

Famine and Fragility: Food Insecurity and Conflict in Gaza

Ally Wilmot

Introduction

The World Food Programme has identified that 100% of people within Palestine face acute levels of food insecurity with 70,000 of children in Gaza in need of urgent treatment for acute malnutrition. A year into the ongoing conflict, the United Nations Development Programme identified the humanitarian crisis to have reached a catastrophic level. The present increase in hunger risk in Gaza results from the ongoing conflict beginning on October 7, 2023.

Current Socioeconomic Situation

According to a UN Trade and Development report, the economic crisis in Gaza has been worsening at a continuous rate. The West Bank's economy has been severely impaired due to violence and trade restrictions imposed. Conflict within Gaza has led to unprecedented loss of life, displacement, and widespread destruction of infrastructure. Each of these contribute to the economic crisis, with Gaza's GDP having decreased 81 percent. The current fiscal strain endured by the region is hindering the Palestinian government's ability to function. The UN Trade and Development report declares that as of early 2024 between 80 percent to 96 percent of the agricultural assets in the region had been eliminated. The decimation of irrigation systems, machinery, orchards, storage facilities, and livestock farms is destroying the region's food production capacity and exacerbating the already extreme levels of food insecurity. In addition, the conflict within Gaza has had a tremendous impact on education, healthcare, social services, and the environment.

A blockade into the region of Gaza resumed on March 2, 2025 as a result of the ongoing conflict in the region. The blockade has made it challenging for aid organizations to reach the people of Gaza and provide aid. The blockade is only causing the risk of famine to continually increase and flourish across Gaza. The ongoing famine is devastating Gaza's most vulnerable populations particularly pregnant and breastfeeding women and young children. Without immediate access to aid and nutrition, the long-term consequences will be profound and potentially irreversible for future generations. Food insecurity alone poses a critical threat, but when coupled with poor nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life, a window vital to healthy physical and cognitive development, the risks multiply exponentially.

The biological implications are deeply intergenerational. When a pregnant woman is malnourished, especially if she is carrying a daughter, the nutritional deficits extend beyond the child to future generations, as female fetuses develop their lifetime supply of reproductive eggs in utero. This makes maternal and early childhood nutrition not only a humanitarian priority but a generational one.

According to the United Nations Development Programme, 99% of households with pregnant women in Gaza report difficulty accessing essential nutritional products and supplements. The World Health Organization further warns that nearly 17,000 children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition; an alarming figure that demands urgent global attention. Intensifying the socioeconomic crisis Gazans are currently enduring, the conflict taking place in the area is directly harming agricultural systems, water access, and livestock farms. The FAO has advocated great concern due to significant losses of livestock, which are necessary for the livelihoods and basic survival of Gazans. Additionally, there has been a notable water shortage in northern Gaza. In northern Gaza, there has been a loss of access to water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities which have resulted in various systems for water production and wastewater collection inoperable. As military operations continue, The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs states that the continuing hostilities are significantly hindering the ability to access essential resources for tens of thousands of civilians.

Recommendations and Long-Term Outlook

Presently, there are organizations working hard to provide humanitarian aid in Gaza. For example, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) is dedicated to doing all they can to provide aid in Gaza regardless of obstacles they may face. The IRC is providing clean drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services, malnutrition counseling and treatment for children and their caregivers, and protection programs that improve the safety and wellbeing of women and children. Additionally, UNICEF is working to increase and sustain water production in Gaza as well as working to provide critical nutrition services. However, the aid blockade that was re-established on March 2, 2025 has proven to be quite the challenge for these organizations. The blockade directly hinders the ability for aid to cross into Gaza, at the very minimum, when it comes to increasing the amount of aid available in Gaza lifting the blockade would be revolutionary when it comes to aid providing.

For more long-term, sustainable solutions, a ceasefire is a necessary step. As conditions currently are with the conflict, it would be impossible to rebuild infrastructure, health systems, education systems, water access, and agricultural systems. Rebuilding these systems are entirely necessary to the long-term success of Gaza and the generations of Palestinians to come. Right now, the region of Gaza is in an extreme famine, and without the rebuilding of these structures, their survival would be greatly threatened.

Takeaways

The hunger situation in Gaza is dire. While efforts to provide aid are being made, the resources being provided by aid organizations certainly do not eliminate the threat of famine and malnutrition. Attempting to rebuild agricultural systems and infrastructure or salvaging water systems is crucial to aiding the food insecurity in the region, however, the ongoing conflict and violence makes it nearly impossible to sustainably rebuild in the area without immense risk of immediate destruction. For these reasons, a ceasefire in the conflict would be imperative to sustainable intervention and development for food and social systems in Gaza, as well as rebuilding the community and economy in a sufficient way. In the meantime, 100 percent of people in Gaza are hungry and at risk of malnutrition, without a ceasefire and sustainable intervention, this will undeniably impact the entire population of Gazans for generations to come.

References

“Children in Gaza Need Life-Saving Support.” *Unicef*, 12 Jul. 2025,

<https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/children-gaza-need-lifesaving-support>.

Crisis in Gaza: What to Know and How to Help | *The IRC*. 10 Jul. 2025,

<https://www.rescue.org/crisis-in-gaza>.

Economic Crisis Worsens in Occupied Palestinian Territory amid Ongoing Gaza Conflict |

UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD). 12 Sep. 2024,

<https://unctad.org/news/economic-crisis-worsens-occupied-palestinian-territory-amid-ongoing-gaza-conflict>.

Gaza War: Expected Socio-Economic Impacts on the State of Palestine October 2024. Oct.

2024,

<https://www.undp.org/papp/publications/gaza-war-expected-socio-economic-impacts-state-palestine-october-2024>.

Over 1.8 Million in Gaza Face Extreme Hunger | *UN News*. 17 Oct. 2024,

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/10/1155836>.

Palestine | World Food Programme. <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/palestine-emergency>.

People in Gaza Starving, Sick and Dying as Aid Blockade Continues.

<https://www.who.int/news/item/12-05-2025-people-in-gaza-starving--sick-and-dying-as-aid-blockade-continues>.

“Why 1,000 Days?” *1,000 Days*, <https://thousanddays.org/why-1000-days/>.