



GIEWS Update

Palestine

Population of the Gaza Strip at risk of famine due to conflict

Highlights

- In the Gaza Strip, the ongoing conflict has caused the collapse of local livelihood systems and displaced about 1.9 million people.
- Between December 2023 and February 2024, the entire population (about 2.2 million people) is estimated to face high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 [Crisis] and above), including 576 000 people in IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe).
- The risk of famine is very high, as the threshold for acute food insecurity has already been exceeded, while the thresholds for acute malnutrition and non-trauma mortality may also be breached by mid-2024 if hostilities continue.
- The cessation of hostilities and unimpeded humanitarian access are urgently needed to avert the risk of famine.

The conflict in the Gaza Strip is drastically affecting all dimensions of food security and threatens the livelihoods of its entire population. Even before the outbreak of hostilities, in October 2023, large segments of the population relied on humanitarian assistance for their livelihoods. According to the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan, launched in January 2023, about 1.15 million people, representing 58 percent of the population, were estimated to be in need of assistance.ⁱ However, hostilities have interrupted most of the humanitarian operations throughout the Gaza Strip, particularly in northern areas, due to access constraints and insecurity.ⁱⁱ For example, during the first two weeks of January 2024, 29 missions by humanitarian agencies were planned to deliver life-saving supplies in northern conflict-affected areas, but only seven were granted access.ⁱⁱⁱ

Population displacements

As of early January, according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), almost 1.9 million people

in Gaza, or nearly 85 percent of the population, were estimated to be internally displaced and most of them have been evacuated in safer southern governorates. Severe overcrowding of internally displaced persons (IDPs) shelters is reported, with several cases of infectious diseases.

Food availability

The conflict has interrupted imports of all food and non-food items, with a dramatic impact on food availability, as the Gaza Strip is entirely dependent on imports to meet consumers' demand for key staple foods, including wheat and rice.^{iv} Food availability has also been affected by the interruption of imports of non-food items critical for the food system, such as fuel, animal feed and other agricultural inputs. Active fighting has resulted in widespread damage to food stocking facilities, flour mills, bakeries and market infrastructures. Markets have fully collapsed in northern areas, while they maintain some minimal functioning in central and southern areas. As a result, most imported food items are no longer available. As of mid-November 2023,

stocks of wheat flour, dairy products, mineral water and eggs were totally exhausted. Although some stocks of vegetable oil, rice and pulses were still available, their consumption has drastically declined due to shortages of means for cooking.^v

Agriculture plays an important role for the economy of Gaza Strip and the livelihoods of its population, being an important source of export revenue and providing a significant share of peoples' food requirements of meat, fish, vegetables, fruit, olive oil, eggs and honey, fundamental elements of a healthy and diverse diet.^{vi} According to the preliminary results of an assessment conducted by FAO in December 2023, based on remote sensing imagery, about 28 percent of cropland in the Gaza Strip has been damaged by movements of heavy vehicles, bombing, shelling and other conflict-related activities. The worst affected areas are Gaza and north Gaza Governorate, where almost 40 percent of arable land has been damaged. In addition, more than 20 percent of wells used for irrigation were destroyed, and most of agricultural infrastructures, including stores for agricultural produce and inputs, and livestock shelters were destroyed. The beginning of hostilities coincided with the start of the harvesting operations of olives, fruits and vegetable crops, which normally take place in October and November, and substantial losses are reported.^{vii} The livestock sector has also been severely affected by the conflict, with significant animal deaths due to military operations and lack of feed and water leading to starvation and premature slaughtering. Based on field observations, about 70 percent of cattle and 45 percent of sheep and goats perished, while almost the entirety of poultry (over 15 million) was lost. Fishing activities have been completely halted due to access restrictions to fishing areas, damage to ports and boats and lack of fuel.

Food access

Physical access to food is severely constrained by insecurity and destruction of market infrastructure, exacerbated by the lack of fuel that restricted movements of both traders and consumers. Economic access to food is hampered by increasing food prices and low household purchasing power, which are making

the limited quantities available unaffordable for most households. Between September and November 2023, prices of wheat flour and rice increased by about 50 percent, while prices of vegetables increased by almost three times.^{viii} Between September and December 2023, prices of olive oil and chicken meat increased 65 and almost 90 percent, respectively.^{ix} Economic access to food is further constrained by a sharp decrease in incomes. In December 2023, it was estimated that economic activities and employment declined by 85 percent since the beginning of the hostilities.^x

Food utilization

The conflict has caused shortage of cooking gas, leading to high reliance on firewood, wood residues and waste burning as primary source of cooking fuel, with consequent exposure of people to heightened risks of respiratory diseases. Moreover, the absence of fresh food, including meat and vegetables, and the reliance on canned food might lead to a decreased absorption of minerals and vitamins. Food utilization has also been affected by lack of safe water, mainly due to fuel unavailability, as most of Gaza's water is supplied from wells and underground aquifers requiring fuel for extraction and desalination. It is reported that the local population has access only to less than 2 litres of safe water per person per day to be used for drinking and domestic hygiene.

Food security in the Gaza Strip

According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis, released on 21 December 2023,^{xi} the entire population of the Gaza Strip, approximately 2.2 million people, is estimated to face high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 [Crisis] and above) between December 2023 and February 2024. This figure includes about 1.17 million people in IPC Phase 4 (Emergency) and about 577 000 people in IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe). This is the highest share of people facing severe acute food insecurity that the IPC has ever estimated for any given area or country globally and the situation is rapidly deteriorating. According to the IPC methodology, one of the three thresholds that need to be surpassed to classify an area in famine conditions (20 percent of households estimated in IPC Phase 5 [Catastrophe])^{xii} has already been

surpassed, as it has been estimated at 26 percent. The other two thresholds on malnutrition¹ and non-trauma death rates² may be breached by May 2024³ if the conflict continues, as they are typically the outcome of prolonged extreme food

consumption gaps. As a result, the risk of famine is very high and the cessation of hostilities is required to allow unhindered humanitarian access and provide urgent, life-saving multi-sectoral assistance.

¹ More than 30 percent of children between 6 and 59 months are acutely malnourished.

² Two deaths per 10 000 people or four child deaths per 10 000 children every day due to starvation or to the interaction of malnutrition and disease.

³ There was a lack of technical consensus among the members of the IPC Famine Review Committee on whether famine thresholds could be breached already by early February 2024 at the end of the IPC analysis projection period.

Notes

- i. **OCHA**. 2023. *Humanitarian Response Plan - OPT. Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2023*. Jerusalem. January 2023. https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/HRP_2023.pdf.
- ii. **OCHA**. 2023. *Flash Appeal: Occupied Palestinian Territory. 2023 Humanitarian Programme Cycle, October–December 2023 (First Revision November 2023)*. Jerusalem. 6 November 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/flash-appeal-occupied-palestinian-territory-october-december-2023-first-revision-november-2023>.
- iii. **OCHA**. 2024. *Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel - Flash Update #95*. 17 January 2024. <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-95-enarhe>.
- iv. **OCHA, UNRWA and WFP**. 2022. *Gaza CWG - Food Basket, 20 April 2022*. 11 November 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/gaza-cwg-food-basket-20-april-2022>.
- v. **WFP**. 2023. *Gaza Market Monitoring - Flash Update #3. WFP Palestine*. 30 October 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/wfp-palestine-gaza-market-monitoring-flash-update-3-30-october-2023>.
- vi. **FAO, European Union and CIRAD**. 2023. *Food Systems Profile - Palestine. Catalysing the sustainable and inclusive transformation of food systems*. Rome, Brussels and Montpellier, France. <https://www.fao.org/3/cc7323en/cc7323en.pdf>.
- vii. **FEWSNET**. 2023. *Gaza Strip Targeted Analysis - November 2022*. Gaza. 21 December 2023. <https://fews.net/middle-east-and-asia/gaza/targeted-analysis/december-2023>.
- viii. **WFP**. 2023. *Gaza - Food Security Assessment. WFP Palestine*. 6 December 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/gaza-food-security-assessment-december-2023>.
- ix. **FAO**. 2024. *Food Price Monitoring and Analysis (FPMA) Tool. Monitoring and analysis of prices*. Online tool. FAO Rome, Italy. Cited 24 January 2024. <https://fpma.fao.org/giews/fpmat4/#/dashboard/home>.
- x. **WB**. 2023. *Impacts of the Conflict in the Middle East on the Palestinian Economy - Update*. World Bank Group. December 2023. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/7600aee6c75eff4cf9b71ea1fe4016db-0280012023/original/NoteWBG-dec11-CLEAN.pdf>.
- xi. **IPC**. 2024. *IPC Global Initiative - Special Brief - Gaza Strip. IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis - December 2023–February 2024*. Rome, Italy. January 2024. https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Gaza_Acute_Food_Insecurity_Dec2023Feb2024.pdf.
- xii. **IPC**. 2023. *Fact Sheet - The IPC Famine - Updated December 2023*. IPC Global Support Unit (IPC GSU). Rome, Italy. December 2023. https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Famine_Factsheet_2022.pdf.

This report was prepared by the **Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS)** of the Markets and Trade Division of FAO. The updates focus on developing anomalous conditions aimed at providing early warnings, as well as latest and more elaborate information than other GIEWS regular reports on the food security situation of countries, at both national and sub-national levels. None of the information in this report should be regarded as statements of governmental views.

For more information visit the **GIEWS Website** at: <http://www.fao.org/giews/en/>

Enquiries may be directed to:

Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture (GIEWS)
Markets and Trade - Economic and Social Development
GIEWS1@fao.org

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Rome, Italy

The **Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture (GIEWS)** has set up a mailing list to disseminate its reports. To subscribe, submit the Registration Form on the following link: [http://newsletters.fao.org/k/Fao/markets and trade english giews world](http://newsletters.fao.org/k/Fao/markets%20and%20trade%20english%20giews%20world).

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this information product do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) concerning the legal or development status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The mention of specific companies or products of manufacturers, whether or not these have been patented, does not imply that these have been endorsed or recommended by FAO in preference to others of a similar nature that are not mentioned. Dashed lines on maps represent approximate border lines for which there may not yet be full agreement.

The views expressed in this information product are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of FAO.

ISSN 2707-1723 [Print]

ISSN 2707-1731 [Online]

© FAO, 2024



Some rights reserved. This work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 IGO licence (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO; <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/igo/legalcode>).

Under the terms of this license, this work may be copied, redistributed and adapted for non-commercial purposes, provided that the work is appropriately cited. In any use of this work, there should be no suggestion that FAO endorses any specific organization, products or services. The use of the FAO logo is not permitted. If the work is adapted, then it must be licensed under the same or equivalent Creative Commons license. If a translation of this work is created, it must include the following disclaimer along with the required citation: "This translation was not created by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). FAO is not responsible for the content or accuracy of this translation. The original [Language] edition shall be the authoritative edition."

Disputes arising under the licence that cannot be settled amicably will be resolved by mediation and arbitration as described in Article 8 of the licence except as otherwise provided herein. The applicable mediation rules will be the mediation rules of the World Intellectual Property Organization <http://www.wipo.int/amc/en/mediation/rules> and any arbitration will be conducted in accordance with the Arbitration Rules of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL).

Third-party materials. Users wishing to reuse material from this work that is attributed to a third party, such as tables, figures or images, are responsible for determining whether permission is needed for that reuse and for obtaining permission from the copyright holder. The risk of claims resulting from infringement of any third-party-owned component in the work rests solely with the user.

Sales, rights and licensing. FAO information products are available on the FAO website (www.fao.org/publications) and can be purchased through publications-sales@fao.org. Requests for commercial use should be submitted via: www.fao.org/contact-us/licence-request. Queries regarding rights and licensing should be submitted to: copyright@fao.org.