



**MAS**

PALESTINE ECONOMIC POLICY  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE (MAS)

# Food Insecurity Bulletin

Issue 29 Autumn and Winter 2023





**MAS**

PALESTINE ECONOMIC POLICY  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE (MAS)

# **FOOD INSECURITY BULLETIN**

**Issues 29 - Autumn and Winter 2023**



PALESTINE ECONOMIC POLICY  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE (MAS)

**Biannual Bulletin Published by:**  
Palestine Economic Policy  
Research Institute (MAS)

Tel: +972 (2) 298 7053/4 | Fax: +972 (2) 298 7055  
info@mas.ps | www.mas.ps

**Research team:**

**Supervision :** Raja Khalidi

**Assistant Researchers:**

Iman Saadeh  
Anmar Rafeedie

**In this Issue...**



<b>Editorial</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Highlights</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. Latest Updates on Food Insecurity (Until February 2024)</b>	<b>4</b>
The Israeli Occupation Uses Starvation as a Weapon in its Aggression on the Gaza Strip	<b>4</b>
The Lack of Availability of Potable Water and the Contamination of Water Sources in the Gaza Strip as a Long-term Colonial Policy and Weapon in the Aggression	<b>5</b>
The Israeli War Machine Destroys Livelihoods and Targets the Food Basket in the Gaza Strip	<b>8</b>
<b>2. Developments regarding Food Prices in Palestine and across the Globe</b>	<b>10</b>
Global Food Prices (July 2023- December 2023)	<b>10</b>
Food Prices in Palestinian Markets (July 2023- December 2023)	<b>13</b>
<b>3. Literature Review</b>	<b>17</b>
Food Security under the Occupation: Studies on the Weaponization of Hunger	<b>17</b>
Israeli Starvation Policies	<b>18</b>
Starvation in International Law	<b>19</b>









---

## I Editorial

### **Absolute Food Insecurity in Palestine is the Goal, and Weaponization of Hunger the Means, of the Israeli War on Palestine**

Since 2009, the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) has periodically published the Food Security Bulletin as a voluntary contribution from its resources to support the efforts of the Food Security Sector in Palestine. The Bulletin aims to support decision-makers and institutions operating in improving the conditions of this sector and serves as a periodic useful reference for reviewing developments in and comparing the conditions of the sector. It is only one of MAS's research and scientific contributions to the subject that has seized constant attention in recent years, especially through research projects carried out in collaboration with partners such as the World Food Program (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

This issue of the Bulletin comes at a time when the genocidal war waged by the Israeli occupation has been going on for five months. This war, in which various international laws and conventions intended to safeguard the rights of peoples in wars and armed conflicts are violated, has left over 30,000 dead, over 71,000 wounded, and approximately 2,000,000 displaced persons. This is not to mention the targeting of hospitals, medical staff, and ambulances, resulting in a significant shortage of health facilities and depriving Gazans of accessing necessary medical treatment.

Given these disastrous conditions witnessed by the Strip, this Issue has been retitled as the Food Insecurity Bulletin, to shed light on the deployment by the Israeli occupation of starvation as a weapon in the war it is waging on the Strip, and Palestine.

The Israeli aggression is characterized not only by the scale of using excessive military force against unarmed civilians but also by the utilization of brutal collective punishments intended to render Gaza uninhabitable, such as domicile and war by starvation, thus creating conditions favorable to the spread of diseases and epidemics. In particular concerning the provision of edible food as a fundamental component of human life, the Israeli occupation has used starvation as a weapon of warfare, rendering the whole population of the Gaza Strip in near-famine conditions, as stated by relevant international institutions. All of this has been accompanied by the targeting of agricultural land and fishing boats as part of a systematic plan designed to undermine the production infrastructure in the Strip.

This war marks the culmination of the long-term colonial policies that have contributed to the deprivation of the population of the Gaza Strip of clean potable water and targeted the livelihoods and food basket of the Strip. Moreover, this issue of the Bulletin reviews the most salient developments concerning global and local food prices, with local food prices being largely affected following the prevention by



---

the Israeli occupation of the entry of foodstuffs into the Strip, whether through commercial importing or in the form of humanitarian aid. Prices have been also affected locally in the West Bank markets given the state of uncertainty pertaining to the war on the Gaza Strip and the impact on traditional food supplies largely associated with the Israeli occupation. While the Bulletin primarily references data through the first three months of the war, the course of the war in subsequent months and immediate prospects regrettably confirm the grim outlook and the shocking numbers reviewed here.

In its third section, the Bulletin revisits the theoretical discussion in relevant literature on the use of starvation as a weapon in instances of war, with a focus on the use by the Israeli occupation of the policy of blockade, considered a major threat to food security, through undermining the various components of food security. This section also refers to the documents clarifying the Israeli occupation policy since 2007 intended to starve the population of the Gaza Strip without causing a famine. Under this policy, the Israeli occupation calculates the calories needed to only ensure the subsistence of the population of the Gaza Strip and accordingly allows the entry of a certain number of truckloads of food into the Strip. This section also addresses a set of rules in international law “governing” instances of occupation, including the obligations of the occupying state vis-à-vis the occupied. It examines several studies that have referred to the deployment by the Israeli occupation of starvation as a weapon in the wars it has launched against the Gaza Strip, including in the ongoing war.



## Highlights

- In its war on the Gaza Strip, the Israeli occupation has employed starvation as a weapon, preventing the entry of food, water, and fuel into the Gaza Strip. As noted by Oxfam, in the wake of the complete closure imposed on the Gaza Strip since October 2023, only 2% of the needs of the population of the Gaza Strip are allowed entry to the Strip.
- The outcomes of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report (dated 22 December) point out that 90% of the Gaza population in the northern districts spend a whole day and a whole night without food, including as much as 20% of the population who remained without food for 10 days out of 30 days.
- The per capita water consumption has dropped to 1-3 liters per day in the course of the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip. Such a drop has occurred as part of the starvation policy employed by the Israeli occupation as a weapon against the population of the Gaza Strip.
- As a result of the destruction inflicted upon infrastructure by Israeli aggression, approximately 130,000 cubic meters of untreated wastewater from the Gaza Strip are discharged into the Mediterranean daily. Approximately 65 wastewater pumps have stopped functioning and all wastewater treatment plants and systems, which total 6, have stopped functioning completely due to blocking the power supply and the lack of fuel. The lack of fuel has also disrupted the wastewater treatment plants.
- During the period from 8 December 2023 to 7 February 2024, the whole population of the Gaza Strip, (totaling approximately 2.2 million), was classified in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis or worse). This marks the highest percentage of people ever facing high levels of acute food insecurity in any region or country.
- During the first three months of the aggression, the Cost-of-Living Index (CLI) has experienced an unprecedented rise, particularly in the Gaza Strip. CLI in Palestine has registered a rise of 10% since the onset of the aggression on the Gaza Strip, corresponding to 2.57% for October, 3.50% for November, and later 3.49% for December.
- Access to food in the Gaza Strip is governed by two fundamental factors: first, the rising food prices as a result of the food transport price inflation and reliance on goods imported from Israel, and second, the declining purchase power of individuals as a result of the lack of well-paying jobs and poor investment and business opportunities.



## I Latest Updates on Food Insecurity (Until February 2024)

### ◆ The Israeli Occupation Uses Starvation as a Weapon in its Aggression on the Gaza Strip<sup>1</sup>

The Israeli occupation has used starvation as a weapon in its war on the Gaza Strip, preventing the entry of food, water, and fuel into the Strip. As noted by Oxfam, following the complete closure imposed on the Gaza Strip on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October, only 2% of the needs of the Gaza Strip population has entered the Strip. While only very scant and insufficient assistance was allowed entry to the Strip, commercial importing to the Strip was banned. As this aggression continues, over 2 million people are in desperate need of food and cannot access it under catastrophic humanitarian conditions as a result of the war.

After over two months of aggression, half of the Gaza population faces acute hunger. The outcomes of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report (dated 22 December) point out that 90% of the Gaza population in the northern districts spend a whole day and a whole night without food, including as much as 20% who remained without food for 10 days out of 30 days. In the southern districts, one out of every two people only depends on humanitarian aid to feed his household.<sup>2</sup> This report concludes that the Gaza Strip is on the brink of famine should the blocking of the supply of food, fuel, water, and electricity to the Strip continue as it is.<sup>3</sup>

Before the eruption of the current aggression, one truck of aid was allowed to enter the Gaza Strip (via the Israeli crossings) every 14 minutes, corresponding to approximately 104 trucks a day.<sup>4</sup> As for the commercial Rafah crossing between the Strip and Egypt, during the last year before the war, it saw the flow of hundreds of trucks teeming with various consumer goods and essential food supplies, with some sources estimating the number of such trucks at 500.<sup>5</sup> However, since the 9<sup>th</sup> of October, the Israeli occupation only allows the entry of a very small number of trucks into the Gaza Strip via the Rafah crossing in the southern Strip, with an average of one truck every 3 hours and 12 minutes, noting that not all trucks were loaded with food. Thus, it does not allow the entry of all truckloads of food into the Strip. According to the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), until the 140<sup>th</sup> day of the war, a total of 13,834 trucks carrying various humanitarian aid and consumer goods entered the Strip via the different crossings.<sup>6</sup> After 156 days of continuous Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, OCHA reported, based on the MoH-Gaza data, there are 25 people including 21 children died of malnutrition and dehydration<sup>7</sup>.

1 <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/starvation-weapon-war-being-used-against-gaza-civilians-oxfam>

2 WFP PALESTINE EMERGENCY RESPONSE. Situation Report 11

3 <https://www.wfp.org/stories/humanitarian-operations-risk-conflict-strangles-gaza>

4 <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/starvation-weapon-war-being-used-against-gaza-civilians-oxfam>

5 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/21/israel-hamas-war-aid-trucks-enter-gaza-egypt-rafah-border-crossing-opens>

6 <https://twitter.com/cogatonline/status/1761017991288725862/>

7 <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-day156->





Apart from the above, the aid that reaches the Gaza population, such as lentils or flour, mostly does not benefit them due to the state of displacement and the lack of fuel and clean water for cooking. Moreover, a series of airstrikes have resulted in destroying or damaging many bakeries and groceries. As for those bakeries and groceries still operating, they could not meet the local demand for fresh bread and are at risk of being shut down due to the lack of necessities, such as flour and fuel. Besides, the sole wheat grinder operating in Gaza has become redundant due to the blocking of the power supply.

International humanitarian law strictly prohibits the deployment of starvation as a method of warfare. In its capacity as the occupying power in Gaza, Israel is bound by the obligations arising under international humanitarian law through providing the needs of and protecting the Gaza population. In 2018, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 2417, which unanimously condemned the starving of civilians as a method of warfare. The Resolution considers the denial of access to humanitarian assistance a violation of international law. Oxfam affirms that it has become painfully clear that the humanitarian situation unfolding in Gaza is fully commensurate with the denial condemned by the Resolution.

### ◆ **The Lack of Potable Water and the Contamination of Water Sources in the Gaza Strip as a Long-term Colonial Policy and Weapon in the Aggression<sup>8</sup>**

The lack of clean and potable water is manifest in the fact that 97% of the water available in the Gaza Strip is contaminated. Estimates in mid-October indicated that 3 liters of water are available per capita, noting that according to the estimates of the United Nations, 15 liters of water shall be available, as a minimum, per capita. These estimates could be rather optimistic given the way things turned out as the ferocious war drags on without an end in sight. Bottled water has run out and it has become very difficult for families to secure it given the fact that its prices have risen to over five-fold in some areas. The Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) states that the current water production in Gaza is only 5% of its total typical production. It is expected that water production will further drop unless the water and wastewater facilities are supplied with electricity or fuel to resume operations.

Before the war, the per capita water consumption in the Gaza Strip was only 20% of the per capita global water consumption, corresponding to no more than 20 liters per capita. This is because according to United Nations reports and PWA's remarks, 97% of water sources in Gaza are contaminated and unfit for human consumption. During the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, the per capita water consumption dropped to 1-3 liters a day, and such a drop has occurred as part of the starvation policy employed by the Israeli occupation as a weapon against the population of the Gaza Strip.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.palestine-studies.org/ar/node?1654847/fbclid=IwAR0Rp6Iz6nziXD2T8LlxYW3nQOSnyMSeUqcR-PoESc60qDb5npSKM1s94Xg>





As a result of the blocking of the entry of fuel to the Gaza Strip, desalination plants which used to supply approximately 6% of potable water to the Strip ceased operating. The Israeli Mekorot Water Company has stopped the supply of water to the Strip. It used to supply approximately 6,000 cubic meters of water to the Strip daily before the onset of the aggression although the population of the Strip in reality needed 33,000 cubic meters of water daily. The last source of potable water is purchasing mineral water, which is considered costly, particularly since 60% of the population of the Gaza Strip suffer from poverty and the cost of purchasing water accounts for 3.3% of their income, which is higher than the global average, which does not exceed 1% of income.

Concerning the reasons for the deterioration of the water quantity and quality in the Gaza Strip, Abdul-Rahman at-Tamimi points out that Israeli settlements established on the border of the Gaza Strip have depleted a large portion of the Strip's underground water during the period from 1967 to 2005. It is estimated that these settlements used to consume approximately 15 million cubic meters of water a year, corresponding to a quarter of the capacity of Gaza's groundwater aquifer. Moreover, the Gaza Strip is considered one of the most densely populated regions in the world, resulting in a large consumption of underground water, an increase in the levels of water salinity, and the intrusion of seawater into the groundwater aquifers in the Strip. This is not to mention other practices, including the excessive use of chemicals in agriculture, resulting in the infiltration of such chemicals into and having a detrimental impact on the quality of underground water. Additionally, there is a lack of purification plants for wastewater, which is discharged into the sea and valleys and infiltrates into the groundwater aquifer. Besides, the Israeli occupation has constructed dams, blocking the natural flow of water to Wadi Gaza and reducing the quantity and quality of water replenishing the groundwater aquifer.

The Gaza Strip has relied heavily on the water supplied by the Israeli occupation, and such a reliance posed great risks that became manifest at the onset of the aggression when the occupation prevented water from being supplied to the Gaza population as a means to deliberately deprive them of drinking water. The war has aggravated the already bad conditions of water availability in the Gaza Strip, especially since approximately 40% of the water networks in the Strip were destroyed and the main pumps malfunctioned due to bombing or the lack of fuel. The Strip has a desalination plant that operates with a capacity of 5% while two other plants have ceased operating completely due to the blocking of the electricity supply and lack of fuel in the Strip.<sup>9</sup> Groundwater contamination will likely further exacerbate due to the bombing and disruption of desalination plants, increasing the infiltration of wastewater into the groundwater aquifer.

Given the destruction of infrastructure by Israeli aggression, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) points out that the Gaza Strip is on the brink of an environmental disaster that imperils livelihoods.

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_Ar\\_AggressionEnvGazaWar2023A.pdf](https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_Ar_AggressionEnvGazaWar2023A.pdf)









Approximately 65 wastewater pumps have ceased operation and all wastewater treatment plants and systems, which total 6, have ceased operating completely, resulting in approximately 130,000 cubic meters of wastewater flowing untreated into the Mediterranean in the Gaza Strip.<sup>10</sup> The infiltration of wastewater along the beach has polluted the deep sea at a distance of 700 meters and rendered this zone unfit for fishing, imperiling the livelihood of fishermen and jeopardizing food security from fish and seafood on which Gazans rely for food. Apart from this, the greatest danger lies in the lack of potable water, which would push Gazans to drink chemically and biologically contaminated or salty water and result in the spread of epidemics and diseases, including renal diseases such as renal failure, on a large scale. Finally, at-Tamimi estimates losses to the water sector alone as a result of the current aggression at USD 2.1 million compared to USD 34 million following the 2014 aggression. Hence, one can realize how the starvation policies are in line with the means to exterminate human life in its ugliest inhumane forms.

### ◆ **The Israeli War Machine Destroys Livelihoods and Targets the Food Basket in the Gaza Strip<sup>11</sup>**

As a result of the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip for over a decade and a half, PCBS estimates Palestine's cumulative losses in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at a minimum of over USD 35 billion, corresponding to ten times the GDP of the Gaza Strip. Macroeconomic indicators indicate that the Gaza Strip contributed approximately 36% to Palestine's GDP before 2006 and such a contribution started to gradually decline as a result of the 17-year-long suffocating blockade imposed on the Strip that affected all production inputs. Such a contribution reached no more than 17% in recent years as a result of the erosion of the production base.<sup>12</sup>

The current war on the Gaza Strip has aggravated the suffering of the Strip population, leading to the collapse of agricultural and food activities and the blocking of the water, food, and fuel supplies to the blockaded Strip. It is expected that the livestock and fishing-related activities will cease for a long period and the fresh fruit and vegetable cultivation activities will too. This will reduce the chances of the Gaza population to access bio-based sources of protein, beneficial food, employment opportunities, and livelihoods.

The agricultural sector is considered a core contributor to the GDP with a contribution of 11% in 2022. It is an important employer of labor, contributing to the alleviation of unemployment in the Gaza Strip. It constitutes a fundamental food resource for the population in the Gaza Strip, particularly given the Israeli blockade imposed on them and the denial of the entry of food, water, medicine, and fuel since 2007.

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals\\_/pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_Ar\\_AggressionEnvGazaWar2023A.pdf](https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals_/pcbs/PressRelease/Press_Ar_AggressionEnvGazaWar2023A.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <https://refugeesps.net/p26490/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/postar.aspx?lang=ar&ItemID4624=>



The daily direct losses to the agricultural sector are estimated at approximately USD 1.6 million as a result of the cessation of production. The value of such losses becomes two-fold when the destruction in terms of the value of agricultural assets and property as well as razed agricultural areas is calculated. According to various estimates issued by the Gaza Strip on the agricultural sector, the total agricultural losses might exceed USD 180 million given the fact that the occupation destroyed thousands of trees and razed many agricultural areas and holdings in its recent aggression.<sup>13</sup>

According to government sources in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli army has directly destroyed approximately 25,000 dunums of agricultural land, particularly in the northern Strip, in the course of the genocidal war it continues to wage. This statement was made on the 39<sup>th</sup> day of the war. In addition to the complete destruction of cultivated crops, this destruction has rendered these areas unfit for agriculture due to the discharge of a large quantity of chemicals, resulting in soil pollution. Palestinian officials from inside the Gaza Strip remarked that the occupation systematically operates on the ground to alter the geography of Gaza by sabotaging as large an area of agricultural land as possible. The Israeli aggression on the Strip, particularly on the northern Strip, has caused heavy damage to the marketing of crops, such as guava, date, and olive after they perished or were razed.

The areas cultivated with vegetables account for 53% of the total agricultural areas in the Gaza Strip, with 34% of such areas concentrated in the northern district of the Strip and 30% in the Khan Younes district. This entails causing direct damage to the main source of vegetable production. Moreover, extensive areas of olive trees were razed with such areas accounting for 63% of the tree-cultivated area. This is not to mention the extermination of complete herds of livestock, disproportionately concentrated in the various districts of the Gaza Strip.

Several factors have converged and spoiled cultivated crops, chiefly the inability of farmers to access their lands, in addition to the total blocking of water, electricity, and fuel required to operate water pumps, resulting in heavy losses. Additionally, agricultural land along the eastern frontier of the Gaza Strip, which produces the components of the Strip's integral food basket, has sustained great losses as a result of incessant Israeli aerial and artillery bombardment. The Gaza Strip attempted over previous years to realize self-sufficiency from this food basket and market and export part of its produce to the West Bank and abroad. The destruction of agricultural seasons in Gaza portends food disasters as Oxfam has documented in the reference it made to the loss of the current "golden time" of agricultural production in Gaza.<sup>14</sup>

13 [https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals\\_/pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_Ar\\_AggresAgriculturalSector2023A.pdf](https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals_/pcbs/PressRelease/Press_Ar_AggresAgriculturalSector2023A.pdf)

14 <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/golden-time-seasonal-farming-production-destroyed-and-lost-northern-gaza-amid>



## ◆ Level of Food Insecurity Classification in the Gaza Strip

The agricultural sector is targeted as part of the weapon of starvation employed by the Israeli occupation, particularly since 44% of the households' consumption of final food commodities in the Gaza Strip is sourced from local production and 56% of it comes from importing from abroad.<sup>15</sup> This means that the Israeli occupation ruins all of the Gazans' sources and means of subsistence by totally preventing commercial importing and targeting locally produced crops. The outcomes of such an action are obvious in the field. During the period from 24 November to 7 December, estimates indicate that over 90% of the population of the Gaza Strip (corresponding to approximately 2.08 million people) face high levels of acute food insecurity classified in IPC Phase 3 or above (Crisis or worse). Among these, over 40% of the population (corresponding to 939,000 people) was in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and over 15% (corresponding to 378,000 people) was in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5). The situation quickly deteriorated as the aggression intensified during the last two months.

During the period from 8 December to 7 February 2024, the entire population of the Gaza Strip (about 2.2 million people) was classified in IPC Phase 3 or above (Crisis or worse). This is the highest share of people facing high levels of acute food insecurity ever classified for any given area or country. Among these, about 50% of the population (corresponding to 1.17 million people) is in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and at least one in four households (more than half a million people) is facing catastrophic conditions (IPC Phase 5). These are characterized by households experiencing an extreme lack of food, starvation, and exhaustion of coping capacities. Even though the levels of acute malnutrition and non-trauma-related mortality might not have yet crossed famine thresholds, these are typically the outcomes of prolonged and extreme food consumption gaps. The increased nutritional vulnerability of children, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and the elderly is a particular source of concern.

## I Developments regarding Food Prices in Palestine and across the Globe

### ◆ Global Food Prices (July 2023 - December 2023)

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Food Price Index (FAO FP), global food prices demonstrated relative fluctuations in the second half of 2023. Indices indicate that there was a general decline in the Food Price Index as well as in the Food Products Indices, except for the Dairy Product Price Index, albeit to varying degrees. Notably, there has been a constant decline in cereals prices following the Ukrainian-Russian War, indicating that they are not stable. It is also notable that the sugar prices demonstrated severe fluctuation during the second half of the year after they sharply rose last March as a direct result of the dry climate conditions that downplayed the expectations of sugar production in India, China, and Thailand, and due to the slow onset of the sugar cane season in Brazil.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_Ar\\_AggresAgriculturalSector2023A.pdf](https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_Ar_AggresAgriculturalSector2023A.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/the-measure-of-world-food-prices-rose-in-april-for-first-time-in-a-year/en>

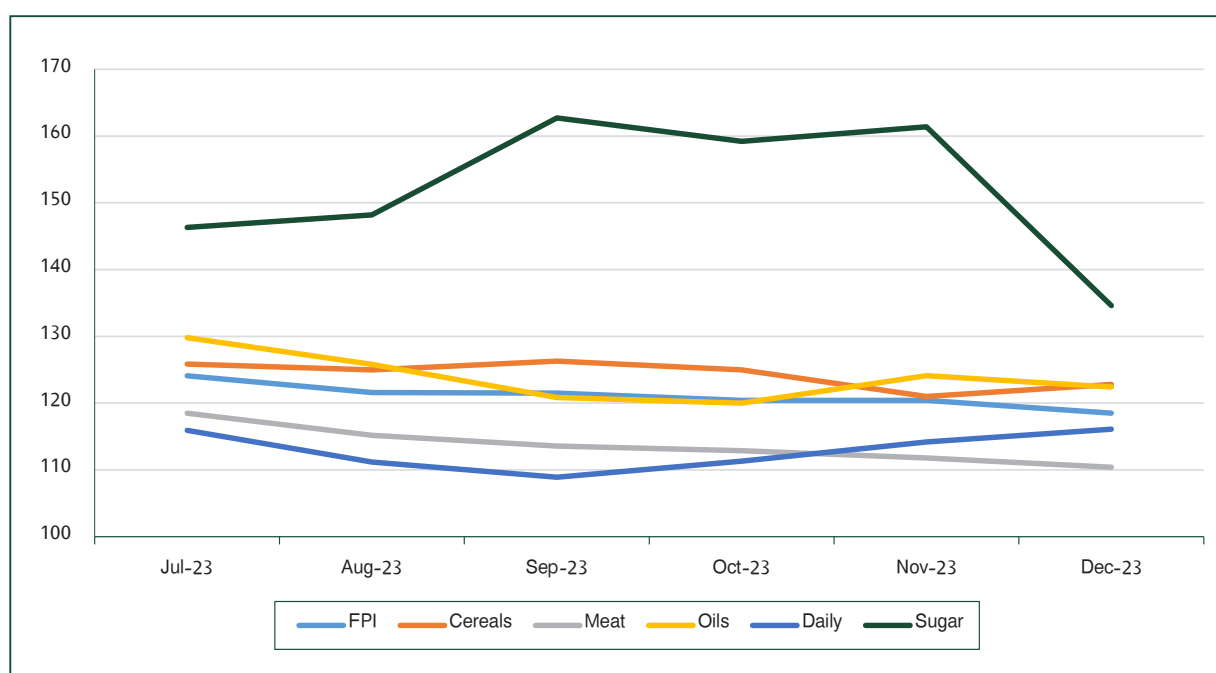




## Price Trends

Chart 1 below illustrates the trends in the FAO FP in the second half of 2023 as well as five indices of a set of basic food commodities, namely meat, dairy products, cereals, oils, and sugar, which constitute the Food Price Index. The FAO FP registered a sequential decline during the second half of 2023 and temporarily stabilized in November before it declined once again in the last month of 2023, reaching 118.5 points. Thus, the 2023 Food Price Index reached 124 points.

**Chart 1: Prices of Basic Commodities in Global Markets**



Source: FAO, 2023

Food prices, Cereal prices, Meat prices, Oil prices, Dairy product prices, Sugar prices

## Meat Prices

The FAO Meat Price Index registered a sequential decline during the second of 2023, declining from 118.5 points in July to 110.4 points in December. This decline is ascribed to the decline in meat importing due to the low availability of exportable supplies, particularly from Asia, leading to a decline in meat prices, in general, and in pig meat prices, in particular. Such a decline did not balance the slight rise in the prices of other meats. The FAO Meat Price Index registered a slight decline at 3.5% from the previous year and reached an average of 114.6 points in 2023 due to the increased availability of exports from the main exporting areas in contrast to a fall in the demand for imports on the part of meat-importing countries. This has resulted in a fall in the annual average of meat value, except for pig meat.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/>



## Sugar prices

The FAO Sugar Price Index registered a fluctuation trend [exhibited fluctuations] in price rises and drops in the second half of the year, ultimately registering a notable decline. It reached 134.6 points in December 2023 down from 146.3 points in July 2023, corresponding to a drop of 8%. It notably increased at 9.8% in October compared to August as well as at 96.72% compared to the corresponding month in 2022, marking the highest increase since 2011.<sup>18</sup> This increase is ascribed to concerns over a dwindling global supply in the upcoming sugar season due to falling production in Thailand and India and as an outcome accompanying the El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO) phenomenon. This phenomenon leads to temperature changes in the equatorial ocean, resulting in dry weather and the destruction of crops.<sup>19</sup> Sugar prices registered a sharp decline of 16% in December, and such a decline is ascribed to the sugar production intensity motivated by favorable climate conditions, which contributed to the decline. It is also ascribed to the Indian government's decision to limit the use of sugar cane for ethanol production.<sup>20</sup> Overall, the FAO Sugar Price Index registered an average of 145 points for 2023, corresponding to a sharp increase of 26.7% from the previous year.

## Cereal Prices

The FAO Cereal Price Index continued its downward trend and tends to return to the pre-Ukrainian-Russian War levels, registering an average of 124.3 points during the second half of 2023. During this period of six months, it exhibited a constant downward trend, including a drop of 3% in October 2023. This drop is ascribed to the drop of global coarse grain prices by 5.6% as a result of the sharp decline in maize and wheat prices.<sup>21</sup> Following the drop in wheat prices over a consecutive four-month period, the FAO Cereal Price Index rose once again in December due to the rising demand for wheat in the wake of weather fluctuations that affected the logistics services of some wheat-exporting states and tensions in the Black Sea. While the prices of all rice, maize, and barley species rose, the prices of grain sorghum partially dropped.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the FAO Cereal Price Index fell in December by 1.5% compared to November, marking the largest fall in the second half of the year. Hence, it registered a substantial fall of 15.4% in wheat prices, with such prices reaching 130.9% points during the year. This is indicative of the availability of wheat supplies in the global market.

18 <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/fao-food-price-index-unchanged-in-september/en>

19 <https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/sugar-prices-rise-after-el-nino-damages-crops.7362933/-html> ;  
<https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/fao-food-price-index-unchanged-in-september/en>

20 <https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en~:#/>

21 <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/fao-food-price-index-holds-steady-november-enarruzh>

22 <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/fao-food-price-index-declines-december-enzh>





## Dairy Product Prices

The FAO Dairy Price Index has not exhibited substantial change in terms of prices during the period from July to December. Despite its fluctuation during the six months, the index continued its downward trend that lasted for nine months. It registered a fall of 115.9 points in July compared to the previous month due to the decline of milk supplies following the rising temperature in Europe. It further exhibited a fall in August and September as a result of low global demand for imports, the availability of exportable supplies in producing countries, particularly in milk powder-producing countries, and falling world butter and cheese prices. In contrast, the index exhibited an increase in the last three months due to the rising demand for milk powder and butter, reaching 116.1 points in December. Nevertheless, the index exhibited a sharp fall of 16.6% compared to the previous year, reaching 118.8 points. Such a sharp fall is ascribed to the falling prices of dairy products of all kinds worldwide due to the low demand for imports, particularly for prompt imports, concurrently with the availability of stocks in importing countries.<sup>23</sup>

## Vegetable Oil Prices

The FAO Vegetable Oil Price Index registered a noticeable increase of 12.10% in July 2023 due to the renewed situation of uncertainty surrounding the exportable supplies following Russia's decision to end the implementation of the grain export agreement (or the Black Sea Grain Initiative).<sup>24</sup> However, it later exhibited a constant downward trend, except for November, during which it registered a rise of 3.40%, reaching 124.1 points before it fell once again in December to 122.4 points. This fall is ascribed to the lower world prices of palm, soy, rapeseed, and sunflower oils, in parallel with the declining purchases on the part of major importers.<sup>25</sup> Overall, the FAO Vegetable Oil Price Index registered a sharp fall of 61.5 points compared to the previous year, reaching 126.3 points, corresponding to a fall of 32.7%.

### ◆ Food Prices in Palestinian Markets (July 2023 - December 2023)

The PCBS measures food prices using an index it has developed, namely the Food Price Index (FPI), a component of the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Following relative stability of food prices in the first half of 2023 and a rise of 2.1% in prices, food prices registered a rise of 18.1% during the period from July to December 2023, pushing up the FPI at the end of the year to 138.50 points.

The cost-of-living index rose by 24.4% during the period from July to December 2023 compared to a slight rise of 2.2% registered in the first half of the year. By the end of the year, the CPI registered 123.23 points, averaging 112.12 points for 2023 and corresponding to a rise of 5.87% from the previous year.

23 <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/fao-food-price-index-declines-december-enzh>

24 <https://www.fao.org/markets-and-trade/resources/news-events/detail/en/c/1647628/>

25 <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/fao-food-price-index-declines-december-enzh>

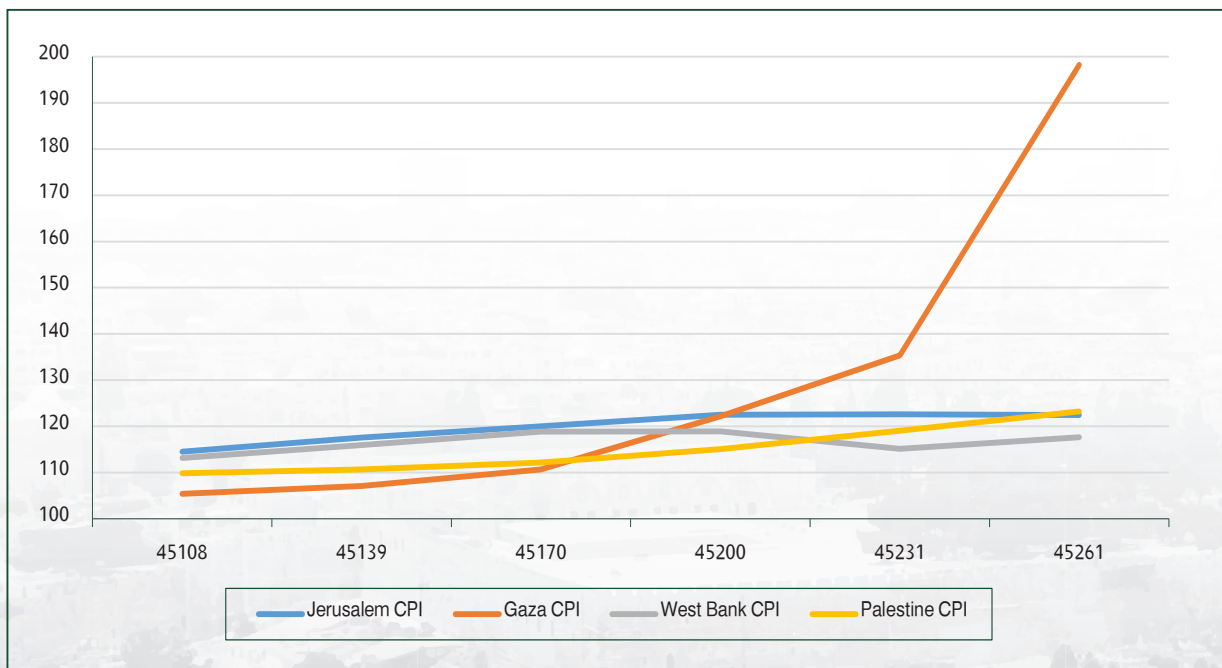


The cost-of-living index in Palestine exhibited an unprecedented rise, particularly in the Gaza Strip, during the first three months of the aggression. It exhibited a rise of 10% since the onset of the aggression on the Gaza Strip, marking a 2.57% rise in October, a 3.50% rise in November, and later a 3.49% rise in December. This rise was primarily driven by the sharp rise in the prices of basic commodities in Palestine, particularly in agriculture and fishing activities.

## Food Prices by Area

The aggression cast a shadow over rising prices in the second half of 2023. This is manifest in the analysis of the FPI and CPI during the first three months of the second half of the year compared to the last months of this half of the year. Prices rose in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem at varying degrees. As shown in Chart 2, the Gaza Strip was naturally the most affected by the rising cost-of-living levels due to the aggression. The cost-of-living index in the Gaza Strip rose by 11.99% in October compared to the previous month, and later by 18.35% in November, and later by 12.21% in December, marking a total rise of 88%. This weakened the purchasing power of individuals in the Gaza Strip by a total of 33% for the last three months of the year. Compared with the corresponding months of 2022, the cost-of-living index rose in the Gaza Strip by 14.59% in October, 36.39% in November and 54.11% in December. Prices had also risen in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, albeit at much lower percentages. During the period from September to December 2023, they rose by 6.9% in the West Bank and by 3.9% in Jerusalem.

**Chart 2: Consumer Production Index (CPI) by Area**



Source: PCBS, 2023

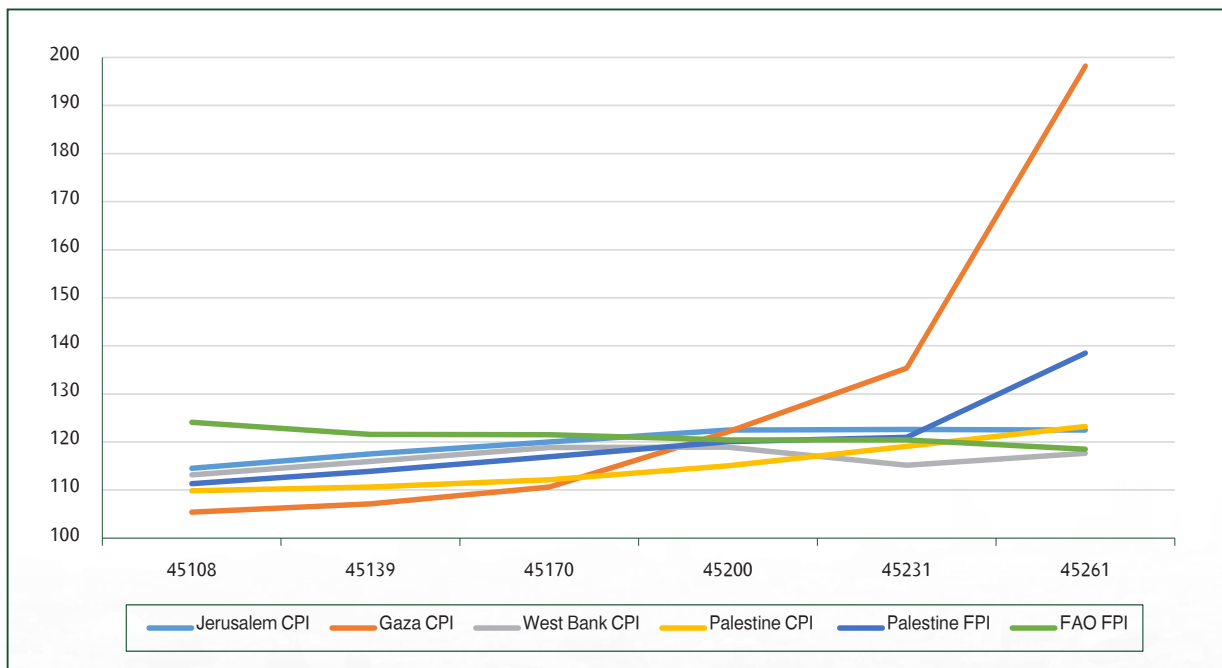




## The PCBS FPI compared to FAO FPI

This section presents a comparison between the PCBS FPI and FAO FPI, as it is necessary to note the difficulty of conducting this comparison since the FPI in Palestine is mostly composed of locally produced foodstuffs, restricting its vulnerability to the changes in world foodstuff prices. For comparison purposes, 2018 was adopted as a base year for the FAO FPI instead of the period 2014- 2016. During the period from July to December 2023, world food prices slightly fell by 4.5%, stabilizing at 118.5 points at the end of the year at an average of 124 points for the whole year. In contrast, FPI in Palestine rose by 24.4% during the same period, reaching 138.8 points. The sharp difference, as shown below, could be accounted for by the sharp rise in agriculture and fishing production prices due to the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, which in turn raised food prices in Palestine, particularly in the Gaza Strip.

**Chart 3: FAO and Palestine Food Price Index (FPI)  
by Area and the Consumer Price Index (CPI)**



Source: PCBS (2023), and FAO (2023)





## I Review of Recent Global Literature

FAO defines food insecurity as a condition in which “all people, at all times, do not have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for a healthy life”.<sup>26</sup> Food insecurity in the world is affected by a set of factors, including economic shocks, climate changes, limited resources, and conflict.<sup>27</sup> In Palestine, three of these four factors are related to the Israeli occupation policies, which threaten the prospects for the realization of food security, directly prevent food availability, and hinder individuals’ ability to produce or access food, as recently manifested in the most heinous forms in Gaza. As a result of these policies, a third of Palestinians (33.6%) suffer from food insecurity, with 90% of them living in the Gaza Strip.<sup>28</sup> This brings the total of those suffering from food insecurity in the Gaza Strip to 64% of the population with approximately 80% of the population living under the poverty line.<sup>29</sup>

That being said, not only is hunger as a variable dependent on and an outcome of the war is affected by war, but it also becomes per se a tool mostly deployed as an “internationally-banned” method of warfare, conducive to weakening the other party by starving them and sabotaging their production infrastructure. The effects of the wars of aggression take dimensions beyond inflicting structural and human destruction, as the control and hegemony mechanisms take other forms in addition to these dimensions. Hunger is weaponized by a wide range of direct and indirect mechanisms and policies, which all function in a complementary manner to threaten the health system and undermine its efficacy.

### ◆ The Israeli Policies of “Weaponizing Hunger”

The blockade is considered the optimal study case on the concept of “weaponizing hunger”. It is a “slow” form of warfare, whereby the party laying the blockade relies on the exhaustion of food and other supplies that ensure the preservation of the blockaded party’s unity to splinter such unity.<sup>30</sup> In the Gaza Strip, the general policy governing this blockade, which is lenient compared to what is witnessed nowadays, falls under the overall orientation summed up by the former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s advisor as intended to “make the lives of Palestinians harder, but with ensuring that this does not cause a humanitarian crisis.”<sup>31</sup> Life under the blockade is engineered by exerting absolute command over crossings and controlling the qualities and quantities of materials, such as food, goods, fuel, raw materials and other infrastructure-supporting materials.<sup>32</sup>

26 [Organic agriculture and access to food | FAO](#)

27 [CL 172/Intro Item 5: Global food security challenges and its drivers: Conflicts and wars in Ukraine and other countries, slowdowns and downturns, and climate change \(fao.org\)](#)

28 [Palestine | World Food Programme\) wfp.org/](#)

29 [Gaza 15\\_years of blockade | UNRWA](#)

30 [Chapter 3 Hunger Politics :Sanctions as Blockade Warfare in :Sanctions as War\) brill.com/](#)

31 [Tightening the Noose on JSTOR](#)

32 [An embargo on Gaza \(ynetnews.com\)](#)



To frame this policy within a different context with the direct goal of devastating the whole of the Gaza Strip, security pretexts designed to neutralize the resistance action of the “ Hamas” Movement were invoked after the movement assumed power in the Gaza Strip.<sup>33</sup> The blockade has resulted in social and economic crises affecting the whole population of the Gaza Strip. The most important of such crises are high unemployment rates along with associated poverty, the low purchasing power of individuals, and growing reliance on foreign assistance and aid, in addition to poor services and development infrastructures, which have an impact in one way or another on food insecurity.

While economic embargo casts a shadow over the food insecurity crises by causing economic crises that hamper individuals’ ability to access food, starving Palestinians by impoverishing them has not been a natural consequence of economic insecurity, but has been intentional and systematic.<sup>34</sup> One of the manifestations of the previous motto in the context of weaponizing hunger was a secret draft leaked later on, determining the “red lines” of the food consumption of the Gaza Strip population, based on the single principle of “putting the Palestinians on a diet, but not making them die of hunger.”<sup>35</sup> This text accurately details the required food products allowed entry to achieve this objective. This is achieved by calculating the calories in the truckloads of food products allowed entry into the Strip and determining the necessary “minimum” nutrition that ensures the population’s subsistence without exposing them to malnutrition.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, this aggression aggravates the structural effects of the occupation’s grand policy of imposing a tightened blockade on agricultural production and development and jeopardizing food security. The occupation places formidable geographic obstacles in the way of animal and plant production by restricting the fishing zone or agricultural land in borderline areas, which seldom remain fixed, as well as by determining the materials allowed for entry to develop the production process.<sup>37</sup> As a result, approximately 35% of agricultural land and 85% of fishing water were damaged due to the obstacles imposed.<sup>38</sup>

## ◆ Starvation in International Law

In international law, there is a set of laws “governing” the instances of occupation, including the obligations of the occupying state towards the occupied. “To the fullest extent of the means available to it”, the occupying power shall provide the population with food assistance, import foodstuffs if there are no natural resources that could be sufficiently utilized, and allow the population, particularly children, to

33 [Tightening the Noose on JSTOR](#)

34 [Tightening the Noose on JSTOR](#)

35 “Gaza on Brink of Implosion as Aid Cut-off Starts to Bite,” *The Observer*, April 16, 2006, accessed June 7, 2012,

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/apr/16/israel>.

36 [red-lines-presentation-eng.pdf](#) gisha.org/

37 For more: <https://www.mezan.org/uploads/files/15322454331008.pdf>

<https://www7.iber.com/politics-economics>

<https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/features/gaza-fishermen-restricted-livelihoods>

<https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/opt-farming-without-land-fishing-without-water-gaza>

38 [Real stories ,real lives – what the Gaza blockade means | UNRWA](#)



access easily relief consignments of supplies as per Articles 55 and 59 of the Protocol to the Geneva Convention IV (1949).<sup>39</sup> Most importantly, the occupying power shall be prohibited from hindering “any preferential measures in regard to food (...) and protection against the effects of war.”<sup>40</sup> As for the starvation of civilians as a method of war, it is considered a war crime in any case, even with the assumption that Israel is not obliged to any functions that fall within “the occupying power’s obligations” based on its claim that it is not an occupying power. This is because Israel controls the possibility of allowing the entry of basic materials, including food and water, into blockaded areas.<sup>41</sup>

As for the instances marred by intentional non-compliance with international law concerning the guidelines on food availability to civilians in the instance of war for any objective whatsoever, such an instance becomes that of utilizing starvation as a method of warfare. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court stipulates that “intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare” is considered a war crime in international armed conflicts.<sup>42</sup>

The deployment of starvation as a weapon of warfare is not restricted to denying the availability of food through a blockade. Article 54 of the Protocol also prohibits “to attack, destroy, remove or render useless, for that purpose, objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population” regardless of whether motivated by starving the population or compelling them to move away. This includes the infrastructure that provides food security, such as agricultural land, crops, livestock, and the water supplies necessary for drinking and crop irrigation.<sup>43</sup> The ban imposed on the population of the Gaza Strip is also considered a form of collective punishment in violation of Article 33 of the Protocol to the Geneva Convention IV (1949)<sup>44</sup> as well as Article 50 of the Hague Convention (1950). Thus, it could be asserted that starvation and its deployment as a weapon of warfare is prohibited under international law regardless of the variety of interpretations and justifications or different contexts.

### ◆ Food Security under the Occupation: Studies on the Weaponization of Hunger

During the current aggression, a short report was issued on starvation in the course of the war. The author of the report reviewed the Israeli occupation’s statements directly or indirectly related to the humanitarian disaster in the Gaza Strip, particularly relating to food, and held legal approaches to them in the context of international law and the war crimes falling within it.<sup>45</sup> The report concluded that Israel’s practices, particularly concerning imposing a complete siege on the Gaza Strip, point to the fact that the occupation attempts to deliberately starve out the whole of the population of the Gaza Strip in

39 [IHL Treaties - Geneva Convention \(IV\) on Civilians, 1949 - Article 59 \(icrc.org\)](#) ; [IHL Treaties - Geneva Convention \(IV\) on Civilians, 1949 - Article 55 \(icrc.org\)](#)

40 [IHL Treaties - Geneva Convention \(IV\) on Civilians - 1949 ,Article\) 50 icrc.org\(](#)

41 [The Blockade of Gaza and the Starvation War Crime \(justsecurity.org\)](#)

42 <https://www.icrc.org/ar/doc/resources/documents/misc/6e7ec5.htm>

43 [IHL Treaties - Additional Protocol I \(to the Geneva Conventions - 1977 ,Article\) 54 icrc.org\(](#)

44 [IHL Treaties - Geneva Convention \(IV\) on Civilians, 1949 - Article 33 \(icrc.org\)](#)

45 [The Blockade of Gaza and the Starvation War Crime \(justsecurity.org\)](#)





pursuit of its security goal of attacking “the Hamas Movement”, which is prohibited under international law and classified under the war crimes clauses.<sup>46</sup> Despite the scarcity of recent studies that frame the occupation’s practices within the concept of using starvation as a method of warfare or discuss the implications of Israeli policies in the course of the aggression on the humanitarian, economic, and social conditions of the population, this policy is not new in the Gaza Strip, and it was recurrently addressed in the literature on starvation in the course of wars.

Another study attempts to review and define the mechanisms of and the motive behind the siege and place them within the concepts of spatial practice, symbolic politics, and biopolitics to understand its impact on individuals and their experiences.<sup>47</sup> The study concludes that the siege per se is a mechanism to impose occupation without the need for the occupier to have a physical presence in the besieged geographic space. This is accomplished through several mechanisms, the most important of which in the context of starvation are imposing economic sanctions in their different manifestations that include dominance over the calories of the besieged society. Such mechanisms turn the siege into a form of vital political warfare by turning the internationally condemned nutritional warfare into a mechanism of technological nonviolent dominance that substitutes the use of direct violence.

In a comparable context, a study titled *Food Security Challenges and Innovation: The Case of Gaza* argues that food insecurity is used in the Gaza Strip as a tool for warfare or a coercive tool during conflict through which control and dominance are institutionalized.<sup>48</sup> The study reviews the mechanisms through which food security limitations are employed as a weapon to subjugate the population through exerting direct command and control over access to and utilization of natural resources, production, and trade, and that exacerbate reliance on aid.

During the siege imposed in 2007 and the 2008–2009 aggression, these mechanisms are manifest in two fundamental forms of the diet system in Gaza. First, the funding infrastructure of agricultural production has turned the diet system in Gaza into a mechanism that exacerbates food insecurity. Secondly, in the context of starvation, the Israeli occupation has intentionally devastated natural resources and imposed unbalanced trade relations in the food trade sector. Through these mechanisms, food security as a concept is no longer restricted to the availability of or access to food but covers the set of economic and social conditions that hinder access to the sources of food production.

Other approaches to starvation in the Gaza Strip and its deployment as a mechanism of warfare link food insecurity to the fragile economic situation in the Strip as an outcome of the occupation’s policies, which preclude the enhancement of healthy dietary patterns in various forms.<sup>49</sup> These approaches

46 [The Blockade of Gaza and the Starvation War Crime \(justsecurity.org\)](http://justsecurity.org)

47 [The Blockade of Gaza: Spatial Violence, Humanitarian Strategies, and the Biopolitics of Punishment - Winter - 2016 - Constellations - Wiley Online Library](http://www.wiley.com)

48 [Microsoft Word - Food Security Challenges and Innovation- Gaza.docx\) hln.org](http://hrn.org)

49 [We Didn’t Want to Hear the Word “Calories”: Rethinking Food Security, Food Power, and Food Sovereignty—Lessons from the Gaza Closure \(berkeley.edu\)](http://berkeley.edu)



do not discuss starvation as it relates to the lack of food availability as a result of the direct targeting of the food system through clear starvation policies, such as siege and the devastation of agricultural and water infrastructure. On the contrary, they suppose that food is available, but show that several economic factors are precluding access to it. Thus, they analyze the economic impact as an indirect factor employed by the occupation to undermine the food system in the Gaza Strip.<sup>50</sup>

However, the two female researchers argue that the food insecurity crisis is not the outcome of food insecurity in local markets, but rather a result of the lack of economic access to food. Naturally, the lack of economic access to food is a result of the fragile economic situation of individuals in the Gaza Strip in the wake of the policies of economic isolation and devastation imposed by Israel on the Strip.<sup>51</sup> Although there is no shortfall in food on a typical day, high poverty rates preclude the individuals' ability to access available food.

This is what the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) referred to in a report on food security during the war. It affirmed that food insecurity is the outcome of high poverty rates arising from unemployment, and such rates are partially accounted for by the Israeli restrictions on the movement of persons and goods.<sup>52</sup> The findings of a study on the determinants of food insecurity in Palestine detail that when it comes to poverty, food insecurity in Palestine is more prevalent among the poorest 20% of Palestinians, as food security is tied to employment opportunities,<sup>53</sup> considered slim in the Gaza Strip.

Economic access to food in the Gaza Strip is governed by two fundamental factors: first, the rising food prices as a result of food transport price inflation and reliance on goods imported from Israel, and second, the declining purchase power of individuals as a result of the lack of well-paying jobs as well as poor investment and business opportunities.<sup>54</sup> These findings align with a recently issued study on the relationship between conflict and food security. It found that conflict as a whole reduces production inputs and income, and, thus, is conducive to increasing the number of days individuals have to consume a limited quantity of un-preferred foods.<sup>55</sup> This study also concluded that being in close proximity to buffer zones is inversely related to food security. People living in proximity to buffer zones in the Gaza Strip are deprived of practicing agriculture as the majority of such people are primarily comprised of farmers and own agricultural land in buffer zones.<sup>56</sup> More specifically, those living a kilometer away from a buffer zone have lower dietary diversity and a higher level of food insecurity experience.<sup>57</sup>

50 [We Didn't Want to Hear the Word 'Calories': Rethinking Food Security, Food Power, and Food Sovereignty—Lessons from the Gaza Closure \(berkeley.edu\)](#)

51 [We Didn't Want to Hear the Word 'Calories': Rethinking Food Security, Food Power, and Food Sovereignty—Lessons from the Gaza Closure \(berkeley.edu\)](#)

52 [Food Insecurity in Palestine Remains High | UNRWA](#)

53 [Determinants of food insecurity in occupied Palestinian territory: a cross-sectional survey \(thelancet.com\)](#)

54 [Draft, 17 July 2009 \(wfp.org\)](#) ; [Fragmented Lives: Humanitarian Overview 2012 \[EN/AR\] | OCHA \(unocha.org\)](#)

55 [Pathways to food insecurity in the context of conflict: the case of the occupied Palestinian territory | Conflict and Health | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](#)

56 [Pathways to food insecurity in the context of conflict: the case of the occupied Palestinian territory | Conflict and Health | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](#)

57 [Pathways to food insecurity in the context of conflict: the case of the occupied Palestinian territory. \(2022\)](#)





**Biannual Bulletin Published by:**  
Palestine Economic Policy  
Research Institute (MAS)

---

Tel: +972 (2) 298 7053/4 | Fax: +972 (2) 298 7055  
info@mas.ps | www.mas.ps

