

PALESTINE

Escalation of violence in Gaza



KEY PRIORITIES

34

PEOPLE
KILLED

+1,200

PALESTINIANS
INTERNALLY
DISPLACED

USD 40M

ESTIMATED LOSSES
FROM THE
SUSPENSION OF
ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

FUNDING AND RESPONSE
CAPACITY

UNRWA, UNICEF, OCHA

Palestinian Government
and Palestinian Ministry
of Health

Palestinian Red
Crescent Society

CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

On 9 May 2023, Israel launched air raids on several areas across the Gaza Strip, with claims to target members of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) movement (Al Jazeera 09/05/2023; OCHA 16/05/2023). In response, according to the Israeli authorities, on 10 May, the PIJ fired around 400 rockets from Gaza, some of which were misfired and fell inside the Gaza Strip (Al Jazeera 10/05/2023). Between 9–13 May, Israel conducted a series of air strikes on the Gaza Strip under Operation Shield and Arrow. On 13 May, a ceasefire was declared between the Israeli authorities and PIJ (CNN 13/05/2023). It is unclear whether the local authority in Gaza had any involvement in the conflict (Al Jazeera 10/05/2023).

The five-day fighting killed at least 34 people and injured 190 in Gaza as at 14 May. In Israel, two people have been reported dead, and 40 injured (OCHA 16/05/2023).

As at 13 May, the destruction of homes and safety concerns had displaced more than 1,244 Palestinians, 43 of whom are currently sheltering at a UNRWA school in Beit Lahiya (OCHA 13/05/2023).

According to the Ministry of Public Works and Housing in Gaza, as at 13 May, the air strikes had damaged around 2,943 housing units, including more than 243 that were severely damaged or totally destroyed (OCHA 16/05/2023). The air strikes also damaged Al-Aqsa hospital in Deir al-Balah, the Indonesian hospital in northern Gaza, and two primary healthcare clinics in Khan Younis and northern Gaza (Al Jazeera 13/05/2023).

The Erez (for people) and Kerem Shalom (for goods) crossings were reopened on 14 May. These crossings had been closed for six days, cutting off the supply of vital items, such as food, medical supplies, and fuel (TOI 14/05/2023).

During the five-day fighting, schools and private and public facilities were shut down, and people limited their movement out of their homes (Al Jazeera 10/05/2023).

Anticipated scope and scale

After five days of fighting, Israel and the PIJ agreed on 13 May to a ceasefire mediated by the Egyptian Government. This ceasefire is being experienced with some uncertainty, because just a couple of hours after it started, both sides continued to fire. Both sides mentioned that they were only willing to abide by the ceasefire if their counterpart also did so (BBC 13/05/2023; The Statesman 14/05/2023). As at 16 May, the ceasefire appeared to have stabilised (OCHA 16/05/2023). Besides the cessation of shelling, markets have reopened, and governmental and non-governmental institutions and public transport have resumed operations. Although the ceasefire is fragile, it appears to be holding (The New Arab 16/05/2023 and 14/05/2023).

In various regions of Palestine, tensions remain. On 15 May, the Palestinians commemorated 75 years of the Nakba, which is the annual Palestinian commemoration of their mass displacement during the establishment of Israel in 1948. Israeli police forces responded with arrests and shootings against demonstrators, injuring at least 17 people (NPR 15/05/2023; MEMO 16/05/2023).

Humanitarian constraints

Since 2007, when Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip as the local authority, the Israeli authorities have significantly increased restrictions on the movement of goods and people in the region. In practice, this has meant that Palestinian citizens living in the Gaza Strip are cut off from the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, restricting commercial transfer, livelihood opportunities, and access to essential services and goods. The volume of truckloads to Gaza in mid-2022 was 30% less than in the first five months of 2007 despite the population increasing by at least 50% (UNICEF 30/06/2022).

As at 11 May, the Israeli checkpoints and barriers surrounding Gaza were closed for at least three days, further constraining the transport of relief supplies, such as medicine, into Gaza (PRC 11/05/2023).



During the escalation of violence, the Gaza Power Plant shut down one of its three operating turbines, reducing electricity provisions to 12 hours per day. This limited livelihood activities and the provision of essential services, including health, water, and sanitation (OCHA 16/05/2023). Years of regular conflict have resulted in multiple damage to the energy infrastructure. Gaza constantly experiences power cuts. Some days, these cuts last for over 20 hours. They intensify during times of increased violence as a result of damage to the energy infrastructure (NBC News 23/08/2022; OCHA accessed 16/05/2023).

CRISIS IMPACT

Health

Between 9–13 May, Israeli air strikes killed 34 people, of whom at least 12 were civilians and six were children, and injured at least 190 in Gaza (OCHA 16/05/2023). The air strikes also damaged Al-Aqsa hospital in Deir al-Balah, the Indonesian hospital in northern Gaza, and two primary healthcare clinics in Khan Younis and northern Gaza (Al Jazeera 13/05/2023). The health sector in Gaza has deteriorated over the last decade because of the Israeli blockade. In March 2023, 47% of essential drugs in the country were only in stock for less than one month, and emergency medical equipment was in stock for less than three months. Israel has a permit system in Gaza to allow the exit of Palestinians in need of medical care in Israel or other areas of Palestine. In 2022, 34% of applications were denied, and 18% were denied between January–March 2023 (OCHA accessed 16/05/2023). Young people tend to receive more permit denials. Because every person has the right to only one companion, parents of children in need of medical attention are often denied an exit permit. Between 2018–2021, at least 43% of the parents of children in need of medical care were denied exit permits. Medical supplies are also approved through permits, preventing the building of a more robust health system in Gaza. In 2021, 69% of requests for the entry of x-ray/computed tomography spare parts or equipment were denied (Health Cluster/WHO 06/07/2022). The damage to hospitals from the fighting limits their ability to care for Palestinian patients, and the blockade is likely to make reconstruction difficult (UNICEF 16/05/2023).

Shelter

The five-day violence damaged more than 2,943 housing units, including 103 destroyed and 140 severely damaged, internally displacing at least 1,244 Palestinians. Some of these people were displaced in search of safer places during the strikes, but others were displaced because of damage to their homes. The former is expected to return as the ceasefire holds, but the others need reconstruction for their homes. Damage to residential units is estimated at USD 9 million (OCHA 16/05/2023; Shelter Cluster/UNHCR 16/05/2023).

Livelihoods

The escalation of violence led to the suspension of all commercial and economic activities in the Gaza Strip (IFP 13/05/2023; The New Arab 14/05/2023). This resulted in losses estimated at around USD 40 million. Fishing activities were suspended for five days, affecting at least 4,400 people whose families depended on fishing as their main source of income. The agricultural sector also lost about USD 3 million, including about 200 agricultural wells, 10,000m of irrigation lines, and 600 dunums (148.2 acres) of crops (vegetables and fruits) covered by greenhouses. The loss of livestock is estimated at USD 225,000. The inability of farmers to access their crops also led to shortages of food and vegetables in local markets (OCHA 16/05/2023).

The violence is affecting an already impoverished economy. During the first quarter of 2022, unemployment rates in Gaza reached almost 46% (PCBS 10/05/2023). Around 65% of the population in the Gaza Strip live below the poverty line (UN 04/09/2022). Among those who work, around 60% are in informal employment, and this figure is as high as 90% for young people (WB 06/2019). At least 150,000 people in Gaza are daily-wage labourers, meaning they do not earn a salary and their income depends on the work they do during the day (Al Mezan 04/10/2020). Daily workers are among the population mainly affected by the suspension of economic activities.

DRIVERS OF THE CRISIS

Increasing tensions

According to the UN, 2022 has been the deadliest year for the West Bank (the other territory of the Palestinian state) (OHCHR 27/01/2023). The rise and consolidation of a far-right discourse in Israel that has adopted a more extreme national-religious narrative about the conflict have heightened pre-existing tensions in the region (Axios 02/11/2022). In December 2022, Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister of Israel from 1996–1999 and 2009–2021, returned to power with a coalition shared with some ultranationalist parties. This coalition has since promoted policies of annexing the West Bank and legalising and militarising Israeli settlements in Palestine (UN 24/02/2023; NPR 29/12/2022; ACAPS 29/03/2023). During the first quarter of 2023, Israeli authorities demolished, forced people to demolish, or seized 290 Palestinian-owned structures across the West Bank (OCHA 03/05/2023). In 2022, 953 Palestinian-owned structures were demolished or seized in the West Bank, the highest number since 2016 (OCHA 21/02/2023). As at 17 May 2023, 9,472 Palestinian-owned structures had been demolished or seized in the West Bank since 2009 (OCHA accessed 18/05/2023).



In response, a new generation of Palestinian armed groups not aligned with the larger political factions that govern the West Bank or Gaza Strip is emerging. While not militarily strong, these groups are more likely to act violently and less likely to seek negotiated solutions. This has served as an excuse for Israel to argue that there are new threats that need to be controlled (ICG 17/04/2023; Al Jazeera 22/03/2023).

Rising tensions have manifested in several recent events. In early April 2023, during an overlap of Muslim and Jewish holidays, the Israeli police entered and exercised force against several hundred Muslim worshippers in Al-Aqsa Mosque after Ramadan prayers (BBC 05/04/2023). On 7 April, Israel launched strikes in southern Lebanon and some missiles in the Gaza Strip targeting Palestinian fighters in Lebanon, who fired around three dozen rockets into Israel, injuring two people (AP 07/04/2023).

COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Israeli blockade

The Israeli ban on the entry of different goods into Gaza implies the need for the approval of Israeli-Palestinian authorities. Some goods are denied entry because they are considered 'dual-use items', meaning items that might have eventual military use, including even some construction materials (Gisha 20/04/2023). This has worsened the ability of Palestinian municipalities to mitigate the impact of violence (OCHA 30/06/2022). During previous escalations of violence, the Israeli blockade prevented the entry of materials needed for the reconstruction of damaged houses and WASH infrastructure (OCHA 16/12/2021; Oxfam 22/03/2021; Gisha 06/10/2021). Sufa, the main entry point for construction materials, closed in 2007, and Karni, the main commercial crossing, closed in 2011. Currently, the Kerem Shalom crossing, the only entry point for imports and exports into Gaza, is subject to severe restrictions and complex bureaucratic procedures from Israel. The blockade has also contributed to fuel scarcity in Gaza since 2011 with the shutdown of Nahal Oz, the main entry point for fuel (OCHA 16/12/2021).

Population density

Gaza has a population of 2.2 million across a 365km² area. This means that Gaza is one of the most densely populated territories in the world, with about 5,800 people per km² (TWP 14/05/2021). Comparatively, the population density in Israel is 426 people per km², while the average in the Middle East and North Africa is between 43–48 people per km² (WB accessed 05/01/2023). Because of the high concentration of population in such a small space in Gaza,

even highly localised missiles against military targets have a high probability of hitting civilians. Given that just under half of the population of Gaza is made up of children, they are particularly vulnerable to being killed or injured during bombardment (TWP 14/05/2021).

FUNDING AND RESPONSE CAPACITY

The Palestinian Government estimated the monetary cost of the damage to infrastructure at around USD 1 million. This includes the repair of more than 150 water lines, more than 170 sewage lines, more than 300 power lines and transformers, and damage to roads. The estimated damage to residential units is USD 9 million (OCHA 16/05/2023). The 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan for Palestine required around USD 502 million (OCHA 25/01/2023). As at 16 May, only 12.4% had been covered (OCHA accessed 16/05/2023). Over the next few days, this budget will be adjusted to include the amounts required to respond to the current escalation of violence (OCHA 16/05/2023).

GAZA STRIP AND ISRAELI-DECLARED BUFFER ZONE



Source: BBC (20/05/2021)