

STATE OF PALESTINE

Escalation of hostilities and insecurity in the Gaza Strip and West Bank

CRISIS OVERVIEW

Armed hostilities and insecurity escalated in the Gaza Strip between 10–21 May, following increasing tensions between Palestine and Israel reported in the West Bank and East Jerusalem since mid-April. Palestinian armed group Hamas fired rockets into Israel, and Israeli security forces (ISF) responded with airstrikes and shelling on Gaza. Clashes and unrest between Palestinians, ISF, and civilians took place in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and across Israel (OHCHR 27/05/2021; UNICEF 24/05/2021).

The escalation of hostilities resulted in civilian casualties, displacement, infrastructure damage, and disruption of humanitarian activities and access to basic services on a scale not seen in Gaza since the 2014 war. At least 287 Palestinians have been killed (256 in Gaza and 31 in the West Bank), including around 70 children (OCHA 06/06/2021 a; OCHA 06/06/2021 b). Around 9,464 people have been wounded across Palestine, with the majority in the West Bank (OCHA 27/05/2021 a). In Israel, 13 people have been killed, including two children, and 710 wounded (OCHA 06/06/2021 a). Over 113,000 people were displaced across Gaza. Around 8,500 people remained in displacement with host families as at 03 June (OCHA 06/06/2021 c).

While no further hostilities have been reported in Gaza since the ceasefire on 21 May, protests and tensions continue in East Jerusalem, mostly against forced eviction in Sheikh Jarrah and other Palestinian neighbourhoods. Around 100 Palestinians were injured as a result of ISF's violent response to protests between 24–31 May (OCHA 04/06/2021). Search and arrest operations and night raids have significantly increased in East Jerusalem, Nablus, Jenin, Hebron, and Bethlehem. Intercommunal violence has also increased, including settler attacks against Palestinians and their property (OCHA 27/05/2021 b).

Humanitarian needs remain critical across Palestine. Acute protection, health, shelter, education, WASH, food, and non-food item needs are particularly high in Gaza, where humanitarian needs were already critical before the most recent round of hostilities (OCHA 27/05/2021 b; OCHA 23/12/2021; OCHA 15/12/2021; OCHA 01/12/2020). Access constraints such as movement and administrative restrictions, damage to infrastructure and roads, and explosive remnants of war (ERW) contamination hamper needs assessment and assistance delivery. The movement of people, goods, and humanitarian supplies remains extremely limited.

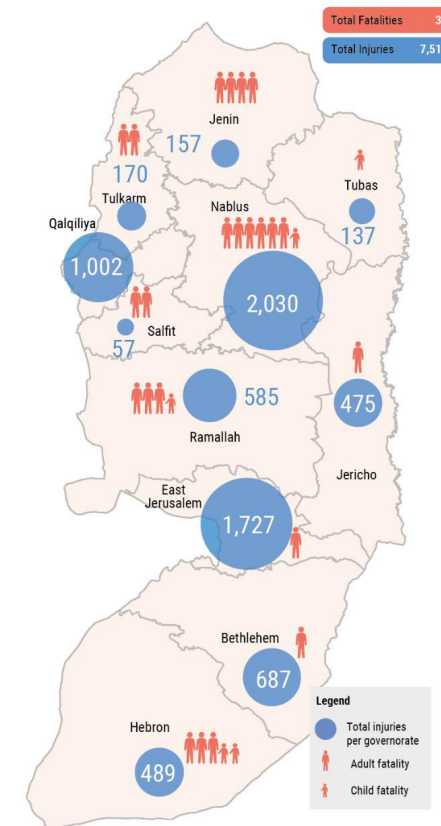
ABOUT THIS REPORT

Aim: this report provides an overview of the recent conflict escalation in the State of Palestine and highlights humanitarian needs in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip by analysing current needs, humanitarian constraints, underlying vulnerabilities, and aggravating factors that could lead to further hostilities.

Methodology: the analysis is based on a review of publicly available data and published reports up to 06 June 2021.

Limitations: assessments are in progress, and information on the scale of the crisis and humanitarian needs is still limited. ACAPS was not able to verify the exact number of people injured or killed or the scale of damage as the available data varies between reports.

Casualties per governorate in the West Bank



Source: OCHA 27/05/2021 a

KEY FIGURES

1.3 million

PALESTINIANS IN NEED OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE DUE TO RECENT ESCALATION

113,000

PALESTINIANS DISPLACED

+9,400

PALESTINIANS INJURED

+280

PALESTINIANS KILLED

+50

EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES DAMAGED

+20

HEALTH FACILITIES DAMAGED

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CRISIS IMPACT	2
HUMANITARIAN AND OPERATIONAL CONSTRAINTS	6
PRE-EXISTING VULNERABILITIES	6
AGGRAVATING FACTORS	7
DRIVERS OF THE VIOLENCE	10

CRISIS IMPACT



Source: OCHA 06/06/2021 a

Armed hostilities between Palestine and Israel and insecurity escalated in Gaza between 10–21 May, following increasing tensions reported in the West Bank and East Jerusalem since mid-April. Violent police response to Palestinians protesting against forced evictions in Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, as well as the use of force against worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque and other sites in the Old City of Jerusalem in April and May, prompted the conflict escalation (ICG 14/05/2021).

Armed operations were triggered on 10 May. Hamas gave Israel an ultimatum to withdraw its forces from Al-Aqsa Mosque and Sheikh Jarrah and to release all protesters detained by 18:00 on that day. Shortly after the deadline expired, they fired a series of rockets towards Israel; ISF retaliated by launching airstrikes on Gaza (BBC 21/05/2021).

After 11 days of hostilities, Hamas and Israel agreed on a ceasefire that entered into effect on 21 May (OHCHR 21/05/2021). While no further hostilities were reported in Gaza since the ceasefire, protests and tensions continue in East Jerusalem, mostly against forced eviction in Sheikh Jarrah and other Palestinian neighbourhoods. Around 100 Palestinians were injured by ISF between 24–31 May, mostly during protests and as a result of tear gas, rubber bullets or live ammunition, physical assault, or gas canisters (OCHA 04/06/2021).

Search and arrest operations and night raids have significantly increased in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, particularly in Nablus, Jenin, Hebron, and Bethlehem. Intercommunal violence has also increased, including settler attacks against Palestinians and their property. Common protection concerns include the use of live ammunition, arrests and detentions, excessive use of force, and access restrictions (OCHA 27/05/2021 b).

Scope and scale

Demonstrations, violence, and clashes between forces and worshippers triggered militarised operations of a scale that had not been recorded since the 2014 war. Palestinian armed group Hamas fired more than 4,000 rockets into Israel, with unprecedented intensity and scope (UNSCO 27/05/2021; The New York Times 13/05/2021). Although a significant number of rockets were intercepted by Israel's defence system, others caused casualties and damage to houses and critical infrastructure.

ISF responded with over 1,500 airstrikes and shelling, including missiles fired from aircraft, and attacks from the sea, causing a significant number of casualties, displacement, and a high degree of damage to houses and critical infrastructure in Gaza (UNSCO 27/05/2021). The intensity of bombing and degree of infrastructure damage is higher than in the 2014 war (MSF 19/05/2021). While the scale of reported injuries relative to the length of the conflict has been much larger in the recent hostilities, reported fatalities were higher in the 2014 war. This is likely thanks to a better system of pre-airstrike warnings put in place by ISF.



More than 860 injuries were reported per day of fighting between 10–21 May in Gaza and the West Bank, compared to 225 in 2014 in Gaza. Similarly, the degree of damage to housing units, critical infrastructure, and public facilities was much higher in May, with more housing units, educational facilities, and health facilities destroyed or damaged during the 11-day conflict compared to the 50-day hostilities in 2014 (OCHA 23/05/2021; UNOSAT 30/09/2014; OCHA 23/06/2015; OCHA 04/09/2014; OCHA accessed 26/05/2021; CAAC Bulletin 30/11/2013; OHCHR 18/03/2019; OCHA 28/07/2009; ACHR 01/03/2009).

The recent hostilities had more extensive geographical impact compared to previous conflicts. While previous conflicts were predominantly focused on Gaza, the recent hostilities resulted in widespread insecurity across the West Bank and in mixed communities within Israel. Protests and clashes in areas such as Ramle, Lod, Jaffa, Haifa, Umm al-Fahm, Nazareth, Rahat, Hebron, Nablus, Ma'alot-Tarshiha, Bethlehem, Tulkarem, Jenin, and the Qalandia refugee camp resulted in further casualties and were met with police brutality (ICG 14/05/2021).

The intensity of the recent conflict and its widespread geographical scope are likely to have severe and long-lasting impact on the affected populations in Palestine and Israel. It is unclear whether the ceasefire in Gaza is going to be successful in decreasing the escalating ethnic and intercommunal tensions.

Casualties: Around 287 Palestinians were killed due to the recent hostilities, including 70 children. 256 people, including 66 children, were killed by airstrikes in Gaza between 10 - 21 May – at least 129 of them civilians – and 31 people, including five children, were killed in the West Bank as a result of violent police response to demonstrations and clashes between Palestinians and ISF. Over 9,460 Palestinians were injured – 1,948 in Gaza between 10 – 21 May, including 610 children, and 7,516 in the West Bank between 13 April – 21 May (OCHA 06/06/2021 a; OCHA 06/06/2021 b). People continue to get injured in the West Bank as protests and demonstrations carry on. At least 13 people, including one soldier and three foreign nationals, have been killed, and about 710 have been injured in Israel during the duration of the hostilities (OCHA 04/06/2021; OCHA 06/06/2021 a; OCHA 06/06/2021 b; OCHA 27/05/2021 b; OCHA 23/05/2021; OCHA 27/05/2021 a).

Displacement: more than 113,000 IDPs sought shelter and protection in Gaza during the armed hostilities. Over 77,000 IDPs were displaced to shelters in 58 UNRWA schools, while around 36,000 IDPs stayed with host families (OCHA 23/05/2021; UNRWA 20/05/2021). Following the ceasefire, most people left the UNRWA shelters and returned home. About 8,500 families remained displaced as at early June as their homes were severely or completely destroyed and uninhabitable. The majority of them are staying with host families, but around 235 people are still sheltered in two UNRWA schools (OCHA 6/06/2021 c; OCHA 27/05/2021 b).

Impact on critical infrastructure

The conflict had a significant impact on residential and critical infrastructure in Gaza, including houses, roads, and WASH, health, and electricity infrastructure.

Power supply in the Gaza Strip was down to only 96mw (400mw would be an optimal supply of electricity to meet the needs of the area) during the hostilities. This brought the power supply deficit to 76% and was enough to provide only five hours of electricity per day (OCHA 27/05/2021 b; ACHR 16/05/2021). As at early June, up to ten hours of electricity a day was available, but the supply remained unstable (OCHA 06/06/2021 c).

The Gaza Strip relies on Israel for most of its supply of electricity, although there is one internal plant. The active airstrikes and shelling prevented maintenance teams from accessing and repairing damaged networks, causing a permanent power cut for some neighbourhoods. The electricity outages also affect the functioning of infrastructure – primarily water and sewage systems and the operation of hospitals and other humanitarian services (ACHR 16/05/2021; OCHA 27/05/2021 b).

Communications: the airstrikes severely damaged or destroyed networks, equipment, and devices that are crucial for communication and internet companies in Gaza, disrupting communication and internet services. The attacks also targeted dozens of streets, damaging utility poles with wires that provide internet and communication services (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor 18/05/2021). More detailed information about infrastructure damage and maintenance progress is not yet available.

WASH structures in Gaza were severely affected. Six sewage water pumps were completely destroyed, and 12 were damaged. During the hostilities, four central sewage treatment stations in Gaza were non-functioning as the maintenance teams were unable to travel to the sites. They will not be able to operate at full capacity again until the networks are repaired (ACHR 02/06/2021).

Sectoral needs

Health

Around 1.2 million people need health and nutrition assistance due to the recent hostilities (OCHA 27/05/2021 a). Acute needs for trauma and emergency care and mental health and psychosocial support are reported, both among the affected population and health workers (OCHA 27/05/2021 a). Between 24–30 health facilities were damaged in the Gaza Strip (WHO 21/05/2021; Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor 30/05/2021). The Al Rimal Clinic, which hosts the main COVID-19 laboratory services in Gaza, has sustained severe damage. Two doctors of Gaza's coronavirus task force were killed (WHO 21/05/2021; AP 20/05/2021). Dar Al Shifa Hospital, Gaza's largest maternity hospital, was damaged by airstrikes (UNFPA 20/05/2021).

As at 20 May, 28 out of 30 hospitals in Gaza were only partially functioning. About two-thirds of the primary healthcare units are not functioning, and the rest are partially functioning because of damage caused by the conflict. Current stocks of 46% of essential drugs and 33% of essential medical supplies will only last for under a month (WHO 21/05/2021). Power supply is enough to provide only five - ten hours of electricity per day, and damages to WASH structures in Gaza have disrupted the provision of healthcare and other basic services (OCHA 06/06/2021 c, UNFPA 20/05/2021). The Health Cluster is still carrying out assessments of health facilities to identify service capacity, needs, and damage.

Between 7–20 May, 89 attacks on healthcare were reported in the West Bank, and 28 in the Gaza Strip (WHO 21/05/2021). Restrictions on the movement of healthcare workers, paramedics, and ambulances were reported across the West Bank and East Jerusalem (UNFPA 20/05/2021; WHO 21/05/2021). The Gaza Strip's health infrastructure was struggling even before the hostilities, and conflict-related casualties have caused added strain to the system. The risk of a new wave of coronavirus infections still exists.

Road infrastructure has been heavily damaged, obstructing ambulance access in Gaza (WHO 21/05/2021). About 54 health workers were injured, and 25 health vehicles damaged, detained, or confiscated in West Bank since the start of the conflict (WHO 21/05/2021; UNFPA 20/05/2021).

Access to essential medical supplies, equipment, and personnel poses a serious challenge to the health sector as a result of limitations imposed on the import of goods from Israel (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor 27/05/2021).

Protests and civil unrest continue across the West Bank and East Jerusalem, affecting medical staff's safety and their capacity to treat a substantial number of injuries on a daily basis (UNICEF 24/05/2021).

Girls and women's access to reproductive health and other medical services is limited because

of the damage to medical units. Currently, there are around 87,000 pregnant women in Gaza and vulnerable areas of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Areas A, B, and C, and H2. 29,000 women will give birth in the next three months. Of the estimated 16,500 deliveries in Gaza over the next three months, around 2,500 are expected to experience complications, with many pregnant women requiring an emergency C-section (UNFPA 20/05/2021).

Priority needs include emergency and trauma services, mental health and psychosocial support, and access to essential health services (OCHA 27/05/2021 b).

WASH

93 airstrikes affected WASH infrastructure in Gaza, resulting in severe damage to facilities and access restrictions for more than one million people. Wastewater networks, pipelines, wells, a wastewater pumping station, and service vehicles sustained damage (OCHA 21/05/2021).

1.3 million people require WASH assistance due to the latest hostilities (OCHA 27/05/2021 a). As at early June, 400,000 people had no regular access to safe piped water in the Gaza Strip because three main desalination plants providing drinking water suspended their operations during the hostilities (OCHA 06/06/2021 c; OCHA 25/05/2021; OCHA 21/05/2021). The three plants are now back in operation for eight hours per day (UNICEF 03/06/2021). A preliminary assessment confirmed that 2,730 metres of water networks and transition pipelines, three wastewater pumps, 4,240 metres of wastewater networks, and at least 15 water wells were severely affected (We World 17/05/2021).

Priority needs include hygiene materials, emergency fuel, rehabilitation of WASH facilities, trucked water delivery, solid waste collection, and wastewater cleaning, as well as chlorine and operation chemicals for critical WASH facilities (OCHA 27/05/2021b).

Shelter

More than 105,000 people need shelter and NFI assistance due to the recent hostilities (OCHA 27/05/2021 a). Extensive damage was reported to residential and commercial buildings in the Gaza Strip. About 17,100 apartments have been affected, and 300 buildings, including at least 1,145 apartments, were destroyed. Around 1,030 homes were severely damaged and are uninhabitable, and almost 15,000 homes suffered partial damage (OCHA 27/05/2021 a; Shelter Cluster 25/05/2021).

Prior to the recent conflict, there were already a significant gap in providing shelter solutions and a housing shortage of around 120,000 homes in Gaza. Access to construction materials needed for the shelter response is very limited because of recent access constraints and limitations imposed on the import of goods from Israel (OCHA 27/05/2021 b).

Priority needs include non-food items and shelter assistance for IDPs and the reconstruction of uninhabitable homes. Further assessments are underway.



Education

The recent, intense bombardments in Gaza and the use of UNRWA schools as temporary shelters have severely impacted the education of more than 610,000 school-age children (OCHA 27/05/2021 a). Prior to the recent conflict, close to 500,000 Palestinian children (60% in Gaza and 40% in the West Bank) were in need of education assistance due to recurrent conflict, attacks on schools, movement restrictions, inadequate infrastructure, and poverty (OCHA 23/12/2021). The situation was compounded by the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 and associated prevention measures and prolonged school closures.

During the conflict, all schools were closed again, impeding access to education for nearly 600,000 students. About 54 educational facilities, including 46 schools, were directly hit by airstrikes or tank shells, affecting around 41,900 children and 21,300 education staff in Gaza (We World 21/05/2021; OCHA 23/05/2021; Save the Children 19/05/2021). School-age children in the West Bank are exposed to violence on their way to school – a key source of stress and anxiety – while a lack of adequate school infrastructure is a major concern in the Gaza Strip and in vulnerable areas of the West Bank.

Priority needs include resuming remote or in-person learning, repairing damaged education facilities, supporting students' mental health, and rehabilitating the UNRWA schools that were used as temporary shelters during the conflict.

Livelihood

Fishing activities off the Gaza coast were prohibited by the Israeli authorities at the start of the conflict (OCHA 21/05/2021) and allowed to resume on 25 May but only to six nautical miles, affecting over 50,000 people involved in the fishing sector. Many economic and commercial facilities were targeted in the Gaza Strip. Airstrikes destroyed or damaged more than 525 economic establishments, including 50 factories (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor 19/05/2021).

Priority needs include fully opening the Kerem Shalom border crossing and ensuring the entrance of animal fodder, agricultural inputs, and other essential supplies, as well as expanding the fishing zone and providing food and cash assistance to affected families and individuals (OCHA 27/05/2021 a).

Protection

Around 1.3 million people need protection services due to the recent hostilities (OCHA 27/05/2021 a). Palestinians affected by violence need protection assistance, including psychological first aid, structured psychosocial support, child protection, suicide prevention, case management, sexual and gender-based violence support, and legal aid (OCHA 27/05/2021 b).

Hostilities and violence challenge the humanitarian partners operating in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and movement restrictions are a major constraint for Protection Cluster partners (OCHA 27/05/2021 b).

Priority needs include specialised protection response for IDPs, girls and women, children, people with disabilities, and those who were injured. There is a need to scale up mental health and psychosocial support services, including psychological first aid, structured psychosocial support, suicide prevention, case management, the national helpline, and clinical mental health services (OCHA 27/05/2021 a). The removal of ERW and other mine action interventions and awareness-raising are a priority, particularly for children and IDPs returning home (OCHA 06/06/2021 c).

Protests and detentions: between 10 May–3 June, the Israeli police arrested over 2,140 people, including at least 1,950 Palestinians and 190 Israelis (Haaretz 03/06/2021; Arab48 03/06/2021; The Intercept 29/05/2021; Al Jazeera 01/06/2021). During IDF and Hamas military operations between 10–21 May, 1,420 Palestinians and 170 Israelis were arrested in the West Bank and East Jerusalem; over 290 of them were minors who risk facing military courts (TRT World 18/05/2021; Haaretz 03/06/2021; Arab48 03/06/2021). This occurred as the Israeli police announced an operation called 'law and order' amid agreeing on the ceasefire, in which it was planning to arrest 500 Palestinian who live within Israeli areas and participated in the protests (Ynet 23/05/2021).

As protests against the demolition of East Jerusalem neighbourhoods and confiscation orders continue, there are concerns regarding the excessive use of force by ISF against protesters, including live ammunition, rubber bullets, and tear gas used during clashes, as well as search and arrest operations (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor 20/05/2021).

Mental health: many Gazans have lost relatives, homes, and livelihoods. Arrests and detentions, settler violence, excessive use of force, and access restrictions affect people's mental health. The hostilities will have a long-lasting psychological impact and increase the risk of developing mental disorders among the affected populations. Most community-based interventions for mental and trauma health support were suspended as a result of the conflict, affecting office-based and in-person services and awareness-raising activities (OCHA 27/05/2021 b).

Child protection: at least 66 Palestinian children in Gaza, four in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and two from Israel were killed during the 11 days of violence, and around 600 were injured (OCHA 27/05/2021 b; OCHA 23/05/2021).

Hostilities and associated trauma have a devastating mental health impact on children, potentially leading to serious physical and psychological symptoms (OCHA 23/05/2021; OCHA 21/05/2021). Children who experienced violence and its consequences are suffering from fear and anxiety, lost their ability to speak, lack adequate sleep, and are displaying signs of distress, such as constant shaking and bedwetting (Al Jazeera 30/05/2021; OCHA 27/05/2021).



a; Save the Children 21/05/2021). A study conducted in Gaza after the 2014 war showed that 70% of children who lived in the worst-affected areas were suffering from nightmares even one year later, with 75% regularly bedwetting (Save the Children 07/07/2015).

Children are exposed to increased violence by the ISF and Israeli settlers, particularly those attending schools near Israeli settlements, which limits their access to services – including education (OCHA 23/05/2021).

Gender-based violence (GBV) concerns: gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities have intensified with the recent hostilities and consequent displacement, tensions, and violence. (OCHA 27/05/2021 a). During the conflict, around 37,000 displaced women and girls were living in communal shelters and with host communities in Gaza. GBV services were suspended because of the hostilities, with GBV shelters closed and survivors sent home. Several GBV service providers, including frontline workers, have been directly affected by the bombardments in Gaza, which is likely to have a severe impact on the availability of GBV services (UNFPA 20/05/2021).

Many women who have lost their spouse or male breadwinner suffer a lack of protection resulting from the loss of assets, control over their inheritance, and legal documentation necessary for child custody and guardianship (OCHA 27/05/2021 a).

People with disabilities: 10% of the almost 2,000 injured Palestinians in Gaza may suffer from a disability (OCHA 27/05/2021 a). The vulnerability of people with disabilities increases during hostilities as they face additional barriers to seeking protection.

HUMANITARIAN AND OPERATIONAL CONSTRAINTS

Access constraints such as movement and administrative restrictions, damage to infrastructure and roads, and ERW contamination hamper needs assessments and assistance delivery. The movement of people, goods, and humanitarian supplies remains extremely limited.

Gaza border crossings: the Israeli-controlled Erez Crossing remained closed during the conflict, limiting access to medical services for injured people and those in need of urgent medical treatment in the West Bank or East Jerusalem (We World 24/05/2021). On 20 May, an MSF team was denied permission to cross into Gaza through an Israeli-controlled crossing for the second time during the 11 days of hostilities (MSF 20/05/2021).

The entry of medical and humanitarian supplies into Gaza through the Kerem Shalom border crossing remained very limited during the conflict, decreasing response capacity. The crossing was partially reopened later for humanitarian purposes only (The Jerusalem Post 24/05/2021). The transport of humanitarian goods and animal fodder into Gaza was allowed on 21 May. The Ministry of Agriculture reports a severe shortage of fodder, leading to increasing animal deaths and a possible collapse of the livestock sector (OCHA 23/05/2021).

The Egyptian-controlled Rafah and Salah al Din crossings remain functional (OCHA 23/05/2021).

Infrastructure constraints: damage to infrastructure and services and power outages remain a major access constraint. Damaged roads, rubble, and destroyed power and WASH infrastructure delay the recovery efforts (OCHA 27/05/2021 b). About 39 incidents of obstruction to access for medical teams in the West Bank were recorded since 12 May, including prevention of humanitarian health access to at least two persons fatally wounded (WHO 21/05/2021; ACHR 16/05/2021). Heavy damage to road infrastructure is obstructing ambulance access in Gaza (WHO 21/05/2021).

Recurrent electricity cuts and internet disconnection across Gaza are impacting humanitarian response and remote service modalities. Repeated power cuts are particularly affecting hospitals and increasing the reliance on fuel, which is difficult to import. An NGO hospital was unable to operate because of fuel shortages (OCHA 21/05/2021).

Attacks on public services: several offices, clinics, and hospitals supported by humanitarian agencies were damaged and at least temporarily put out of service (MSF 28/05/2021). The attack on the Al Rimal Clinic resulted in the injury of two healthcare workers. The Qatar Red Crescent Society office was hit by airstrikes in Gaza (QRCS 19/05/2021; QRCS 17/05/2021).

Contaminated areas: ERW contamination is a serious concern (OCHA 21/05/2021). Explosive items can be found in residential areas, agricultural fields, and among debris, endangering responders, farmers, children, and construction workers. Between 2014–2020, 19 Palestinians have been killed and 170 injured by ERW across Gaza, particularly near the security fence (OCHA 24/09/2020).

PRE-EXISTING VULNERABILITIES

The humanitarian situation in Palestine is characterised by a protracted protection crisis driven by more than 53 years of military occupation, Gaza blockade, recurrent hostilities, human rights violations, and internal divisions. The recurrent military clashes between Israel and Palestinian armed groups and episodes of armed conflict that took place in 2008/09, 2012, 2014, and 2021, particularly in the Gaza Strip, have aggravated the situation.

Humanitarian needs

An estimated 2.45 million people out of 5.2 million in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip were in need of humanitarian assistance at the beginning of 2021, prior to the recent hostilities (OCHA 23/12/2021; OCHA 15/12/2021; OCHA 01/12/2020). About 65% of people in need are located in the Gaza Strip.



The cumulative impacts of a decades-long conflict, displacement, protracted protection crisis, recurrent escalation of hostilities, and the COVID-19 pandemic have deepened the needs of Palestinians in 2021. While the number of people in need only increased slightly, from 2.41 million in 2020 to 2.45 million, the number of people experiencing severe levels of humanitarian needs increased from 40% in 2020 to 60% in 2021 (OCHA 23/12/2020).

The recent conflict has further increased humanitarian needs. The damage to infrastructure has worsened existing infrastructure and power deficits, resulting in further limitations in access to services, particularly WASH and health. The lack of essential equipment is likely to hamper response and recovery.

Poverty and economic decline

About 1.5 million Palestinians live under the poverty line. Prior to the conflict, the proportion of poor households was projected to increase in 2021 from 53% to 64% in the Gaza Strip and from 14% to 30% in the West Bank. Those living in poor or women-headed households, Palestine refugees living in refugee camps, children (particularly those under five years of age), the elderly, pregnant and lactating women, persons with disabilities, small-scale farmers, herders and fishers, and displaced people remain most vulnerable to economic hardships (OCHA 23/12/2021).

The recent hostilities have undermined the livelihoods of tens of thousands of people in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which might result in further economic decline and aggravate poverty levels. Unemployment rates in Gaza rose from 23% in 2005 to 49% at the end of 2020. The poverty gap has increased from 14% in 2005 to 20% in 2020, and the cost of lifting the Gazan population out of destitution has increased by four times – from USD 209 million to USD 838 million (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor 24/01/2021; UN General Assembly 13/08/2020).

Gaza blockade

Israel had imposed movement restrictions over Gaza since the 1990s. After Hamas won the election in January 2006, Israel imposed a land, sea, and air blockade on Gaza in July 2007. This blockade has locked the entire Gazan population into 365 square kilometres, with movement restrictions on people and goods. Gazans cannot move into the West Bank and East Jerusalem without Israeli permission or into Egypt without Egyptian authorities' approval.

The blockade has severe implications for the living conditions and humanitarian situation in Gaza, undermining local economy growth and violating human rights. The restrictions on people's movement through the Rafah Border Crossing imposed by Egyptian authorities

compounded the situation, with crossing only allowed to people on a waiting list and after months awaiting permission to cross (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor 24/01/2021; UN General Assembly 13/08/2020).

It is estimated that over 1.4 million Palestinians are food-insecure and aid-dependent in 2021. About 35% of Gaza's farmland and 85% of its fishing waters are totally or partially inaccessible because of Israeli military measures. Since early 2018, the electricity supply has decreased from eight to around four hours per day, threatening the delivery of basic services such as water and waste management and medical services (OCHA 23/12/2021; Oxfam 26/05/2021).

The economy experienced significant losses as a result of the blockade and the four military operations that took place in 2008/09, 2012, 2014, and 2021. As long as the blockade exists, Palestinians in Gaza will not be able to exercise their rights – particularly the freedom of movement, as the majority of them are not allowed to leave Gaza for treatment, education, or work. Continuous restrictions on the import of food, building materials, medicines, and international aid are likely to hamper the response and prolong the negative consequences of the recent hostilities.

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

COVID-19: as at 03 June 2021, 228,151 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 2,754 associated deaths have been reported in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Gaza has reported 110,023 confirmed cases and 1,023 associated deaths (WHO 03/06/2021).

The recent hostilities took place while Palestine was dealing with a rapid increase in COVID-19 caseload, with active cases increasing by almost 60% in April. COVID-19 response, including testing, vaccinations, and prevention campaigns, has been disrupted during the conflict. Electricity outages, damaged WASH structures, and displacement are creating a high risk for COVID-19 and waterborne disease outbreaks (WHO 21/05/2021; We World 17/05/2021). As at April 2021, only about 250,000 people (less than 5% of the total population) have been vaccinated (OCHA 06/05/2021).

The COVID-19 crisis and its socioeconomic impact have increased the severity of needs for 346,000 Palestinians, who had been identified as having moderate needs prior to the outbreak. About 95% of women-owned businesses were negatively impacted by COVID-19 (OCHA 15/12/2021; WFP 22/12/2021; World Bank accessed 03/06/2021).

Intercommunal violence

Clashes between Palestinians and ISF have continued across the West Bank, resulting in two Palestinian fatalities after the ceasefire. Given the unprecedented scale of clashes across the West Bank and Israel, it is not clear whether the ceasefire will be effective in decreasing the level of intercommunal violence. A surge in intercommunal violence between Palestinians and Israelis was reported prior to and during the recent hostilities. Both Palestinian and Israeli communities were accused of violence, including burning businesses and vehicles and carrying out home invasions, assaults, and even murder (*The Intercept* 29/05/2021; *Foreign Policy* 13/05/2021; *Daily Sabah* 03/06/2021; *Financial Times* 14/05/2021).

Israeli and Palestinian casualties due to wars and violence between 2008–2021

	PALESTINIAN FATALITIES	ISRAELI FATALITIES	PALESTINIAN INJURIES	ISRAELI INJURIES
2008	877	30	2,325	819
2009	1,059	5	6,401	112
2010	87	8	1,572	177
2011	117	16	2,143	120
2012	259	3	4,677	571
2013	39	6	3,992	151
2014	2,327	15	17,533	2,708
2015	174	26	14,639	313
2016	108	12	3,464	210
2017	77	17	8,449	157
2018	299	13	31,259	117
2019	137	10	15,491	123
2020	30	3	2,751	58
2021 (as at 28 May)	280	11	8,784	57

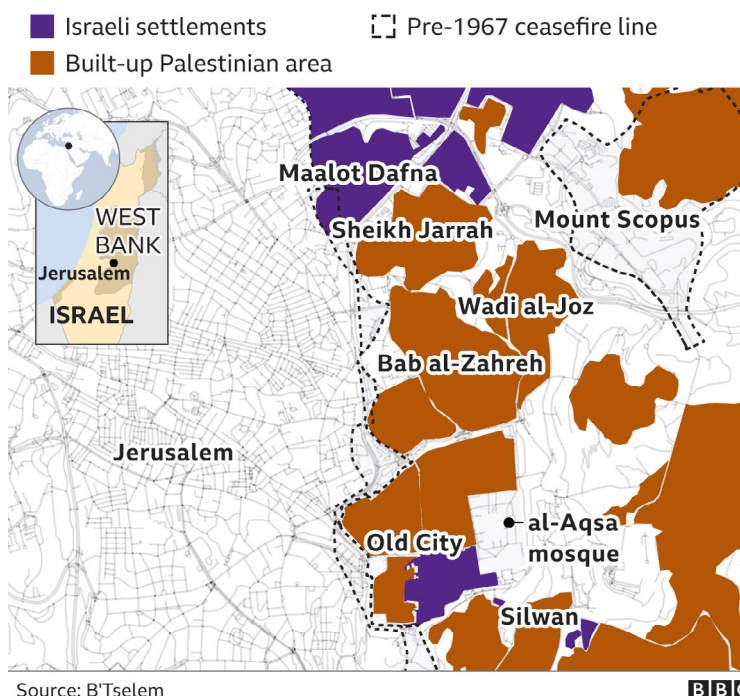
Source: OCHA (accessed 26/05/2021)

About 21% of Israel's population are Palestinians who face systematic institutional, social, and legal discrimination at the governmental level and within the justice system (*The Intercept* 29/05/2021; *Euronews* 26/05/2021; *Brookings* 21/05/2021; *HRW* 27/04/2021). Discriminatory policies and polarising sectarian rhetoric in media and politics are exploiting unrest, instability, and the history of sectarian violence in Israel and Palestine to mobilise radical groups and wider communities and perpetuate violence.

Israeli settlers' violence against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank is on the rise, with assaults and property destruction. During the hostilities, at least 51 settler violence incidents (including physical assault, harassment, damage to or destruction of homes, schools, agricultural lands, livelihood structures, and vehicles) have been recorded in 29 Palestinian communities in the West Bank (*We World* 21/05/2021). This represents a significant surge in the number of incidents within a short period of 11 days of violence escalation.

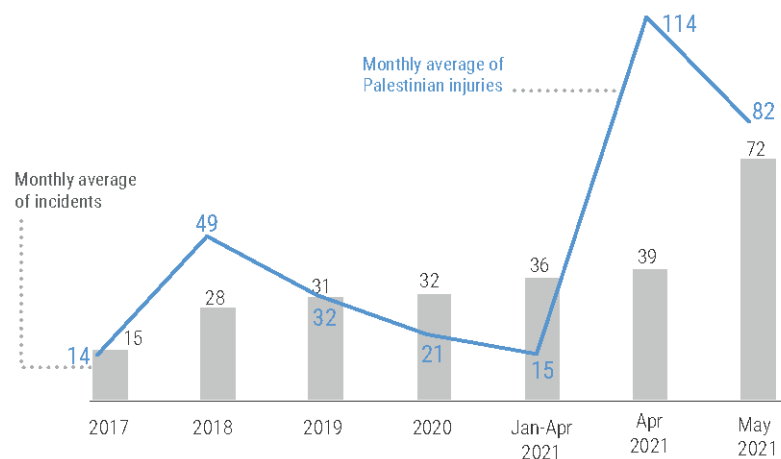
As at 2 June, a total of 441 settler violence incidents had been reported in 2021 – a 49% increase compared to the same period in 2020. The incidents were mostly recorded in the areas of Hebron, Nablus, Jerusalem, and Ramallah (*OCHA* accessed 07/06/2021). In comparison, about 771 incidents of settler violence were recorded in all of 2020, leading to 133 injured Palestinians and damaging 9,646 trees and 184 vehicles.

East Jerusalem settlements



Source: (BBC 26/05/2021)

ATTACKS BY ISRAELI SETTLERS*



* Incidents where people known or believed to be Israeli settlers attacked Palestinians or damaged their properties or where forces intervened in incidents involving Israeli settlers

Source: (OCHA 06/06/2021 b)

Forced evictions, demolitions, and displacement

Continuous protests against the forced eviction of Palestinian communities will likely fuel more intercommunal violence and further escalations. The dispute over evictions in Sheikh Jarrah could erupt again anytime, triggering a new cycle of violence between protesters and police forces. The confiscation of houses is delayed, but the case is under review with Israel's Supreme Court, and the decision is still pending. In Batn al-Hawa neighbourhood in Silwan, 19 families are also at risk of forced eviction (Haaretz 26/05/2021; Amnesty International 25/05/2021; Al Jazeera 04/06/2021; The Times of Israel 28/05/2021). Protests against forced evictions in the two neighbourhoods have been taking place in the beginning of June, with multiple injuries reported due to violent ISF response (Aljazeera 04/06/2021; Middle East Eye 05/06/2021).

Around 100 Palestinians were injured by ISF between 24–31 May, mostly during protests and as a result of tear gas, rubber bullets or live ammunition, physical assault, or gas canisters (OCHA 04/06/2021).

338 structures were demolished in the West Bank in 2021 as at 03 June, leaving 492 people displaced (OCHA accessed 06/06/2021). This represents a 44% increase in the targeting of structures and a 47% increase in people displaced during the first five months of 2021,

compared to the same period in 2020 (UN News 14/04/2021; OCHA 16/04/2021). The number of Palestinians who lost their homes in 2020 was the highest since 2016 (B'Tselem 04/01/2021).

Demolition and confiscation policies and practices in the West Bank particularly affected Area C, East Jerusalem, and the Israeli-controlled part of Hebron. Those policies are expected to remain in place, putting Palestinians at risk of forcible transfer and leading to the erosion of livelihoods (OCHA 23/12/2021). Confiscation procedures do not require the Israeli authorities to provide prior notice, preventing affected people from formally objecting to the decisions in advance.

Number of demolished structures, demolished donor-funded structures, and people displaced due to demolitions between 2009–2021.

	DEMOLISHED STRUCTURES*	DONOR-FUNDED STRUCTURES	DISPLACED PEOPLE
2009	279	1	676
2010	439	0	593
2011	631	74	1,102
2012	623	90	850
2013	663	109	1,103
2014	609	116	1,236
2015	560	108	743
2016	1,094	300	1,593
2017	421	106	664
2018	468	56	472
2019	628	128	907
2020	854	157	1,001
2021 (as at 3 June)	338	113	492

* Demolished either by the Israeli authorities or the owners, who were forced to do so by the authorities.

Source: OCHA (accessed 06/06/2021)

DRIVERS OF THE VIOLENCE

Increasing tensions in East Jerusalem started on 13 April when Israeli authorities banned East Jerusalem residents from entering the Old City through the Damascus Gate and barricaded the area during Ramadan. In response, Palestinian youth and far-right Israeli groups organised protests which resulted in clashes near the Damascus Gate. Tensions escalated between Palestinians, ISF, and civilians in and around the Old City, leading to clashes and hundreds of arrests and injuries. This triggered the heaviest rocket attacks on Israeli territory by Hamas since 2018 and, in response, airstrikes targeting Hamas positions in Gaza by Israel. On 25 April, following 12 days of violent confrontation in East Jerusalem, the barricades were taken down by Israeli authorities (UNSCO 27/05/2021; ECHO 26/04/2021; Al-Monitor 26/04/2021; UNSCO 24/04/2021; Al Jazeera 17/04/2021; Al Jazeera 16/04/2021).

Protests against Sheikh Jarrah forced eviction orders escalated in April when local Palestinians organised daily demonstrations against the Israeli Supreme Court ruling on the planned eviction of 28 Palestinian families (about 500 people). The far-right Israeli groups saw this as a provocation and accompanied Knesset member Itamar Ben-Gvir into Sheikh Jarrah on 10 May. This fuelled protests, with Israeli police firing sponge bullets, stun grenades, and skunk water, causing hundreds of injuries. Tensions and arrests are continuing to date, and the appeal is under the Israeli Supreme Court ruling (OCHA 27/05/2021 c; BBC 26/05/2021; France 24 15/05/2021; +972 Magazine 07/05/2021).

The postponement of the Palestinian Legislative Council elections was announced on 29 April and ascribed to the increasing tensions. The elections were scheduled on 22 May, followed by a presidential election on 31 July and elections for the Palestinian National Council (the Palestine Liberation Organization's internal decision-making organ) on 31 August. All three elections were postponed indefinitely. The reasons for the postponement, besides increasing tensions, included internal fragmentation and the fact that Fatah, led by current President Mahmoud Abbas, would face certain defeat. Additionally, Israel has refused to allow East Jerusalem Palestinians to vote in the elections. The decision of postponing caused major disappointment among Palestinians, who saw it as an opportunity for change (Shehab News 29/04/2021 a; Shehab News 29/04/2021 b; ICG 30/04/2021).

Al-Aqsa Mosque clashes escalated on 07 May when Israeli police confronted Palestinians angered over the eviction orders in East Jerusalem and used force against worshippers at the mosque inside the walled Old City, injuring dozens. The situation deteriorated on 08 May when the police closed the gates leading to the mosque, blocked Palestinian citizens from reaching Al-Aqsa for prayers, and attacked worshippers. The following day, ISF fired stun grenades and tear gas at worshippers and attacked people inside the mosque using rubber bullets, stun grenades, and tear gas. Several Palestinians were injured and many detained. On 10 May, Israeli soldiers confiscated the keys of the mosque's main gates in a raid (Reuters 07/05/2021; Al-Monitor 18/05/2021; OCHA 30/04/2021). About 657 Palestinians were injured

during the widespread clashes in the Al-Aqsa compound prior to the violence escalation in Gaza (OCHA 11/05/2021). Palestinian armed factions had already issued warnings two weeks earlier, threatening that they would respond to the escalations in Jerusalem (ICG 14/05/2021).

Intercommunal violence between Palestinians and Israelis has significantly increased as a result of these developments. Violence and protests were accompanied by inflammatory statements, hate speech, and violent threats issued by both sides and amplified by social media. Settler attacks against Palestinians and their property also increased, particularly in Hebron, where 22 attacks were recorded during the first three weeks of May, compared to 12 during the entire month of April (OCHA 27/05/2021 b). This has driven unprecedented intercommunal violence across the West Bank and Israel's mixed cities and neighbourhoods, contributing to increasing insecurity and social tensions.