



Technicians repairing a heavily damaged fibre-optic cable. On 18 December, thanks to the efforts of such teams, working under high risk, telecommunications were partially restored in Gaza. The shutdown, beginning on 14 December, has severely affected humanitarian and emergency operations, hindering access to vital information. Photo by Paltel, 18 December 2023

# Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #72

18 Dec 2023

## Key points

- Following the longest shutdown of telecommunications and internet services in Gaza, which started on 14 December, services to the southern parts of Gaza Strip have been partially restored. This marked the fifth blackout since 7 October.
- On 18 December, heavy Israeli bombardments from air, land, and sea, continued across Gaza, with the most intense airstrikes reported in Jabalya, as well as in Ash Sheikh Redwan, Ar Rimal, Ash Shujai'yeh, and Ad Daraj areas of Gaza city. Intense ground operations and fighting between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups continued on 18 December, especially in Khan Younis and Rafah, in southern Gaza. The firing of rockets by Palestinian armed groups into Israel continued.
- According to the MoH in Gaza, between 7 October and 18 December afternoon, at least 19,453 Palestinians were killed in Gaza. About 70 per cent of those killed are said to be women and children. As of then, about 52,286 Palestinians have been injured, according to the MoH. Many people are missing, presumably buried under the rubble, waiting for rescue or recovery. Between 16 December and 18 December, ten Israeli soldiers were killed because of the fighting in Gaza, including one soldier who died as a result of injuries sustained on 14 December. According to the Israeli military, since the start of the ground operations, 129 soldiers have been killed in Gaza, and 704 have been injured.
- Heavy strikes have caused a high number of casualties in northern Gaza; between 17 December and 18 December overnight, more than 100 people were reportedly killed in Jabalya with many more missing and injured, according to the MoH in Gaza. On 17 December, houses and buildings in Ash Sheikh Redwan, Ar Rimal, Ash Shuja'i'yeh, and Ad Daraj neighbourhoods were heavily bombarded, with at least 54 fatalities reaching Al Shifa Hospital, according to the media.
- On 17 December, at least 31 people were reportedly killed in Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza city. Three people were reportedly shot and injured inside the hospital compound, and another three persons were shot and injured when they were trying to fetch water near the hospital gate. On 18 December, in the early morning, Al Shifa Hospital was struck again, including the entrance gate and the Surgery Building. Reportedly, the strikes killed five people, including children. At about 10:30, the hospital was struck again where IDPs were sheltering, reportedly killing 26 Palestinians and injuring others.
- Since 7 October and as of 16 December, UNRWA reported that at least 297 IDPs seeking refuge in its shelters have been killed and at least 1,032 injured. A total of 342 school buildings have sustained damage (about 70 per cent of all school buildings in Gaza). Seventy of the schools damaged are UNRWA schools, with at least 56 serving as shelters for IDPs. Several schools, including UNRWA schools, have been directly hit by Israeli airstrikes or tank shells.
- On 17 December, 102 trucks carrying humanitarian supplies and four tankers of fuel entered Gaza through Rafah crossing and 79 trucks entered through Kerem Shalom crossing. This is well below the daily average of 500 truckloads (including fuel and private sector goods) that entered every working day prior to 7 October. Figures for 18 December are unconfirmed as of 22:00.

- Between 16 and 18 December, Israeli forces killed 12 Palestinians in the West Bank, including three children and another Palestinian died from wounds sustained in a previous Israeli forces' operation, bringing the fatality toll to 291, including 75 children by Israeli forces or/and Israeli settlers since 7 October, which represents almost 60 per cent of the total Palestinian fatalities since 1 January 2023.

## Hostilities and casualties (Gaza Strip)

- The following are among the deadliest incidents reported on 17 and 18 December:
  - On 17 December, at about 19:00, at least 55 Palestinians were reportedly killed, including more than 15 children, many others injured, and more than 100 reported as missing when several houses in a residential block were reportedly hit in Old Gaza Street, Jabalya city, North Gaza.
  - On 17 December, at about 11:30, 14 Palestinian were reportedly killed, and tens injured, when the Al Hinnawy School in western Khan Yunis, southern Gaza, was reportedly struck.
  - On 17 December, at about 19:00, 17 Palestinian were reportedly killed, and tens were injured, when several areas in eastern Khan Yunis, southern Gaza were reportedly struck.
- On 16 December, according to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, an elderly woman and her daughter were shot and killed inside the compound of the Holy Family Church in Az Zaitoun, Gaza city. Several others were reportedly shot and injured. Pope Francis condemned the attack on the building, declaring “there are no terrorists, but families, children, people who are sick and have disabilities, and nuns.” The Israeli army reported that its operational findings had disproved the claims of the attack. Also on 16 December, the adjacent Convent of the Sisters of Mother Theresa, was struck, rendering the building uninhabitable, and displacing 54 persons with disabilities who are cared for by the Order.

## Displacement (Gaza Strip)

- Areas encompassing nearly 30 per cent of the Gaza Strip (excluding the orders to evacuate the areas north of Wadi Gaza) have been marked for evacuation on the Israeli military’s online map that was launched on 1 December. Access to this information is impaired by recurrent interruptions in telecommunications and the lack of electricity.
- Since 3 December, tens of thousands of IDPs, who have arrived in Rafah governorate, continue to face extremely overcrowded conditions both inside and outside shelters. With an estimated fourfold increase in population density, exceeding 12,000 people per square kilometre, Rafah governorate is now the most densely populated area in the Gaza Strip.
- Obtaining an accurate figure of the total number of IDPs remains challenging. According to UNRWA, almost 1.9 million people in Gaza, or nearly 85 per cent of the population, are estimated to be internally displaced, including people who have been displaced multiple times.
- Nearly 1.4 million of these IDPs are registered in 155 UNRWA facilities across Gaza, including more than 1.2 million in 98 UNRWA shelters in the Middle Area, Khan Younis and Rafah governorates. The average number of IDPs in UNRWA shelters located in the middle and southern areas is about 12,400 people, more than four times their capacity.

## Electricity

- Since 11 October, the Gaza Strip has been under an electricity blackout, after the Israeli authorities cut off the electricity supply, and fuel reserves for Gaza’s sole power plant were depleted. For more information on electricity supply to the Gaza strip, please see this [dashboard](#).
- Health care, including attacks (Gaza Strip)
- On 17 December, the An Nasser Medical Complex, in Khan Younis, southern Gaza, was hit at least twice. An artillery shell struck the maternity ward, killing a 13-year-old child, and injuring several others, according to the MoH in Gaza.
- As of 18 December, only eight out of 36 hospitals across the Gaza Strip are functional and able to admit new patients, although services are limited. Only one of these hospitals is in the north, according to WHO. The two major hospitals in southern Gaza are operating at three times their bed capacity, while facing critical shortages of basic supplies and fuel. According to the MoH in Gaza, occupancy rates are now reaching 206 per cent in inpatient departments and 250 per cent in intensive care units. Additionally, these hospitals are providing shelter to thousands of IDPs.

## Food security

- On 18 December, Human Rights Watch accused the Israeli government of “using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare” in Gaza and of “deliberately blocking the delivery of water, food, and fuel, while wilfully impeding humanitarian assistance, apparently razing agricultural areas, and depriving the civilian population of objects indispensable to their survival.”
- Between 3 and 12 December, WFP conducted a [rapid food security assessment](#), following the significant deterioration of the food security situation in the south of Gaza, following the large influx of IDPs with the resumption of hostilities on 1 December. Very severe hunger levels were reported in 44 per cent of respondent households, compared with 24 per cent in a previous assessment conducted on 27-30 November. The proportion of IDP households reporting members going to sleep hungry at night increased from 34 to 50 per cent of all assessed households. The acute shortage of cooking gas has led to heavy dependence on firewood,



wood residues, and waste burning, raising the risk of respiratory diseases. The food security situation in the northern governorates of Gaza is believed to be significantly worse.

## Hostilities and casualties (Israel)

- Over 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals have been killed in Israel, including 36 children, according to the Israeli authorities, the vast majority on 7 October.
- During the humanitarian pause (24-30 November), 86 Israeli and 24 foreign national hostages were released. The Israeli authorities estimate that about 129 people remain captive in Gaza, including Israelis and foreign nationals.

## Violence and casualties (West Bank)

- Between 16 and 18 December, Israeli forces killed 12 Palestinians, including three children and another Palestinian died from wounds sustained in a previous Israeli forces' operation in Jenin. The deadliest incident, which lasted for over ten hours, took place in Nur Shams Refugee Camp in Tulkarm and resulted in five Palestinians killed. The operation involved armed clashes with Palestinians, and airstrikes, resulting in extensive infrastructure damage. An additional four Palestinians, including two children, were killed in another Israeli forces operation in Al Far'a Refugee Camp (Tubas), during which armed clashes were reported. Another three Palestinians were killed during confrontations during search-and-arrest operations in Beit Ummar (Hebron), Deir 'Ammar refugee Camp (Ramallah) and in Jenin city. In another separate incident, Israeli forces killed a Palestinian man near the barrier gate in Deir Al Ghusun (Tulkarm) while he was reportedly trying to enter Israel through one of the breaches along with a group of Palestinian workers.
- Since 7 October, 291 Palestinians, including 75 children, have been killed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Additionally, two Palestinians from the West Bank were killed while carrying out an attack in Israel on 30 November. Of those killed in the West Bank, 281 have been killed by Israeli forces, eight by Israeli settlers and another two either by forces or settlers. This toll represents more than half of all Palestinians killed in the West Bank this year. With a total of 491 Palestinians killed in the West Bank, 2023 is the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank since OCHA began recording casualties in 2005.
- Since 7 October, four Israelis, including three members of Israeli forces, have been killed in attacks by Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. An additional four Israelis were killed in an attack by Palestinians from the West Bank in West Jerusalem (one of the four was killed by Israeli forces who misidentified him).
- Seventy-one per cent of the Palestinian fatalities in the West Bank since 7 October have occurred during search-and-arrest and other operations carried out by Israeli forces, including some – mainly in Jenin and Tulkarm governorates – involving exchanges of fire with Palestinians. Half of the fatalities were reported in operations that did not involve armed clashes.
- Since 7 October, Israeli forces have injured 3,634 Palestinians, including at least 561 children; 51 per cent in the context of search-and-arrest and other operations and 41 per cent of them in the context of demonstrations and. Another 88 Palestinians have been injured by settlers and 18 other Palestinians injured either by Israeli forces or settlers. Some 33 per cent of those injuries have been caused by live ammunition, compared with 9 per cent in the first nine months of 2023.

## Settler Violence

- Since 7 October, OCHA has recorded 347 Israeli settler attacks against Palestinians, resulting in Palestinian casualties (35 incidents), damage to Palestinian-owned property (266 incidents), or both casualties and damage to property (46 incidents).
- The weekly average of incidents since 7 October stands at 33, compared with 21 incidents per week between 1 January and 6 October 2023. The number of incidents since 7 October has declined from 80 incidents in the first week (7-14 October) to 21 incidents between 9 and 14 December. One-third of these incidents included firearms, including shootings and threats of shootings. In nearly half of all recorded incidents, Israeli forces were either accompanying or reportedly seen as supporting the attackers.

## Displacement (West Bank)

- Since 7 October, at least 189 Palestinian households comprising 1,257 people, including 582 children, have been displaced amid settler violence and access restrictions. The displaced households are from 15 herding/Bedouin communities. More than half of the displacements occurred on 12, 15, and 28 October, affecting seven communities.
- Also, since 7 October, 378 Palestinians, including 198 children, have been displaced following the demolition of their homes in Area C and East Jerusalem, due to lack of Israeli-issued building permits in Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which are almost impossible to obtain. The monthly average of displacement between 7 October and 7 December represents 27 per cent increase compared with the monthly average of displacement in the first nine months of the year.
- Another 86 Palestinians, including 40 children, have been displaced following the demolition of 18 homes on punitive grounds since 7 October, compared with 16 homes punitively demolished in the first nine months of the year. The Human Rights Committee, in its review of the fourth periodic report of Israel, in 2014, concluded that punitive demolitions are a form of collective punishment and as such are illegal under international law.
- Another 451 Palestinians, including 207 children, have been displaced since 7 October following the destruction of 69 residential structures during other operations carried out by Israeli forces across the West Bank; 55 per cent of the displacement was

reported in Jenin Refugee Camp, and 39 per cent in Nur Shams and Tulkarm Refugee Camps (both in Tulkarm).

## Funding

- As of 18 December, Member States have disbursed [US\\$525 million](#) against the [updated Flash Appeal](#) launched by the UN and its partners to implement its response plan in support of 2.2 million people in the Gaza Strip and 500,000 in the West Bank. This constitutes nearly 43 per cent of the \$1.2 billion requested. Private donations are collected through the [Humanitarian Fund](#).

## HUMANITARIAN NEEDS AND RESPONSES: 12 December – 17 December

### Health

UNRWA carried out the following health activities across Gaza between 7 and 9 December:

- Eight out of 22 UNRWA health centres are still operational in the middle and southern areas of Gaza. On 13 December, 8,265 refugees and non-refugees received health care in these centres.
- Midwives are providing care for post-natal and high-risk pregnant women at the eight operational health centres. There are an estimated 50,000 pregnant women in Gaza, with more than 180 giving birth every day. A total of 124 post-natal and high-risk pregnancy cases were attended to at health centres.
- UNRWA continued providing health care to IDPs at shelters through 97 medical teams. Each team is composed of one or two doctors and a nurse. Some 591 health workers in health centres and shelters provided support to 12,305 patients.

### Protection

- The situation in Gaza has deteriorated to the point whereby protection actors are largely unable to operate, due to communication outages, risks in moving and access cut to northern Gaza, as well as severe constraints on the activities of service providers and frontline actors.
- There are major and mounting protection concerns for vulnerable groups, including children separated from their families, pregnant and lactating women (PLWs), newborns, persons with disabilities (PwDs), and the elderly.
- The following activities were undertaken during past week included:
  - The Palestine Medical Relief Society distributed 1,616 dignity kits to PwDs and vulnerable women/girls in UNRWA shelters in Khan Younis
  - The Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture provided 25 people with remote psychological first aid support.

### Food security

- Between 7 October to 10 December, UNRWA distributed flour to about 160,000 people north of Gaza. In the south, flour distribution reached about 1,153,020 people, including 75,000 families outside shelters.
- Since the beginning of December, WFP distributed high energy biscuits (HEB) biscuits for one day to about 600,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in designated shelters. In addition, WFP has distributed food parcels or wheat flour to about 110,000 IDPs during the past two week.
- Some 11,385 IDPs residing in host communities received food parcels to support their food needs for 15 days.
- Throughout the reporting week, only two partners—UAWC and Taawon—managed to implement operations in the northern area of Gaza; they distributed food parcels to approximately 46,250 IDPs in public shelters.
- In the southern area, 11 partners have provided ready-to-eat (RTE) food, food parcels, flour, and hot meals to about 2.5 million people over the past week.
- World Central Kitchen (WCK), in partnership with ANERA and MECA, provided hot meals and RTE to a variety of family sizes. WCK plans to provide community kitchen kits, wood pellets or charcoal, and food products for 28,000 meals.
- The Food Security Cluster (FSS) has set a primary objective to meet the daily food needs of 2.2 million people, for a weekly cumulative target of 15.4 million people. In the current reporting week, FSS partners achieved a coverage of only 18 per cent of the cumulative weekly target.

### Nutrition

Nutrition partners provided the following essential nutrition preventive and curative supplies during the reporting period to prevent malnutrition among children and mothers:

- UNICEF delivered Ready to Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) quantities to its partners, Juzour and UNRWA, to launch the implementation of the simplified approach for the management of wasting, for children under five with severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and moderate acute malnutrition (MAM).

- UNICEF managed to deliver Lipid-based supplements (SQ-LNS) covering the need of 61,600 children (6-24 months) inside shelters for one month; micronutrient supplements for 1,660 pregnant and breastfeeding women; and Vitamin A supplements for 3,370 infants (6-11 months).
- UNRWA distributed HEBs to 320,000 people and 27,184 date bars to people in shelters, as an immediate urgent food response in emergency.

## Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

- A total of 20 WASH partners are currently active and operating across the Gaza Strip. Several organizations are trying to reactivate their operations in Rafah (15), Khan Younis (15), Gaza City (10), and northern Gaza (7).
- The dual-use item constraints prevent a full-fledged WASH response from taking place. A consignment of piping and generators were not allowed into Gaza during the humanitarian pause. During the pause, few WASH supplies entered Gaza, despite the use of the prioritization list for entry; no new storage tanks, jerry cans, cleaning kits entered via Rafah crossing. No latrines were built.
- Water quality and access standards remain unachieved. Access is a particular challenge as the water networks are fractured, production points are reduced, power for pumping and distribution is restricted and storage and outlets are minimized. Many communities are isolated across Gaza but particularly north of Wadi Gaza.
- The CMWU and WASH agencies have produced on average 41,068 cubic metres of water, and have distributed around 80,000 litres of fuel, approximately 11,430 litres daily.

## Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFI)

- During the reporting period, despite some progress in delivering and distributing basic NFIs, including bedding, there is still a significant shortage of shelter winterization materials such as tents, tarpaulins, and plastic sheeting for use as sealing off kits.
- IDPs are increasingly seeking shelter in large ad hoc sites.
- Shelter Cluster partners distributed the following items inside and outside collective centres in the southern governorates:
  - 2,300 kitchen kits.
  - 56,800 blankets and 27,450 mattresses.
  - 2,000 mats.
  - 7,300 tarpaulin sheets

## Logistics

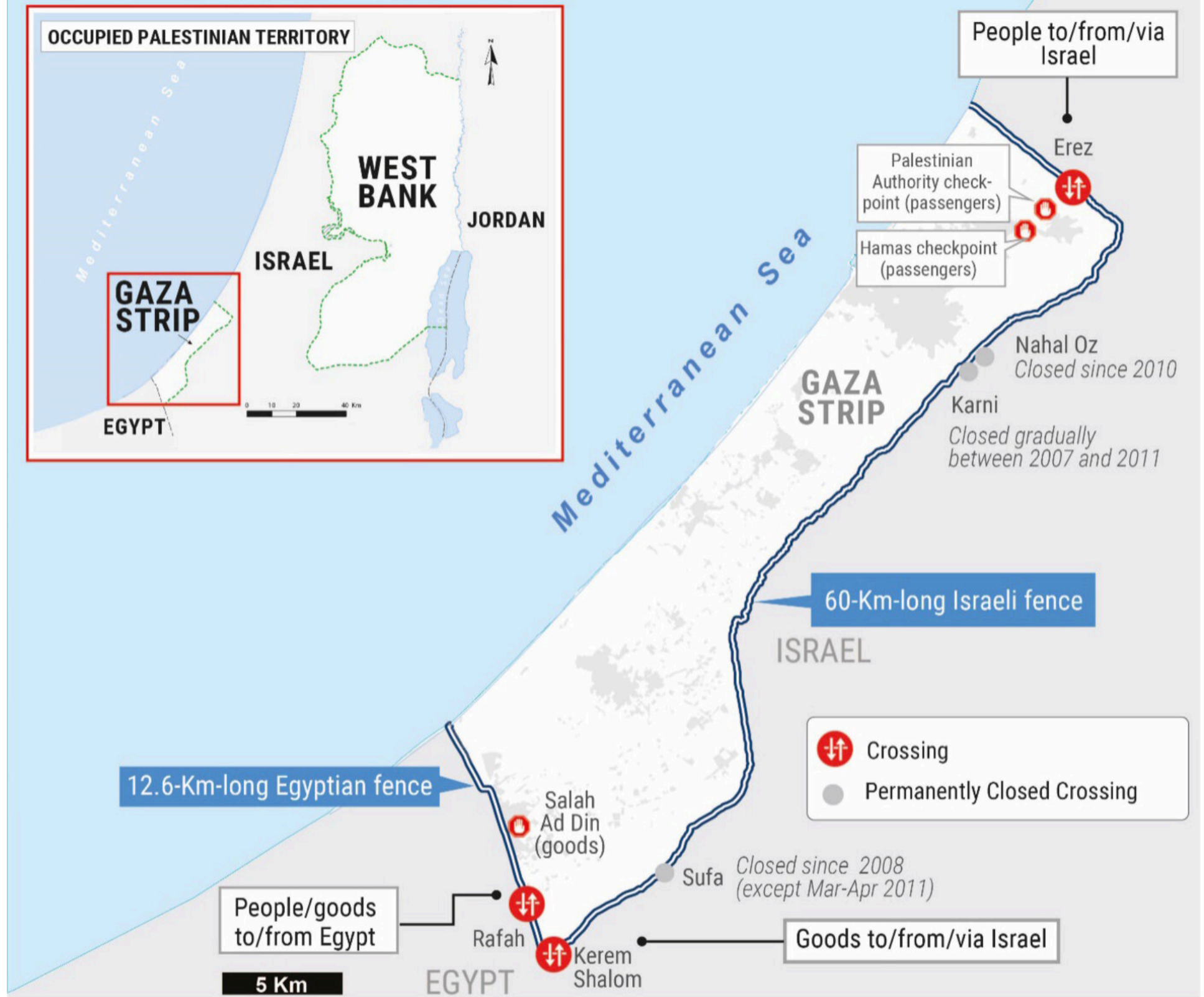
- The Logistics Cluster, together with HELP Logistics and JSI, coordinated an assessment of the Gaza public health capacity for warehousing and logistics between November-December 2023, available [here](#).
- The Cluster has handed over and installed a total of 14 Mobile Storage Units (MSUs) that have augmented the offloading capacity in the Rafah handover point and the storage capacity of four UN Agencies and International NGOs.
- In Al Arish, Egypt, the Logistics Cluster augmented the ERC storage capacity with the installation of 10 MSUs with a dedicated set-up for the temperature-controlled cargo through four inflatable cold rooms, in addition to eight prefabs and four ablution units.

## Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

- To enhance communication with communities, the PSEA network adopted a new visual identity named 'Sanad,' which regularly disseminates safeguarding messages through various mediums, including printed brochures, stickers, and radio spots tailored to the emergency context.
- Given communication challenges in Gaza and limited internet access, the network predominantly relies on printed brochures and stickers to reach the population. UNICEF sent 500,000 Sanad brochures to Gaza for distribution, alongside hygiene kits.
- Sanad initiated social media channels to convey safeguarding messages. In the initial two weeks, messages on these platforms reached about 150,000 users, with over 90 per cent from the West Bank. There are further plans to increase the reach of these channels to a broader audience in the weeks ahead.

**Protection against sexual abuse and exploitation (PSEA) remains a cross-cutting priority for all clusters. The SAWA helpline, reachable at 121 and through WhatsApp at +972 59-4040121 (East Jerusalem at 1-800-500-121), operates 24/7. This toll-free number is widely disseminated across all areas of intervention to report cases of SEA and to facilitate emergency counselling and referrals for affected communities to access life-saving services. The PSEA Network monitors calls daily and will increase the number of counsellors if necessary.**

# The Gaza Strip prior to the current escalation



\* Asterisks indicate that a figure, sentence, or section has been rectified, added, or retracted after the initial publication of this update.