

The Palestine Social Medicine Course 2023 Overview

Palestine Program for Health and Human Rights.

The [Palestine Program for Health and Human Rights](#) is an academic hub engaging in a broadly collaborative justice – and rights – based approach to understanding Palestinian Health, supported through a partnership between the FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University and the Institute of Community and Public Health at Birzeit University.



Philosophy.

In Palestine, communities struggle with confronting the ‘upstream’ drivers of health that overwhelm the capacities of a traditional biomedical approach in addressing poor health outcomes. Social Medicine offers a progressive framework to critically explore the social and structural determinants in Palestine through engaging with the political, historical, and social underpinnings of health. The 3-week, intensive course provides students with a critical engagement and understanding of the social and structural drivers of health in Palestinian society.

Inaugural Palestine Social Medicine Course.

In July 2023, the program hosted its inaugural Palestine Social Medicine Course at the Institute of Community and Public Health at Birzeit University in partnership with the [World Health Organization – office for the occupied Palestinian territory](#). The overall objective of the course was to develop critical engagement with and understanding of the social and structural drivers of health in Palestinian society.



Guest Speakers and Lectures. The course integrates medical practitioners, academics, activists, technical officers, and community organizers from over 20 non-governmental and governmental organizations, academic institutions, civil society organizations, and medical organizations in Palestine and abroad.

“I [feel] really inspired...I felt optimistic and full of energy that there is hope for change. The speakers were inspiring, and we [there were] so many take home messages about resistance, advocacy, and protest.” - Student Feedback

Field Visits. Bearing witness to the lived realities of Palestinians provides the historical, political, and social context to understand Palestinian health.

- **Hebron:** students visited the Palestine Medical Relief Society regional headquarters and had a guided tour of the old city and Al-Ibrahimi Mosque with the Humanitarian Field Support Assistant of OCHA.
- **Bethlehem/Battir:** students toured Aida Refugee Camp, the separation wall, and met with community health workers at Lajee Center. In Battir, students learned about the UNESCO world heritage site of the terraces of Battir and Roman aqueducts.

- **Jerusalem:** students visited Augusta Victoria Hospital, a key referral hospital for Gazan patients, toured the Old City, and visited UNRWA clinic and the Spafford Children's Center.
- **Jaffa:** students embarked on a full day tour of the Old City, the Port, and surrounding areas of Jaffa led by former Israeli Parliament member Sami Abu Shehadeh.
- **'Unrecognized Villages' of the Naqab:** students toured the Naqab desert and visited Al Zarnouq, one of over 35 villages inhabited by Palestinian Bedouin populations with Israeli citizenship but lack formal land recognition by Israel.

"Speakers and home visits in the Naqab were incredibly valuable and so many of us, including Palestinians, walked away with knowledge we didn't previously have and [that] could not readily be obtained"

- Student Feedback

2nd Annual Palestine Social Medicine Course. We are planning for the 2nd Annual Palestine Social Medicine course in August 2024. With each successive course we hope to build an alumni network of future leaders who are passionate about championing structural health issues via local, national, and global advocacy and organizing efforts. Applications will open in late Fall 2023.