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KEY PRIORITIES

+5,800

GAZAN WORKERS
DISPLACED TO THE
WEST BANK

10,000

DETAINED GAZAN
WORKERS SENT
BACK TO GAZA

High

PROTECTION NEEDS

CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

On 7 October 2023, the Qassam Brigades (the armed wing of Hamas which governs the Gaza Strip) and several Palestinian armed groups launched a military operation against Israel called al-Aqsa Storm. They fired rockets into the south of Israel and physically entered the territory. Approximately 1,400 Israelis were killed and around 240 Israelis and foreign nationals were taken hostage. Israel responded with heavy bombardment into the Gaza Strip, before expanding its military operation inside Gaza from 28 October (OCHA 09/11/2023; OCHA 07/10/2023; HRW 29/10/2023; Al Jazeera 16/10/2023). As at 7 November, over 10,800 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, two thirds of whom are women and children, and more than 26,900 Palestinians have been injured. About 2,450 people are missing, dead, or trapped under the rubble waiting to be rescued, including more than 1,400 children (OCHA 09/11/2023). In the West Bank, over 150 Palestinians have been killed (OCHA 07/11/2023).

As at 7 October, an estimated 18,000-18,500 residents of the Gaza Strip held work permits issued by the Israeli authorities. These allowed them to work and live in Israel and Israeli settlements in the West Bank (ILO 27/10/2023; Gisha 24/10/2023; Reuters 03/11/2023). On 10 October, Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) revoked all work permits. This announcement was followed by mass arrests and detentions of Gazans working in Israel by Israeli authorities. The workers were detained in Israeli facilities in the West Bank (Gisha 24/10/2023; Al Jazeera 03/11/2023; AP 03/11/2023). Other Gazan workers fled from Israel to the West Bank after their permits were revoked.

On 2 November, Israel began sending the detained Gazan workers back to Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing (Gisha 24/10/2023; Reuters 03/11/2023; Al Jazeera 28/10/2023 and 03/11/2023; CNN 03/11/2023). As at 8 November, the total number of Gazan workers detained by Israel, displaced to the West Bank, or sent back to Gaza is unclear. Palestinian Authority officials initially estimated that around 4,500 Gazans were detained by Israel. However, on 4 November, it was reported that Israel had sent 10,000 detained Gazan workers back to Gaza (Washington Post 04/11/2023). As at 5 November, 5,850 Gazan workers

were seeking temporary shelter in collective sites and host facilities in the West Bank, including in Ramallah, Jericho, Tulkarim, Bethlehem, and Hebron (AA 04/11/2023; UNWRA 26/10/2023; Al Jazeera 28/10/2023; CNN 16/10/2023; NPR 30/10/2023). It is unclear how many, if any, have since returned to Gaza.

ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

Six Israeli organisations have petitioned the Israeli High Court to release the names and whereabouts of the remaining detainees and guarantee that they are being held in adequate conditions (Gisha 24/10/2023; Al Jazeera 03/11/2023). Reports suggest Palestinian detainees face cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment, are denied legal representation, and have inadequate access to food, healthcare, and WASH facilities. Further arrests would mean more Gazan workers facing such issues (Aljazeera 01/11/2023; Amnesty 03/05/2023; UN 17/04/2015; Save the Children 06/07/2023).

Gazan workers who are sheltering in public facilities in the West Bank are at risk of raids, arrest, and detention by Israeli authorities (Al Jazeera 28/10/2023; AA 04/11/2023). There has been an increase in Israeli settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank in recent weeks (OCHA 01/11/2023).

HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

The Israeli authorities have heavily restricted movement in the West Bank since 7 October. This is to contain potential Palestinian protests and mobilisation of Palestinian armed groups. Movement is restricted between and within towns and cities, including East Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus, Hebron, and Al-Bireh. Military checkpoints and roadblocks have been established by Israeli forces in and around towns in the West Bank (OCHA 28/10/2023; Aljazeera 28/10/2023; UNRWA 11/10/2023). These heightened physical and administrative measures will restrict humanitarian activities and humanitarian access for Palestinians in the West Bank, including Gazan workers.

In Gaza, the complete siege imposed by Israel and current military operations are impeding scale-up of the humanitarian response (OCHA 07/11/2023).

CRISIS IMPACTS

Gazan workers detained by Israel

By revoking work permits for Gazans, Israeli authorities deprived them of their legal status and associated rights to work and be present in Israel and Israeli settlements in the West Bank (Gisha 24/10/2023). The workers are being detained without legal grounds in Israeli facilities, where they are reportedly subject to cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment, including physical and psychological violence (The Independent 23/10/2023; Washington Post 04/11/2023). According to OHCHR, some of the reported incidents could amount to torture (OHCHR 03/11/2023). The detainees have also been denied access to due process and judicial guarantees, including legal representation (OCHA 03/11/2023; Gisha 24/10/2023). ICRC was not permitted to meet the workers, who were reportedly detained as 'enemy non-combatants' (The Guardian 03/11/2023). Gazan workers who are detained for prolonged periods may incur significant mental health and psychosocial needs because of the conditions of their detention and concern for their family and friends in Gaza amid the aerial and ground military operations.

On 18 October, the Knesset (Parliament of Israel) approved a temporary plan denying Palestinian prisoners the right to 4.5 square meters of space. The plan increased the capacity of cells to hold more than double their previously capacity (Al Jazeera 21/10/2023 and 28/10/2023; MEMO 31/07/2023). Physicians for Human Rights Israel also report that the Israeli Prison Service disconnects power and water to prisoners, restricts meals and physical exercise, and denies access to healthcare (PHR 26/10/2023). At least two Palestinian prisoners have died in custody since 7 October (OCHA 02/11/2023).

In response to allegations that the detained workers have been mistreated, the Israeli Defense Forces stated that there are "no known claims of abuse of Gazan residents in custody", and that videos allegedly depicting abuse would be examined (France24 06/11/2023). As for reports that some Gazan detainees have been violently interrogated about their alleged involvement in the al-Aqsa Storm operation, an Israeli official reported that the workers were detained for being in Israel illegally after their work permits were revoked, rather than for suspected ties with Hamas. The official also stated that some workers were being held for their own protection from violence against Israeli communities (CNN 06/11/2023).

Gazan workers displaced to the West Bank

Many Gazan workers who have sought refuge in the West Bank were forced to leave their work sites and temporary homes in Israel with no notice or time to gather possessions, including money, identity documents and phones (Al Jazeera 12/10/2023 and 04/11/2023; The Washington Post 04/11/2023). They are temporarily seeking shelter in schools and public facilities. They need adequate shelter, NFIs, and cash assistance to meet their daily needs (PRCS 29/10/2023; UNRWA 26/10/2023).

Given the poor socioeconomic situation and humanitarian conditions in the West Bank, Gazan workers will likely face significant difficulties finding livelihood opportunities and adequate support from authorities and host communities (OCHA 25/01/2023). They are also likely to face difficulties accessing healthcare, given that Palestinian patients from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip previously required permits to reach hospitals in East Jerusalem (WHO 23/08/2023).

Some displaced Gazan workers in the West Bank are unable to contact their families in the Gaza Strip. Others have received distressing news about the death, injury, or displacement of family members (NPR 30/10/2023). UNRWA has provided psychosocial support services to over 150 Gazan workers in Hebron, Ramallah, and Tulkarm (UNRWA 26/10/2023).

There is a risk of further arrests of Gazan workers amid continuing raids in the West Bank (Al Jazeera 28/10/2023).

Gazan workers sent back to Gaza

Gazan workers who have been sent back to Gaza face risks to their lives amid ongoing military operations. Many will be unable to contact and find surviving family and community members because of insecurity, communication blackouts, and displacement. At least 45% of housing units in the Gaza Strip have been destroyed or damaged since the start of hostilities. This has left many returning Gazan workers without shelter (OCHA 04/11/2023). Those originally from the northern Gaza Strip, which Israel has cut off, will be displaced to the south (Al Jazeera 03/11/2023; OCHA 04/11/2023).

Further, as at 4 November, there have been over 100 attacks on healthcare facilities in Gaza, resulting in very limited availability of healthcare services (OCHA 04/11/2023; WHO 04/11/2023). As at 7 November, 14 out of 35 hospitals were no longer functioning (OCHA 06/11/2023). The need for mental health and psychological support services in Gaza is also dire (OCHA 07/11/2023). As the healthcare system is overwhelmed, returning workers who experienced

violence and mistreatment while detained in Israel may not receive the required healthcare and mental health support (MSF 10/10/2023). Those who sustained injuries while in detention will likely face challenges receiving treatment.

Before the hostilities, more than 80% of the Gazan population lived in poverty. Unemployment in Gaza was among the highest in the world, affecting nearly half the population (OCHA 06/2022; UNWRA accessed 08/11/2023). Gazan workers who worked in Israel or the Israeli settlements in the West Bank could, on average, earn far more than workers who remained in the Gaza Strip and often sent money back to support their families (The Independent 23/10/2023; AP 26/08/2022). They also earned twice the daily average wage in the West Bank (World Bank 11/05/2023). The revocation of work permits will have a significant impact on their livelihoods and the purchasing power of these workers and their families, with the hostilities exhausting their coping capacities.

COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Blockade of Gaza Strip

Israel has imposed a 16-year blockade of the Gaza Strip since 2007, constraining the movement of people and goods. Palestinians require Israeli permits to travel in and out of the Gaza Strip. The blockade has had negative impacts on the humanitarian operations of UN agencies, national NGOs, and INGOs (OCHA 09/08/2019, 25/01/2023, and 23/05/2023). Following the outbreak of hostilities on 7 October, the Israeli government ordered a complete siege on Gaza. This included cutting electricity and water and the import of fuel (DW 09/10/2023). With such constraints, humanitarian assistance is severely limited and unable to meet the mounting needs.

Coercive environment in the West Bank

Since the beginning of conflict in Israel and Palestine and the Israeli occupation, Palestinians in the West Bank have faced protection and access challenges. These have included threats to their lives, liberty, security, and property, and restricted freedom of movement. Israel has implemented a range of policies and practices that have created a coercive environment for Palestinians in the West Bank, especially those living in Area C, East Jerusalem, and the H2 area of Hebron city. These practices and policies include military orders permitting the expedited demolition or seizure of properties, continuing attacks and intimidation by Israeli settlers, lack of adequate law enforcement, and multiple checkpoints and barriers. All deprive Palestinians of access to basic housing, livelihood opportunities, and services, including education and healthcare (OCHA 31/12/2020, 16/12/2021, and 25/01/2023; ACAPS 01/10/2021 and 16/03/2023).

For more details on the crisis and background information, you can read the recently published ACAPS report, 'Humanitarian impact overview one month since the conflict' (ACAPS 06/11/2023).¹ For further additional information on past needs in Gaza, see the ACAPS Palestine Country Page.