



## Internal Displacement and Humanitarian Situation in the Gaza Strip

November 2015

*The following provides a factual overview of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, based on publicly available sources (noting that UNHCR does not have a presence in the Gaza Strip).<sup>1</sup> This document is based on information available up to 15 November 2015.*

The July-August 2014 hostilities in the Gaza Strip, the third conflict in less than six years, compounded the already dire humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip across all sectors, including livelihoods, housing, food security, water and sanitation, health and education.<sup>2</sup> One year after the end of the 2014 conflict, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) assessed that the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip continues to deteriorate.<sup>3</sup> The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) warned in September 2015 that, if current economic trends persist, “Gaza could become uninhabitable by 2020.”<sup>4</sup> Observers note that there has been virtually no reconstruction to repair the damage to homes and infrastructure caused by the conflict, while the Gaza blockade continues to be in place. Moreover, no permanent ceasefire is in place, and peace talks have not made progress.<sup>5</sup>

Recurrent episodes of violence in the State of Palestine continue to result in casualties, with large numbers of Palestinians injured and killed in clashes and air strikes.<sup>6</sup> According to OCHA, 18 Palestinians were killed and a further 863 injured during confrontations with Israeli Security Forces in the Gaza Strip in October 2015.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR’s *Position on Deportations to Gaza* (February 2015) is available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5448f2bea.html>.

<sup>2</sup> “The armed conflict of July-August 2014 has had a severe impact on Gaza’s economy, lives and livelihoods. The conflict has created a humanitarian crisis and dramatically augmented the development challenges”; The World Bank, *Economic Monitoring Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee*, 27 May 2015, <http://bit.ly/1CifNLP> (hereafter: The World Bank, *Economic Monitoring Report*, 27 May 2015), para. 26.

<sup>3</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Periodic Monitoring Report: 2015 Strategic Response Plan Occupied Palestinian Territory - 1 January to 30 June 2015*, 1 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1NDAK8i> (hereafter: OCHA, *Periodic Monitoring Report*, 1 September 2015), pp. 3, 12.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), *Gaza Could Become Uninhabitable in Less than Five Years in Wake of 2014 Conflict and Ongoing De-Development, According to New UNCTAD Report*, 1 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1X7e2uk>.

<sup>5</sup> “One year on from the onset of Operation Protective Edge life for many people in Gaza is getting worse. There has been virtually no reconstruction, there is no permanent ceasefire, no meaningful peace talks, and the blockade is still firmly in place”; Oxfam, *Crisis in Gaza*, 3 July 2015, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/emergencies/crisis-gaza>.

<sup>6</sup> OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin Monthly Report, October 2015*, 31 October 2015, pp. 1-2, 3-5, <http://bit.ly/1H8id7u>; UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), *Gaza Situation Report 114*, 15 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/20YASsU>. For details on reasons contributing to the spiral of violence in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Israel, see UN Department of Political Affairs (UNDP), *Security Council Briefing on the Situation in the Middle East, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov*, 15 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1isJWVo>.

<sup>7</sup> This accounted for the largest monthly casualty figure since the end of the 2014 hostilities; OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin Monthly Report, October 2015*, 31 October 2015, p. 1, <http://bit.ly/1H8id7u>. See also UNRWA, *UNRWA Calls for Political Action and Accountability to Stem the Current Spiral of Violence and Fear, Official Statement*, 12 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Pq5bn4>.

The Gaza blockade, restricting the movement of people and goods to and from the Gaza Strip, entered its ninth year in 2015 and continues to have a devastating effect on the living conditions of the 1.8 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.<sup>8</sup> The situation is compounded by severe restrictions on entry and exit for Palestinians to Egypt since June 2013, which was further tightened since October 2014 amid a deteriorating security situation in the Northern Sinai, which is the point for land access to the Gaza Strip from Egypt.<sup>9</sup>

## Internal Displacement

According to the Independent Commission of Inquiry, which was established by the UN Human Rights Council, the 2014 hostilities in the Gaza Strip uprooted 500,000 people at its peak, or nearly 28 per cent of the Gaza Strip's population.<sup>10</sup> Some 300,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) sought temporary refuge in 90 UNRWA-operated emergency shelters.<sup>11</sup> Many IDPs experienced multiple displacements.<sup>12</sup> As of September 2015, some 100,000 people still remained displaced as their homes were either destroyed or severely damaged. While some IDPs are renting accommodation or residing with host families, others live in precarious conditions in prefabricated units, tents, makeshift shelters, or in their heavily damaged homes.<sup>13</sup>

## Reconstruction

The housing sector was severely affected by the July-August 2014 hostilities as more than 171,000<sup>14</sup> homes suffered minor to severe damage or were destroyed,<sup>15</sup> exacerbating the existing housing shortfall.<sup>16</sup> In addition, much of the territory's infrastructure was damaged, including schools, hospitals and health centres, orchards, water and sanitation facilities, communication networks, as well as the Gaza Strip's only power plant.<sup>17</sup> The reconstruction of the Gaza Strip is moving at a slow pace, "adding to the general frustration of the population following years of movement restrictions and rising unemployment and poverty."<sup>18</sup> In early July 2015, UNRWA announced that housing reconstruction could begin shortly; by late September 2015 work had begun on more than half of the 19,000 homes that were totally destroyed or severely damaged.<sup>19</sup> However, to date only one house which had been totally destroyed has been reconstructed.<sup>20</sup> Delays reportedly

<sup>8</sup> "The Human Rights Commissioner had also reiterated her calls for the blockade on Gaza to be lifted. The blockade, which has destroyed the area's economy, has resulted in high unemployment rates and a growing dependence on international aid"; UN News Service, *As Civilian Casualties Rise in Gaza, UN Rights Council Agrees Probe into Alleged 'War Crimes'*, 23 July 2015, <http://bit.ly/1HY303H>. See also OCHA, *The Gaza Strip: The Humanitarian Impact of the Blockade, July 2015*, 2 July 2015, <http://bit.ly/1O2hcPN>.

<sup>9</sup> For details on access to the Gaza Strip from Egypt, including entry/exit procedures and the security situation in Northern Sinai, see also UNHCR, *Access through Rafah Border Crossing, the Gaza Strip*, November 2015, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/564ec6d44.html>.

<sup>10</sup> This new displacement needs to be seen in the context that the vast majority of the Gaza Strip residents are Palestine refugees (1.26 million out of a total population of 1.76 million); UNRWA, *Where We Work – Gaza Strip*, accessed 15 November 2015, <http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/gaza-strip>.

<sup>11</sup> Since the ceasefire of 26 August 2014, IDPs hosted in UNRWA collective centres have been gradually leaving for alternative accommodation, with the last centres shutting down in June 2015; OCHA, *Gaza One Year On - Internal Displacement in the Context of the 2014 Hostilities*, 6 July 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Ygb4Go>. See also AFP, *Final UN Shelter in Gaza Closes, Many Remain Homeless*, 18 June 2015, <https://shar.es/1ugulB>.

<sup>12</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Detailed Findings of the Independent Commission of Inquiry Established Pursuant to Human Rights Council Resolution S-21/1*, 22 June 2015, A/HRC/29/CRP.4, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5589521f4.html> (hereafter: UN Human Rights Council, *Detailed Findings of the Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 22 June 2015), para. 577.

<sup>13</sup> Shelter Cluster Palestine, *Shelter Cluster Factsheet*, September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1MB6xa2> (hereafter: Shelter Cluster, *Shelter Cluster Factsheet*, September 2015), pp. 5, 6; OCHA, *Fragmented Lives - Humanitarian Overview 2014*, March 2015, pp. 4, 10, <http://bit.ly/1EH5RLO>.

<sup>14</sup> This is significantly higher than initial estimates made in late 2014; OCHA, *Periodic Monitoring Report*, 1 September 2015, p. 28; UN Development Programme (UNDP), *Detailed Infrastructure Damage Assessment*, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1EfZp28> (hereafter: UNDP, *Detailed Infrastructure Damage Assessment*, 2014), p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> According to the Shelter Cluster, a total of 171,000 housing units were impacted by the last conflict, affecting both refugees and non-refugees, including 12,580 that were totally destroyed, 6,524 that sustained severe damage, 6,212 with major and 145,825 with minor damage; Shelter Cluster, *Shelter Cluster Factsheet*, September 2015, p. 10. To date, UNRWA engineers have confirmed 140,190 Palestine refugee houses as impacted during the summer 2014 conflict; 9,117 of them are considered totally demolished while 5,252 shelters have suffered severe, 3,700 major and 122,121 minor, damages; UNRWA, *Gaza Situation Report 113*, 9 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1SUXI4N>.

<sup>16</sup> UNDP, *Detailed Infrastructure Damage Assessment*, 2014, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *Detailed Findings of the Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 22 June 2015, paras 579, 581, 584.

<sup>18</sup> OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin Monthly Report - August 2015*, 28 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/1MSxjOQ> (hereafter: OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin – August 2015*, 28 August 2015), p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> UN Secretary-General, *Bold Actions Urgently Needed 'to Stabilize Situation on the Ground, Improve Lives of Palestinians'*, *Secretary-General Tells Ad Hoc Liaison Committee Meeting*, 30 September 2015, <https://shar.es/1ufMpi>.

<sup>20</sup> UNRWA, *'After 70 Days, I Held the New Keys in my Hands'*, 21 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1SXJavS>. See also, Al-Jazeera, *First Gaza Refugee Home Rebuilt since 2014 Israeli War*, 22 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1MIkX7H>.

relate mostly to the slow disbursement of pledged foreign aid,<sup>21</sup> and continued restrictions on the entry of building material to the Gaza Strip.<sup>22</sup> While families have benefitted from reconstruction and shelter assistance, severe gaps in addressing the needs of affected persons have been identified, primarily due to funding constraints.<sup>23</sup> Due to lack of funding, 7,200 refugee families with totally destroyed homes have not yet begun reconstruction.<sup>24</sup> At the current pace of reconstruction, it will reportedly take years, if not decades, to fully address the widespread needs for reconstruction and repairs.<sup>25</sup>

## Livelihoods

In April 2015, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, during a visit to the Gaza Strip, summarized the extent of the destruction caused by the 2014 hostilities by stating that “no human being who visits can remain untouched by the terrible devastation that one sees here in Gaza”. He went on to say that as shocking as the devastation of the buildings might be, “the devastation of peoples’ livelihoods is 10 times more shocking.”<sup>26</sup>

A May 2015 report by the World Bank observed that as a result of the 2014 hostilities, the Gaza Strip’s economy was on the verge of collapse. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) estimates that as an immediate consequence of the hostilities, the unemployment rate stood at 47.4 per cent in the third quarter of 2014, and at 42.8 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2014,<sup>27</sup> on average 11 per cent higher than prior to the 2014 conflict.<sup>28</sup> According to the World Bank, unemployment in the Gaza Strip is now the highest in the world.<sup>29</sup> Youth and women’s unemployment rates in the Gaza Strip are reported to be particularly high, reaching about 60 per cent for youth,<sup>30</sup> and more than 80 per cent for women.<sup>31</sup> According to UNCTAD, “[T]he latest military operation has effectively eliminated what was left of the middle class, sending almost all of the population into destitution and dependence on international humanitarian aid.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>21</sup> International donors at the “Cairo Conference on Palestine - Reconstructing Gaza” in October 2014 pledged USD 3.5 billion (a quarter of which is existing commitments, reallocated from existing commitments or assistance that was already disbursed during the war) to be provided over a period of three years (2014-2017). As of 31 August 2015, USD 1.229 billion was disbursed, which puts the disbursement ratio at 35 per cent; The World Bank, *Reconstructing Gaza - Donor Pledges*, 29 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/115k15A>.

<sup>22</sup> According to Roberto Valent, Special Representative of the Administrator - Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People, UNDP, it will take 30 years to rehabilitate and reconstruct what had been damaged; The National, ‘*Gaza Reconstruction Could Rake 30 Years*’, 25 June 2015, <http://bit.ly/115kshn>. The Independent Commission of Inquiry assessed in June 2015, “[W]hile there has been some progress in facilitating reconstruction through the creation of the ‘Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism’ (GRM), created in September 2014 with a view to rehabilitating houses and infrastructure damaged during the 2014 hostilities, it has been far too slow and woefully inadequate to address the immense needs in Gaza”; UN Human Rights Council, *Detailed Findings of the Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 22 June 2015, para. 579. According to OCHA, there has recently been a noted increase in the volume of construction materials entering the Gaza Strip; however, the increase is said to be “tempered by an increase in the number of restricted items defined by the Israeli authorities as ‘dual’ civilian/military-use items, which are prohibited from being imported into Gaza without special authorization.” Items considered as “dual use” include, among other things, also basic construction materials such as cement, gravel and metal bars; OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin Monthly Report*, September 2015, 2 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1MUQ67Q> (hereafter: OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin – September*, 2 October 2015), pp. 2-3; Inter Press Service, *Designed to Fail: Gaza’s Reconstruction Plan*, 15 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/1KocBRD>.

<sup>23</sup> For details on various forms of assistance to affected families as well as remaining gaps, see Shelter Cluster, *Shelter Cluster Factsheet*, September 2015, pp. 1, 6-9. For more details on UNRWA’s specific response on shelter to Palestine refugee families, see also UNRWA, *Gaza Situation Report 113*, 9 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1SUXI4N>.

<sup>24</sup> UNRWA, *Gaza Situation Report 115*, 22 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1X3WY1Y>.

<sup>25</sup> OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin – August 2015*, 28 August 2015, p. 3; OCHA, *Periodic Monitoring Report*, 1 September 2015, p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> UN News Centre, *Arriving for Talks in Gaza, New UN Envoy Urges Palestinian Unity, End to Israeli Blockade*, 30 April 2015, <http://bit.ly/1MSBF1W>.

<sup>27</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), *Press Release on the Results of the Labour Force Survey (October- December, 2014) Round*, 12 February 2015, <http://bit.ly/1S3PTU9>. See also UNRWA, *Gaza Refugee Women: A Life of Many Faces*, 1 April 2014, at: <http://bit.ly/1N67I5V>.

<sup>28</sup> The World Bank, *Economic Monitoring Report*, 27 May 2015, p. 5. For 2013, when PCBS estimated unemployment in the Gaza Strip to stand at 34.5 per cent, see OCHA, *The Gaza Strip: The Humanitarian Impact of Movement Restrictions on People and Goods*, 3 July 2013, [http://unispal.un.org/pdfs/OCHA\\_GazaRestrictions.pdf](http://unispal.un.org/pdfs/OCHA_GazaRestrictions.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Further aggravating the situation, some 70 per cent of those who work in the private sector in the Gaza Strip receive an average monthly salary of USD 174. Far less than the still-not-enacted minimum wage of USD 400; The World Bank, *Economic Monitoring Report*, 27 May 2015, pp. 5, 6 and paras 27 and 34.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 34.

<sup>31</sup> UNCTAD, *Report on UNCTAD Assistance to the Palestinian People: Developments in the Economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, TD/B/62/3, 6 July 2015, <http://bit.ly/1NV3nBT> (hereafter: UNCTAD, *Report on UNCTAD Assistance to the Palestinian People*, 6 July 2015), para. 29.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 30.

UNCTAD reports that at least 40,000 people employed in the agricultural sector were affected by damage to agricultural lands and the loss and/or death of livestock. As many as 247 factories and 300 commercial centres were fully or partially destroyed.<sup>33</sup>

The World Bank estimates that 39 per cent of the Gaza Strip population live below the poverty line, up from an estimated 28 per cent in 2013.<sup>34</sup> Unemployment and poverty in turn impact on the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, including the rights to food, work, health, water and sanitation.<sup>35</sup>

## Food Security

The dire prospects of finding employment and making a living are aggravated by high levels of food insecurity as a result of high food prices and insufficient and unstable financial resources.<sup>36</sup> The estimated figures for food insecurity and persons depending on food aid reach about 57 per cent and 80 per cent, respectively.<sup>37</sup> The number of Palestinian refugees solely reliant on food distribution from UNRWA increased from 72,000 in 2000 to 878,000 by May 2015, representing half the population of the Gaza Strip and 65 per cent of registered refugees.<sup>38</sup>

## Health

While access to health care was precarious even before the 2014 military escalation, the fighting has further weakened the medical infrastructure.<sup>39</sup> Many damaged health facilities are still waiting either for rebuilding or maintenance, including the totally destroyed Al-Wafa Hospital, due to a lack of construction materials or lack of funding.<sup>40</sup> Shortages in staff,<sup>41</sup> essential medicines and medical supplies,<sup>42</sup> lack of outside training, as well as electricity and fuel,<sup>43</sup> negatively affect the quality of health care and curtail critical services such as the

<sup>33</sup> Office of the Quartet Representative, *Gaza: Opportunities for Reconstruction and Economic Development*, October 2014, pp. 7, 12, <http://bit.ly/1KEEiAE>. See also Food Security Sector, *Agriculture in the Post-War Gaza Strip*, 18 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1KEEks5>.

<sup>34</sup> The World Bank, *Economic Monitoring Report*, 27 May 2015, para. 27.

<sup>35</sup> “These numbers [on unemployment and poverty], however, fail to portray the degree of suffering of Gaza’s citizens due to poor electricity and water/sewerage availability, war-related psychological trauma, limited movement, and other adverse effects of wars and the blockade.” And further: “Unemployment and poverty have reached staggering rates and the quality of life for the large majority of Gaza’s citizens is hardly bearable. The feeling of hopelessness is pervasive, in particular following the summer 2014 war”; The World Bank, *Economic Monitoring Report*, 27 May 2015, p. 6 and para. 48.

<sup>36</sup> In August 2015, according to UNRWA, food prices remained volatile and increased by three per cent compared to the previous month as a result of rising vegetable prices due to hot weather conditions; UNRWA, *Gaza Situation Report 110, 8 September - 15 September 2015*, 18 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1HWuNHd>. See also OCHA, *2015 Strategic Response Plan OPT*, 12 February 2015, <http://bit.ly/1MDUFUL> (hereafter: OCHA, *2015 Strategic Response Plan OPT*, 12 February 2015), p. 40.

<sup>37</sup> World Food Programme (WFP), *WFP Palestine Brief - Reporting Period: 01 April – 30 June 2015*, 30 June 2015, p. 2, <https://shar.es/1urgCX>.

<sup>38</sup> UNRWA food assistance is distributed four times per year in 12 UNRWA Distribution Centres across the Gaza Strip; UNRWA, *Gaza Situation Report 111/112*, 2 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1NAzjYs>; UNCTAD, *Report on UNCTAD Assistance to the Palestinian People*, 6 July 2015, para. 30.

<sup>39</sup> “The recent conflict in Gaza severely impacted on the health and wellbeing of the entire population. Large-scale population displacement, shortages of water and electricity, environmental health hazards, loss of income and many more factors increased drastically the vulnerability of the majority of the population at a time when the siege on Gaza and the financial crisis of the government had already left the system on the brink of collapse”; Health Cluster, *Gaza Strip, Joint Health Sector Assessment Report*, September 2014, p. 3, <http://bit.ly/211KWBz>.

<sup>40</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), *Critical Issues in Health Services in Gaza: One Year after the Summer 2014 War*, 25 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/1NbwVwM> (hereafter: WHO, *Critical Issues in Health Services in Gaza*, 25 August 2015), p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> For example, Al-Shifa Hospital, the largest hospital in Palestine with 900 beds and 1,656 employees faces chronic drug and staff shortages, has no radiotherapy services, and faces problems with reliable power and fuel supplies; WHO, *Swiss Delegation Visit Al-Shifa Medical Compound in Gaza*, 9 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Nb7YBV>.

<sup>42</sup> “In July 2015, 4 drugs used to treat hemophilia and thalassemia were at zero stock and the remaining 3 drugs were at critical levels of less than 3 months’ supply; 54% of medicines for treating infections and 40% of chemotherapy drugs were at zero stock. Medicines used by chronic patients at primary health care level are also in short supply, especially psychiatric drugs and common heart disease medications, forcing patients to pay out-of-pocket or go without. The zero stock lists of medical disposable materials were particularly high for dental health services (95%), open heart surgery and heart catheterization (78%) and ophthalmology (66%)”; WHO, *Critical Issues in Health Services in Gaza*, 25 August 2015, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> “Fuel crisis in the MoH [Ministry of Health] is still ongoing and services provided to patients in critical care units are at special risk, including ORs, ICUs, ERs, and hemodialysis units. Long blackouts occurred recently when the power station in Gaza had a fuel shortage and recurrent damages of the main lines from Egypt have affected the health sector. Hospitals have consumed planned reserves in order to power generators during longer cuts (...). WHO, OCHA and UNRWA intervened several times in the last two months to replenish MoH hospitals’ fuel supplies, despite emergency measures in place over the past 2 years to conserve power”; WHO, *Critical Issues in Health Services in Gaza*, 25 August 2015, p. 2. “Common coping mechanisms adopted by hospitals throughout Gaza include the postponement of non-urgent and

treatment of patients suffering from diseases such as cancer and heart conditions.<sup>44</sup> Maternal and neonatal mortality rates in the Gaza Strip are reported to be showing a significant increase since 2013.<sup>45</sup> As a result of a lack of staff and resources, newly-built health facilities have reportedly been unable to open.<sup>46</sup> The Ministry of Health reported that 60 per cent of laboratory materials are at zero stock.<sup>47</sup>

As a result of these shortages and the lack of specialized health services in the Gaza Strip, patients have to rely on a complicated mechanism for medical referrals abroad, requiring access approvals from Israel or Egypt.<sup>48</sup> While the majority of requests to leave the Gaza Strip for medical reasons are approved, however, many applications are reportedly delayed or even denied in some cases, resulting in the applicants missing their medical appointments.<sup>49</sup> August 2015 saw the highest rate of denials of such requests in the last five years.<sup>50</sup> The number of border crossings to access health care in Egypt has dropped significantly given that the Rafah border has largely been closed since October 2014.<sup>51</sup>

The number of people with permanent or long-term disabilities has reportedly increased, with preliminary estimates indicating that up to 1,000 children will be permanently disabled as a result of the hostilities in 2014. Post-traumatic stress disorder and other stress-related symptoms have increased as a result of the latest hostilities and about 20 per cent of the Gaza Strip's population are estimated to be in need of long-term mental health assistance,<sup>52</sup> among them more than 370,000 children.<sup>53</sup>

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*elective surgeries; increasing referrals of patients outside of Gaza, particularly for chronic illnesses; discharging patients prematurely; and reduction and/or cancellation of complementary services, such as cleaning and catering. In addition, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), some 300 machines and medical equipment at hospitals have been damaged due to fluctuations in the current and are now out of order*"; OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin – August 2015*, 28 August 2015, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin – September*, 2 October 2015, p. 9; WHO, *UN Underscores Gaza Blockade Impact and Health Needs One Year after Ceasefire*, 25 August 2015, <https://shar.es/lurr4B>; WHO, *Critical Issues in Health Services in Gaza*, 25 August 2015, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> "The Ministry of Health reported 17 maternal deaths in 2014, five of which occurred during the conflict. This compares to 11 cases in 2012 and 12 cases in 2013. Of the seven deaths reported so far in 2015, six were classified as avoidable, a clear indication of decline in the quality of care"; UN Populations Fund (UNFPA), *One Year after Gaza Conflict, Situation for Women and Youth Remains Dire*, 26 August 2015, <https://shar.es/lug2VX>. The number of babies dying before the age of one has consistently gone down over the past several decades, from 127 per 1,000 live births in 1960 to 20.2 in 2008. At the last count in 2013, however, it had risen to 22.4 per 1,000 live births. The rate of neonatal mortality, which is the number of babies that die before they reach one month, has also gone up significantly, from 12 per 1,000 live births in 2008 to 20.3 in 2013; UNRWA, *Infant Mortality Rate Rises in Gaza for First Time in Fifty Years*, 8 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/1TkzZ7j>.

<sup>46</sup> "The consequences are that New MoH health facilities and units cannot open due to the lack of both staff and resources, such as the newly completed 100-bed Indonesian-funded hospital in North Gaza, maternity and pediatric department in Al-Aqsa hospital, and a main building for Nasser hospital in Khan Younis. Five new and fully equipped operating rooms in Shifa cannot be opened because of the staff shortage, and one of two operating theatres in Beit Hanoun have been closed and in Beit Lahiya surgeries are restricted only to the day shift. The open heart surgery unit in European Gaza hospital was closed in June due to lack of staff and medical disposables and patients referred to Shifa"; WHO, *Critical Issues in Health Services in Gaza*, 25 August 2015, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> WHO, *Critical Issues in Health Services in Gaza*, 25 August 2015, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> OCHA, *2015 Strategic Response Plan OPT*, p. 35. According to the Ministry of Health Referral Abroad Department (RAD) in the Gaza Strip, the main referral specialties needed in August were oncology, orthopedic surgery, nuclear medicine, hematology and ophthalmology; WHO, *Monthly Report: Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip, August 2015*, 28 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1X7DKPA> (hereafter: WHO, *Monthly Report: Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip, August 2015*, 28 September 2015), p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> The latest figures available are for August 2015, when 2,121 patients had applied for permits to exit the Gaza Strip through Erez checkpoint for hospital appointments (the majority, 93 per cent, had been referred through the Ministry of Health, while the seven per cent were sponsored by NGOs and other donors). According to the Palestinian District Liaison office in Gaza, 72 per cent of patients were approved, 19 per cent received no response to their applications (347 patients, including 90 children) and 11 per cent were denied permits (235 patients, including six children and 21 elderly patient over 60 years old). This represented a decline compared to earlier months, the cause of which is not clear; WHO, *Monthly Report: Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip, August 2015*, 28 September 2015, p. 1. See also OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin – September*, 2 October 2015, Annex. According to Physicians for Human Rights Israel, Israel "has a policy of arbitrarily denying medical treatment from Palestinians, even when such treatment can save their lives"; Physicians for Human Rights, *Denied - Harassment of Palestinian Patients Applying For Exit Permits*, 11 June 2015, <https://shar.es/luguFd>.

<sup>50</sup> WHO, *Monthly Report: Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip, August 2015*, 28 September 2015, p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> So far, the Rafah border was open on only 19 days this year, allowing only 148 patients to cross into Egypt for health care (out of 946 referrals issued by the MoH). Before the July 2013 closure, more than 4,000 residents of the Gaza Strip crossed Rafah monthly for health-related access; WHO, *Monthly Report: Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip, August 2015*, 28 September 2015, pp. 1, 3.

<sup>52</sup> WHO's mental health program coordinator in the Gaza Strip, Dr. Dyaa Saymah, told the Independent Commission of Inquiry that the current trauma response in the Gaza Strip was, "scattered and short term funded"; UN Human Rights Council, *Detailed Findings of the Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 22 June 2015, para. 595.

<sup>53</sup> OCHA, *Gaza Initial Rapid Assessment*, 9 September 2014, p. 3, <http://bit.ly/1QMfx1s>. See also Reuters, *Marriage Fars, Stigma Stop Gaza Girls Seeking Mental Health Care*, 4 October 2015, <http://tmsnrt.rs/1MmK5Rw>; UNICEF, *In Gaza, Children Are Deeply Affected by Violence*, updated 29 September 2015, <https://shar.es/1u0TRC>; Save the Children, *Gaza Children Facing Severe Emotional Distress*, 6 July 2015, <http://bit.ly/1MB7L5p>.

## Education

The education sector, already overstretched prior to the hostilities,<sup>54</sup> saw further destruction and damage to kindergartens, schools and universities.<sup>55</sup> Overall, the quality of education in the Gaza Strip is reported to have worsened, because classes have become larger and the time spent at school shorter (with most schools running double or even triple shifts, thus shortening the school day), in addition to psychological and considerable economic challenges.<sup>56</sup>

## Electricity, Water and Sanitation

The Gaza Strip suffers from a chronic shortfall in power supply, which severely disrupts the delivery of basic services in all sectors.<sup>57</sup> Damage sustained to infrastructure during the summer 2014 hostilities<sup>58</sup> reportedly further exacerbated the pre-existing shortfall in power supply.<sup>59</sup> Electricity supply in the Gaza Strip meets only 45 per cent of its estimated needs. Consequently, its residents have been suffering from regular electricity outages.<sup>60</sup> Power cuts in the Gaza Strip normally extend to 12-16 hours a day, but can be significantly longer, e.g. as a result of fuel shortages or during the hot summer months when demand increases.<sup>61</sup> Alternatives are difficult to come by as firewood and gas are very scarce and liquid fuel is costly and not easily available to many.<sup>62</sup>

Water and sanitation facilities were heavily affected by the escalation of violence as water and sewage infrastructure was damaged or completely destroyed.<sup>63</sup> Despite some rehabilitation, by December 2014 water supply remained irregular, with more than 70 per cent of households in the Gaza Strip being supplied with piped water for 6-8 hours only once every two to four days, due to insufficient power supply.<sup>64</sup> The average water consumption from the network stands at 45 litres per person per day. This has increased reliance on private, uncontrolled water suppliers and lowered hygiene standards.<sup>65</sup> Water-related costs have also increased, and doubled in some areas, further reducing access to drinking water of already vulnerable families.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>54</sup> “Education in Gaza has long been characterized by overcrowding and unsafe conditions with approximately 37.3 students per class”; UNDP, *Detailed Infrastructure Damage Assessment*, 2014, p. 20.

<sup>55</sup> “The July-August armed conflict in Gaza resulted in unprecedented damage to the education system. The MoEHE reported damage to 189 public schools in Gaza, and UNRWA reported damage to an additional 83 UNRWA schools (...). Of the 407 kindergartens (KGs) in Gaza, 274 KGs, or almost two thirds of the total, reported some level of infrastructure damage. At least 11 Higher Education institutions were also damaged during the conflict”; OCHA, *2015 Strategic Response Plan OPT*, p. 35. See also UNICEF, *In Gaza, Children are Deeply Affected by Violence*, updated 29 September 2015, <https://shar.es/1u0TRC>; UN Human Rights Council, *Detailed Findings of the Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 22 June 2015, para. 585; UN Security Council, *Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General*, 5 June 2015, A/69/926-S/2015/409, paras 98-99, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/557abf904.html>. These new damages come in addition to extensive damages that occurred during the 2008 hostilities, which resulted in 217 schools and 60 kindergartens being damaged, including 18 facilities damaged beyond repair. Most of these have not seen reconstruction due to the ongoing blockade; UNDP, *Detailed Infrastructure Damage Assessment*, 2014, p. 20.

<sup>56</sup> OCHA, *2015 Strategic Response Plan OPT*, p. 35.

<sup>57</sup> OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin – August 2015*, 28 August 2015, p. 6; UNDP, *Detailed Infrastructure Damage Assessment*, 2014, p. 17.

<sup>58</sup> “The electricity sector suffered the brunt of the destruction. Electricity infrastructure in many areas has been uprooted and completely destroyed, including transmission and distribution lines, cabling, electricity poles and transformers”; UNDP, *Detailed Infrastructure Damage Assessment*, 2014, p. 19. See also UN Human Rights Council, *Detailed Findings of the Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 22 June 2015, paras 450-455, 581.

<sup>59</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *Detailed Findings of the Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 22 June 2015, para. 583.

<sup>60</sup> OCHA, *The Humanitarian Impact of Gaza’s Electricity and Fuel Crisis*, July 2015, p. 2, <http://bit.ly/1PzZHHW>.

<sup>61</sup> “Throughout July, several incidents underlined the severity of the electricity crisis in the Gaza Strip. On 1 July, the electricity supply to the southern governorate of Rafah, home to 220,000 people, came to an almost complete halt when all three Egyptian feeder lines supplying southern Gaza were disconnected, reportedly after sustaining damage due to military operations in Northern Sinai. The lines were repaired on 7 July, but frequent cuts and electricity fluctuations mean that the situation in Rafah remains precarious. On 20 July, two Israeli feeder lines supplying Gaza City and Khan Yunis were also disconnected. The lines were repaired on 22 July. Also on 20 July, due to a lack of fuel supply, Gaza’s sole Power Plant (GPP) was forced to shut down completely, triggering rolling power cuts of up to 18 hours a day throughout Gaza. Fuel supplies resumed on 29 July and partial operation has been restored. However, due to the high demand for electricity in summer and increased losses through the grid, power cuts are still longer than the usual 12 to 16 hours per day”; OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin – August 2015*, 28 August 2015, p. 4. See also OCHA, *The Humanitarian Impact of Gaza’s Electricity and Fuel Crisis*, July 2015, <http://bit.ly/1PzZHHW>.

<sup>62</sup> The World Bank, *Economic Monitoring Report*, 27 May 2015, para. 40.

<sup>63</sup> UNDP, *Detailed Infrastructure Damage Assessment*, 2014, p. 12.

<sup>64</sup> OCHA, *Periodic Monitoring Report*, 1 September 2015, p. 13.

<sup>65</sup> OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin – August 2015*, 28 August 2015, p. 6; UNDP, *Detailed Infrastructure Damage Assessment*, 2014, p. 12.

<sup>66</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *Detailed Findings of the Independent Commission of Inquiry*, 22 June 2015, para. 584.

The Gaza Strip's population relies on coastal aquifers as their main source of freshwater, yet 95 per cent of this water is not safe to drink according to WHO standards.<sup>67</sup>

### **Explosive Remnants of War (ERW)**

Thousands of explosive items continue to pose a serious threat to civilians across the Gaza Strip.<sup>68</sup> In 2014, ERW accidents reportedly caused eight fatalities and 57 injuries, up from three fatalities and 23 injuries in 2013, especially affecting men and boys.<sup>69</sup> Since the ceasefire agreement in August 2014, at least 11 people have been killed and 110 injured as a result of unexploded ordnance.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> UNCTAD, *Report on UNCTAD Assistance to the Palestinian People*, 6 July 2015, para. 45.

<sup>68</sup> Handicap International, *Gaza: One Year after the Conflict, Civilians Still Threatened by Explosive Remnants of War*, 8 July 2015, <https://shar.es/1ugsQT>; UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS), *International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, 'More than Mines', Gaza*, 8 April 2015, <https://shar.es/1urr9O>.

<sup>69</sup> OCHA, *Fragmented Lives - Humanitarian Overview 2014*, 26 March 2015, p. 6, <http://bit.ly/1EH5RLO>. See also Handicap International, *Bombs under Rubble*, January 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Ygblns>.

<sup>70</sup> For example, "[O]n 30 October [2015], an unexploded ordinance (UXO) detonated accidentally when an 11-year old refugee child and UNRWA student was handling it in northern Gaza. The child sustained shrapnel wounds"; UNRWA, *Gaza Situation Report 117*, 5 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1HY2t1C>. See also, OCHA, *Protection of Civilians Weekly Report, 15-28 September 2015 (Two-Week Period)*, 28 September 2015, p. 1, <http://bit.ly/1O2FhG6>.