court decisions:** Courts issue legally binding rulings that impact civil and commercial disputes, family law matters, and property rights.
- **Notary public documents:** Notary offices issue and authenticate legal instruments such as irrevocable powers of attorney, general powers of attorney, and specific powers of attorney.
- **Land and property transaction records:** Notary public offices document land sales and property transfers, which often take place through irrevocable powers of attorney.
- **Legal declarations and affidavits:** Individuals can submit sworn statements and declarations before notary offices, which then record and authenticate them.
- **Execution orders and enforcement records:** The judiciary maintains records of legal enforcement actions, including the execution of court rulings related to criminal and civil disputes.

Laws regulating record-keeping

The High Judicial Council operates under the Palestinian Judicial Authority Law No. 1 of 2002, which defines the judiciary's structure, jurisdiction, and responsibilities. Several key articles of the law outline the role of judicial bodies in record-keeping:

- **Article 3** establishes the High Judicial Council as the supreme authority overseeing judicial affairs, including the management of public records.
- **Article 7** mandates that courts and judicial offices maintain official records of all legal proceedings, rulings, and authenticated documents.

- **Article 10** specifies that notary public offices must maintain permanent archives of all notarized documents, ensuring their accessibility and legal validity.
- **Article 14** stipulates that judicial rulings are legally binding and enforceable unless overturned by a higher court, reinforcing their role in shaping public records.
- **Article 20** requires that judicial records be maintained in both physical and electronic formats to ensure their preservation and security.

Record-keeping since the political split

From the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1994 until 2007, the judicial system, including the notary public office, operated under a unified framework managed by the High Judicial Council, overseeing both the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

However, after 2007, the DFA in Gaza established its own High Judicial Council, leading to a lack of recognition of judicial decisions and official legal documents between the West Bank and Gaza. Officials from the High Judicial Council in Ramallah confirmed that no formal cooperation has existed between the judicial authorities in the West Bank and Gaza since 2007. As a consequence, judicial rulings issued in Gaza are not officially recognized in the West Bank, and vice versa.

This division has had a significant legal impact on the judicial system. In the West Bank, legal authentication has become increasingly complicated, particularly for notary public and legal documents issued in Gaza. While, in principle, these documents should be authenticated by a court notary department to be legally valid, judicial officials noted that authentication of Gaza-issued documents submitted in the West Bank for official purposes now occurs exclusively through the Palestinian Bar Association in both territories. Although this process is technically irregular, it remains the only available mechanism.

Additionally, judicial record-keeping has suffered due to the political division and lack of coordination. In 2001, with support from UNDP, the Palestinian Authority (PA) introduced Mizan I, a digital system for managing and archiving court files, initially implemented in the Ramallah Conciliation Court. The system was gradually expanded to cover all Palestinian courts, which was accomplished in 2006. While Mizan (now Mizan II) remains fully operational in the West Bank, receiving regular updates and maintenance from the responsible company, the situation in Gaza has evolved differently.

After 2007, courts under the DFA in Gaza continued to use Mizan I, albeit disconnected from the system in the West Bank. No further communication with the responsible company was possible, preventing regular updates and maintenance. Instead, the DFA modified and adapted Mizan whenever necessary, introducing an auxiliary system in 2019 to compensate for the lack of technical support.

According to interviews conducted by DCAF with court officials between October 2024 and March 2025, active court proceedings were meticulously digitized despite the challenges posed by the large volume of data. Officials estimate that 95% of new case files were digitized, though this excluded supporting documents and physical evidence, which could not be digitized. Meanwhile, older case files were only partially digitized, leaving significant gaps in historical legal records.

Impact of the Gaza war and key findings on destruction

The 2023 Gaza war has exacerbated existing challenges in judicial record-keeping, with the destruction of court buildings, notary offices, and archives severely disrupting legal documentation processes. Notably, the Palace of Justice, which served as Gaza's central judicial hub, housing civil, criminal, and administrative courts, as well as the public prosecutor's office, was destroyed. This devastation has long-term implications for legal certainty, inheritance rights, and property claims in Gaza. Currently, courts operate in ad-hoc locations and mobile units.

Court files that had not yet been digitized were likely destroyed and may only be partially recoverable. However, digitized files should have been preserved, at least allowing active court cases to continue. At the start of the war, servers went out of service, rendering Mizan inoperative. Following the ceasefire, the DFA attempted to restart the system, which functioned briefly for a week before shutting down again due to infrastructure and logistical failures.

As of March 2025, no digitization efforts are operational, according to both High Judicial Council officials and statements from the Gaza Public Prosecution. However, if logistical support and resources were made available, the system could be restored, allowing judicial record-keeping to resume.

Key findings:

- The destruction of court buildings, notary offices, and archives in Gaza has severely disrupted legal documentation processes, further complicating property rights, financial disputes, and civil registry records. Currently, no digitisation of files is functional, and government e-services operate only intermittently.
- The loss of judicial records created before the introduction of Mizan in 2006 undermines legal certainty, making it difficult to verify ownership, authenticate legal documents, and enforce court rulings, thereby increasing the risk of legal disputes. This issue is worsened by the loss of physical evidence and supporting documents.
- Digitized court records (since 2006) were likely preserved, meaning, with sufficient logistical and resource support, judicial governance in Gaza could gradually resume.
- While temporary court structures have been established, they lack secure access to legal databases, making legal proceedings more difficult and prone to inconsistencies.

The Palestinian Bar Association

The Palestinian Bar Association (PBA) is responsible for regulating the legal profession and overseeing the authentication of certain legal documents.

Documents published and recorded

As part of its responsibilities, the PBA issues and authenticates various legal documents, including:

- **Powers of attorney:** The PBA authenticates general, specific, and irrevocable powers of attorney, particularly for property transactions.
- **Legal certifications:** The Association verifies the authenticity of signatures and stamps on legal documents for official recognition.
- **Bar membership records:** It maintains records of licensed lawyers, including their registration details and professional status.
- **Disciplinary records:** The PBA documents disciplinary actions taken against lawyers in line with legal and ethical standards.

Laws regulating record-keeping

The PBA operates under the Law of Regular Lawyers No. 3 of 1999, which defines its structure, responsibilities, and role in overseeing the legal profession. Before 2007, the General Assembly of Lawyers in both the West Bank and Gaza functioned as a unified body, electing a single Bar Council. However, following the political split, Decree-Law No. 14 of 2011 amended Article 11 of the original law, formally established two separate Bar Associations – one in the West Bank and one in the Gaza Strip - each with financial autonomy and an independent General Assembly.

Despite this division, the PBA remains the sole representative body for Palestinian lawyers. The unified Bar Council consists of 15 members, with 9 based in the West Bank and 6 in Gaza.

Key legal provisions governing the PBA's record-keeping responsibilities include:

- **Article 18** mandates the association's role in maintaining records of licensed lawyers, their registration, and disciplinary actions.
- **Article 25** specifies the Bar Association's authority in authenticating legal documents, including powers of attorney and certifications.
- **Article 30** requires that authenticated legal documents be recorded in a central registry to ensure verification and prevent fraud.
- **Article 35** mandates that records be maintained in both physical and electronic formats, ensuring accessibility and security.

Record-keeping since the political split

Following the 2007 division, the PBA in Gaza replaced notary public offices in Gaza and assumed responsibility for authenticating official documents and powers of attorney intended for use in the West Bank. In 2011, the Palestinian Prime Minister's Office issued directives allowing the PBA in Gaza to authenticate official documents and transmit them to the West Bank for approval. Under this system, official powers of attorney from Gaza were authenticated upon arrival at the Bar Association headquarters in the West Bank.

The impact of the Gaza war and key findings on destruction

The Gaza war has severely disrupted legal documentation processes for the Bar Association in Gaza. The complete destruction of government infrastructure, including administrative offices and records storage, has made the authentication and transmission of official documents increasingly difficult. As a result, the Bar Association now only verifies copies of powers of attorney, which are sent via WhatsApp for authentication before being stamped and signed in the West Bank. This shift highlights the fragility of legal record-keeping systems in conflict zones and the urgent need for more secure and resilient documentation mechanisms.

Regarding documentation that existed prior to the war, research indicates that the Bar Association stored all its documents using a cloud system, keeping documentation safely stored outside Gaza on international servers.

Key findings:

- The Gaza war has destroyed the infrastructure of the Gaza Bar Association, making it impossible to formally transmit original legal documents between Gaza and the West Bank.
- Digital communication (WhatsApp) is now used to transmit photos of documents, not their originals, as an alternative method for document verification, raising concerns about security, authenticity, and long-term record preservation.
- Legal records are maintained in electronic formats, but conflict-related destruction poses a severe threat to institutional memory and access to official records.

THE EDUCATION SECTOR

The Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education is responsible for regulating and supervising educational institutions across the oPt, overseeing national examinations such as the General Secondary Examination (*Tawjihi*), and issuing official high school diplomas. The Ministry operates under Decree-Law No. 8 of 2017 on General Education, which replaced the Education Law of 1964 and the Knowledge Law of 1933. Despite the political division in 2007, the Ministry has continued to oversee education in both the West Bank and Gaza, maintaining authority over school certification, record-keeping, and degree verification.

Documents published and recorded

As part of its responsibilities, the Ministry of Education maintains and issues a host of documents, including:

- **School certificates:** Issued for all educational levels, documenting students' academic progress and completion of required curricula.
- **Tawjihi certificates:** The official General Secondary Examination certificates for Palestinian students.
- **University degrees:** Verified and authenticated for students graduating from Palestinian universities.
- **Equivalency certificates:** Issued for degrees obtained from foreign institutions to certify their recognition in Palestine.
- **Licensing documents for educational institutions:** Permits for private and foreign schools and kindergartens, issued under ministry regulations.

Laws regulating record-keeping

The **Decree-Law No. 8 of 2017 on General Education** outlines the Ministry of Education's regulatory and supervisory authority over educational institutions and record-keeping. Key legal provisions include:

- **Article 4, Clause 10** grants the ministry supervisory authority over non-governmental educational institutions.
- **Article 7, Clause 3** authorizes the Minister of Education to issue regulations governing the licensing and administration of kindergartens.
- **Articles 15–20** establish the procedures for licensing private and foreign educational institutions, placing them under the ministry's jurisdiction.
- **Article 25** mandates that official school records, including *Tawjihi* certificates, be maintained in both physical and digital formats to ensure secure archiving and retrieval.
- **Article 32** requires that degrees from foreign institutions be authenticated by the Ministry of Education through Palestinian embassies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Record-keeping since the political split

Following the split, the Ministry of Education continued its role in both the West Bank and Gaza, maintaining oversight of school curricula, examination records, and university certifications. Despite the existence of a separate Ministry of Education in Gaza, which has introduced some of its own textbooks and educational standards, the West Bank-based Ministry has remained the primary authority responsible for record-keeping and verification. Regarding the authentication of foreign degrees obtained by Gazan residents, officials explained that these certificates are processed through Palestinian embassies and require an official ministerial stamp for recognition. Additionally, university degrees issued in Gaza must be stamped by the PA Minister of Education to ensure their official recognition.

In sum, despite administrative fragmentation, the Ministry of Education in the West Bank has maintained a centralized system for record-keeping and authentication, ensuring that student records, school certificates, and university degrees remain accessible for future verification and retrieval. Any student from either the West Bank or Gaza who requires their final school certificates (grades 1–12) can obtain them from the Ministry of Education in Ramallah. As for higher education, university and master's degree certificates can also be obtained from the Ministry of Education after graduation is fully completed. However, possessing a copy of these certificates is required for reissuance.

The impact of the Gaza war and key findings on destruction

The Gaza war has led to the near-collapse of the education system, with extensive destruction of schools and university infrastructure. The Gaza Ministry of Education was forced to halt operations entirely. However, core institutional memory remains intact, as key educational records -such as school diplomas and university degrees-are securely stored in a centralized system in the West Bank.

Universities and their physical archives suffered severe destruction, yet student records have been preserved thanks to cloud-based international servers. This has been confirmed by major universities such as the Islamic University, Al-Azhar University, and Al-Aqsa University, who have shared with DCAF's researchers the fact that they have cloud storage systems in place. While universities required several months to reactivate their systems, most students can now access their academic records remotely. The storage of educational records in the West Bank and on international servers ensures continuity in academic certification and future verification, despite the extensive physical destruction in Gaza. For specific details on the loss of documentation and recovery of them by university, refer to the full dataset.

Key findings:

- The war has devastated Gaza's educational infrastructure, severely limiting access to schooling and universities and disrupting access to education certification.
- Student records have remained largely unaffected due to the centralization of educational data in the West Bank or due to the usage of cloud systems in the case of most universities
- The war has intensified reliance on the West Bank for record-keeping and certification.

THE LOCAL GOVERNANCE SECTOR

Municipalities

There are 121 Palestinian municipalities: 96 in the West Bank and 25 in Gaza. Following the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA), local elections became a significant arena for Palestinian political development. The first local elections under the PA were held in 2004-2005 in both the West Bank and Gaza—the first since 1976. Municipalities fall under the authority of the PA's Ministry of Local Government. While they are granted a degree of autonomy, they are highly dependent on the PA central government for the bulk of their budget.

Documents published and recorded

Municipalities maintain a wide range of records, including internal documents, service provision forms, and public records essential for governance and citizen rights. Key public records include:

- **Permits and licenses** (e.g., building permits, electricity subscription permits, street elevation permits)
- **Trade licenses** (for industrial, commercial, and tourist activities)
- **Municipal council decisions**
- **Detailed urban planning and zoning plans**
- **Financial and legal records**

Laws regulating record-keeping

Municipalities operate under the 1997 Local Authorities Law, with amendments introduced through Decree No. 9 (2008) and Decree No. 8 (2016). While municipalities maintain a degree of administrative autonomy, they remain financially dependent on the PA. Key legal obligations regarding municipal record-keeping include:

- Maintaining **official records of all municipal activities**, decisions, and financial transactions.
- Ensuring public record accuracy, preservation, and accessibility, particularly in areas such as **budgeting, land administration, and taxation**.
- Keeping records of **municipal contracts, public tenders, and procurements**, subject to government oversight.

Record-keeping since the political split

Following the 2007 political division, municipalities continued operating under separate governance structures. Gaza is home to 25 municipalities, each responsible for local governance and service provision within its respective jurisdiction. The Ministry of Local Government under the DFA oversees all municipalities, issuing directives and ensuring regulatory compliance.

In both the West Bank and Gaza, independent efforts were made at the municipal level to digitise records. However, digitisation was not centralised and remained fragmented, not only between Gaza and the West Bank but also among different municipalities in each region. As a result, municipalities developed their own record-keeping and archiving practices. Given Gaza's ongoing crises, efforts have been made to safeguard municipal records through computerisation initiatives. Some municipalities, such as Gaza Municipality and Khan Younis Municipality, developed their own digital systems, while others benefited from donor-supported projects.

The Impact of the Gaza war and key findings on destruction

The Gaza war post-October 2023 has resulted in extensive destruction of municipal infrastructure. The physical archives of Wadi Gaza Municipality, Nuseirat Municipality, Khan Younis Municipality and New Abasan Municipality have been entirely destroyed. Other archives of Gaza Municipality, Al-Zahraa Municipality, Al-Zawaida Municipality, Al-Masdar Municipality, Al-Bureij Municipality, Wadi Al-Salqa Municipality, Deir Al-Balah Municipality, Al-Qarara Municipality, Al-Shawka Municipality, and Rafah Municipality have been partially destroyed. Without immediate intervention, vital municipal records could be permanently lost, impacting land ownership, business licensing, and urban planning efforts in Gaza. A more detailed overview by municipality can be found in the full dataset.

Key findings:

- **Destruction of physical archives:** The destruction of municipal buildings resulted in the far-reaching loss of data.
- **Unclear status of electronic back-ups:** Municipalities retained backup copies of many records, but the extent of data security remains unclear due to limited disclosure. It is unknown whether key electronic backups are stored on servers that remain safe.
- **Varying levels of electronic back-ups:** Several municipalities have confirmed electronic back-up of data all essential data. Others have confirmed the existence of only partial back-ups of the documentation they stored (see details in the full dataset).
- **Loss of supporting data:** Supporting data - such as zoning maps laying out the exact borders of land ownership - have likely never been digitized and are likely to be lost.

THE HEALTH SECTOR

The Ministry of Health

The Palestinian Ministry of Health carries out its responsibilities through its medical staff working in its directorates across all Palestinian governorates. It oversees the implementation of health laws, monitors healthcare facilities to ensure they meet licensing requirements, reviews registration applications, issues licenses, and refers violators for investigation and legal prosecution.

Documents published and recorded

The Ministry of Health is responsible to ensure the provision of health services. This includes key responsibilities regarding the granting of license and maintain public records. The Ministry holds the following documents:

- **Licenses for health providers** incl. licenses for healthcare providing institutions and professionals
- **Licenses for various industries** incl. food, pharmaceutical, cosmetic, funeral and waste industry (manufacturing, import, export, disposal and storage)
- Health insurance certificates and records
- **Specialized health care records** that are strictly regulated such as abortion

Laws regulating record-keeping

The key legislative text governing the record-keeping of the Ministry are the provisions set forth in the Public Health Law No. 20 of 2004.

- **Article 2**, paragraphs 1-16, sets out the Ministry's comprehensive responsibilities for issuing licences to various industries, including to health care providers and professionals
- **Article 65** assigns the Ministry the authority to regulate pharmaceuticals
- **Article 8** assigns the Ministry the responsibility to maintain specialized health care records, such as on abortion procedures

Since the enactment of the law in 2004, the Ministry has issued numerous regulations detailing and updating licensing procedures, also considering product innovation and technological changes. These include the Minister of Health's Regulation on Public Health Hazards No. 1 of 2013, and Regulation No. 1 of 2015 on the licensing of ambulance centers and ambulance vehicles.

Record-keeping since the political split

Until 2007, the Ministry of Health operated as a unified entity in both the West Bank and Gaza, overseeing healthcare provision and maintaining medical and licensing records in a coordinated manner.

However, the 2007 political division led to an administrative split, disrupting unified data management. While technical coordination continued, particularly on support in accessing medications and for medical referrals to healthcare providers outside the oPT, data was no longer jointly administered. West Bank officials confirmed that since 2007, no shared database exists for healthcare-related licenses or medical records between the two regions. Hence, both physical as well as electronic records, such as patient records, are stored separately.

Despite this, in practice, the DFA in Gaza continued to follow West Bank guidelines, largely due to limited resources and a lack of necessary equipment to independently regulate certain products, such as pharmaceuticals.

The Impact of the Gaza war and key findings on destruction

The war has had a devastating impact on Gaza's healthcare infrastructure, severely damaging both medical facilities and the archives of the Ministry of Health. This includes the destruction of physical files related to licensing and healthcare records. While some medical records are also held by healthcare providers, their preservation remains uncertain.

With approximately 34 out of 36 hospitals and clinics partially or completely destroyed by Israeli forces and consequently out of service, including major facilities such as Al-Shifa, Kamal Adwan, and Al-Awda Hospitals, which were completely destroyed, it is highly likely that most medical records are irretrievable.

According to officials from the Gaza-based Ministry of Health, electronic data archiving has been only partially implemented. While key medical records were intended to be saved and backed up electronically, it is unlikely that this was done comprehensively. Particularly private healthcare providers, such as doctors and dentists did often not follow official storage protocols and stored most data only physically. Additionally, DCAF was unable to verify the extent to which electronically backed-up data remain accessible.

Key findings:

- The destruction of Gaza's infrastructure has severely impacted the Ministry of Health's records, including patient medical records.
- Private healthcare providers, including hospitals, doctors, and dentists, suffered equally severe destruction, further complicating medical record preservation.
- According to officials, key healthcare data was supposed to be backed up electronically, meaning data loss is estimated to be only partial, though the full extent remains unclear.

THE ECONOMIC SECTOR

The Ministry of Transport and Communications

Since 1994, The Ministry of Transport and Communications is responsible for traffic regulation, vehicle ownership registration, technical inspections, and personal driver's licensing in all parts of the oPt.

Documents published and recorded

As a key responsibility, the Ministry of Transportation and Communication publishes the following documents:

- **Driver's license** issued by the Licensing Authority authorizing the holder to operate a specific type of vehicle.
- **Vehicle registration license:** An official permit issued by the Licensing Authority, allowing a vehicle to be operated on public roads for the duration of its validity under the conditions stipulated in the law.
- **Licenses for driving schools and instructors:** The Licensing Authority issues licenses for all entities, be it persons or institutions instructing citizens.
- **Licenses for public transportation:** The Licensing Authority issues licenses to all public transportation entities and businesses.
- **Records of traffic violations and penalties:** The Ministry records all details about registered traffic violations and issued penalties.

Laws regulating record-keeping

The Ministry of Transport and Communications operates under Palestinian Traffic Law No. 5 of 2000, which establishes the legal framework for vehicle registration, licensing, and enforcement. Article 1 defines the essential documents issued by the ministry, while Article 2 mandates that no vehicle may operate on public roads unless it is registered with the Licensing Authority and issued an official operating license. Cabinet Decision No. 393 of 2005, serving as the Executive Regulation of the Traffic Law, further details licensing procedures.

The Ministry's structure and responsibilities are clearly outlined within the Traffic Law:

- **Article 3** designates the Ministry of Transport and Communications as the central authority for traffic regulation, licensing, and enforcement.
- **Article 4** assigns the Licensing Authority the responsibility of issuing vehicle and driver's licenses, supervising traffic laws, and managing vehicle registration.
- **Article 5** defines the ministry's role in organizing public transport, setting safety standards, and licensing transport operators.

The Traffic Law emphasizes proper documentation and data management:

- **Article 7** mandates the maintenance of a central traffic database, recording all registered vehicles, drivers, and issued licenses.
- **Article 8** requires tracking of traffic violations and penalties, ensuring data accessibility for authorized entities.
- **Article 9** stipulates that all records must be preserved in both physical and electronic formats to enhance security and accessibility.

While these legal provisions theoretically apply to both the West Bank and Gaza, in practice, the Ministry in Gaza has operated separately since the 2007 political split, leading to parallel licensing systems and limited coordination between the two regions.

Record-keeping since the political split

Until 2007, the Ministry operated in both the West Bank and Gaza in a unified way regarding the enforcement of traffic laws, maintaining records of vehicle licenses and personal driving licenses. It issued all licenses through its directorates across Palestinian cities under a uniform regulatory framework until the 2007 division.

However, the 2007 division led to a complete administrative separation, disrupting coordination between the two areas. Officials confirmed that since 2007 no cooperation or shared database for personal or vehicle licenses exists, and that each side maintains its records separately.

The impact of the Gaza war and key findings on destruction

The war and the destruction that it has caused on the Ministry of Transport and Communications' infrastructure in Gaza following the October 2023 war has severely disrupted critical administrative functions, including vehicle registration, driver licensing, and traffic law enforcement. On the one hand, the infrastructure of the Ministry building, including the physical archiving has sustained partial damage. Therefore, physical records have been lost, and electronic databases are likely compromised due to infrastructure damage and power outages. The lack of access to official documentation hinders the verification of vehicle ownership and driver identity, increasing security risks and impeding law enforcement. According to Gaza-based Ministry officials, data archiving is only partial, thus suggesting a risk of potential data loss, including some records of the Palestinian Traffic Police.

Key findings:

- The destruction of Gaza's infrastructure during the Gaza war has severely affected the Ministry of Transport and Communications' documentation and registries.
- Ministry buildings, archives, and databases were either damaged or completely destroyed, leading to the loss of official records.
- The inability to access digital or physical records has halted essential administrative processes, including vehicle registration and driver licensing.

The Palestinian Monetary Authority and the Palestinian banking system

The Palestinian Monetary Authority (PMA) is an independent public institution, functioning as the central bank of Palestine. It is tasked with overseeing monetary and financial policy to ensure the stability of the banking sector and foster balanced economic growth.

Financial records

The PMA plays a critical role in the creation, implementation, and enforcement of banking regulations across the West Bank and Gaza. In fulfilling these duties, the PMA ensures that banks maintain and retain key financial records that are crucial for both regulatory compliance and operational continuity. The following types of records are vital for the stability of the financial system:

- **Customer financial records:** These include documents related to savings accounts, credit card accounts, and other financial instruments.
- **Loan and mortgage documents:** These cover records of loans, including the status of repayments, terms, financial assets, and collateral.
- **Transaction records:** Including deposit, withdrawal, and transfer information that is critical for maintaining transparency and customer accountability.

Laws regulating record-keeping

The PMA operates under the authority of the Palestinian Monetary Authority Law No. (2) of 1997, which outlines its independence and powers. Additionally, Banking Law No. 9 of 2010 provides a detailed regulatory framework for the functioning of the banking sector in Palestine. These laws ensure that banks adhere to sound practices for liquidity, record-keeping, auditing, and reporting.

The relationship between the PMA and Palestinian banks is based on a framework of supervision and oversight. The PMA sets the regulatory and operational guidelines for banks, ensuring that financial institutions comply with these standards to promote sector stability and protect depositors. Banks operating under the PMA's jurisdiction are required to follow these regulations and submit to regular inspections and audits.

Record-keeping since the political split

The ongoing political division between the West Bank and Gaza since 2007 has significantly affected the operations of the PMA and the functioning of the banking sector in Gaza. As of the most recent available data, 13 banks are licensed by the PMA in Palestine, including 7 local banks and 6 foreign banks. 11 banks are operating in Gaza under PMA authority.

Despite the ongoing political split, the PMA has maintained a presence in Gaza, with main offices located in both Ramallah (West Bank) and Gaza City. Banks registered in the West Bank but operating in Gaza are still required to comply with the PMA's regulations.

However, two were established in Gaza by the De-Facto Authority: Production Bank and National Islamic Bank. These banks are not regulated by the PMA, meaning they are not covered by the deposit insurance scheme, nor do they guarantee the rights of depositors, shareholders, or pension funds, posing risks to their customers.

The impact of the Gaza war and key findings on destruction

The war in Gaza has had a catastrophic impact on the banking infrastructure, disrupting financial operations and hindering the PMA's ability to maintain accurate records. According to the World Bank, as of early 2024, over 90% of bank branches in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed, with only three ATMs remaining functional. The destruction has significantly impaired the banking system, resulting in the loss of physical records and complicating the continuation of financial services.

The PMA has made efforts to resume banking operations and restore record-keeping capabilities. These efforts include the reopening of some bank branches in the southern Gaza Strip starting February 2025 and working to re-establish digital payments, including the iBURAQ system.

Key findings:

- Bank branches, ATMs, and key infrastructure have been widely destroyed. Records stored physically have been lost irretrievably.
- While PMA-regulated banks backed up their data on external servers outside Gaza, local banks not regulated by the PMA, which stored their data physically or on local servers, have suffered extensive record losses.
- The lack of functioning infrastructure has left many financial institutions unable to provide banking services or maintain their records accurately, hindering the ability of businesses and individuals to access financial resources.

OVERVIEW OF THE DESTRUCTION

The second part of the report presents DCAF's assessment of the current state of the institutional memory of Palestinian institutions in the Gaza Strip.

Key observations

- **Widespread physical data loss:** In many cases, physical archives have been completely destroyed due to their targeting by Israeli forces. Other institutions had their records seized by Israeli forces. Occasionally, public institutions have been looted by Palestinian civilians. Overall, those things leading to the loss of hard-copy records across multiple sectors.
- **Limited reported data loss:** Despite the extensive physical destruction, most institutions contacted by DCAF reported that their data has been at least partially backed up electronically. Out of 45 contacted institutions, 38 reported their data to have at least been partially backed up.
- **Risk to physical non-digitized data:** A major concern is the loss of non-digitized physical records, especially supporting documents crucial for legal and administrative purposes. This includes evidence files and legal documents related to past or ongoing criminal proceedings. It also includes dispute records, such as maps outlining agreements and historical ownership claims, which are essential for resolving property conflicts.

Overall limitations

The situation of ongoing war while research took place had an impact on the quality and quantity of data collected and assessed. Given the report's limitations, the results presented below should be treated as rough estimations rather than definitive figures.

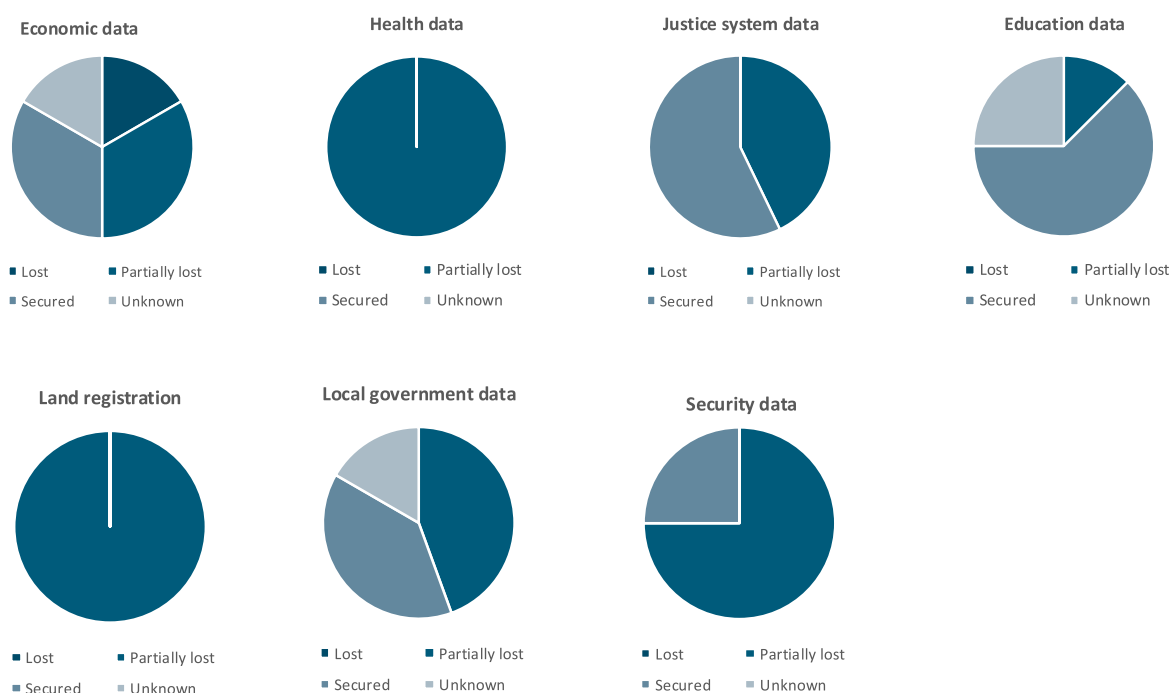
- **Uncertainty over data backup locations:** While there has been a somewhat surprising positive assessment of the amount of data that public institutions reported to have survived, especially considering the long-lasting blockade of Gaza and associated resource shortage, it must be taken with caution. Many public institutions reported that their data was or is electronically backed up. However, institutions often did not specify where these backups are stored. DCAF assesses that at least some backup data was stored in Gaza, but institutions affiliated with the DFA have been hesitant to share details, as no decision has been made on whether or when this information will be disclosed.
- **Vague institutional reporting:** The lack of precise information from institutions makes it impossible to quantify the exact extent of lost data, raising concerns about the true impact on institutional memory.

Overview by sector

The extent of data loss varies significantly across sectors, with some institutions successfully preserving their records while others have experienced partial or complete loss. To illustrate this impact, the graphs below provide a visual representation of data retention by sector, categorizing records as fully secured, partially lost, or completely lost

(see details in the full dataset). The graphs reflect data retention per institution and not a statistical estimate of lost or retained data. For example, in the education sector, DCAF surveyed nine institutions out of which none reported that data was completely lost, one that records were partially lost, five that records were completely retained, and two did not respond to DCAF. Partially lost and hence partially retained data refers to partial electronic backups being in place. Physical data as shown below has suffered extensive destruction.

This analysis highlights sectoral differences in data preservation, reflecting variations in digital backup practices and infrastructure resilience. For instance, in the education sector, most institutions have managed to secure all their data, while a smaller portion has retained only part of it. Other sectors demonstrate varying degrees of data loss, emphasizing the uneven impact of destruction on institutional memory.

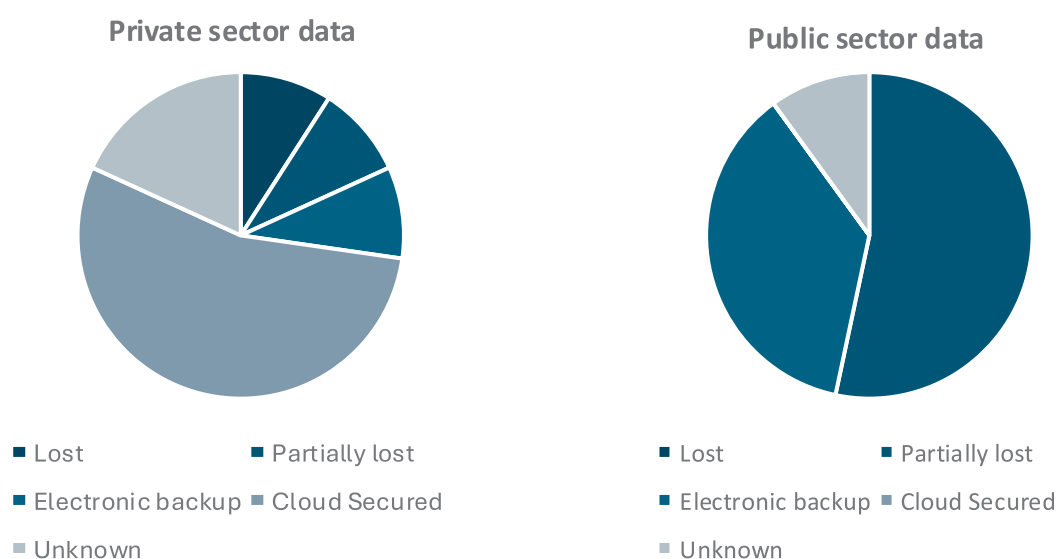


Key findings:

- **Overall, reported data loss has been limited**, particularly in the education and local government sectors, which have demonstrated significant resilience. Other sectors, such as land registration and healthcare, reported concerning but limited data loss.
- **Institutions have indicated that essential data has been electronically backed up, mitigating the overall impact of data loss.** However, DCAF was unable to verify the accuracy of these claims or determine whether backup data remains accessible or would require extensive recovery efforts.
- **Supporting documents, which are rarely digitalized**, have suffered extensive losses. This is particularly concerning in sectors such as the land sector, where crucial supporting documents, such as maps outlining disputes, have been lost.

Overview of destruction: public vs. private sector

DCAF assessed the impact of the war on institutional memory in both the public and private sectors. The following graphs capture the extent of data loss in each sector. Graphs represent the data lost per surveyed institution. For example, DCAF surveyed 11 private institutions, out of which six reported that their data was secured on cloud servers, one reported access to full electronic back-ups, one that data was partially lost and one that data was fully lost. The graphs only include surveyed institutions. Other institutions, such as private and smaller healthcare providers, which DCAF estimates have often lost their data completely, are not included.



Key findings:

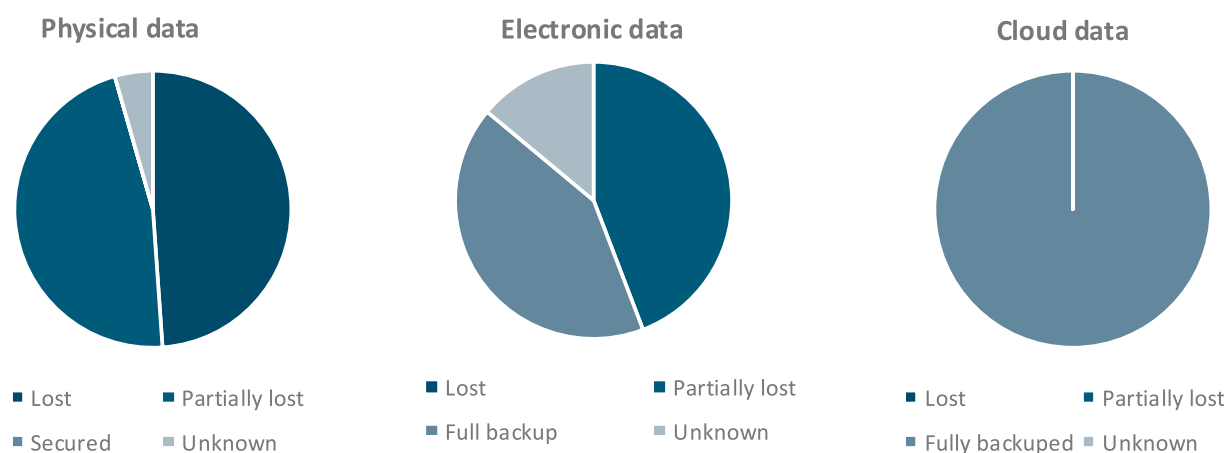
- The surveyed institutions in **the private sector have, in most cases, fared significantly better than the surveyed public institutions**. This is particularly true for universities and banks under the authority of the Palestinian Monetary Authority (PMA). Banks and universities that responded to DCAF's request for data reported that all their records had been secured electronically through backups stored on international cloud servers. While access to records was initially disrupted, most universities were able to restore online services after several months.
- In the economic sector, **banks operating in both Gaza and the West Bank have followed strict backup procedures** outlined by the PMA. These protocols include offsite storage of essential customer data, including financial records, outside Gaza. However, local banks that do not fall under PMA regulations have reported more extensive and potentially irrecoverable data losses, including sensitive financial information of customers.
- **Public institutions have suffered comparatively greater data losses**. Their data was often only partially backed up electronically and, in most cases, stored on servers inside Gaza. While institutions reported that at least some of their data survived, the exact extent of losses remains unclear. However, it is evident that public institutions have fared worse than private entities that relied on international cloud solutions.

Overview by type of data

DCAF categorized data storage into three types:

- **Physical data:** Hard copies stored in archives within public or private buildings.
- **Electronic data:** Digital records stored on hard drives, with potential backups in multiple locations.
- **Cloud Data:** Information stored on international cloud servers.

The graphs below show the number of data points DCAF gathered. For example, for their physical records, 22 institutions reported their data to be completely lost, 21 reported their physical records to be partially lost, and none that their physical records were fully secured.



Key findings

- **Destruction of public archives:** Physical data particularly held by the public sector has suffered far-reaching destruction. Public institutions were directly targeted by Israeli forces and several archives burned out. Critically, this includes critical criminal justice files from regular courts and the public prosecution. However, while damage is extensive, some documents of certain archives might be still recoverable.
- **Destruction of privately held physical data:** Data held by the private sector has been severely affected as well. This damage extends to private citizens, many will have lost all their critical documents, highlighting the importance of retaining institutional memory.
- **Partial destruction of electronic data:** Many institutions reported that key data (though rarely all data) had been electronically backed up. However, until the exact backup locations are confirmed, it remains uncertain whether the data is truly recoverable.
- **Cloud data remained intact:** Cloud-stored data remained secure. Yet, it was not always immediately accessible. Universities, for example, took several months to regain access to their servers and restore services for students.

Factors influencing destruction

Based on the assessment conducted by DCAF and the reports obtained by official institutions based on the Gaza Strip, it has become clear that four factors influenced the type of data that has been lost:

- **System automation:** Institutions that had invested in system automation through specialized software solutions demonstrated the highest level of resilience during the crisis. Automated systems not only generate digital records of all completed transactions but also ensure that transaction histories are securely stored and easily retrievable when needed.
- **Data digitization:** While electronic systems store transaction records, it is equally crucial to preserve digital copies of all associated documents. These files, though often large and requiring substantial storage space, often form the foundation of decision-making and official processes. Many of these had not been digitized and seem to be lost.
- **Disaster recovery planning:** Unexpected crises can strike at any time, making it essential for institutions to have robust disaster recovery plans in place. Institutions that had either full or partial recovery strategies in place exhibited significantly greater resilience during the crisis. Some, such as banks and universities, were even able to restore over 95% of their operational services, allowing them to continue functioning despite severe disruptions.
- **Cloud backup vs. local backup:** Institutions that implemented off-site backups in geographically separate locations or international cloud servers were able to preserve most data that has been digitized. Cloud technology has played a crucial role in this regard. Once access to these cloud-based archives was restored, they were able to resume operations and continue delivering essential services.

IMPACT OF INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY LOSS ON SECURITY SECTOR GOVERNANCE

Institutional memory is a cornerstone of effective governance in the security and justice sectors. It preserves institutional knowledge, legal frameworks, and operational practices essential for safeguarding personal and property rights. The loss of institutional memory due to conflict, the destruction of archives, and personnel attrition has significant consequences for security sector governance (SSG) in Gaza.

The link between security sector governance and institutional memory

Institutional memory plays a crucial role in ensuring transparency, accountability, and operational efficiency in the security sector. It allows institutions to build on past experiences, maintain adherence to human rights standards, and execute security operations efficiently and effectively. In the justice sector, institutional memory provides essential legal precedents, judicial decisions, and records that enable judges and lawyers to uphold the rule of law. This continuity supports fair and consistent judicial processes, reinforcing public confidence in the justice system and safeguarding individual freedoms and rights.

Institutional memory also influences broader governance and societal stability. It ensures that security and justice institutions function based on established policies and legal frameworks rather than ad hoc decision-making. Good security sector governance relies on institutional knowledge to prevent the recurrence of past mistakes, guide policy reforms, and enable evidence-based decision-making. Additionally, maintaining well-documented records ensures accountability, enhances public trust, and reinforces the legitimacy of security institutions.

Impact of institutional memory loss on SSG

The Gaza war has severely impacted the institutional memory of public institutions in the Gaza Strip through the destruction of archives and databases, alongside the loss of key personnel. Without access to historical records and operational data, institutions struggle to make informed decisions, implement policies effectively, and maintain oversight mechanisms. The loss of institutional memory also weakens accountability, as the absence of documented evidence makes it difficult to track institutional actions and uphold human rights standards.

Institutional continuity and governance challenges

Institutional memory loss affects institutional continuity and creates governance challenges.

- **Operational efficiency:** The destruction of archives will hinder the delivery of security and justice services. Institutions will struggle to make informed decisions without data and established procedures. Because security and justice institutions already operated before the war under extreme resource constraints and inefficient procedures, effective strategies to resolve issues were often not institutionalised on paper but instead relied on the experience of personnel. Many key officials who carried expertise and

knowledge essential for decision-making have been killed or displaced. This loss makes it difficult to maintain operational efficiency, as newly appointed personnel must operate without the necessary records and procedural knowledge. Institutions will need to invest significant time and resources in reconstructing lost data, which will divert efforts from essential security and justice functions.

- **Burden of establishing new records:** The burden of re-establishing lost records will likely overwhelm institutions already operating with limited resources. Without sufficient institutional capacity, security and justice governance will remain fragmented. This may further weaken public trust in security and justice institutions.
- **Opportunities for political influence and corruption:** The need to recreate a large number of records could create opportunities for political manipulation and corruption, as documentation gaps may be exploited to serve particular interests.

Responding to emerging security and justice challenges

The loss of institutional memory will create new legal and operational challenges.

- **New legal challenges:** Security and justice institutions will face difficulties in verifying and adjudicating disputes related to land ownership, property rights, and financial records. Cases involving lost bank savings, debt claims, and entitlement to social services will require extensive efforts to resolve, even under normal circumstances. The destruction of records further complicates these challenges, making it harder to ensure fair and transparent decision-making.
- **New operational challenges:** In addition to restoring past records, institutions will need to address a host of emerging and drastic security challenges and governance issues, as is already the case due to the heavy impact of the war on the Gaza Strip overall. Without institutional memory to guide policy responses, security institutions may struggle to develop effective strategies. The lack of complete data on vulnerable groups—including women, children, and the elderly who previously received specific services—will make it even more difficult for security and justice institutions to provide necessary support.

Institutional coherence

The erosion of institutional memory will also impact strategic planning and institutional coherence.

- **Strategic planning and reform efforts:** The loss of archives will not only disrupt routine operations but also weaken strategic planning and institutional reform efforts. Without documented institutional knowledge, long-term rebuilding efforts may lack clear direction.
- **Institutional fragmentation:** Security and justice institutions will often be forced to respond on an ad-hoc basis to emerging challenges without being able to draw on established data. This increases the risk of fragmentation in institutional structures and policy implementation, reducing institutional coherence.

Trust and informal institutions

Institutional memory loss will likely affect public trust and the emergence of informal governance structures.

- **Decreased public trust:** The loss of institutional memory will likely have a direct impact on public trust in security and justice institutions. Effective governance relies on transparency, consistency, and the ability to provide reliable services. However, as institutions struggle to recover lost data and re-establish operational capacity, inefficiencies will increase, leading to a public perception that security and justice institutions are not serving them as they should. This will undermine confidence in formal governance structures.
- **Informal security and justice structures:** In the absence of functional state institutions, informal mechanisms are likely to emerge to fill governance gaps. While these mechanisms often provide important short-term solutions, they typically operate outside formal oversight structures, which can undermine the rule of law and the state's monopoly on the use of force.
- **National reconciliation:** The loss and restoration of institutional memory is closely linked to national reconciliation efforts. Restoring institutional memory requires coordinated efforts involving the Palestinian Authority (PA), the de facto authority (DFA) in Gaza, and the international community. Given that security and justice data are sensitive and tied to the exercise of institutional power, any process of restoring and sharing data between the PA and the DFA must be accompanied by a broader national reconciliation process to ensure its success.

Conclusion

The loss of institutional memory presents a significant challenge for security sector governance in Gaza. Without well-preserved records, experienced personnel, and functioning oversight mechanisms, security and justice institutions will struggle to provide effective services and uphold the rule of law. Addressing these challenges will require a comprehensive strategy focused on rebuilding institutional capacity, restoring documentation, and ensuring that governance structures are equipped to meet both existing and emerging security challenges. Without these efforts, the long-term stability and legitimacy of security institutions in Gaza will remain at risk.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the widespread loss of critical records in Gaza, immediate action is required. Below are the most pressing priorities, addressed to be tackled by both the Palestinian Authority and the international community.

For the Palestinian Authority (PA)

Generic recommendations

1. *Establish a specialized multi-sectoral commission for the restoration and preservation of Palestinian archives:*
 - The commission should coordinate efforts across all institutions, both governmental and private, to locate, secure, and restore archives.
 - Prioritize urgent recovery while developing a long-term strategy for digitization and resilience against future crises.
 - Ensure coordination with relevant Israeli authorities where necessary to access lost or seized records, facilitate document verification, and enable citizens to reclaim official documents.
 - Establish an independent oversight body to monitor progress, prevent mismanagement, and ensure transparency in document recovery.
2. *Preserve remaining physical archives before further destruction occurs:*
 - Building on this report, conduct a mapping to detail the specific documents, by institution, that made it through the war.
 - Deploy specialists and necessary equipment to salvage and restore damaged records.
 - Train personnel in archival recovery and data protection to build local expertise in preserving institutional memory.
3. *Assess the accessibility of backed-up data and initiate recovery efforts:*
 - Determine the status of electronically stored data to assess its veracity and accessibility.
 - Identify missing or corrupted files or data and initiate technical recovery measures where possible.
 - Implement cybersecurity measures to protect restored databases from hacking, corruption, or misuse.
4. *Establish a legal framework for recognizing unofficial copies of lost documents:*
 - Legal provisions allowing for documents stored on private devices (e.g., mobile phone photos) to serve as valid evidence in property rights claims, inheritance cases, and legal disputes.
 - Launch public campaigns to encourage citizens to contribute missing records, such as personal copies of official documents, to support institutional memory restoration.

5. *Create a national electronic platform for document recovery and issuance:*

- Develop a centralized platform enabling citizens and businesses to request replacement documents and establish new property titles for land, buildings, vehicles, and other assets, to resolve competing claims.
- Ensure secure digital storage solutions for future records, including encrypted cloud backups and redundancy measures.

Specific recommendations

1. *Urgently update the civil registry and issue vital records:*

- The Ministry of Interior should expedite the processing of lost or damaged civil records, including birth and death certificates, marriage and divorce records, and personal identification/status documents.
- Retrieve electronic backup copies from the civil registry, particularly those maintained in the West Bank and/or by the Israeli authorities.
- Facilitate proper registration of deaths, births, marriages, and other personal status matters that have occurred without official documentation, by creating an online survey for easy registration of such events that can be distributed on social media and will feed into the De-Facto Authority Mol/PA joint server updated until January 2023.
- Facilitate pro-bono legal counselling for individuals facing documentation-related challenges, ensuring displaced individuals, refugees, and vulnerable groups can navigate legal processes.

2. *Ensure the judicial system is ready to process claims related to individual rights:*

- Courts should restore operations and be prepared to prioritize disputes, inheritance claims, and other legal cases, including war-related matters.
- Establish streamlined procedures for handling cases where official documentation has been lost or destroyed.
- Establish knowledge-transfer mechanisms within the judiciary, ensuring that legal professionals document and share institutional knowledge to mitigate capacity gaps caused by personnel loss.

3. *Secure land and property records:*

- The Land Authority in Gaza and the West Bank must coordinate efforts to retrieve and validate copies of land and property titles.

4. *Restore economic records and company registrations:*

- The Ministry of National Economy should unify the company registration archives between Gaza and the West Bank.
- Enable businesses to reclaim lost registration documents through the electronic platform, ensuring the verification of ownership records, debt claims, and contractual obligations
- Establish processes and infrastructure that enable cash requests and cash transfer from humanitarian organizations for the affected population that cannot access banks or ATMs.

For the international community

1. *Provide financial and technical assistance for data recovery:*
 - Mobilize and/or financially support specialized technical support to remove rubble, conduct de-mining operations, and recover both physical and digital records.
 - Deploy experts in document restoration, digital forensics, and archival preservation to assist Palestinian institutions.
 - Support capacity-building for institutional personnel by training officials in archival recovery, digital preservation, and security governance best practices.
2. *Support the establishment of an electronic document recovery and verification platform:*
 - Provide funding and expertise to develop a secure, accessible digital platform where citizens and businesses can request lost documents.
3. *Assist in the development of long-term disaster resilience strategies:*
 - Support large-scale digitization efforts to reduce dependency on physical archives.
 - Invest in secure cloud storage solutions to ensure data redundancy and prevent total loss in future crises.
4. *Ensure that justice and accountability mechanisms address wartime losses:*
 - Integrate property rights restitution and legal identity recovery into transitional justice efforts.
 - Support the harmonization of legal frameworks and databases between Gaza and the West Bank, ensuring a unified and coherent governance structure for security, justice, and economic recovery.



Maison de la Paix
Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2E
1202 Geneva Switzerland

DCAF Ramallah Office
Al-Sahel St. 3
Old City, Ramallah
Palestine

info@dcaf.ch
[+41 \(0\)22 730 94 00](tel:+417309400)
www.dcaf.ch

