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Country Policy and Information Note Occupied Palestinian Territory (Gaza): Security and Humanitarian Situation

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Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in [the basis of claim](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into two main sections: (1) analysis and assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note – i.e. the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw – by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment on whether, **in general**:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- A person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- A person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- Claims are likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- If a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case’s specific facts.

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation’s (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013](#). Namely, taking into account the COI’s relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the ‘cut-off’ date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion.

Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email [the Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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Assessment

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 That the general humanitarian situation in Gaza is so severe as to make removal a breach of Articles 15(a) and (b) of the European Council Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004 ('the Qualification Directive') / Articles 2 and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR); and/or
- 1.1.2 That the security situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories presents a real risk which threatens a civilian's life or person such that removal to this country would be in breach of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive (serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence).

1.2 Points to note

- 1.2.1 Gaza has been 'occupied' by Israel since 1967. Along with the West Bank, they are collectively known as the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs).
- 1.2.2 For a Palestinian to return to Gaza, permission must be given by the Israeli authorities.
- 1.2.3 Only Palestinians holding an ID number and who are on the Palestinian population registry are able to return to the OPTs (Gaza or the West Bank). Palestinians who do not hold an ID number and who are not on the population registry may be a Palestinian from the diaspora and are therefore unable to return to the OPTs under the Oslo Accord agreement.

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 Although the population of Gaza is 1.8 million people, the Palestinian population of around 12 million people is divided between historic Palestine and a diaspora, mainly in neighbouring Arab countries. The status of the diaspora in other countries varies; some have citizenship, some have been recognised as refugees, whilst others lack a status altogether.
- 2.1.2 For information on assessing credibility, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 2.1.4 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 Some members of the Palestinian Authority security services, or the de facto security in Gaza operated by Hamas, have been responsible for human rights abuses. Additionally, a number of armed groups, some of which have been proscribed in the UK, operate in and out of Gaza (see [groups operating in Gaza](#)).
- 2.2.2 If there are serious reasons for considering that the person has been involved with such abuses, then decision makers must consider whether one of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Decision makers must nevertheless consider each case on its individual facts and merits.
- 2.2.3 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection. The exclusions for humanitarian protection are wider than the refugee Convention, therefore please refer to the [Asylum Instruction on Humanitarian Protection](#) (section on exclusion) which sets out the exclusion provisions.
- 2.2.4 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the [Asylum Instructions on Exclusion under Articles 1F of the Refugee Convention](#) and the [Asylum instruction for Restricted Leave](#).

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2.3 Risk

a. Refugee convention

- 2.3.1 Decision makers must first consider if the person faces persecution for a Refugee Convention reason noting that a state of civil instability and/or where law and order has broken down does not of itself give rise to a well-founded fear of persecution for a Convention reason.
- 2.3.2 Where the person qualifies under the Refugee Convention, decision makers do not need to go on to assess the need for Humanitarian Protection. It is only if the person does not qualify under the Refugee Convention that decision makers need to assess the need for protection firstly under Articles 15(a) and (b) of the Qualification Directive/Articles 2 and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and, if that is unsuccessful, under Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive.
- 2.3.3 For further guidance on Humanitarian Protection see the [Asylum Instruction on Humanitarian Protection](#).

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b. Humanitarian situation

- 2.3.4 Gaza's population is estimated to be 1.9 million, around 73% of whom are refugees registered and assisted by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) which itself is reliant on international financial support. Since 2007, the militant Islamist group, Hamas, has governed the territory and been the dominant security force, although a number of other groups operate out of Gaza.
- 2.3.5 In 2007 Israel imposed a land, air and sea blockade of Gaza citing security concerns following the territory's take over by Hamas which continues at the

time of writing. Israel and Egypt restrict the movement of goods and people into and out of Gaza, although Israel does allow some humanitarian food and medical supplies to enter the territory. The degree of the restrictions fluctuates corresponding to changes in the security situation and political interactions between Israel, the Palestinian Authority (the governing authority for all of the OPTs, based in the West Bank) and Hamas.

- 2.3.6 The Israeli blockade has led to a steady decline in Gazans' living conditions, reducing access to essential services such as healthcare, education and housing, depressing the economy, raising unemployment to around 40% and food and water insecurity. Over 50% of the population has been pushed into 'poverty', while an estimated 80% of the population rely on some form of international assistance (see [Humanitarian situation](#)).
- 2.3.7 Almost all piped water is undrinkable, while the electricity supply is restricted and continuously fluctuates, varying from 4 to 11 hours a day in 2018, affecting the delivery of public services such as hospitals and schools, and undermining economic activity. The control on goods has led to a severe shortage in essential medicines, while the restrictions of the movement of people has prevented those needing medical treatment from seeking it outside of Gaza and movement of humanitarian workers into and out of the territory (see [Humanitarian support](#) and [Freedom of movement](#)).
- 2.3.8 UNRWA supports the majority of Palestinians in Gaza, including those in the 8 refugee camps which accommodate around 500,000 people, providing basic services including accommodation, healthcare and education, as well as food assistance. UNRWA has faced cuts to its budget during 2017/18, primarily the result of a reduction in US funding. Conditions in camps are overcrowded, with high rates of poverty, unemployment and food insecurity. UNRWA-registered refugees are in general poorer and face greater hardships than those who are not (see [Humanitarian situation](#)).
- 2.3.9 A series of conflicts with Israel have exacerbated the poor humanitarian situation. The worst was in 2014 when Israeli air-raids, which had the stated aim of stopping rocket attacks by Hamas, led to over 1,000 civilian deaths, thousands of casualties, vital infrastructure damaged and destroyed, and the temporary displacement of tens of thousands of people. Some reconstruction has taken place since the conflict in 2014, however 14,000 people remain displaced with 53 percent in need of temporary shelter assistance. Clashes between Gazans, including Hamas, and the Israeli Defence Forces continue although Israel's airstrikes in 2017 and 2018, which had the stated aim of stopping rocket attacks by Hamas, have been fewer and caused much less damage than in 2014 (see [Humanitarian situation](#) and [Security situation](#)).
- 2.3.10 Hamas continues to govern Gaza, providing basic services including education, and to permit humanitarian actors, including the UNRWA, to operate and provide assistance to the Gazan population. The economy is stagnant and around half of the population are unemployed: in the first quarter of 2018 it reached 49.1 percent. Nearly 40 percent of Gazans are reported to live below the poverty line. The movement of goods and people into and out of the territory has increased in 2018 compared to 2017 (see

[Healthcare, Employment, Financial Security and the Economy](#) and [Freedom of movement](#)).

2.3.11 In the country guidance case of [HS \(Palestinian – return to Gaza\) Palestinian Territories CG \[2011\] UKUT 124 \(IAC\)](#), heard on the 15 and 16 December 2009, 22 and 23 February 2010 and 10 June 2010 and promulgated 11 April 2011, the Upper Tribunal (UT) considered, amongst other matters, whether the general situation in Gaza amounted to a breach of Article 3 of the ECHR. The UT looked at a wide range of evidence primarily covering 2008 and 2009 after the Israeli blockade had begun and included Israel’s ‘Operation Cast Lead’ in Gaza which led to thousands of deaths and casualties and substantial damage to infrastructure, economic activity and public services (see paras 186 to 214). On the basis of that evidence, the UT found that:

‘Our assessment of the background evidence is that it clearly shows a harsh state of affairs in Gaza which reflects a deterioration beyond the situation prior to the Operation Cast Lead hostilities. The infrastructure of Gaza is significantly depleted, and there are problems of access to electricity and clean water and there are limits on the amount of products that are brought into the territory. We do not seek to undervalue the level of difficulty that the appellants in this case, and indeed other residents of Gaza, face in the territory. But we consider that the tests set out in the Refugee Convention as applied in the case law and under Article 3 are set at a level of risk which is higher than that which would be experienced by the appellant and her family in this case on return...

‘As regards the general socio-economic and humanitarian situation in Gaza, there is on the whole common ground in the evidence provided by both sides, although some of the evidence on the part of the Secretary of State indicates some small level of improvement in various respects. There has to be shown to be a severe deprivation with denial of shelter, food and the most basic necessities of life for the appeal to succeed. It is relevant to note... that to succeed in a claim for protection based on poor socio-economic or dire humanitarian living conditions under... Article 15 of the Qualification Directive or Article 3, the circumstances would have to be extremely unusual... The Secretary of State draws an analogy with decisions of the Tribunal concerning Zimbabwe, Somalia and Sudan, ... and it was said that the Refugee Convention was far from being designed to meet all humanitarian needs given the countless millions who would otherwise be entitled to its benefits. The appellant and her family have relatives in Gaza, and, even if they are unable to accommodate them, they have friends also, and there is a good deal of humanitarian aid... It is necessary to bear in mind the reduced levels of violence, and the fact that basic goods are, to a limited extent, being imported into Gaza whether with Israeli assistance or as a consequence of being brought in through the tunnels, and though the situation is a serious one, we do not consider that it crosses the Article 3 or Refugee Convention threshold.’ (paras 222 and 224)

2.3.12 The recent Court of Appeal decision regarding Gaza: [MI \(Palestine\) v Secretary of State for the Home Department \[2018\] EWCA Civ 1782](#) commented that the Country Guidance in HS was “somewhat out of date”

(para 34) and held that the Deputy Upper Tribunal Judge had failed to have proper regard to the country evidence, in particular the evidence as to the “seriously worsened” since 2014 position after the Israeli military operation in 2014 (para 32), whilst maintaining that the high Article 3 threshold has not been met.

- 2.3.13 While socio-economic conditions continue to be poor, and may have deteriorated since HS was promulgated, they are not generally so severe as to meet the threshold of Article 3 of the ECHR / Article 15 b of the QD.
- 2.3.14 The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is not such that it represents, in general, a risk of harm contrary to Article 3 of the ECHR. However, decision makers must consider on the facts of the case whether a returnee, by reason of his or her individual vulnerability, may face a real risk of harm contrary to Article 3 of the ECHR as a result of the humanitarian situation. Factors to be taken into account include age, gender, medical conditions, ill-health, disability, the effect on children, other family circumstances, housing opportunities, the ability to sustain themselves and available support structures.

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c. Security situation

- 2.3.15 An assessment of protection needs under Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive must only take place if a claimant is unable to establish a need for refugee protection or subsidiary protection under Article 15(a) or 15(b).
- 2.3.16 Civilians must be genuine non-combatants and not those who are party to the conflict. Civilian status could extend to former combatants who have genuinely and permanently renounced armed activity.
- 2.3.17 For further guidance on the application of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive, see the [Asylum Instruction on Humanitarian Protection](#).
- 2.3.18 Gaza has experienced several waves of conflict with Israel since the blockade began in 2007, the worst being Israel’s ‘Protective Edge’ military offensive in the summer of 2014 which killed more than 2,000 inhabitants of Gaza, including more than 1,500 civilians, among them some 539 children. The United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry found that substantial information pointed to the possible commission of war crimes by both Israel and Palestinian armed groups (see [Healthcare overview](#)).
- 2.3.19 Despite a ceasefire signed in 2014, Hamas and the Israeli authorities have intermittently exchanged fire and Israel has launched air-strikes primarily at Hamas positions in Gaza, leading to tens of casualties. Military confrontations have impacted both sides, with Gaza enduring the majority of fatalities (see [Security situation](#)).
- 2.3.20 Since March 2018, demonstrations organized by civilians but subsequently possibly influenced by Hamas known as the ‘Great March of Return’ have occurred at the Gaza-Israeli border. The Palestinian demonstrators are demanding to return to the land from where their families were expelled 70 years ago. The Israeli Defence Forces have responded with force to quell the demonstrations, using live fire which has killed over 210 people and caused over 22,000 to be wounded. Most casualties during the

demonstrations have occurred at certain points along the perimeter fence separating Gaza from Israel. Palestinians have flown kites and balloons filled with explosives over the fence into Israeli territory starting at least 750 fires and destroying 2600 hectares of land (see [Security situation](#)).

- 2.3.21 In the country guidance case of [HS \(Palestinian – return to Gaza\) Palestinian Territories CG \[2011\] UKUT 124 \(IAC\)](#), heard on the 15 and 16 December 2009, 22/23 February 2010 and 10 June 2010 and promulgated 11 April 2011, the UT noted that neither party argued that Article 15(c) was applicable to Gaza (para 221). It further observed that:

‘We do not consider it can be said that the appellant and her family are at risk of such a high level of indiscriminate violence that there are substantial grounds for believing that they would face a real risk threatening their life or person solely by being present there...’. (para 223)

- 2.3.22 Most violence in Gaza is confined to clashes at the Gaza / Israeli border during demonstrations or intermittent air-strikes against Hamas by the Israeli Defence Forces, which have the stated aim of stopping rocket or mortar attacks into Israel by Hamas. The security situation, therefore, by its nature and level of casualties is not such, and has not deteriorated to the extent that, there is a general risk of indiscriminate violence that meets the 15(c) threshold.’

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2.4 Internal relocation

- 2.4.1 Gaza is very small, approximately 360 square kilometres (less than a quarter of the size of Greater London). Decision makers must take into consideration the small physical size.
- 2.4.2 The Israeli authorities control and restrict all movement into Israel and the West Bank from the Gaza Strip. Israeli military incursions, and successive military campaigns by the Israeli Defence Force, combined with the use of force in access-restricted areas can add to the difficulty of entering or exiting, or travelling within Gaza. In addition, Hamas additionally operate their own restrictions and limitations on movement into and out of Gaza.
- 2.4.3 Internal relocation between the West Bank and Gaza is likely to be extremely difficult and unreasonable in most cases. Internal relocation within Gaza almost impossible and unreasonable. However, each case will need to be considered on its individual facts with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they may not be able to relocate. For more information, please see the Country Policy and Information Note on [OPTs: Background Note](#).
- 2.4.4 For further general guidance on internal relocation, see Asylum Instructions on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#) and [Gender Issues in the Asylum Claim](#).

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2.5 Certification

- 2.5.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

2.5.2 For guidance on certification, see the [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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Country information

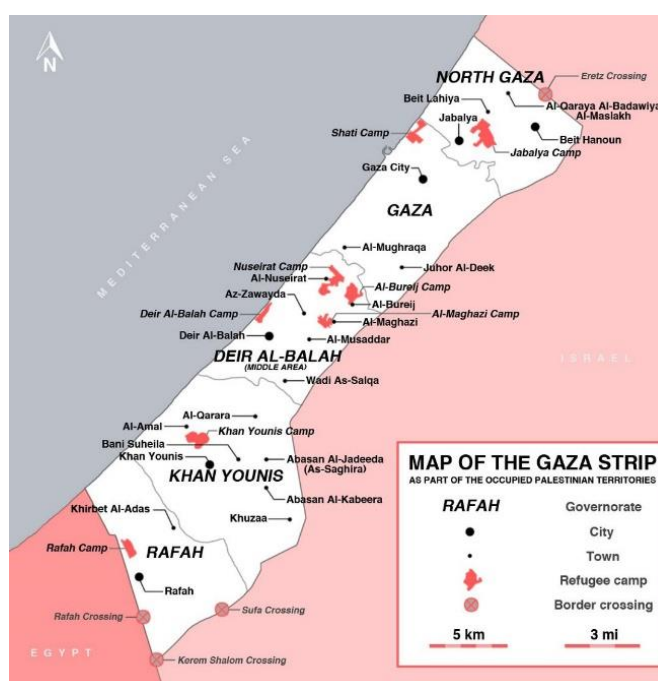
Updated: 5 March 2019

3. Overview

3.1 Geography and Demography

3.1.1 The Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) report of 15 March 2017 stated that 'the Gaza Strip is approximately 360 square kilometres (less than a quarter of the size of Greater London) and has a young and growing population of 1.8 million, with over 70 per cent of the population under 29 years of age. The Gaza Strip lies between Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea'¹.

3.1.2 Mapsland² published an (undated) map of the Gaza strip:



3.1.3 According to the statistics provided by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the estimated population in the Gaza Strip was at the end of 2018 1.961 million.³

3.1.4 Around 73 percent of the population are UNRWA refugees, who are supported by the organisation, some of whom are in camps, some are not.⁴

3.1.5 Gaza is split into five governorates: North Gaza, Gaza, Deir Al-Balah, Khan Younis and Rafah⁵.

¹ Australian Government: (DFAT) 'Thematic Report' Section 2 paras 2.6, 15 March 2017, [url](#)

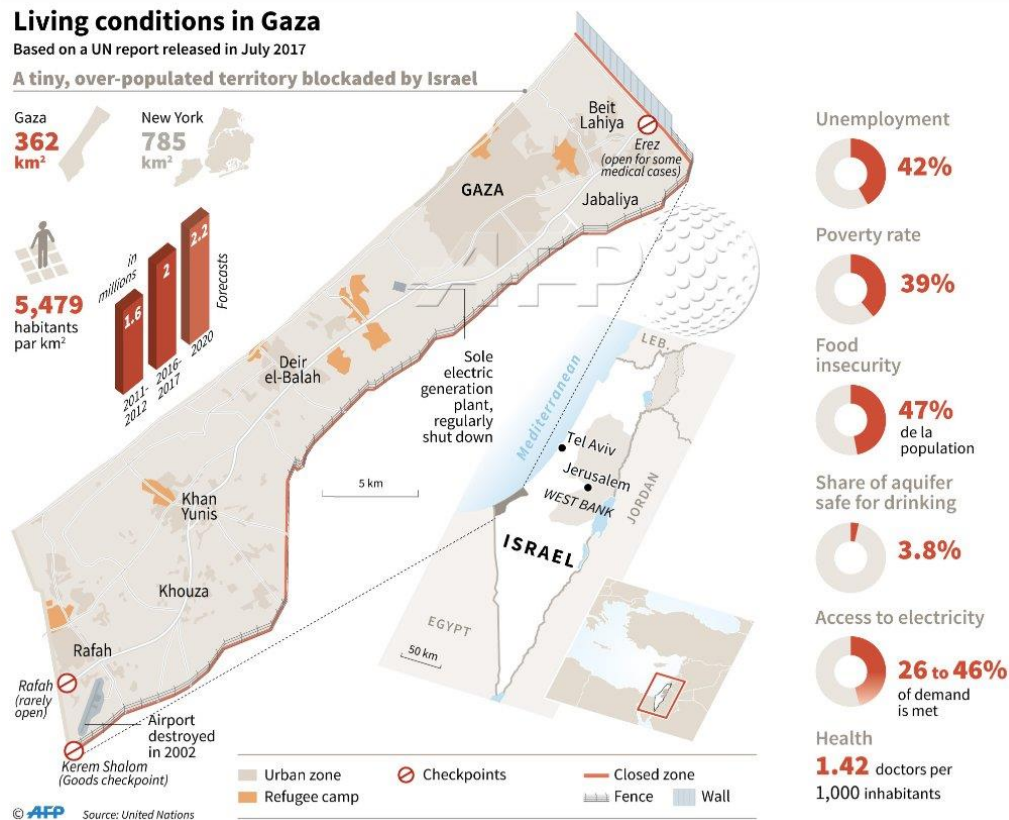
² Mapsland, 'Detailed map of Gaza strip with cities', undated, [url](#)

³ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Palestinians at the End of 2018, p.19, December 2018, [url](#)

⁴ UNRWA, 'Where we work', undated, [url](#)

⁵ WebGaza, 'Gaza Strip Governorates', May 2011, [url](#)

- 3.1.6 The CIA World Factbook noted that, based on 2018 estimates, 28.5 per cent of the population are aged between 25 – 54 years, 3.48 per cent are aged between 55 – 64 years and 2.58 per cent are 65 years and above.⁶
- 3.1.7 Based on a UN report released in July 2017, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) published a map and social-economic data of the Gaza strip in its November 2018 report, ‘The Palestinians: Background and U.S Relations’⁷:



- 3.1.8 For more information, please see the Country Policy and Information Note on [OPTs: Background Note](#).

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4. Protagonists

4.1 Hamas

- 4.1.1 According to a House of Commons research debate pack on the Humanitarian Situation in Gaza, ‘Hamas is a Palestinian militant Islamist movement whose political wing is the governing authority in the Gaza Strip. Hamas’ military wing is proscribed as a terrorist organisation by the UK government.’⁸

⁶ CIA, The World Factbook, Middle East: Gaza Strip, ‘People and society’, 15 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷ CRS, ‘The Palestinians: Background and U.S Relations’, 21 November 2018, [url](#)

⁸ House of Commons, ‘Humanitarian Situation in Gaza’, (p2), 22 June 2018, [url](#)

- 4.1.2 In March 2001, the Home Office proscribed Hamas in its list of terrorist organisations, 'Hamas aims to end Israeli occupation in Palestine and establish an Islamic state'⁹.

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4.2 Palestine Authority

- 4.2.1 The BBC mentioned that the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), also known as the Palestinian Authority (PA), acts 'as an interim body to run parts of Gaza ... pending an agreed solution to the conflict'.¹⁰
- 4.2.2 The same media outlet states that the PA 'functions as an agency of the PLO, which represents Palestinians at international bodies. It is led by a directly-elected president, who appoints a prime minister and government which must have the support of the elected Legislative Council.'¹¹
- 4.2.3 The House of Commons library paper on the Humanitarian Situation in Gaza in June 2018 noted that, 'The Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority (PA) has also in the last few years used a series of restrictions to try and coerce Hamas into allowing the PA to once again control the territory. The PA started in 2017 to curb electricity supplies and restrict medical referrals to Israel. Combined with the Israeli/Egyptian blockades they precipitated a severe humanitarian crisis in the territory, which continues to this day.'¹²

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4.3 Israeli authorities

- 4.3.1 The House of Commons debate on Humanitarian Situation in Gaza in June 2018 stated that 'Israel has imposed an economic blockade on Gaza 'since 2007.'¹³ It stated, 'Israel has allowed humanitarian food and medical supplies to enter Gaza. It also delivers oil and fuel for vehicles, industry and power stations. However, all those supplies are limited. Humanitarian agencies, including the UN, argue that the economic blockade undermines the quality of health, education, and water and sanitation services available in Gaza'.¹⁴
- 4.3.2 The BBC mentioned, 'In 2005, Israel completed the withdrawal of all its troops and settlers from the Gaza Strip but it retains control of the airspace, seafront and access - including deliveries of food and other goods - apart from the crossing with Egypt.'¹⁵

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5. Humanitarian situation

5.1 Overview

- 5.1.1 The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) focuses on delivering relief and human development to Palestinian refugees in Jordan,

⁹ Home Office, 'Proscribed Terrorist Organisations', 22 December 2017, (page 10), [url](#)

¹⁰ BBC, 'Palestinian Territories profile', 7 December 2017, [url](#)

¹¹ BBC, 'Palestinian Territories profile', 7 December 2017, [url](#)

¹² House of Commons, 'Humanitarian Situation in Gaza', (p3), 22 June 2018, [url](#)

¹³ House of Commons, 'Humanitarian Situation in Gaza', (p2), 22 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴ House of Commons, 'Humanitarian Situation in Gaza', (p2), 22 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵ BBC, 'Palestinian Territories profile', 7 December 2017, [url](#)

Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem¹⁶. The organisation stated that:

‘It has contributed to the welfare and human development of four generations of Palestine refugees, defined as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.” The descendants of Palestine refugee males, including legally adopted children, are also eligible for registration.

‘UNRWA services are available to all those living in its areas of operations who meet this definition, who are registered with the Agency and who need assistance. When the Agency began operations in 1950, it was responding to the needs of about 750,000 Palestine refugees. Today, some 5 million Palestine refugees are eligible for UNRWA services.’¹⁷

5.1.2 Regarding its development and services, it notes ‘UNRWA human development and humanitarian services encompass primary and vocational education, primary health care, relief and social services, infrastructure and camp improvement, microfinance and emergency response, including in situations of armed conflict.’¹⁸

5.1.3 The same source provided the following overview on the situation in Gaza ‘For the last decade, the socioeconomic situation in Gaza has been in steady decline. The blockade on land, air and sea imposed by Israel following the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip in 2007 entered its 12th year in June 2018 and continues to have a devastating effect as access to markets and people’s movement to and from the Gaza Strip remain severely restricted...’¹⁹

5.1.4 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) world report of events in 2018, published in January 2019 stated that,

‘The Israeli government continued to enforce severe and discriminatory restrictions on Palestinians’ human rights; restrict the movement of people and goods into and out of the Gaza Strip...

‘Israel continued to maintain its more than decade-long effective closure of Gaza, exacerbated by Egyptian restrictions on its own border with Gaza, limiting access to water and electricity (households in Gaza received power between four and five hours a day on average during most of the year). Israel also restricted access to medical care and educational and economic opportunities. In July [2018], in response to the launching of incendiary kites from Gaza, Israeli authorities banned the shipment of most goods out of Gaza, limited entry to “humanitarian” items and temporarily reduced the fishing zone off the Gaza coast from six to three nautical miles, measures that amount to collective punishment. ‘Gaza’s unemployment rate stood at 55 percent during the third-quarter of 2018, according to the Palestinian

¹⁶ UNRWA, ‘Where we work’, undated, [url](#)

¹⁷ UNRWA, ‘Who we are’, undated, [url](#)

¹⁸ UNRWA, ‘What we do’, undated, [url](#)

¹⁹ UNRWA, ‘What we do’, undated, [url](#)

Central Bureau of Statistics, and 80 percent of Gaza's nearly 2 million people depend on humanitarian aid.²⁰

5.1.5 The United States Congressional Research Service (CRS) mentioned in a December 2018 report, 'The Palestinians: Background and U.S Relations':

'The precarious security situation in Gaza is linked to humanitarian conditions, and because Gaza does not have a self-sufficient economy, external assistance largely drives humanitarian welfare. Recent U.S. and PA reductions in funding for Gaza have affected the humanitarian assessment. Much of the focus from international organizations has been on the possibility that funding cuts could make a difficult situation in Gaza worse. Gazans already face chronic economic difficulties and shortages of electricity and safe drinking water. According to the World Bank, large transfers of aid and PA money historically have kept Gaza's economy afloat, but those transfers have significantly declined since 2017... The possibility that humanitarian crisis could destabilize Gaza has prompted discussions and some efforts among U.S., Israeli, and Arab leaders aimed at improving living conditions and reducing spillover threats.'²¹

5.1.6 The UN Secretary-General report on the OPT published in October 2018 noted that:

'The humanitarian and human rights situation in Gaza continues to unravel steadily. The electricity crisis that deepened last year has continued with little change, severely restricting Palestinians' access to medical care, education, and livelihoods. Since the start of 2018, residents of Gaza have not had access to more than six hours of electricity per day; most days they have had only four or five hours. In recent months, the United Nations has called repeatedly for emergency fuel to be provided to Gaza in order to prevent a complete and catastrophic breakdown in essential services, particularly after Israel introduced restrictions on the entry of fuel to Gaza.

'The World Bank has reported that the Gaza economy is current in "free fall", with minus 6 per cent growth in the first quarter of 2018; it cited the blockade as the core issue but noted also other contributing factors, including the significant cuts to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the decision by the Palestinian Authority to cut salaries in Gaza.

'In addition to restrictions on the travel of individuals, Israel has in recent months imposed restrictions on the entry of essential goods to Gaza. Israeli authorities have clearly stated that those measures are undertaken in response to the flying of burning kites into Israeli territory that has resulted in significant damage to Israeli crops. 22 That has resulted in severe shortages of, among other things, emergency fuel. As noted above, the United Nations has on several occasions warned of the possibility of total collapse of essential services if fuel is not allowed to enter Gaza. The fact that the entire Gaza population could be subject to an even more serious degradation of conditions owing to the actions of a few points to the imposition of collective

²⁰ HRW, 'World report events of 2017', page 291, 18 January 2018, [url](#)

²¹ CRS, 'The Palestinians: Background and U.S relations', (page 19 and 20), 21 November 2018, [url](#)

punishment, which is prohibited under article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.²²

- 5.1.7 The UN OCHA's '2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview', published in December 2019 noted that:

'Palestine refugees represent 70 per cent of the total Gaza population. The 1.4 million Palestine refugees in Gaza, as all people in Gaza, are currently experiencing a deep socio-economic crisis, in a situation of de-development caused by both economic as well as political events. There is significant increased demand for services from UNRWA resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. With the continuing restrictions on the movement of people and goods, the widespread loss of livelihoods due to the 2014 conflict, and the recent crisis resulting from PA allowance cuts and electricity shortages, the number of refugees requiring food assistance has been continuously increasing, showing an increase in poverty levels. Similarly, the number of medical consultations at UNRWA health centers has been regularly increasing since December 2016, becoming more pronounced from mid-2017. Unemployment levels rose again to over 54 per cent in Q2 2018. The restrictions on the movement of people and goods, and the dire socio-economic situation, have had serious repercussions on the psychosocial well-being of Palestine refugees in Gaza.'²³

- 5.1.8 The Norwegian Landinfo COI report of December 2018 reviewing information on the humanitarian situation in Gaza summarised its findings:

'The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip has deteriorated dramatically in recent years due to three factors: First, a blockade that Israel established in 2007 has ravaged the foundation of local business. Secondly, acts of war between Israeli forces and Hamas have led to massive destruction of economic infrastructure, housing and cultivated land. Finally, Palestinian internal conflicts have caused political chaos and ineffective administration of the Gaza Strip. The economic crisis has led to more than half of the workforce being unemployed, and an equal share of the population lives below the poverty line. Nearly four out of five Palestinians receive some form of assistance. There is a lack of electricity and clean drinking water. The reconstruction after the wars has been slow, and many homeless people still live in temporary homes. The healthcare and education sectors lack funds to expand in line with the rapid population growth, thus reducing the quality of public services.'²⁴

- 5.1.9 The [Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics](#) releases publications that chart life in Gaza through statistics, including its compendium report [Palestine in Figures 2017](#) which provides data on a range of social and economic indicators.

- 5.1.10 The humanitarian situation in Gaza fluctuates, subject to variations in the political and security context. See the following sources for updates:

²² UN Secretary general, 'Situation of human rights ... since 1967', 22 Oct 2018 (paras. 9 and 18), [url](#)

²³ UN OCHA, '2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, p. 8, December 2018, [url](#)

²⁴ Landinfo, Palestina: Den humanitære situasjonen på Gazastripen (p. 4), 10 December 2018, [url](#)

- World Health Organisation, [Special Situation Reports](#)
- UN OCHA for [situation reports, Protection of Civilians Reports, Monthly Humanitarian Bulletins](#)

5.1.11 See also the OPTs background note for general information about the socio-economic situation in Gaza.

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5.2 Refugee camps

5.2.1 According to UNRWA, there are 1.4 million registered refugees in Gaza, as of 1 January 2018.²⁵

5.2.2 UNRWA noted that ‘over half a million Palestine refugees in Gaza live in the eight recognized Palestine refugee camps, which have one of the highest population densities in the world.’ UNRWA stated that it ‘does not administer or police the camps, as this is the responsibility of the host authorities’.²⁶

5.2.3 UNHCR noted that ‘The camps, many of which have developed into urban areas, are characterized by overcrowding, poor living conditions, social problems associated with overstretched infrastructure, high levels of unemployment and food insecurity, environmental health concerns, lack of privacy and severely limited spaces for safe play and recreational activities’.²⁷

5.2.4 The 8 camps are:

- [Beach camp](#)
- [Bureij camp](#)
- [Deir El-Balah camp](#)
- [Jabalia camp](#)
- [Khan Younis camp](#)
- [Maghazi camp](#)
- [Nuseirat camp](#)
- [Rafah camp](#)²⁸

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6. Health care

6.1 Overview

6.1.1 The DFAT report of 15 March 2017 observed:

‘The health sector in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is overstretched, with inadequate physical infrastructure and severe shortages of essential medication, especially in Gaza. Health services are provided by

²⁵ UNRWA, ‘Where we work – Gaza Strip’, undated, [url](#)

²⁶ UNRWA, ‘Where we work – Gaza Strip’, [url](#)

²⁷ UNHCR, ‘... Situation in the Gaza Strip ...’ (section 3), 23 Feb 2018, [url](#)

²⁸ UNRWA, ‘Where we work – Gaza Strip’, [url](#)

the Palestinian Authority, NGOs, private clinics and United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). UNRWA manages 22 primary health facilities in Gaza... and provides support for family planning, mental health and physical rehabilitation for victims of conflict.²⁹

- 6.1.2 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) world report of events in 2018, published in January 2019 stated that:

‘The Israeli army limits travel out of Gaza to what it calls “exceptional humanitarian cases,” meaning mostly medical patients, their companions, and prominent businesspersons with permits. In the first eight months of 2018, the army approved only 60 percent of permit applications from Palestinians seeking medical treatment outside Gaza.

‘...Shortages of fuel, needed to operate generators during power outages, stemming from various factors including disputes over payment for the power between the PA and Hamas and exacerbated by Israel blocking entry of fuel in July, led to the partial closure of several hospitals. As of October 31, 44 percent of “essential” medicines were completely depleted, according to Gaza’s Central Drug Store.’³⁰

- 6.1.3 In April 2018 UN OCHA described the health system in the Gaza Strip as being ‘on the verge of collapse as a result of the 10-year blockade, the deepening intra-Palestinian political divide, deteriorating energy supply, inconsistent payment of public sector medical personnel, and growing shortages in medicines and disposables’.³¹

- 6.1.4 UN OCHA’s ‘2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview’, published in December 2018, provided the following overview of the situation in 2018:

‘A significant number of the injured from the “Great March of Return” demonstrations have suffered extensive bone and tissue damage from gunshot wounds, requiring complex surgeries. Approximately 8,000 elective surgeries have had to be postponed due to the massive influx of trauma casualties, a lack of bed capacity and limitations due to electricity shortages, with patients discharged early every week to make room for the next wave of casualties. Patients referred outside for medical treatment unavailable in Gaza, especially those injured in the demonstrations, continue to face major access constraints on exiting through the Israeli-controlled Erez crossing, with only 59 per cent approved in the first half of 2018. This has only been partly alleviated by the re-opening of the Egyptian controlled Rafah Crossing almost continuously since May [2018], as passengers are subject to unclear selection criteria, challenging crossing procedures and long delays. The violence in Gaza has also generated widespread mental health and psychosocial (MHPSS) consequences with over 50,000 people, half of them children, in need of MHPSS responses.’³²

- 6.1.5 The 2018 UNHCR report noted:

²⁹ DFAT, ‘Thematic Report’, Section 2 paras 2.17, 15 March 2017, [url](#)

³⁰ HRW, ‘World Report 2019: Israel and Palestine, Events of 2018’, 17 January 2019, [url](#)

³¹ UN OCHA, ‘Humanitarian Bulletin: occupied Palestinian territory April 2018, April 2018, [url](#)

³² UN OCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, p. 7, December 2018, [url](#)

‘While the population in the Gaza Strip continues to grow and with it, medical needs, the capacity of the public health sector, including medical infrastructure, resources, supplies and staff, reportedly continue to shrink. Extended power cuts and fuel shortages reportedly put additional strains on the health sector. Although critical departments in Gaza’s hospitals reportedly continue to function, there has been a disruption in the delivery of primary and secondary healthcare services by the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health has reportedly implemented strict contingency measures, including the temporary closure of three hospitals (Beit Hanoun Hospital, Durrah Hospital, Psychiatric Hospital), and partial closure of an additional 13 MoH primary healthcare clinics, impacting over 300,000 people. The functioning of critical services such as blood banks, laboratories and vaccine storage is also directly affected by the continuous power cuts. According to the WHO, any further disruption in the power supply would be immediately life-threatening for patients relying on electrical devices.

‘Medical needs among the population in the Gaza Strip are reportedly overwhelming, with new-borns, children under the age of five, pregnant women, survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), patients with chronic illnesses, the elderly and people with disabilities particularly affected by the lack of adequate healthcare services. As a result of the extremely difficult living conditions in the Gaza Strip, including effects of the blockade and exposure to successive cycles of conflict, and in particular the 2014 hostilities, levels of trauma and mental health needs are reportedly particularly high, especially among children and youth. The abuse of drugs, such as the opioid Tramadol, as well as suicide rates are reported to be on the rise.

‘As a result of persistent shortages of drugs, medical supplies, equipment and staff, as well as the lack of specialized health services, patients have to rely on a complicated mechanism for medical referrals outside the Gaza Strip, requiring access approvals from either Israel or Egypt. However, approval rates for referrals through the Israeli-controlled Erez Crossing have reportedly declined significantly, while the Rafah Crossing remains mostly closed. As of mid-November 2017, patients applying to access health care in Israel, the West Bank or in other countries need to submit their permit applications 23 business days prior to their hospital appointment, with the exception of medical emergencies, which can be processed immediately. Delays in processing applications can lead to patients missing medical appointments and delaying critical care. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a total of 54 Palestinians died in 2017 while waiting for an Israeli permit to leave the Gaza Strip for medical treatment.’³³

6.1.6 The WHO’s country co-operation strategy paper for the OPTs of December 2017 noted:

‘A defining feature of the health system in Palestine is its fragmentation [...] at the historical, geographic, institutional and organisational levels...

‘There are four main providers of health care services in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip: the Ministry of Health, UNRWA, nongovernmental

³³ UNHCR, ‘... Situation in the Gaza Strip ...’, (section 3), 23 February 2018, [url](#)

organizations and the Palestinian Military Medical Services, each with its own respective network of primary health care centres and hospitals. For example, UNWRA operates an extended network of clinics providing free services to registered refugees and the nongovernmental organizations are a mixture of traditional charities, Islamic charitable committees, Christian charities and non-profit organizations, often supported by the Palestinian diaspora and mainly offering primary care, maternal health care, rehabilitation and specialized care in referral hospitals, complementing the public sector services. In 2009, there were 129 Palestinian nongovernmental organizations involved in health.[...] The Palestine Red Crescent Society, with its extended network of volunteers, has gradually shifted the focus of its programmes to emergency services. The private for-profit sector increasingly occupies a major role in service provision [...] although dual practice is prevalent, a common finding in many countries, which blurs the line between the public and private sectors.[...] Traditional alternative medicine continues to play an important role in health care.[...] Additionally, Israeli hospitals admit patients referred from both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank at a very high cost, further exacerbating financial problems.

'Barriers to accessing health services represent a serious challenge to ensuring adequate provision for Palestinians. Permits must be obtained for each health consultation requiring travel to Jerusalem or to neighbouring countries, including Israel, as well as for Gaza patients to travel to the West Bank, and applications for permits are often delayed or denied without apparent reason.'³⁴

6.1.7 The WHO strategy document also observed:

'The occupied Palestinian territory has been faced with the challenges of prolonged conflict and adverse social determinants: widespread poverty, a high prevalence of lifestyle risk factors, vulnerability to man-made and natural hazards, health system weaknesses and difficult access to health care. These all have a negative impact on health. Despite this, key health outcomes in Palestine show improving trends, are better than the average in the Eastern Mediterranean Region and are similar to those of neighboring countries, though they lag far behind Israeli indicators...National figures, however, mask the substantial differences between the West Bank and Gaza, which reflect historical, regional, security and socioeconomic disparities. It is likely that the disparities between Gaza and the West Bank have increased since the data... were collected in 2013 following the Gaza war and its aftermath.'³⁵

6.1.8 The Humanitarian Response Plan observed that 'Conflict and the protracted humanitarian crisis have also resulted in high levels of psychosocial distress, particularly among children, and in gender-based violence (GBV) in all its forms'.³⁶

6.1.9 Previous conflicts between Gaza and Israel have caused ongoing medical affects until today. BBC monitoring reported on 3 November 2018:

³⁴ WHO, Humanitarian Response Strategy (p16), December 2017, [url](#)

³⁵ WHO, Humanitarian Response Strategy (p12), December 2017, [url](#)

³⁶ Humanitarian Response Strategy, 'Jan–Dec 2018 Humanitarian response plan', (p6), Dec 2017, [url](#)

'A Palestinian child has succumbed to the injuries he had sustained in an Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip in 2014, reported the Palestinian Quds News Network on Twitter on 3 November.

'Mohammed al-Rifi was injured when an Israeli missile targeted his house in Al-Tuffah neighbourhood in eastern Gaza, the Quds News Network said.

'The 14-year-old al-Rifi lost his father, sister and four of his cousins in the attack, the network added.

'He passed away after four-years of treatment in Al-Wafa Hospital, Palestinian PlusQuds News said.'³⁷

6.1.10 According to Data featured in the Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict, UNOCHA reported that out of the 11, 231 Palestinians who were injured during the conflict, 10 per cent suffer permanent disability.³⁸

6.1.11 Amnesty International's annual report covering 2017 stated that, 'Many patients with life-threatening illnesses were unable to access treatment outside Gaza due to Israeli restrictions and delays by West Bank authorities in processing referrals'.³⁹

6.1.12 Medecins Sans Frontieres reported in November 2018 that:

'Thousands of people shot by the Israeli army during protests in Gaza this year are overwhelming the Gazan medical system with complex wounds, infections, and disabilities... The cumulative needs of wounded patients are creating a medical emergency, as the lack of appropriate treatment in Gaza's crippled health system leads to a high risk of infection, especially for patients with open fractures... Such a large number of injuries affects not just those injured, but also strains the provision of regular health care in Gaza. The consequences of these wounds—especially if untreated—will be lifelong disability for many, and, if infections are not properly treated, amputation or even death.'⁴⁰

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6.2 Ministry of Health provision

6.2.1 According to the Health Cluster, there are '14 [Ministry of Health] MoH hospitals (2,243 beds) and 49 MoH primary healthcare clinics (PHC) in Gaza. These health facilities provide 40% of Gaza's primary healthcare, covering approximately 600,000 people and 90% of all hospital care services.' The 14 hospitals in Gaza are:

'Abu Yousef Al Najjar Hospital

Al Aqsa Hospital

Al Dora Hospital

Al Harazeen Hospital

³⁷ BBC Monitoring, 'Palestinian child dies of injuries sustained in 2014 attack', 3 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁸ UNOCHA, 'Key figures on the 2014 hostilities', 23 June 2015, [url](#)

³⁹ AI, 'The state of the world's human rights - 2017/18 yearly report', page 208, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁰ MSF, 'Gaza: Thousands of people shot during protests require urgent treatment', 29 Nov 2018, [url](#)

Al Helal Al Emarati Hospital
Al Shifa Hospital
Beit Hanun Hospital
European Hospital
Indonesian Hospital
Nasser Hospital
Ophthalmic Hospital
Paediatric Hospital
Psychiatric Hospital
Specialized Paediatric Hospital'⁴¹

6.2.2 The Humanitarian Response plan of December 2017 noted that:

'Health services were also impeded by delays in the shipment of essential drugs and disposables from the PA Ministry of Health, and by the delay or suspension of payments for the referral of patients for medical treatment outside Gaza. Following Egyptian mediation, the two sides reached an agreement in Cairo in October 2017, which envisages the resumption of authority in Gaza by the Government of National Consensus. In late 2017, the PA regained control over the Gaza side of the crossing points and the transfer of responsibility at Gaza-based public institutions is proceeding.'⁴²

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6.3 UNRWA provision

6.3.1 United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) stated that, 'Years of socioeconomic decline, conflict and closure have left the health sector across the Gaza Strip lacking adequate physical infrastructure and training opportunities. Facilities are overstretched, and service is frequently interrupted by power cuts. These challenges further threaten the health of the population, which is already at increasing risk'.⁴³

6.3.2 UNRWA also noted:

'Through 22 centres, UNRWA provides health-care services to the vast majority of the over 1.2 million Palestine refugees in Gaza. We also provide clinic and laboratory services, along with personalized maternal health and family planning, in all our health centres. Radiology services are available at 6 centres, and dental services at 21.

'Across the Gaza Strip, psychological trauma, poverty and environmental degradation have had a negative impact on residents' physical and mental health; many, including children, suffer from anxiety, distress and depression. In order to assist those most affected, we established special education needs (SEN) clinics in several of our health centres. UNRWA

⁴¹ Health Cluster Occupied Palestinian Territory, HeRams Gaza Hospitals, September 2018, [url](#)

⁴² Humanitarian Response Strategy, 'Jan–Dec 2018 Humanitarian response plan', (p6), Dec 2017, [url](#)

⁴³ UNRWA, 'Health in the Gaza strip', undated, [url](#)

placed psychosocial counsellors in several schools to support children dealing with a range of problems, including fear of violence, sleeplessness, a lack of motivation in school or the inability to concentrate.’⁴⁴

6.3.3 According to UNRWA, there are:

- ‘Registered population accessing UNRWA health services: 1,224,383 (96.9%)
- Primary health care (PHC) facilities: 22
- Total outpatient consultations for general physicians: 4,418,452
- Total outpatient consultations for specialists: 96,796
- Average daily medical consultations per doctor: 113
- Total dental screening consultations: 90,660
- Laboratory tests: 2,113,481
- Plain x-rays: within UNRWA: 36,165
- Health staff: 1,016’⁴⁵

6.3.4 Regarding physical rehabilitation, UNRWA noted that there are 3,691 trauma patients and 7,654 non-trauma patients. For family planning assistance, there are 11,058 new family planning users, 59,001 continuing family planning users and 99.9% deliveries in health institutions. In regard to non-communicable diseases, there are a total of 60,900 patients registered with UNRWA.⁴⁶

6.3.5 The UN OCHA’s ‘2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview’, published in December 2019 noted that:

‘UNRWA’s Community Mental Health Programme conducted a study in May 2017 assessing the psychosocial well-being of 2,262 adult refugees and 3,142 refugee students. The study found a high level of psychosocial stress among both refugee students and adults, with almost one half of adults (48.9 per cent) experiencing poor well-being, with 63 percent of these warranting further screening for depression, and almost 30 per cent of children experiencing serious difficulties.’⁴⁷

6.3.6 For updates on the provision of health, see [Health Cluster situation reports](#). For up to date health and emergency response reports, see [WHO health infographics and Special Situation Reports](#).

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6.4 Water, sanitation and electricity

6.4.1 The Department for International Development (DFID) mentioned in its May 2018 programme Summary report, ‘Supporting Economic Empowerment and Development in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (SEED OPTs):

⁴⁴ UNRWA, ‘Health in the Gaza strip’, undated, [url](#)

⁴⁵ UNRWA, ‘Health in the Gaza strip’, undated, [url](#)

⁴⁶ UNRWA, ‘Health in the Gaza strip’, undated, [url](#)

⁴⁷ UN OCHA, ‘2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, p. 8, December 2018, [url](#)

'...in Gaza ... less than 4% of groundwater is fit for human consumption. In Gaza, because of a lack of waste water treatment facilities, the equivalent of 43 Olympic swimming pools of raw sewage is emptied into the Mediterranean every day. The only alternative is to pay for water tanks, containers and bottled water which is unaffordable for the poorest people and smallest businesses. The lack of clean water and sewage treatment drives down people's standard of living, and poses a health and environmental risk. It also limits economic growth, particularly for those sectors such as agriculture which are heavily dependent on water.'⁴⁸

- 6.4.2 The DFAT report of 15 March 2017 noted that, 'The UNRWA Environmental Health programme ... controls the quality of drinking water and provides sanitation services to prevent disease outbreak'.⁴⁹ The same report added: 'In 2012 UNRWA published a report predicting that Gaza will become an unliveable place by 2020 based on several factors that continue to remain of concern, including the rising population and declining access to water, sanitation and electricity. During January 2016, there were blackouts of up to 20 hours per day in Gaza due to deteriorating electricity supply. Malnutrition rates among children under five is on the rise, especially in Gaza where the rate between 2000 and 2010 increased by 60 per cent.'⁵⁰
- 6.4.3 The HRW world report of events in 2018, published in January 2019, observed 'The limited supply of electricity in Gaza compromised the water supply, sewage treatment, and hospital operations. Shortages of fuel, needed to operate generators during power outages, stemming from various factors including disputes over payment for the power between the PA and Hamas and exacerbated by Israel blocking entry of fuel in July, led to the partial closure of several hospitals.'⁵¹
- 6.4.4 The Humanitarian Response plan of December 2017 noted that the electricity deficit is 'undermining already depleted basic services and further reducing water supply and the operation of critical WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) facilities'.⁵²
- 6.4.5 The same report stated that 'Power outages of 18 to 20 hours a day continue, most of the population has access to piped water for only three to five hours every five days and only the most critical health, water and sanitation facilities are functioning, thanks largely to a United Nations-facilitated, donor-funded emergency fuel distribution'.⁵³
- 6.4.6 UNHCR reported:
'Since April 2017, the Gaza Strip has been facing a severe electricity crisis as a result of the dispute between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas about how the payment for fuel for the Gaza Power Plant, leaving the Gaza Strip's population with only a few hours of electricity per day and undermining the provision of basic services. In early January 2018, this

⁴⁸ DFID, 'SEED OPTs', (page 6), May 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹ DFAT, 'Thematic Report', Section 2 paras 2.18, 15 March 2017, [url](#)

⁵⁰ DFAT, 'Thematic Report', Section 2 paras 2.18, 15 March 2017, [url](#)

⁵¹ HRW, 'World report events of 2017', page 291 and 292, 18 January 2018, [url](#)

⁵² Humanitarian Response Strategy, 'Jan-Dec 2018 Hum'tarian response plan', (p 6), Dec 2017, [url](#)

⁵³ Humanitarian Response Strategy, 'Jan-Dec 2018 Hum'tarian response plan', (p 6), Dec 2017, [url](#)

measure has reportedly been relaxed as the Palestinian Authority reinstated payments for electricity to Israel, which led Israel to resume power supply to the Gaza Strip, allowing for six to eight hours of electricity per day.

Nevertheless, the Gaza Strip continues to suffer from extensive power cuts, which are exacerbated by the lack of fuel to run back-up generators needed to operate hospital equipment, schools, water and sanitation services as well as desalination plants.

‘The unprecedented shortfall in power supply in 2017 reportedly has a devastating effect all aspects of life, including critical sectors such as wastewater treatment, waste disposal, health services, agriculture and other livelihoods, education, and re-construction.

‘Access to safe water is of critical concern in the Gaza Strip. Due to persistent power shortages, most households receive piped water for only three to five hours every day. The Gaza Strip’s population relies on coastal aquifers as its main source of freshwater, yet 96 per cent of this water is considered unfit for human consumption. Due to the poor quality of piped water, the vast majority (90 per cent) of the population reportedly have to turn to unregulated private operators to access desalinated water for drinking and cooking at higher costs, thus increasing the financial burden for poor families. In the eastern parts of the Gaza Strip, some 100,000 people reportedly remain without access to any water network. Due to the precarious state of infrastructure, over 560,000 persons in 60 communities in low-lying locations across the Gaza Strip are reportedly at risk of flooding, even from light rainfall.

‘The already limited capacity of wastewater treatment facilities has reportedly further declined and on 20 February 2018, municipalities across the Gaza Strip announced that raw sewage will be pumped directly into the Mediterranean Sea due to electricity and fuel shortages required to run the plants. As a result of untreated or insufficiently treated wastewater being discharged into the Mediterranean Sea, the Gaza Strip is faced by a growing environmental and health crisis.’⁵⁴

6.4.7 UNRWA noted that ‘over 90 per cent of the water in Gaza has been deemed unfit for human consumption’.⁵⁵

6.4.8 A number of sources report electricity outages in the Gaza strip. The Guardian reported on 3rd January 2018:

‘An ongoing electricity crisis in Gaza has left hospitals reliant on emergency generators for up to 20 hours a day, while medical staff have been forced to cut back on basic services such as equipment sterilisation and diagnostics. About 500,000 litres of fuel are required each month to sustain critical care in Gaza, but funding will only cover hospitals’ needs until the end of February.

‘Dr Mahmoud Daher, head of the WHO’s Gaza sub-office, said the health system is on “the edge of collapse”. Without urgent fundraising, hospitals will face a disastrous situation, he said. “There are at least 200 babies and people in intensive care units. It would be a really fatal situation for them.

⁵⁴ UNHCR, ‘... Situation in the Gaza Strip ...’, (section 3), 23 February 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁵ UNRWA, ‘Health in the Gaza strip’, undated, [url](#)

There are dozens of people who are going to surgical operations that would be affected.”

‘Dr Andy Ferguson, director of programmes for Medical Aid for Palestinians (Map), an organisation that works with hospitals and other healthcare providers across Gaza and the West Bank, said electricity outages in Gaza, combined with medical shortages and severe restrictions on freedom of movement, were creating a medical emergency.

‘Generators are also in need of maintenance, the WHO warned, but hospitals are unable to carry out repairs due to restrictions on moving goods into Gaza.’⁵⁶

6.4.9 The UNOCHA October 2018 Humanitarian bulletin, published on 16 November 2018, noted that:

‘A recent report prepared by the RAND Corporation warns that if the chronic state of emergency in Gaza’s water and sewage sector continues, an endemic disease outbreak or other public health crisis is imminent, with the risk of it spreading to Israel and Egypt...

‘The main causes of the water and sanitation crisis are the depletion and poor quality of Gaza’s single coastal aquifer, which is the source of 95 per cent of all water in Gaza. Until the 1990s the aquifer provided Gaza Strip inhabitants with drinkable tap water. Today 97 per cent of this water is unfit for human consumption based on World Health Organization (WHO) standards...

‘The water and sewage situation in Gaza, including the contamination of the aquifer, has been exacerbated over the past decade by a range of other factors that include damage to infrastructure during the recurrent hostilities; insufficient, unreliable and fluctuating electricity available to operate WASH facilities; import restrictions on materials and equipment categorised by Israel as “dual use” items which cover some 70 per cent of WASH-related equipment; and funding shortages for damaged and worn infrastructure, salaries and maintenance.

‘Despite geographical variations in water quality across Gaza and efforts to improve the quality of water extracted (by mixing it with desalinated water or with water purchased from Israel), most water piped to households through the network is unfit for human consumption. This water is for use solely for domestic purposes other than drinking or cooking.

‘Residents in Gaza are aware that most tap water is unfit for human consumption and 9 out of 10 people rely on desalinated water, 81 per cent of which comes from the private sector. It is purchased in containers or tanks at prices 10-30 times more expensive than piped water, thus posing a heavy burden on already impoverished families.

‘Apart from the economic burden, this situation generates a range of health hazards...

‘According to RAND, one-fourth of all diseases in Gaza are waterborne...

⁵⁶ The Guardian, ‘Gaza’s health system close to collapse ...’, 3 January 2018, [url](#)

‘Surgeons are unable to wash their hands prior to surgery due to lack of clean water.

‘Water is frequently unavailable at Al-Shifa, the largest hospital in Gaza. When it is available, it is not fit for use. Water is “either cut off, rusty or salty”, says Dr. Nassir Hammad, head nurse of the Surgical Department. This is particularly challenging given that the prepping of patients and medical staff sterilization processes requires clean water rather than the unsafe water currently provided through the network.

“When the water is cut, all the sterilization process from machines, instruments, beds and rooms is affected. Even when water is available, doctors and nurses are often unable to sterilize their hands to carry out surgery because of the water quality.”

‘Medical staff try to find solutions to keep operations on schedule, including checking if there is water in other departments, purchasing water where possible and using sanitizing gels. The hospital has even asked patients coming to undergo surgery to either bring water from other departments or bathe before coming to the hospital.

‘Apart from the dangers associated with these measures, they are not reliable solutions. According to Dr. Hammad: “In many cases, operations have had to be rescheduled due to the lack of water, or we wait until water is available.”

‘Post-operation infections could be reduced through the use of clean water but is being addressed by using sanitizing gels. The problem of sanitizing equipment remains unresolved, and the salty water available from the network has caused medical tools to rust and valuable medical equipment to malfunction. Replacement equipment is difficult to obtain due to funding shortages, access-related limitations and the short life span of this equipment in light of the ongoing water crisis.’⁵⁷

6.4.10 The World Health Organisation mentioned in their November 2018 situation report that ‘In November, electricity from the mains grid increased from 6 hours to 11 hours out of 24; however, the emergency fuel supply to sustain the health sector will run out in the first week of December; this will be immediately life-threatening for over 1,500 patients dependent on electrical machines’.⁵⁸

6.4.11 Since 1 January 2019 until time of writing, there has been 9 hours of electricity per day.⁵⁹

6.4.12 The UN OCHA’s ‘2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview’, published in December 2019 noted that:

‘All two million people in the Gaza Strip are negatively affected by ongoing deficits and needs in the WASH sector. This includes 983,623 women and 991,428 children who are exposed to public health risks associated with poor

⁵⁷ UNOCHA, ‘Study warns water sanitation crises in Gaza ...’, 16 November 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁸ WHO, ‘Situation report occupied Palestinian Territory, Gaza’ 4 – 17 November 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁹ UNOCHA, ‘Gaza strip electricity supply’, [url](#)

water quality, poor wastewater collection and treatment, lack of storm water infrastructure and lack of proper hygiene practices...

'...over 96 per cent of groundwater in Gaza is unfit for human consumption. The access rate to safe drinking water through the public water network is only 10.5 per cent, down from 98.3 per cent in 2000 and reliance on water tanks, containers and bottled water rose from 1.4 per cent to 89.6 per cent during the same period...

'The impact of the chronic energy crisis in Gaza on water and sanitation services has been pervasive. Throughout 2018, the deterioration in the electricity supply has led to power shortages and lack of repairs, with severe consequences for the operation of water treatment facilities, wastewater pumping stations, and drinkable/piped water supply. The worsened electricity and fuel crisis has further intensified women's responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work, which often entails intensive and physical work and made even more difficult by the restricted access to basic services, the restricted mobility and the lack of resources'.⁶⁰

6.4.13 The same report further noted with regards to the electricity situation:

'For much of 2018, the operation of all essential services in Gaza has been constrained by the continuing electricity crisis, which disrupts productive activity and the delivery of essential services, and undermines already vulnerable livelihoods and living conditions. The UN has been providing some 250 critical facilities, including all 14 public hospitals, water, sewage treatment and solid waste collection facilities, with emergency fuel to avert the collapse of essential services. Hospitals have rationalized fuel reserves by suspending sterilization, laundry, cleaning, catering and selected diagnostic services. The limited operation of water pumps and water desalination plants has led to a decline in water consumption and hygiene standards, while the shortening or suspension of sewage treatment cycles has added to the pollution of the sea off Gaza. Electricity cuts restrict students' study time at school and their ability to concentrate at home, and increases the drop-out rate. The increase in the electricity deficit in recent decades has been driven by the lack of infrastructure development despite the rapid population growth. Since 2017, this has been severely aggravated by the internal divide, following disputes between the PA and Hamas over the funding and taxation of fuel, and the collection of electricity charges, and due to a decision by the PA to reduce payments for Israeli-supplied electricity from the Israeli grid. Although, the delivery of fuel funded by Qatar since late October has resulted in the highest supply of electricity since March 2017, these improvements can do little to reverse the longstanding, structural problems affecting Gaza.'⁶¹

6.4.14 The CRS report from November 2018 noted that 'In fall 2018, Israel started allowing shipments of Qatari fuel and cash into Gaza to partially alleviate the electricity shortages and compensate for the PA funding reductions'⁶².

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⁶⁰ UN OCHA, '2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, p. 22, December 2018, [url](#)

⁶¹ UN OCHA, '2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, p. 7, December 2018, [url](#)

⁶² CRS, 'The Palestinians: Background and U.S relations', (page 20), 21 November 2018, [url](#)

6.5 Employment/ financial security and the economy

- 6.5.1 The Department for International Development (DFID) noted in their programme summary report 'Supporting Economic Empowerment and Development in the Occupied Palestinian Territories' from May 2018:
- 'The fundamental challenges facing the OPTs economy are low growth and high unemployment. The situation in Gaza is particularly acute, where the unemployment rate is over 43%, compared to 29% in the West Bank. Without urgent action to create jobs, unemployment rates will soar even higher as many young people enter the job market. Growing unemployment escalates discontent and may make young people, particularly men, more likely to engage in conflict and violence.'
- 6.5.2 The Global Humanitarian overview report stated that 'three major escalations of hostilities between Hamas/other armed groups in Gaza and Israel in the last ten years; and the impact of 10 years of political and administrative division between the West Bank and Gaza. Combined, these factors have devastated public infrastructure, disrupted basic services delivery and profoundly undermined living conditions'.⁶³
- 6.5.3 UNRWA noted that 'Years of conflict and blockade have left 80 per cent of the population dependent on international assistance while the continuing instar-Palestinian divisions serve to exacerbate the humanitarian and service delivery on the ground. The economy and its capacity to create jobs have been devastated, resulting in the impoverishment and de-development of a highly skilled and well-educated society. In 2018, the average unemployment rate has reached over 50 per cent – one of the highest in the world, according to the World Bank.'⁶⁴
- 6.5.4 The DFAT report of 15 March 2017 observed:
- 'The economy in Gaza is closed and stagnant due to Israel's blockade and the international community's economic sanctions against Hamas. Gaza's 5.5 per cent growth rate in 2016 was heavily dependent on the reconstruction activity following the 2014 conflict.
- 'The poverty rate in Gaza was 39 per cent in 2014, which was over double the poverty rate of the West Bank. Almost 80 per cent of Gaza's population is dependent on aid. According to the IMF, real GDP in Gaza is unlikely to reach pre-2014 conflict levels before 2018.
- 'The movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza is restricted by Israel and Egypt due to security concerns and has reduced economic activity and livelihoods. Israel's maritime blockade of Gaza has affected the fishing industry, which was traditionally a key source of income. Gaza's fishing boats are restricted from venturing beyond six nautical miles (11.1 kilometres) from the shoreline, heavily constraining commercial fishing. Access to external markets and the flow of economic goods in and out of the West Bank through Israel is also restricted. Under the Protocol on Economic Relations (also known as the Paris Protocol), signed by Israel and the Palestinian Territories following the Oslo Accords, Israel collects revenues

⁶³ UNOCHA, 'Global Humanitarian overview report 2018', (page 36), [url](#)

⁶⁴ UNRWA, 'Where we work – Gaza Strip', undated, [url](#)

(including import taxes and value added tax) on behalf of the Palestinian Authority and transfers them on a monthly basis. In the first quarter of 2015 Israel withheld all transfers and according to the World Bank, the Palestinian Authority loses USD285 million annually under the arrangement.⁶⁵

- 6.5.5 The Humanitarian Response plan of December 2017 noted that ‘a further deterioration in Gaza’s chronic electricity deficit, with longer power outages [is] severely impacting the manufacturing and agriculture sectors’.⁶⁶
- 6.5.6 The same report stated that ‘Real GDP growth in Gaza slowed to 0.4 per cent in the first quarter of 2017, while the unemployment rate for the second quarter rose to 44 per cent, and to 62 per cent among those aged between 15 and 29’.⁶⁷
- 6.5.7 Electricity supply in Gaza fluctuates dramatically. According to UNOCHA, who is provided daily with information by the Gaza Electricity Supply Distribution Company, as of January 2019, there is 9 hours of electricity per day. Please refer UNOCHA’s [Gaza Strip electricity supply dashboard](#) for current figures.
- 6.5.8 Please refer to the Country Policy and Information Note OPTs: Background Note for information on the World Bank and IMF websites.
- 6.5.9 The Humanitarian response plan noted:
‘...while the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) has played a key role in facilitating increased imports of construction materials, it has however been less successful in facilitating the import of dual use materials beyond cement and re-bar, also critical for public works projects. The scale of the challenges facing Gaza is underlined in a recent United Nations report which, updating some key indicators for Gaza in the year 2020, concluded “that most of the projections for 2020 have in fact deteriorated even further and faster than anticipated.” The condition of the aquifer, Gaza’s sole source of natural water, is of particular concern as it will be “unusable” by end-2017, with damage “irreversible” by 2020, “unless immediate remedial action is taken.”’⁶⁸
- 6.5.10 The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs noted:
‘The increase in poverty in Gaza, as reflected in PCBS [Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics] data, has been driven by the extreme volatility of its economy, characterized by short periods of growth followed by prolonged and deep recessions. This has resulted in some of the highest unemployment rates in the world: in the first quarter of 2018 it reached 49.1 per cent. Key factors affecting these dynamics include the longstanding Israeli blockade, exacerbated by the internal Palestinian divide, recurrent outbreaks of hostilities, and the chronic energy crisis.’⁶⁹
- 6.5.11 UNHCR reported:

⁶⁵ DFAT, ‘Thematic Report’, Section 2 paras 2.17, 15 March 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁶ Humanitarian Response Strategy, ‘Jan–Dec 2018 Hum’tarian response plan’, (p 6), Dec 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁷ Humanitarian Response Strategy, ‘Jan–Dec 2018 Hum’tarian response plan’, (p 6), Dec 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁸ Humanitarian Response Strategy, ‘Jan–Dec 2018 Hum’tarian response plan’, (p 6), Dec 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁹ UNOCHA, ‘53 per cent of Palestinians in Gaza live in poverty ...’, 5 June 2018, [url](#)

‘Following the 2014 hostilities, the World Bank assessed that the Gaza Strip’s economy was on the verge of collapse. Following the end of the hostilities, the economy has reportedly moderately grown, largely due to reconstruction; however, the economic outlook reportedly remains poor. In the fourth quarter of 2017, unemployment in the Gaza Strip was reported to reach nearly 43 per cent (compared to nearly 14 per cent in the West Bank). Youth unemployment has reportedly soared to more than 60 per cent. There is reportedly also a stark gender gap as unemployment among women is significantly higher than among men. In addition, the majority of those employed in the private sector, nearly 80 per cent, are paid less than the legal minimum wage (compares to 17.3 per cent in the West Bank). Seeking employment opportunities in Israel is reportedly not an option as the Israeli labour market has been closed to workers from the Gaza Strip since 2007, and businesspeople have been facing increasing restrictions on their ability to leave the Gaza Strip via the Erez Crossing into Israel. Furthermore, restrictions imposed by Israel on access to agricultural land in the border area between the Gaza Strip and Israel and restrictions on access to the Mediterranean Sea reportedly disrupt the access to livelihoods of farmers and fishermen in the Gaza Strip. The escalation of the internal Palestinian political divide in March 2017, which resulted in power shortages and salary cuts in the public sector, reportedly continue to negatively affect the livelihoods of many in the Gaza Strip. Nearly 40 per cent of Gazans are reported to live below the poverty line, half of them in extreme poverty. Poverty is considered to be a major factor forcing an increasing number of children into work. The vast majority of the population, about 80 per cent, is reportedly dependent on some form of humanitarian aid, mostly food assistance. Many households have reportedly been forced into debt to secure basic needs such as food, shelter and education.’⁷⁰

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6.6 Food security

- 6.6.1 UNRWA noted that ‘food security and rising poverty mean that most residents cannot meet their daily caloric requirements ...’⁷¹ The same source also mentioned that: ‘The number of Palestine refugees relying on UNRWA for food aid has increased from fewer than 80,000 in 2000 to almost one million today.’⁷²
- 6.6.2 The UN OCHA’s ‘2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview’, published in December 2019 noted that ‘The level of food insecurity remains alarmingly high in Gaza, revealing the long-term impact of the disruptive shocks of recent years, where an estimated 68 per cent of households are severely or moderately food insecure, compared to 12 per cent in the West Bank. The situation in Gaza Strip continue to decline’.⁷³
- 6.6.3 UNHCR reported:

⁷⁰ UNHCR, ‘... Situation in the Gaza Strip ...’, (section II, pages 8-10), 23 February 2018, [url](#)

⁷¹ UNRWA, ‘Health in the Gaza strip’, undated, [url](#)

⁷² UNRWA, ‘Where we work – Gaza Strip’, undated, [url](#)

⁷³ UN OCHA, ‘2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, p. 24, December 2018, [url](#)

‘As a result of poverty and unemployment as well as high food prices, an estimated 39 per cent of households in the Gaza Strip are severely or moderately food insecure. Food insecurity is reported to be particularly high among female-headed households and refugees. Cases of chronic malnutrition among young children in the Gaza Strip are reportedly on the rise. According to UNRWA, the number of Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip relying on UNRWA for food aid has increased from less than 80,000 in 2000 to almost one million in 2017 (representing 77 per cent of the total Palestine refugee population in the Gaza Strip).’⁷⁴

6.6.4 The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported:

‘As confirmed by the PCBS survey, food insecurity in Gaza is primarily caused by a lack of economic access to food, i.e poverty, rather than by the unavailability of food in the marketplace. As a result, the United Nations, through UNRWA and WFP, has increased its food assistance caseload. However, the continuation of this assistance is being currently at risk due to a severe funding shortage.

‘UNRWA currently provides food assistance to more than 996,000 Palestinian refugees in Gaza, who do not have the financial means to cover their basic food needs, through its Emergency Food Assistance program and its Social Safety Net program.

‘The percentage of individuals receiving UNRWA food assistance has increased from less than 10 per cent of the refugee population in Gaza in 2000, to approximately 70 per cent in 2017 (see chart below). UNRWA provides eligible refugee families, on a quarterly basis, a food basket which covers the bulk of the daily caloric needs of beneficiaries.’⁷⁵

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6.7 Education

6.7.1 The UN OCHA’s ‘2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview’, published in December 2019 noted that:

‘In the Gaza Strip, recurrent conflict, the deteriorating humanitarian situation, the chronic electricity deficit and ongoing restrictions on the movement of people and goods, have affected 480,013 basic, secondary and kindergarten (KG) students and teachers. While enrolment and graduation rates in education for girls and boys in Gaza are promising, adolescents’ educational and career aspirations are often not prioritized. Boys are often asked to work instead of going to school – in particular when money becomes limited...

‘In Gaza, deteriorating living conditions, unpaid teacher salaries and lack of school budgets call into question the ability of the education system to deliver adequate education to half a million students. Some 70 per cent of UNRWA schools and 63 per cent of those run by the Ministry of Education already operate on a double- or triple-shift system, reducing instructional hours on core subjects and foundation learning. This is compounded by UNRWA’s financial crisis, and uncertainty regarding whether the Agency can

⁷⁴ UNHCR, ‘... Situation in the Gaza Strip ...’, (section 3), 23 February 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁵ UNOCHA, ‘53 per cent of Palestinians in Gaza live in poverty, ...’, 5 June 2018, [url](#)

continue operating its schools through the current school year and maintain the delivery of other core services. The vast majority of UNRWA students come from poor and vulnerable families.

'The deterioration in the humanitarian situation has pushed more families into poverty undermining their ability to afford basic education supplies for their children, and increasing the risk of drop out. Girls are more vulnerable in this context as parents focus their expenses on family basic needs and prefer to offer education opportunities to boys. Continuing shortages in electricity also restrict students' study time and ability to concentrate and learn and negatively impacts their right and ability to access education at school and at home. Children who drop out are at risk of child labour or of participating in life-threatening activities, increasing the demands on protection services which are already overstretched in Gaza.'⁷⁶

6.7.2 The DFAT report of March 2017 noted that 'UNRWA manages 245 schools in Gaza, delivering education to 232,504 students... UNRWA follows the curriculum of the Palestinian Authority. UNRWA schools are widely viewed as delivering high quality education.'⁷⁷

6.7.3 The USSD report of 2017 noted that:

' Hamas authorities sought to disrupt some educational, cultural, and international exchange programs. They routinely required Palestinians to obtain exit permits prior to departing Gaza. Students participating in certain cultural and education programs (including programs sponsored by foreign governments and international organizations) faced questioning from de facto Hamas authorities.

' Hamas authorities also interfered in local cultural programs. There were continued reports the de facto government suppressed cultural expression that might offend Hamas' interpretation of religious and cultural values and identity.

' Israeli restrictions on movement adversely affected academic institutions and access to education and cultural activities for Palestinians.'⁷⁸

6.7.4 The same report noted that 'A continuing shortage of UNRWA school buildings in Gaza during the year resulted in a double-shift system and shorter school hours.'⁷⁹

6.7.5 Furthermore, the report stated 'In Gaza primary education is not universal. UNRWA, de facto Hamas authorities, religious institutions, and private foundations all provided instruction. In addition to the PA curriculum, UNRWA provided specialized classes on human rights, conflict resolution, and tolerance. There were reports Hamas offered courses on military training in its schools during youth summer camps, to which school-age children could apply for admission.'⁸⁰

6.7.6 The UNHCR report noted:

⁷⁶ UN OCHA, '2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, p. 30, December 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁷ DFAT, 'Thematic Report', Section 2 paras 2.21, 2.22, 15 March 2017, [url](#)

⁷⁸ USSD, 'Country reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017', (Section 2a), April 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁹ USSD, 'Country reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017', (Section 2d), April 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁰ USSD, 'Country reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017', (Section 6), April 2018, [url](#)

'The education sector reportedly faces chronic challenges as a result of the ongoing blockade as well as the effects of the 2014 hostilities. While most schools that had sustained damage in 2014 had reportedly been repaired by mid-2017, numerous kindergartens and higher education institutions have not yet been repaired for lack of funds. Although literacy rates among men and women remain high, the quality of education has reportedly deteriorated over the past decade due to a lack of teachers, overcrowded classrooms and limited hours of instruction. Restrictions related to the blockade have also negatively affected the availability of education materials in schools, according to reports. The severe electricity crisis has reportedly further impacted students' performance and well-being. As in other sectors, the already weak education infrastructure is under mounting pressure due to population growth. Over 5,000 children attending school in the "access restricted areas" (ARAs) also face the risk of Israeli military incursions, crossfire and activities by armed Palestinian groups.'⁸¹

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6.8 Humanitarian situation: Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Numbers

6.8.1 The UNOCHA noted:

'In the Gaza Strip, forced displacement is primarily driven by escalations in hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed groups, with the July-August 2014 conflict resulting in the highest rate of internal displacement since 1967. With the August 2014 ceasefire largely holding, no new displacement occurred during the course of 2016. Over 9,000 families (47,200 people) remain displaced at the end of 2016, down from approximately 16,000 families (90,000 people) at the beginning of the year. Most displaced families remain dependent on temporary shelter assistance provided by humanitarian organizations.'⁸²

6.8.2 The Humanitarian response plan observed in its December 2017 report that 'As of November 2017, approximately 23,500 people still remain displaced from the 2014 conflict, with a gap of over 3,800 of the 11,000 totally destroyed housing units still awaiting reconstruction due to lack of funds'.⁸³

6.8.3 The USSD report noted:

'According to NGOs, 40,000 to 50,000 Palestinians in Gaza lacked identification cards recognized by Israel. Some were born in Gaza, but Israel never recognized them as residents; some fled Gaza during the 1967 war; and some left Gaza for various reasons after 1967 but later returned. A small number lacking recognized identification cards were born in the Gaza Strip and never left, but had only Hamas-issued identification cards. The Israeli government controlled the Palestinian Population Registry, which allows stateless persons to obtain status.'⁸⁴

6.8.4 The UNHCR noted:

⁸¹ UNHCR, '... Situation in the Gaza Strip...', (section 3), 23 February 2018, [url](#)

⁸² UNOCHA, 'Fragmented lives – humanitarian overview 2016', page 5, May 2017, [url](#)

⁸³ Humanitarian Response Strategy, 'Jan–Dec 2018 Humanitarian response plan', (p6), Dec 2017, [url](#)

⁸⁴ USSD, 'Country reports ... for 2017', (Section 2d), West Bank and Gaza, April 2018, [url](#)

‘According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), approximately 100,000 people were displaced due to the destruction or severe damage to their homes (over 17,000 housing units). At the end of December 2017, 4,450 families (about 23,500 individuals) remained displaced as their homes were either destroyed or severely damaged and have not yet been reconstructed. Delays reportedly relate mainly to the slow pace of disbursements of pledged aid for reconstruction and continued restrictions on the import of building materials defined by Israel as “dual use items” through the Kerem Shalom (Karam Abu Salem in Arabic) Crossing into the Gaza Strip. Some 400 Palestine and other refugee families displaced to the Gaza Strip from Syria, Libya and Yemen reportedly face particular shelter concerns.’⁸⁵

6.8.5 The UN OCHA’s ‘2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview’, published in December 2019 noted that as of November 2018 14,000 IDPs remained in Gaza of which 53 percent were ‘in need of temporary shelter cash assistance’.⁸⁶

6.8.6 With regards to IDPs needs the same report noted the following:

‘The lack of funds for the majority of projects in Gaza and West Bank has had a significant impact on the capacity of partners to implement shelter interventions and reach planned targets; the unmet needs were 88 per cent of the total. The main affected groups are those living in multidimensional poverty in Gaza, including 3,000 families displaced in the 2014 hostilities, as well as herding and Bedouin communities exposed to harsh weather conditions in Area C and East Jerusalem.

‘The IDP vulnerability assessment reveals that people displaced from the 2014 hostilities in Gaza are still living in dire housing conditions, with 48 per cent renting, with most relying on TSCA (transitional shelter cash assistance); 12 per cent living with extended or host families; and nine per cent living in their partially damaged homes.’⁸⁷

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7. Humanitarian support

7.1 UNRWA

7.1.1 UNRWA noted that ‘Operating through approximately 12,500 staff in over 300 installations across the Gaza Strip, UNRWA delivers education, health and mental health care, relief and social services, microcredit and emergency assistance to registered Palestine refugees.’⁸⁸

7.1.2 The same source added that, ‘in recent years, UNRWA has made significant improvements to its services in Gaza, such as its schools of excellence and excellent health services initiatives. It also better targets its assistance to the poorest of the poor through the implementation of a proxy-means-tested poverty survey’.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ UNHCR, ‘... Situation in the Gaza Strip ...’, (section 3), 23 February 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁶ UN OCHA, ‘2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, p. 3, December 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁷ UN OCHA, ‘2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, p. 33, December 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁸ UNRWA, ‘Health in the Gaza strip’, undated, [url](#)

⁸⁹ UNRWA, ‘Where we work – Gaza Strip’, [url](#)

7.1.3 The organisation states that ‘notwithstanding the Agency’s ongoing funding crisis, which has forced UNRWA in Gaza to take mitigating measures, particularly with regard to its emergency interventions, UNRWA continues to:

‘Improve the academic achievement, behaviour and values of school students

- Construct desperately needed infrastructure, including schools and shelters
- Improve the quality and targeting of its food and cash assistance to the poorest of the poor
- Promote gender equality and human rights for all
- Nurture entrepreneurship by supporting the private sector’.⁹⁰

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7.2 INGOs/NGOs

7.2.1 In October 2018, The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs observed:

‘Funding for humanitarian activities in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) is at an all-time low. At the end of September, only \$159 million had been secured of a requested \$539.7 million for the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), the multi-agency strategy and funding appeal for the humanitarian community in the oPt. Funding for the oPt HRP is at only 30 per cent, significantly lower than the current global average of 42 per cent.

‘Funding gaps are primarily the result of the decline in contributions for UNRWA, whose projects constitute 53 per cent of the overall requirements for the 2018 HRP. This follows the decision by the United States, the Agency’s largest donor, to substantially reduce financial support, forcing UNRWA to discontinue or scale back its activities in Gaza and the West Bank... The US has substantially reduced all its funding to the oPt, including deciding not to disburse more than \$200 million from USAID’s approved budget for the 2017 fiscal year in the West Bank and Gaza, a further \$25 million for the East Jerusalem hospital network, and, most recently, \$10 million for Israeli and Palestinian co-existence groups.

‘In parallel to the unprecedented financial crisis faced by UNRWA, nearly all agencies requesting through the HRP have received less funding in 2018 than in previous years. This leaves humanitarian partners ill-positioned to meet emerging needs or respond to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, where the enormous rise in casualties from the ‘Great March of Return’ demonstration has placed additional strain on Gaza’s overburdened health system.

‘To respond to this recent crisis, humanitarian agencies have appealed for \$43.8 million through the end of 2018 for emergency interventions, particularly for trauma management and emergency healthcare. At the end

⁹⁰ UNRWA, ‘Where we work – Gaza Strip’, [url](#)

of September, approximately 52 per cent of this request had been provided, leaving a gap of \$21.1 million.⁹¹

7.2.2 On 25th November 2018, BBC Monitoring reported, 'The United States Agency for International Development announced that half of its employees in the West Bank and Gaza will be let go in the coming weeks and by early 2019, the operations will be completely shut down. The humanitarian agency is one of the largest and most important in the region.'⁹²

7.2.3 The House of Commons Library briefing paper of 20 March 2017, noted: 'The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) has a large bilateral aid programme in the OPTs, which consists of two main parts. It provides funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency to support its work on health, education, social protection, and the protection of refugees' rights (£106.5 million between 2012 and 2015); it also provides funding to the Palestinian Authority through the World Bank's Palestinian Reform Development Plan (PRDP) Trust Fund (£129.5m between 2011 and 2015).[...] DFID's projected budget for the OPT for 2016/17 is £43,191,985. DFID currently funds seven projects, including funding for UNRWA and projects to improve security and access to justice; support for the PA to improve public financial management; support for Palestinians at risk of displacement in Israeli controlled Area C of the West Bank and Gaza; humanitarian access in the OPT; support for the work of the Quartet; and a Palestinian market development programme to strengthen the private sector in the OPTs. Full details of these projects are available on the DFID website: [Occupied Palestinian Territories](#).'⁹³

7.2.4 DFID is currently working on a £38,024,697 (\$49,882,848⁹⁴) budget programme, 'Supporting Economic Empowerment and Development in the Occupied Palestinian Territories', which began on 2 November 2018 and is planned to run until 31 March 2023. The department stated that: 'This programme will focus DFID economic development assistance to the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) in the areas of water, electricity, access & movement and trade, and fiscal losses and customs. Programme activities will support institutional capacity building and infrastructure development, working closely with the Palestinian Authority and Government of Israel. The overarching goal is to support economic growth and job creation in the OPTs.'⁹⁵

7.2.5 The programme's Summary Sheet report noted: 'The Palestinian economy is crippled principally by Israeli-imposed restrictions on movement, access and trade, imposed because of Israeli security concerns. The situation is particularly acute in Gaza, where there are severe shortages of water and electricity. The weak economy has led to rising unemployment and worsening living standards; which in turn fuels

⁹¹ UNOCHA, 'Critical funding shortfalls ...', 8 October 2018, [url](#)

⁹² BBC Monitoring, 'USAID to lay off employees, close Palestinian operation', 25 November 2018, [url](#)

⁹³ House of Commons Library, 'Recent Developments in the OPT', section 7.1, 20 March 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁴ Currency-calc, Dollar to British Pound, 5 March 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁵ DFID, 'SEED OPTs', 29 January 2019, [url](#)

Palestinians' sense of grievance and increases the likelihood of violence and conflict.

'This programme is designed to work politically and technically to improve growth and create jobs by: reforming policies; building government capacity; investing in infrastructure; and providing support to businesses. It will increase the sustainable supply of water and energy (particularly in Gaza); and increase trade, freedom of movement and customs revenue, promoting Palestinian control over what enters and leaves the OPTs.'⁹⁶

7.2.6 The Global Humanitarian overview noted:

'In 2018, the humanitarian team will launch its first three-year humanitarian strategic plan, based on a needs analysis that explicitly considered linkages to vulnerability analyses by development actors and identified common drivers of vulnerability. Beyond delivering aid where needed, the new HRP aims to also strengthen linkages with non-humanitarian actors (such as the development community and Palestinian Authority), reduce needs and caseloads over the three years of the plan and make scarce resources go further, including by greater national NGO implementation. For the most vulnerable Palestinians, interventions will strive to protect and promote their rights under occupation, in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law; provide access to basic services and resources where denied; and bolster vulnerable households' capacities to overcome such a protracted crisis.'⁹⁷

7.2.7 According to The Health Cluster, 'With support from the European Union, the World Health Organization (WHO) is replenishing stocks of urgently-needed trauma medicines in Gaza, and providing hands-on training for health staff working in frontline Trauma Stabilization Points (TSPs).'

7.2.8 The same source noted:

'Life-saving medicines and medical supplies to treat more than 100,000 people have been delivered to hospitals and TSPs, filling critical gaps as supplies rapidly deplete as a result of increasing numbers of casualties injured in ongoing demonstrations within the context of the Great March of Return that started on 30 March 2018. In coordination with the Ministry of Health and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, WHO supported the capacity building of more than 60 health workers in 10 TSPs on emergency management of casualties at the TSPs and Emergency Rooms...

'To ensure a comprehensive and coordinated approach to the provision of trauma care in Gaza, WHO has established a dedicated Trauma Working Group with active participation from key partners delivering trauma care across the pathway. Different trauma sub-groups, focusing on areas such as reconstructive surgery and rehabilitation, bring together expertise and knowledge that will ensure quality emergency and trauma care for all injured.'⁹⁸

7.2.9 The Health Cluster mentioned in their 'Trauma Care in Gaza Overview':

⁹⁶ DFID, 'SEED OPTs', (page 2), May 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁷ UNOCHA, 'Global Humanitarian overview report 2018', (page 36), [url](#)

⁹⁸ Health Cluster, 'WHO strengthens trauma care services in Gaza ...', undated, [url](#)

'On the 30th April, WHO established the Gaza Trauma Working Group, which includes the following actors: MoH (Ministry of Health), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), PRCS (Palestinian Red Crescent Society), Medical Aid for Palestinians-UK (MAP-UK), Palestinian Children's Relief Fund (PCRF), Al Awda NGO Hospital, Union of Health Workers Committee (UHCW), Humanity and Inclusion (HI), and Turkey Doctors Worldwide. The objective of the group is to build the capacity of the trauma pathway through enhanced coordination, establish minimum standards of care, and enhance data management...'⁹⁹

7.2.10 The UNOCHA October 2018 bulletin noted:

'Humanitarian interventions planned by the WASH cluster for 2019, assuming the availability of essential funds and energy, include the establishment, extension or rehabilitation of water distribution and sanitation systems and infrastructures; improvements to WASH facilities in key service institutions; supplying households without sanitation facilities to end open defecation and ensure access to at least basic sanitation; and providing WASH facilities with emergency power requirements (fuel and/or renewable energy), equipment and maintenance to enable lifesaving operations to continue.'¹⁰⁰

7.2.11 More information on the key actors in the Gaza Trauma Working Group and their role in the trauma pathway can be found [here](#).

7.2.12 WHO's situation report reported in December 2018 that, 'Health Cluster partners require \$32 million USD to address acute health needs of the most vulnerable communities in the occupied Palestinian territory for 2019, targeting 900,000 people out of the 1.2 million Palestinians are in need of humanitarian health assistance.'¹⁰¹

7.2.13 For information on partner response plans, see [WHO's situation reports](#).

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7.3 Restrictions of support

7.3.1 The Health Cluster reported:

'During the course of 2017, Israeli authorities implemented a series of restrictions on items permitted to be carried across the Erez Crossing, including a prohibition on national staff from bringing toiletries, food and computers out of Gaza. These restrictions hamper the ability of staff to conduct their work, but also undermine basic dignity. These limitations are further intensified by access incidents faced by UN and INGO staff while entering and exiting Gaza, resulting in delayed and denied access to duty stations and operations. Particularly severe incidents include permit confiscation, prolonged interrogation and detainment.

'The Hamas authorities in Gaza also enforce access restrictions on humanitarian actors, including on the movement of staff and access to certain areas, and a permit regime applicable to national and international

⁹⁹ Health Cluster, 'Trauma Care in Gaza – Overview', undated, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰ UNOCHA, 'Study warns water sanitation crises in Gaza ...', 16 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ WHO, 'Situation report Occupied Palestinian Territory 4 – 17 December 2018', page 7, [url](#)

INGO personnel to exit and re-enter Gaza. The Rafah Crossing between Gaza and Egypt opened on an exceptional basis by Egyptian authorities for a total of 30 days during 2017, primarily for pre-registered individuals, humanitarian cases and pilgrims.

'Restrictions on the movement of goods, including imports to the Gaza Strip, continue to impact the fragile humanitarian situation, particularly with respect to the provision of basic services, including health and WASH services, civil defence, preparedness and emergency responders, as well as reconstruction and recovery efforts, given the presence of basic construction materials on the list of restricted items identified by Israeli authorities as "dual use" items.'¹⁰²

7.3.2 The USSD mentioned:

'Israeli import restrictions on certain commodities considered to be dual use continued to impede humanitarian operations in Gaza, including those directed toward refugees. In December 2016 Israeli authorities introduced a requirement whereby approval of UNRWA projects remains valid for only one year. As project implementation timelines often exceeded one year, this new requirement necessitated applications for re-approval of projects, which hampered implementation and increased transaction costs for multiple UNRWA projects.'¹⁰³

7.3.3 'The same report observed:

'Humanitarian organizations continued to raise concerns about the "shrinking operational space" for international NGOs in Gaza following Israel's publication of allegations that staff of international NGOs had diverted goods and funds to Hamas. In one case in 2016, Israeli authorities arrested an employee of an international NGO returning to Gaza from Israel through the Erez crossing and held him for 21 days before he had access to a lawyer of his choosing. He claimed he was physically and psychologically tortured and gave a false confession under duress, according to representatives of the NGO. Israeli authorities held the employee in detention for a total of 50 days before filing charges against him. Israeli authorities held several hearings, but there was no resolution at the end of the year.'¹⁰⁴

7.3.4 UNOCHA reported in their October 2018 bulletin that:

'The longstanding water and sanitation crisis affecting Gaza requires massive infrastructural investment, a sustainable solution to the energy crisis, the lifting of access restrictions and political solutions, both internally and with Israel.

'The fact that an epidemic has not yet occurred is due mainly to mitigating humanitarian responses, including WASH projects focused on ensuring clean drinking water, preventing raw sewage from overflowing into the streets and some treatment of wastewater; the supply of emergency fuel to operate essential facilities and services; and projects such as vaccinations

¹⁰² Humanitarian Response Strategy, 'Jan–Dec 2018 Hum'tarian response plan', (p6), Dec 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰³ USSD, 'Country reports ... for 2017' West Bank and Gaza, (Section 2d), April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ USSD, 'Country reports ... for 2017' West Bank and Gaza, (Section 2d), April 2018, [url](#)

delivered via UNRWA to some 77 per cent of the population in Gaza who are registered as Palestine refugees.

'However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to mitigate the impact of the water and sanitation crisis. At a time of increased need, funding for the oPt is at an all-time low. By October, only US\$197.7 million had been secured of a requested \$539.7 million for the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), i.e a mere 36 per cent. The situation regarding interventions by the WASH cluster is even worse: only 21.7 per cent of \$45.5 million in funding required for responses in 2018 has been so far provided. In fact, nearly all agencies requesting funding through the HRP have received less funding in 2018 than in previous years, including UNRWA whose operations have been undermined by the US government ceasing its financial support to the Agency.

'Lack of funding for lifesaving humanitarian responses has been challenged further by the electricity crisis. This has diverted funds for emergency fuel to operate backup generators and forced other components of planned WASH humanitarian responses to be put on hold.'¹⁰⁵

7.3.5 The UN OCHA's '2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview', published in December 2019 noted that:

'In addition to political challenges and funding shortfalls, humanitarian organizations are facing an increasingly difficult operational context and shrinking humanitarian and civic space, which is hampering their ability to provide assistance and protection to Palestinians throughout the oPt. The Israeli authorities continue to impose physical and administrative restrictions, citing security concerns, on the access and movement of humanitarian actors, especially national employees, who face increasing difficulty in obtaining permits to enter and exit the Gaza Strip. Recent measures include an increase in the processing time for exit permits, a rise in denials and one-year bans, restrictions on the type of items allowed to be taken out of Gaza, and new crossing procedures at the vehicle terminal. These measures have increased uncertainty, delays and logistical impediments, and have a negative impact on humanitarian operations. Other obstacles include restrictions on the delivery of materials needed for humanitarian projects and limitations on the implementation of projects that involve building, expanding or rehabilitating infrastructure in the Gaza Strip...

'The Protection Cluster has observed continued pressure on human rights defenders, including arrest and detention, harassment and legislation aimed at constricting civic space, which are reducing the ability of protection actors to hold duty bearers to account.

'At the same time, humanitarian organizations providing critical services to vulnerable populations in the oPt have increasingly become the target of unsubstantiated allegations of impropriety, misuse of funds, and other attacks. Humanitarian operations in Gaza are also impeded by restrictions imposed by the Hamas authorities, while key donors have reduced and/or conditioned their funding for humanitarian and development projects in Gaza. This has contributed to the channeling of assistance towards an ever-

¹⁰⁵ UNOCHA, 'Study warns water sanitation crises ...', 16 November 2018, [url](#)

shrinking set of sectors and institutions, not necessarily to areas where assistance is most needed. Restrictions stemming from counter-terrorism legislation in their countries of origin, along with the “no contact” policy with Hamas imposed by some donors, have further restricted the operational space of UN and international NGOs in Gaza’.¹⁰⁶

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8. Security situation

8.1 Overview

- 8.1.1 The United States Department of State’s annual human rights report for 2017 noted, ‘Although PA laws apply in the Gaza Strip, the PA did not have authority there. While the PA deployed personnel at Gaza’s border crossings in November [2017], Hamas continued to exercise de facto control of security and other matters’.¹⁰⁷
- 8.1.2 UNICEF’s January – June 2018 Humanitarian situation report noted that ‘Gaza’s security situation is extremely fragile and unpredictable’.¹⁰⁸
- 8.1.3 The same source noted that ‘the risk of escalation in military confrontations with Israel remains high... it is regularly tested by systematic and hostile activities between Palestinian armed groups (rocket and mortar fire, IED explosions, incendiary kites and balloons and targeting of patrols along the fence) and Israeli forces (missile strikes, incursions, tunnel destruction)’.¹⁰⁹
- 8.1.4 The Congressional Research Service report of November 2018 observed:
- ‘Palestinian protests and violence along security fences that divide Gaza from Israel have attracted international attention in 2018. Some Gazans have demonstrated “popular resistance” in which crowds gather near the fences, and some people try to breach the fences or use rudimentary weapons (slingshots, basic explosives, burning tires) against Israeli security personnel. Others have used incendiary kites or balloons to set fires to arable land in southern Israel.[...] The purpose of these tactics may be to provoke Israeli responses that evoke international sympathy for Palestinians and criticism of Israel—a dynamic that bolstered Palestinian national aspirations in the late 1980s during the first intifada.[...] While some of these protests and riots have been organized on a grass-roots level, Hamas has reportedly become more directly involved as they have continued.[...]’
- ‘Israel has used force in efforts to contain the protests and violence near the Gaza frontier. In spring 2018, Israeli personnel killed more than 120 Palestinians in Gaza, given their use of live fire to patrol the security fences around the territory. This led the U.N. Human Rights Council to call in May for an “independent, international commission of inquiry” to produce a report.[...] In June, U.N. General Assembly Resolution ES-10/20 condemned Israeli actions against Palestinian civilians, as well as the firing of rockets from Gaza against Israeli civilians.[...] Subsequently, Israel-Gaza altercations and occasional spikes in violence (including rocket barrages

¹⁰⁶ UN OCHA, ‘2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, p. 10, December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷ USSD, ‘Country reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017’, (Exec Summary), April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ UNICEF, ‘State of Palestine – Humanitarian situation report’, January – June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ UNICEF, ‘State of Palestine – Humanitarian situation report’, January – June 2018, [url](#)

from Gaza and Israeli air strikes inside Gaza) have continued, fueling speculation about the possibility of a fourth major conflict and its regional implications.[...] According to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as of October 22, during 2018 Israeli personnel had killed more than 200 Gazans and injured thousands more.[...] In mid-November, Israel and Hamas narrowly averted all-out conflict after an Israeli raid uncovered by Hamas contributed to a major escalation that required Egyptian intervention to quiet.[...]¹¹⁰

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8.2 'Great March of return'

8.2.1 On 30th March 2018, the 'Great March of return' protests began at the Gaza/Israeli fence border.¹¹¹ Al Jazeera reported on 19 October 2018:

'[...] Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have protested along the fence with Israel demanding their right to return to the homes and land their families were expelled from 70 years ago.

'The Great March of Return rallies culminated on May 15 to mark what Palestinians refer to as the Nakba, or Catastrophe – a reference to the forced removal of 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and villages to clear the way for Israel's establishment in 1948.

'The mass Friday demonstrations have continued since.

'Since the protests began on March 30, Israeli forces have killed at least 205 Palestinians in the besieged coastal enclave and wounded more than 18,000 people, according to health officials in Gaza.¹¹²

8.2.2 The UN General Assembly Security Council's report to the Secretary-General in August 2018 noted:

'During the reporting period, the situation on the ground was characterized by the most significant violence in Gaza since the hostilities of 2014. The situation deteriorated following the start of the "Great March of Return" protests on 30 March 2018, with tens of thousands of Palestinians protesting at or near the perimeter fence between Israel and the Gaza Strip. During the reporting period, 194 Palestinians, including 29 children, were killed in Gaza, 59 on 14 May alone, and an additional 13 Palestinians died of wounds sustained that day, the peak of the protests. Hamas and Islamic Jihad have publicly acknowledged that a number of their members were among those killed in the protests and other incidents. According to the Gaza Ministry of Public Health, during the protests, more than 3,700 Palestinians were wounded by live ammunition resulting in life-altering injuries. One Israeli soldier was killed by sniper fire from Gaza, the first such Israeli fatality since 2014, and five Israeli soldiers were injured near the perimeter fence.

'Among the thousands of peaceful demonstrators, hundreds reportedly attempted to breach the fence, burned tires, threw rocks and fire bombs at Israeli forces or their posts, launched incendiary kites and balloons and laid

¹¹⁰ CRS, Palestinians (ps18-19), 21 November 2018, [url](#)

¹¹¹ Al Jazeera, 'Gaza protests: All the latest updates', 19 October 2018, [url](#)

¹¹² Al Jazeera, 'Gaza protests: All the latest updates', 19 October 2018, [url](#)

improvised explosive devices, at least two of which exploded at or near the fence. According to the Israeli authorities, incendiary kites and balloons caused large fires that burned and damaged thousands of acres of agricultural fields and nature reserves. On three occasions, Palestinian protesters attacked the Kerem Shalom crossing and severely damaged the infrastructure on the Palestinian side, temporarily hampering the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian assistance.

'This period also constituted the most serious escalation in Gaza since the war in 2014. On 29 May alone, reportedly in response to the deaths in Gaza, nearly 200 rockets and mortars rounds were fired from the Gaza Strip towards Israel. The majority of the projectiles were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome defence system, while one mortar reportedly landed in the grounds of a kindergarten in the Eshkol Regional Council, causing no injury. Three Israeli soldiers and two civilians were reportedly injured in other incidents. The Israeli Defense Forces responded by striking targets it attributed to both Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, who had claimed joint responsibility for the attacks.

'On 14 and 15 July 2018, another military escalation ensued between Palestinian militants and the Israeli Defense Forces. Two Palestinian teenagers were killed in an airstrike in Gaza city and 25 were injured by Israeli strikes. Three Israelis were also wounded from a rocket that landed on a residential home in the Israeli town of Sderot.'¹¹³

8.2.3 Amnesty International noted in October 2018, basing its findings on reporting by the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, that 'since the start of the protests, over 150 Palestinians have been killed in the demonstrations. At least 10,000 others have been injured, including 1,849 children, 424 women, 115 paramedics and 115 journalists. Of those injured, 5,814 were hit by live ammunition. According to Israeli media, one soldier was moderately injured due to shrapnel from a grenade thrown by a Palestinian from inside Gaza and one Israeli soldier was killed by Palestinian sniper fire near the fence that separates Gaza and Israel outside of the context of the protests.'¹¹⁴

8.2.4 BBC monitoring reported on 20 October 2018:

'Israeli forces have injured at least 130 Palestinians during the Friday protests on 19 October, the spokesman of the Palestinian Ministry of Health said.

"Some 130 citizens were injured by live bullets in eastern Gaza Strip, including 25 children and four medics," Ashraf al-Qudra said in a tweet.

'Al-Qudra also said that one journalist was injured.

'Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have been holding weekly Friday rallies at the Gaza-Israel fence as part of the "March of Return" protests which began on 30 March...'¹¹⁵

¹¹³ UN General Assembly Security Council, 'Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, report of the Secretary-General', 27 August 2018, (paras 11 – 14), [url](#)

¹¹⁴ Amnesty International, 'Six months on: Gaza's great march of return', 22 October 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁵ BBC Monitoring, 'Gaza Friday protests', 20 October 2018, (subscription only), [url](#)

8.2.5 The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs stated in its 'Protection of civilian report' on 11 October 2018:

'Friday, 28 September, recorded the highest fatality toll in a single day (seven) since 14 May 2018, prompting a call by the Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), Jamie McGoldrick, "on Israel, Hamas and all other actors with the ability to influence the situation, to take action now to prevent further deterioration and loss of life." Two of the child fatalities, boys aged 11 and 15, were shot in the head and chest with live ammunition, bringing to 39 the number of children killed in Gaza since the start of the protests on 30 March. Of the people injured on 28 September and 5 October, 402 were hospitalized, including 216 people (53 per cent) hit by live ammunition; the rest were treated in the field, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza. According to Israeli sources, a number of explosive devices were thrown at Israeli forces during the protests, none of which resulted in Israeli injuries.'¹¹⁶

8.2.6 On 24 November 2018, BBC Monitoring reported:

'Fourteen Palestinians who participated in protests along the Gaza-Israel fence were wounded by bullets fired by the Israeli army on 23 November, according to Gaza Health Ministry spokesman Ashraf al-Qidreh.

'Among them was a child, official Ramallah-based Palestinian news agency Wafa reported on the same day, specifying that the fourteen were wounded by live ammunition, and not rubber bullets.

'Dozens, including a cameraman, were also wounded by asphyxiation due to tear gas inhalation, Wafa added in a separate report.

'Over 210 people have been killed since Palestinians in the Gaza Strip began holding weekly Friday rallies at the Gaza-Israel border in March, and over 22,000 others have been injured, according to Wafa.'¹¹⁷

8.2.7 For regular updates and statistics, see [WHO Occupied Palestinian Territory situation reports](#) and [OCHA monthly figures on conflict-related casualties and violence](#).

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8.3 Security incidents

8.3.1 The 2017 USSD report observed:

'NGOs such as Human Rights Watch (HRW), B'Tselem, the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, and Defense for Children-Palestine published reports alleging ISF (Israeli Security Forces)] personnel committed unlawful killings. In December, Israeli soldiers allegedly shot and killed three Palestinians who threw stones toward soldiers on the other side of the Gaza perimeter fence and four others who were participating in protests near the perimeter fence during which other protesters threw stones at Israeli security fences. On December 15, Israeli forces shot and killed 29-year-old Ibrahim Abu Thurayya during a demonstration at the Nahal Oz checkpoint in Gaza. Thurayya, a double amputee, was 65 feet from the perimeter fence when

¹¹⁶ UNOCHA, 'Protection of civilian report 25 September – 8 October 2018', 11 October 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ BBC Monitoring, 'fourteen Palestinians wounded by bullets in Friday protests', 27 Nov 2018, [url](#)

Israeli forces shot him in the head, according to the B'Tselem. B'Tselem and the PCHR noted that, as he was unarmed and had no legs, he did not pose a threat to Israeli forces. An initial IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] inquiry found no wrongdoing in Thurayya's death, but the IDF later reopened the investigation due to a disparity in the findings of the initial investigation and those of Palestinians groups inside Gaza, according to media.¹¹⁸

8.3.2 Furthermore, the report noted that, 'There were reports that ISF use of small-caliber live ammunition seriously wounded or killed Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, according to UN reports and media reports ... Israeli forces killed 11 Palestinians in restricted areas in Gaza using live fire. Israel warned Palestinians they risked being shot if they entered a "buffer zone" extending 328 yards (300 meters) into Gaza from the border fence'.¹¹⁹

8.3.3 Amnesty International mentioned in its 2017/2018 yearly report, that 'Israeli forces maintained a "buffer zone" inside Gaza's border with Israel and used live ammunition against Palestinians who entered or approached it, wounding farmers working in the area. Israeli forces also fired at Palestinian fishermen in or near the "exclusion zone" along Gaza's coastline, killing at least one and injuring others'.¹²⁰

8.3.4 The USSD report for 2017 noted:

'Israeli soldiers allegedly shot and killed an individual who was trying to damage barbed wire 160 feet away from the Gaza perimeter fence on December 22 and one who had earlier thrown stones at soldiers on the other side of the Gaza perimeter fence but was sitting 640 feet away from the fence at the time of his shooting on December 23. In those two cases, the IDF said it had fired toward Palestinians who tried to cross the border into Israel. Israeli soldiers allegedly killed fisherman Muhammad Baker on May 15; soldiers from an Israeli naval vessel allegedly shot and killed him while pursuing Baker's boat near the northern limit of the fishing zone. Separate investigations by B'Tselem and the PCHR found that at the time of the shooting, Baker and his relatives were fishing within the approved zone. According to the IDF, the vessel had strayed away from the approved zone. In the fourth incident, an Israeli tank shell on March 22 killed a Palestinian who was allegedly sitting next to a fire with two others cooking food after 10:00 pm at a distance of 320 to 530 yards from the Gaza perimeter fence; the IDF announced that they suspected the group was planting explosive devices.'¹²¹

8.3.5 On 18 July 2018, The Independent reported:

'Palestinians in Gaza have vowed to step up arson attacks on Israel after it toughened restrictions on the embattled enclave, blocking deliveries of fuel and gas.

'The so-called "Sons of al-Zawari" unit have launched hundreds of kites and balloons laden with coals and explosives at Israel since April during protests at the border. Their members, who often appear wearing Guy

¹¹⁸ USSD, 'Country reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017', (Section 1a), April 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ USSD, 'Country reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017', (Section 1a), April 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁰ AI, 'The state of the world's human rights - 2017/18 yearly report', page 208, 22 February 2018 [url](#)

¹²¹ USSD, 'Country reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017', (Section 1a), April 2018, [url](#)

Fawkes masks, promised on Wednesday to continue their assault until Israel lifts a crippling 11-year-old blockade.

'Israel, that has deployed drones to take out the \$3 homemade weapons, said the attacks have sparked over 750 fires, burning more than 2,600 hectares of land. On Tuesday Israel reported that an incendiary balloon from Gaza landed in a preschool yard near the border.

'On the same day Israel blocked all fuel and gas deliveries through its only goods crossing to Gaza until Sunday. They also reduced Gaza's permitted fishing zone from six nautical miles to just three, strangling a vital financial lifeline for Gaza's 1.8 million inhabitants.'¹²²

8.3.6 The Telegraph reported, on 14 July 2018:

'Israel's air force carried out the largest daytime airstrike campaign against Hamas in the Gaza Strip since the 2014 war on Saturday, killing two teenagers in an escalation of violence in the region after months of deadly protests.

'The Israeli airstrikes came as Hamas intensified its attacks, firing dozens of mortar rounds at Israel on Friday night and throughout Saturday, some of which were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome air defence system.

'Witnesses said the Israeli air strike hit an empty building in Gaza City and the two casualties were passers-by. A further 15 Palestinians were also reported to have been injured, as well as three Israelis [...]

'The escalation follows violent protests on the Gaza border on Friday in which two Palestinians were also killed - a 15-year-old and a 20-year old - and more than 220 injured, according to Gaza's health ministry. Israel said one of its soldiers was injured.'¹²³

8.3.7 On 29 October 2018, the BBC reported:

Three Palestinian youths have been killed in an Israeli air strike near the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel, Palestinian officials say.

'Gaza's health ministry said the dead were boys aged 13 and 14.

'The Israeli military said it targeted suspected militants who approached the border fence and "were apparently involved in placing" a bomb next to it.

'Hamas, the militant Islamist group which dominates Gaza, accused Israel of targeting civilians.

'The incident followed another escalation over the weekend.

'On Friday night militants in Gaza fired at least 30 rockets towards Israel. The Israeli military responded with air strikes on what it said were more than 80 military targets in the strip.

'The militant group Islamic Jihad said it launched the rockets after Israeli troops shot dead four Palestinians during protests on Friday along the Gaza-Israel border [...].'¹²⁴

¹²² The Independent, 'Gaza's 'fire kite' flyers threaten more attacks ...', 18 July 2018, [url](#)

¹²³ The Telegraph, 'Israel pummels Gaza ...', 14 July 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁴ BBC, 'Israel strike 'kills Gaza youths planting bomb', 29 October 2018, [url](#)

8.3.8 On 12 November 2018, The Guardian reported:

'Israeli forces have killed seven Palestinians in the Gaza Strip in an apparently botched undercover raid and ensuing firefight that has threatened to destroy a precarious, unofficial ceasefire.

'An Israeli lieutenant colonel was killed and another officer wounded in the operation on Sunday night in south-east Gaza, the first known ground incursion there by Israeli forces since the last war in 2014.

'In apparent response to the gunfight, more than a dozen rockets were launched from the Hamas-controlled enclave overnight...

'In a second round of what appeared to be retaliatory attacks, militants in Gaza fired a barrage of rockets and mortar bombs deep into Israeli territory on Monday afternoon, hitting a bus and severely wounding a 19-year-old, according to Israeli media. The Israeli army said 80 projectiles had been launched.

'...Israeli fighter jets began bombing what it said were "terror targets" in Gaza.

' Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, released a statement overnight claiming Israeli forces had "infiltrated this evening in a civilian car" and had opened fire on a group of its armed men near the city of Khan Younis, killing one of its commanders. Its fighters had given chase as the vehicle sped away, it said.

'During the pursuit, Israeli aircraft had "carried out bombardments to cover the withdrawal of this force", it added.

'Medics and Hamas officials said at least seven people were killed, four of them militants, including the Hamas commander Nour Baraka.

'Israel had largely abandoned its tactic of targeting senior Hamas officials in recent years. Its military said in a short statement: "During an IDF [Israel Defence Forces] Special Forces operational activity in the Gaza Strip, an exchange of fire evolved."

'One officer was killed and a second was wounded, it said. The IDF said later that the "special operation yesterday was not intended to kill or abduct terrorists, but to strengthen Israeli security", without specifying how.

'Israeli media reported the operation had been to gather intelligence. The public radio station Kan reported IDF special forces had their cover blown as a result of a technical malfunction, and became pinned down.

'Residents in the area where the fighting took place said the car being driven by the soldiers, some of whom were dressed as women, had been stopped by Baraka, who asked for identification. The soldiers shot him with a silenced gun before speeding to an olive grove, where they were extricated by helicopter. Hamas militants in pursuit had been bombed by air, residents said, and Israeli aircraft destroyed the car used by its forces once they had left. Later on Monday a Hamas member in the neighborhood refused to comment on the accounts.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ The Guardian, 'Eight dead in undercover Israeli operation in Gaza', 12 November 2018, [url](#)

8.3.9 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) world report of events in 2018, published in January 2019 stated that:

‘As of November 19, lethal force by Israeli forces resulted in the killing of 252 and injuring of 25,522 Palestinians in Gaza, OCHA reported. Many of the injuries were life-changing, including hundreds of cases of severe soft tissue damage, some necessitating amputation of limbs. Most of the killings took place in the context of protests, where Israeli forces, following orders from senior officials, used live ammunition against people who approached or attempted to cross or damage fences between Gaza and Israel. Israeli officials rejected the international human rights law standard in policing situations that prohibits the intentional use of lethal force except as a last resort to prevent an imminent threat to life. They argued that live ammunition was necessary to stop breaches of the fences, which they claimed was a Hamas strategy to enable militants to kill or capture Israelis, without sufficiently addressing why lesser measures would not have worked.’¹²⁶

8.3.10 For weekly updates as to the security situation in the Gaza Strip and how it impacts on the human rights of civilians see:

- Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), [Weekly Reports](#)
- UN OCHA, [Protection of Civilians reports](#)

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8.4 Groups operating in Gaza

8.4.1 Currently, the following groups operate in Gaza and are considered to be proscribed terrorist organisations by the Home Office: Hizballah, Abu Nidal Organisation (ANO), Palestinian Islamic Jihad – Shaqaqi (PIJ) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC). Further information can be found [here](#).

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9. Freedom of movement

9.1 Blockade

9.1.1 Encyclopaedia Britannica explained:

‘In autumn 2007 Israel declared the Gaza Strip under Hamas a hostile entity and approved a series of sanctions that included power cuts, heavily restricted imports, and border closures. In January 2008, facing sustained rocket assaults into its southern settlements, Israel broadened its sanctions, completely sealing its border with the Gaza Strip and temporarily preventing fuel imports. Later that month, after nearly a week of the intensified Israeli blockade, Hamas’s forces demolished portions of the barrier along the Gaza Strip–Egypt border (closed from Hamas’s mid-2007 takeover until 2011), opening gaps through which, according to some estimates, hundreds of thousands of Gazans passed into Egypt to purchase food, fuel, and goods unavailable under the blockade. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak temporarily permitted the breach to alleviate civilian hardship in Gaza before efforts could begin to restore the border.

¹²⁶ HRW, ‘World Report 2019: Israel and Palestine, Events of 2018’, 17 January 2019, [url](#)

'In the years after the Israeli blockade on Gaza was instated, an organization known as the Free Gaza Movement made a number of maritime efforts to breach it. The first such mission—which consisted of a pair of vessels bearing medical supplies and some 45 activists—was permitted to reach Gaza in August 2008, and four missions in subsequent months were also successful. In May 2010 a flotilla bound for Gaza was the scene of a clash between activists and Israeli commandos in which 9 of the more than 600 activists involved were killed.

'Under Mubarak, Egypt's cooperation in enforcing the blockade was deeply unpopular with the Egyptian public. In May 2011, four months after a popular uprising in Egypt forced Mubarak to step down as president, Egypt's interim government announced that it would permanently reopen the Rafah border crossing, allowing Palestinians to pass between Egypt and Gaza. About 1,200 people were allowed to cross the border daily, though it remained closed for trade. However, in the turmoil following the ouster of Egyptian Pres. Mohammed Morsi in the summer of 2013, traffic through the border crossing was reduced to 50 people per day because of security concerns and was later closed altogether.'¹²⁷

9.1.2 The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) stated:

'Israel has imposed movement restrictions on the Gaza strip since the early 1990's. Restrictions intensified in June 2007, following the takeover of that part of the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) by Hamas, when Israel imposed a land, sea and air blockade on Gaza, citing security concerns. Despite relaxation of some blockade-related restrictions in recent years, 1.8 million Palestinians in Gaza remain "locked in", denied free access to the remainder of the territory and the outside world. The blockade has undermined the living conditions in the coastal enclave and fragmented the oPt and its economic and social fabric. The isolation of Gaza has been exacerbated by restrictions imposed by the Egyptian authorities on Rafah, its single passengers crossing.'¹²⁸

9.1.3 The UNOCHA noted, 'The UN Secretary-General has found that the blockade and related restrictions contravene international humanitarian law as they target and impose hardship on the civilian population, effectively penalizing them for acts they have not committed. Major escalations of hostilities in the past years have resulted in extensive destruction and internal displacement.'¹²⁹

9.1.4 Amnesty International noted in its 2017/2018 yearly report, 'The state of the world's human rights':

'Israel's illegal air, land and sea blockade of the Gaza Strip entered its 11th year, continuing the long-standing restrictions on the movement of people and goods into and from the area, collectively punishing Gaza's entire population.

¹²⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Gaza Strip', 6 September 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁸ UNOCHA, 'Gaza Blockade', undated, [url](#)

¹²⁹ UNOCHA, 'Gaza Strip', undated, [url](#)

‘Combined with Egypt’s almost total closure of the Rafah border crossing, and the West Bank authorities’ punitive measures, Israel’s blockade triggered a humanitarian crisis with electricity cuts reducing access to electricity from an average of eight hours per day down to as little as two to four hours, affecting clean water and sanitation and diminishing health service access, and rendering Gaza increasingly “unlivable” according to the UN.’¹³⁰

9.1.5 The DFAT report of March 2017 stated:

‘The movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza is restricted by Israel and Egypt due to security concerns and has reduced economic activity and livelihoods. Israel’s maritime blockade of Gaza has affected the fishing industry, which was traditionally a key source of income. Gaza’s fishing boats are restricted from venturing beyond six nautical miles (11.1 kilometres) from the shoreline, heavily constraining commercial fishing. Access to external markets and the flow of economic goods in and out of the West Bank through Israel is also restricted. Under the Protocol on Economic Relations (also known as the Paris Protocol), signed by Israel and the Palestinian Territories following the Oslo Accords, Israel collects revenues (including import taxes and value added tax) on behalf of the Palestinian Authority and transfers them on a monthly basis. In the first quarter of 2015 Israel withheld all transfers and according to the World Bank, the Palestinian Authority loses USD285 million annually under the arrangement.’¹³¹

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9.2 Entry/exit into Gaza

9.2.1 The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs stated on 19 October 2018:

‘Longstanding restrictions on the movement of people and goods to and from Gaza have undermined the living conditions of about two million Palestinians in that area. Many of the restrictions, originally imposed by Israel in the early 1990s, were intensified after June 2007, following the Hamas takeover of Gaza and the imposition of a blockade. These restrictions continue to reduce access to livelihoods, essential services and housing, disrupt family life, and undermine people’s hopes for a secure and prosperous future.’¹³²

9.2.2 The USSD report noted:

‘The PA, Hamas, and Israel generally cooperated with humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons and refugees. Nonetheless, Israeli officials imposed controls on movement of materials, goods, and persons into and out of Gaza and, as a result, constrained UNRWA’s ability to operate in Gaza. AI and HRW reported difficulties by foreign workers in obtaining Israeli visas, which affected the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the West Bank and Gaza. AI and HRW also reported that the Israeli government denied their

¹³⁰ AI, ‘The state of the world’s human rights - 2017/18 yearly report’, page 208, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹ DFAT, ‘Thematic Report’, Section 2 paras 2.6 and 2.14, 15 March 2017, [url](#)

¹³² UNOCHA, ‘Gaza Crossings’ Operations Status: Monthly’, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

employees permits to enter Gaza. On October 30, the Israeli government denied entry to the West Bank to an AI employee who planned to visit relatives in the West Bank and Israel. AI claimed the employee was questioned about his work with AI prior being denied entry on public security grounds.¹³³

9.2.3 The USSD report observed:

‘The PA basic law provides for freedom of movement, but the PA at times effectively restricted freedom of movement into Israel for Gazans by declining to make referrals to Israeli authorities on their behalf. Between April and June, the PA Ministry of Health decreased the number of referrals it issued to Gazan residents in need of medical care in Israel. Following the death of three infants unable to leave Gaza for medical care, the PA reversed its permit cuts.’¹³⁴

9.2.4 UNHCR noted in their February 2018 report, ‘Country of Origin Information on the Situation in the Gaza Strip, Including on Restrictions on Exit and Return’:

‘Travel to and from the Gaza Strip is subject to severe restrictions and is only possible via the territory’s two land crossing points, namely the Erez Crossing and the Rafah Crossing. As a result, very few Gazans are able to travel outside of the Gaza Strip. Most Palestinians in the Gaza Strip remain unable to access the remainder of the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and other parts of the world, with only a minority eligible for exit permits via Israel.’¹³⁵

9.2.5 For more information on entries and exits between 2006 to 2018, see the [UNOCHA Rafah crossing dashboard](#), the [UN OCHA Erez crossing dashboard](#), and [UN OCHA’s Gaza Crossing Database](#).

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9.3 Erez crossing

9.3.1 The UNCHR report reported that, ‘The “Erez” Crossing (Beit Hanoun in Arabic), controlled by Israel, is located between Israel and the Gaza Strip on the northern border of the Strip and serves mainly as a point of passage for people travelling between the Gaza Strip and Israel as well as those seeking to reach the West Bank or third countries’.¹³⁶

9.3.2 The Humanitarian Response Strategy noted, ‘Although the number of Palestinians allowed to leave Gaza through the Israeli-controlled Erez crossing increased after the 2014 hostilities, the figures have declined significantly again since the second half of 2016, with the figure for November 2017 some 47 per cent below the 2016 average’.¹³⁷

¹³³ USSD, ‘Country reports ... for 2017’ West Bank and Gaza, (Section 2d), April 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁴ USSD, ‘Country reports ... for 2017’ West Bank and Gaza, (Section 2d), April 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁵ UNHCR, ‘... Situation in the Gaza Strip ...’, (section IV, pages 22 and 23), 23 February 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁶ UNHCR, ‘... Situation in the Gaza Strip ...’, (section IV, pages 22 and 23), 23 February 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁷ Humanitarian Response Strategy, ‘Jan–Dec 2018 Hum’tarian response plan’, (p6), Dec 2017, [url](#)

9.3.3 The DFAT report noted, 'Erez crossing is open for passenger traffic entering Israel between 7.30am and 3.00pm each day, and for passenger traffic exiting Israel from 7.30am to 7.00pm each day.'¹³⁸

9.3.4 The UNHCR report noted:

'Only pre-determined categories of Gaza Strip residents such as persons with urgent medical needs and their companions, businesspeople, employees of international organizations and individuals with specific humanitarian needs are eligible to receive permits to temporarily enter Israel via the Erez Crossing, subject to security checks. Israeli authorities are reported to have increasingly limited the movement of Palestinians out of the Gaza Strip. In recent years, an increasing number of applications has reportedly either been delayed or rejected, including for medical patients, patient companions, and those travelling for business reasons. Furthermore, employees of international humanitarian and human rights organizations are reportedly subjected to increasing restrictions on their movement, with significant negative implications for these organizations' ability to operate and implement vital projects. Permits are reportedly frequently rejected without reasons or with reference only to security grounds. Observers consider the practice arbitrary and have called for individualized assessments and opportunities to appeal negative decisions. Since mid-May 2017, and based on new regulations, which came into effect in mid-November 2017, the processing time for applications to enter Israel (including for travel to the West Bank and abroad) has been extended to up to 70 working days, depending on the reasons for travel. Starting in 2017, individuals who have received the approval to travel abroad or to return from abroad must use a shuttle service between Erez and Allenby Bridge Crossings, accompanied by a representative of the Palestinian Civil Affairs Committee. The bus service is reportedly only available once a week.

'In February 2016, Israel reportedly instated a practice whereby any resident of the Gaza Strip is eligible to receive a permit to travel abroad via Erez and Allenby Bridge crossings if he/she signs a written commitment not to return for a period of one year. Those who return after the passing of one year will reportedly be issued a single, one-way permit to return to the Gaza Strip. A return before the end of the one-year period is only possible for humanitarian reasons and is at the discretion of the concerned Israeli authorities. Gaza Strip residents who did not intend to be away for one year have reportedly also been made to sign the commitment as a condition for receiving their permit, even if they had already been approved for a permit of a temporary nature.

'According to reports, Palestinians travelling via Erez Crossing have to undergo routine security interviews. According to reports, the frequency and intensity of such interviews have increased over the past years and regularly result in the detention for alleged security reasons. Instances of ill-treatment and pressure to collaborate and/or disclose information about the security situation in the Gaza Strip, their relatives and friends in exchange for permits have been reported by human rights organizations. Refusal to cooperate reportedly often results in the denial of the permit. Israeli authorities have

¹³⁸ DFAT, 'Thematic Report', Section 2 paras 2.49, 15 March 2017, [url](#)

also been reported to revoke permits to enter Israel en masse in response to attacks on Israelis involving Palestinians; such measures have been referred to by the UN as amounting to “collective punishment”.¹³⁹

9.3.5 In November 2018, Gisha reported:

‘Erez crossing resumed regular operations today after a week of restrictions from the Palestinian side, with security forces in Gaza only allowing patients and special cases to exit the Strip since November 12.

‘Erez crossing operated for a total of 19 days during the month of October. The crossings operation’s were severely disrupted two days in the middle of the month when Israel closed Erez in response to rockets landing in Israel’s territory as well as on the day when the Israeli municipal elections were held. On these days, Israel allowed access for some humanitarian cases and foreign nationals. The crossing was also completely closed on the Jewish holiday of Sukkot.

‘A total of 10,187 exits by Palestinians were recorded during October, with an increased number of exits by medical patients and merchants. This figure is 71 percent higher than the monthly average of exits last year when the closure was severely tightened, yet still 29 percent lower than the monthly average number of exits in 2015.’¹⁴⁰

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9.4 **Kherem Shalom crossing**

9.4.1 The DFAT report noted in 2017, ‘Kherem Shalom crossing is open for transportation of goods from 7.00am to 4.00pm on Sunday to Thursday.’¹⁴¹

9.4.2 The Coordination of government activities in the territories (COGAT) stated:

‘In keeping with the policy set by Israel, every day an average of 800 trucks enter the Gaza Strip carrying food, medical equipment, fuel, building materials, agricultural inputs, textile products and more. Representatives of the Palestinian Authority, who then work with the CLA to coordinate logistics and clearance, request the items imported into Gaza.

‘These goods are crucial for the Gazan economy and the needs of the civilian population. Building materials are used for constructing and renovating houses, public institutions and international projects; medical equipment assists in the activities of hospitals and clinics; fuel and gas contribute to the development of the energy sector; and these are only partial examples.

‘In recent years there has been a significant increase in the quantity of goods entering Gaza. Consequently, Israel has invested considerable resources to upgrade the technical and logistical capabilities of Kerem Shalom from both a security and capacity perspective. Besides importing goods to Gaza, Kerem Shalom Crossing is also used for exporting goods from Gaza. This is part of the efforts made by the CLA to support the Gazan economy. At this

¹³⁹ UNHCR, ‘... Situation in the Gaza Strip ...’, (pages 23, 24 and 25), 23 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ Gisha, ‘Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings resume “normal” operations’, 19 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ DFAT, ‘Thematic Report’, Section 2 paras 2.49, 15 March 2017, [url](#)

stage, Gaza produces mainly agricultural products, iron, paper, and furniture. These goods are then sold in Israel, in Judea and Samaria, and internationally.¹⁴²

- 9.4.3 On 10 July 2018, the BBC reported the closure of Kherem Shalom crossing, due to the arson attacks on Israeli land during the ‘Great March of return’ demonstrations. The report noted that Hamas ‘called on the international community to intervene immediately to prevent what it called a “new crime against humanity” and, ‘The Israeli non-governmental organisation Gisha, which promotes freedom of movement for Palestinians, also condemned the Israeli decision’.¹⁴³
- 9.4.4 The Israeli organisation Gisha noted on 12 July 2018 ‘Under the renewed restrictions on movement of goods, only items Israel deems “humanitarian” will be allowed to enter Gaza; mainly fuel, food, some medical equipment and medicine, livestock, and animal feed. All other goods are now forbidden from entering, including items such as construction materials, clothing, blankets, mattresses, water pumps, spare parts, generators and more.’¹⁴⁴

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9.5 Rafah crossing

- 9.5.1 The UNHCR report noted that ‘The “Rafah” Crossing is located at the southern end of the Gaza Strip bordering Egypt and controlled by Egyptian authorities. While it is the Israeli and Egyptian authorities who are primarily controlling movements at their respective border crossings, the Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip reportedly also restricted travel to and from the territory in some cases’.¹⁴⁵
- 9.5.2 The DFAT report stated:
- ‘Rafah is the only crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. Following the overthrow of Hamas’ close ally, Mohammed Morsi, in July 2013 the new Egyptian administration, under the leadership of President Abdel Fatah el-Sisi, implemented restrictions on the movement of Gazans into Egypt through Rafah. As a result, the Rafah crossing has mostly been closed since mid-2013 and movement in and out of Gaza is very difficult for most Gazans. Nonetheless many residents continue to seek opportunities to exit Gaza, including for access to specialised health care and employment. In the first half of 2016 the Rafah crossing was only open for 11 days, with a monthly average of 1,896 exits and entries, compared to 40,816 crossings on average per month in the first half of 2013. There are currently thousands of Palestinians registered with UNHCR as humanitarian cases waiting to leave Gaza through Rafah. Israel sometimes permits Gaza residents to travel abroad through the Erez crossing and then the Allenby Bridge crossing into Jordan: in the first half of 2016 an average of 243 Gazans per month exited

¹⁴² COGAT, Kerem Shalom crossing, undated, [url](#)

¹⁴³ BBC, ‘Israel closes main Gaza goods crossing in response to arson attacks’, 10 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ Gisha, ‘decision to close Kerem Shalom crossing: Blatant collective punishment’, 12 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵ UNHCR, ‘... Situation in the Gaza Strip ...’, (pages 23, 24 and 25), 23 February 2018 [url](#)

this way. However, Jordan has also been known to enforce restrictions that prevent Gazans from crossing the Allenby Bridge.

‘Some residents of Gaza use informal means to exit and enter Gaza. An illegal tunnel system is used to smuggle people and goods in and out of the Gaza Strip to Egypt. The volume of this traffic is difficult to measure given that it is done covertly. Israeli and Egyptian authorities are actively engaged in finding and destroying the tunnel system.’¹⁴⁶

9.5.3 The UNHCR report observed:

‘...only people of specific categories, including medical patients, religious pilgrims, foreign residents and foreign visa holders, including students, can register on a waiting list held by the authorities in the Gaza Strip pending reopening of the crossing. Individuals seeking to be prioritized to leave the Gaza Strip to Egypt during one of the rare openings of the border have reportedly been asked to pay large sums to brokers and border officials. Gaza Strip residents approved for travel by the authorities in Gaza do not require a visa to enter Egypt.

‘Between April and July 2017, the border crossing was reportedly completely closed for exit from the Gaza Strip, representing the longest period of complete closure for those wishing to leave the Strip since 2007. In 2017, the border crossing opened on only 36 days, representing the lowest number after 2015, when the Rafah Crossing opened for only 32 days. Since the handover of control from Hamas to the Palestinian Authority on 1 November 2017, the crossing has reportedly only been temporarily opened on a few occasions and limited to urgent humanitarian cases.

‘Palestinians reportedly do not require a visa in order to return to the Gaza Strip via Egypt. However, in order to avoid liabilities, airlines reportedly only allow Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to board a plane to Egypt if there is a scheduled opening of the Rafah Crossing. Palestinians who arrive in Egypt from a third country en route back to the Gaza Strip reportedly risk being held at Cairo Airport until the Rafah Crossing is opened. Palestinians travelling via Egypt to/from the Gaza Strip are reportedly escorted from Cairo Airport to the Rafah Crossing and vice versa. Egypt reportedly denies entry to the Gaza Strip for Palestinians who do not hold a Palestinian identity card or passport indicating his/her residency in the Gaza Strip, which requires the individual’s inclusion in the Israeli-administered population registry.

‘As a result of the sustained near-closure of the Rafah Crossing, significant numbers of Palestinians reportedly remain stranded on both sides of the border, including many with urgent medical needs seeking medical care outside the Gaza Strip.

‘Some residents of the Gaza Strip reportedly use tunnels to exit and enter the Gaza Strip. Both the Israeli and Egyptian authorities are engaged in locating and destroying the tunnel system.’¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ DFAT, ‘Thematic Report’, Section 2 paras 2.50 and 2.51, 15 March 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ UNHCR, ‘... Situation in the Gaza Strip ...’, (pages 25, 26 and 27), 23 February 2018, [url](#)

9.5.4 However, the Rafah crossing has been open more frequently during 2018 than 2017, being open half of the time with a total of more than 80,000 entries and exits between January and October 2018¹⁴⁸.

9.5.5 In December 2018, UNOCHA reported 3,620 entries into Gaza through the Rafah crossing, whilst there were 5,707 exits. The crossing was open for 22 days in total and closed for 9.¹⁴⁹

9.5.6 A BBC monitoring article reported on 7 January 2019:

‘The Hamas-run interior ministry has taken control of the Rafah Crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt after the Palestinian Authority’s security forces withdrew from the crossing, the Palestinian Maan news agency reported on 7 January.

‘The Palestinian Authority (PA) announced on 6 January that it is pulling back all its employees stationed at the Rafah border crossing due to recent "measures" by Hamas.’¹⁵⁰

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9.6 Movement within Gaza

9.6.1 The USSD report noted:

‘Hamas authorities did not enforce routine restrictions on internal movement within Gaza, although there were some areas of Gaza to which Hamas prohibited access. Increased pressure to conform to Hamas’s interpretation of Islamic norms generally restricted movement by women.

‘The ISF (Israeli Security Forces) routinely detained for several hours Palestinians residing in Gaza who had permits to enter Israel for business, and subjected them to interrogations and strip searches at Israeli-controlled checkpoints.’¹⁵¹

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¹⁴⁸ UNOCHA, OPT (Data / Gaza Crossings) undated, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ UNOCHA, ‘Gaza crossings: movement of people and goods’, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ BBC Monitoring, ‘Hamas takes control of Gaza crossing ...’, 7 Jan 2019, subscription required, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ USSD, Country reports ... for 2017’ West Bank and Gaza, (Section 2d), April 2018, [url](#)

Terms of reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToRs, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Overview
 - Geography and demography
 - History
- Protagonists
 - Hamas
 - Palestine Authorities (PA)
 - Israeli authorities
- Humanitarian situation
 - Overview
 - Refugee camps
- Health care
 - Overview
 - Ministry of Health provision
 - UNRWA provision
 - Water, sanitation and electricity
 - Employment, financial security and the economy
 - Food security
 - Education
 - Humanitarian situation: Internally Displaced Persons (IDPS)
Numbers
 - Refugee camps
- Humanitarian support
 - UNRWA
 - INGOs/NGOs
 - Restrictions on support
- Security situation
 - Overview
 - 'Great March of return'

- Security incidents
 - Groups operating in Gaza
- Freedom of movement
 - Blockade
 - Entry/Exit into Gaza
 - Erez crossing
 - Kherem Shalom crossing
 - Rafah crossing
 - Movement within Gaza

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Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **2.0**
- valid from **5 March 2019**

Changes from last version of this note

Update of COI and policy.

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