

GAZA

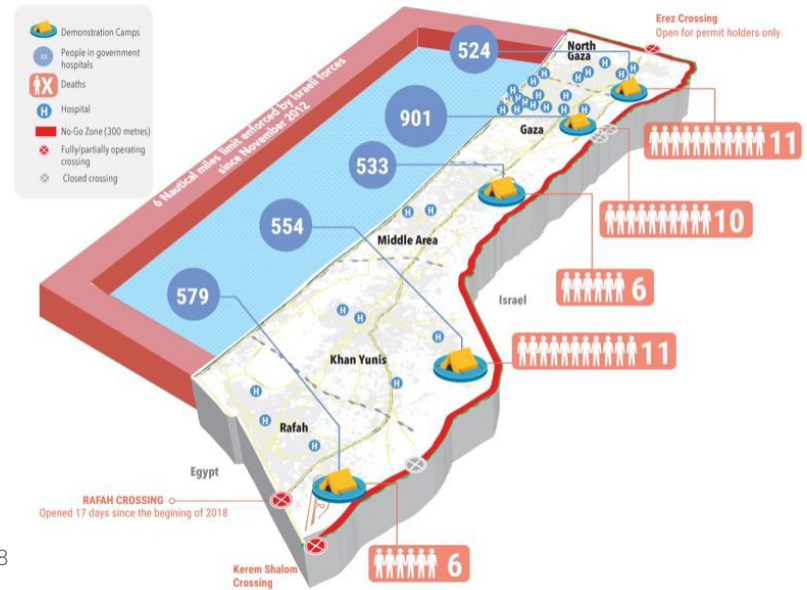
Most pressing needs and vulnerabilities

Thematic report – 7 May 2018

Mass protests on the border between Israel and Gaza since 30 March have resulted in an escalation of violence and a number of casualties not seen in Gaza since 2014. Recent developments have occurred within the context of a deteriorating humanitarian situation. Since early 2017 humanitarian needs have been increasing due to growing access constraints and electricity shortages. Mounting tensions between Palestinian political factions have also led to disrupted service provision. The impact of international actors' political interventions has exacerbated tensions in the region.

The recent increase in violence and humanitarian need has to be considered against the backdrop of vulnerabilities accumulated due to long-standing access restrictions and obstacles to the development of Palestine. Following a decade-long blockade and several Israeli military operations in Gaza, Palestinian infrastructure, economy, and public services are in a critical condition, and capacity to respond to the humanitarian crisis is almost depleted.

Source: OCHA 02/05/2018



Key priorities



+7,900
injuries since 30 March



+96% water
unfit for consumption



+40%
essential drugs depleted



+20 hours per day
electricity supply gap

About this report

This thematic report analyses the most pressing humanitarian needs in Gaza against the backdrop of long-standing vulnerabilities, access restrictions, and political developments. Research was conducted through the secondary data analysis and conversations with key informants in Gaza, West Bank, and Israel.

The report identifies key drivers of the crisis and provides an overview of emergency response preparedness. Aggravating factors have been identified to better understand the impact of potential deterioration of the security situation in Gaza. Existing information gaps and lessons learned based on the response to past acute crises in Gaza are included.

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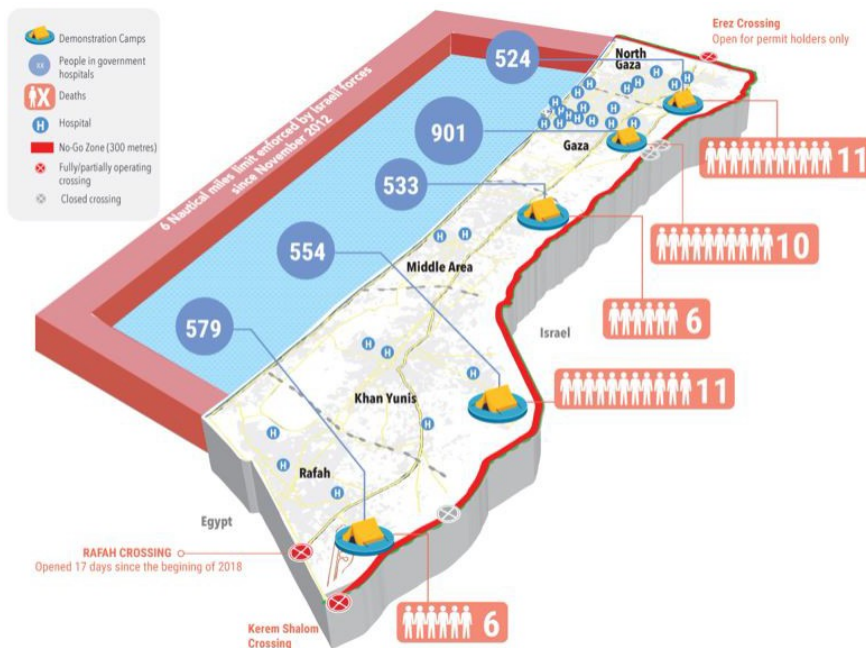
Contextual information

Latest Developments

Continuous mass demonstrations have been taking place in at least five different locations along the perimeter fence on the border between Israel and Gaza since 30 March. As of 4 May the protests have resulted in at least 40 fatalities and over 7,900 injuries, representing levels of violence not witnessed in Gaza since the 2014 conflict OCHA 04/05/2018; WHO 2/05/2018.

Gaza and Khan Younis governorates have registered the highest numbers of casualties. About 2,000 people were injured with live ammunition in all five governorates, which raises serious concerns of excessive use of force by the Israeli army OCHA 04/05/2018; WHO 02/05/2018, OCHA 27/04/2018. In comparison, about 800 people who were hospitalised as of 28 April were injured due to teargas inhalation and 150 by rubber-coated ammunition. The number of casualties has been generally decreasing since the first demonstration on 30 March WHO 2/05/2018, WHO 14/04/2018, WHO 6/04/2018, WHO 31/03/2018.

Protest locations and related casualties as of 2 May 2018



Source: OCHA 02/05/2018

The demonstrations are part of the 'Great March of Return' – a series of mass protests organised by several Palestinian civil society organisations and backed by all the political factions in Gaza. The main objectives of the protests are to denounce Israeli policies, bring international attention to the humanitarian crisis in Palestine, and to demand the Palestinian right to return to their original villages, located in the territory of Israel, from where they were expelled in 1948. The 70th anniversary of this event – *Nakba* – falls on 15 May. Further escalation of protests and violence is expected then, fuelled also by the US decision to move the embassy to Jerusalem, planned to begin on 14 May Jerusalem Post 25/02/2018.

The protest sites, located 500-700 metres from the perimeter fence, are in An-Nahda area (east of Rafah), Al-Najar area (east of Khuza'a in Khan Younis), Al-Bureij camp (Middle Area), Malaka area (east of Gaza city), Abu Safiya in Jabalia, and at the checkpoint in Beit Hanoun (North Gaza). The tents were moved closer to the border before the fifth week of protests.

While the majority of protestors have been peaceful, the Israeli army reported cases of participants burning tires, placing explosive devices along the fence, damaging it, and throwing rocks and home-made 'Molotov cocktail' bombs at the Israeli forces. On 4 May protestors set fire to the Kerem Shalom crossing, damaging the equipment and infrastructure needed for vital fuel and gas delivery OCHA 04/05/2018. Some participants have tried to breach the perimeter fence. No Israeli casualties have been reported, but material damage has been inflicted on Israeli agricultural land due to fires caused by protestors flying explosive devices into the Israeli territory with kites Haaretz 02/05/2018, OCHA 27/04/2018, OCHA 30/03/2018, Al Jazeera 30/03/2018.

Attendance at protests is reported to have decreased since 30 March, when up to 30,000 people participated. The overall number of participants on 27 April was estimated at 10,000 OCHA 27/04/2018. Protests and participation levels escalate on Fridays and further escalation is expected on 15 May when the protestors reportedly plan to attempt to breach the border to Israel. Israeli forces have been preparing for the escalation by deploying snipers and significantly increasing their presence in the area OCHA 30/03/2018. The Israeli soldiers were instructed to fire live ammunition at anyone attempting to cross the fence, or comes within 300 metres of it Btselem 04/2018. Multiple Israeli airstrikes and tank shells were launched into Gaza in April targeting military sites, but also resulting in shelter damage and casualties OCHA 27/04/2018. Moreover, the violence is likely to spread to include more targets within Gaza, especially if Hamas tries to prolong and/or intensify the protests Al Monitor 18/04/2018.

These latest developments follow the general trend of deterioration of access, security, and humanitarian situation in Gaza since early 2017. Stagnation of the political reconciliation process between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, an unstable situation in the region, and impact of the US decision to move the Israeli

embassy to Jerusalem all aggravate the situation and increase the likelihood of further deterioration resulting in increased humanitarian needs and decreased access in mid-May.

Drivers of the humanitarian crisis

Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories: Israeli control over Gaza was imposed in 1967 and has continued since then despite the withdrawal of settlements and Israeli military personnel in 2005. Three military conflicts between Hamas and Israel have heavily impacted Gazan infrastructure and resilience since 2005. The occupation has resulted in continuous control over the border crossings, airspace, and territorial waters as well as enforcing an increasingly harsh range of prohibitions and restrictions on the residents of Gaza, limiting their freedom of movement and access to livelihoods, healthcare, and education. The state of occupation and accumulated impact of military operations has hampered economic development and humanitarian and development projects resulting in the isolation of Gazan communities, lack of social cohesion, increasing humanitarian needs, and a serious economic crisis OCHA 21/12/2017.

Internal Palestinian divide: The conflict between Hamas and Fatah, the political party governing the Palestinian Authority (PA) in West Bank, has continued for over 10 years, following the takeover of Gaza by Hamas in 2007. Division in the administration, foreign policy, and financing that followed the conflict resulted in a lack of sustainable public services in Gaza, with the biggest impacts on healthcare, WASH, and electricity delivery. Punitive measures, including power and fuel supply reductions, civil servant salary cuts, and withholding of medical deliveries and funding, were implemented by the PA in 2017 in order to pressure Hamas to give up control over Gaza. Those measures led to a significant deterioration of humanitarian conditions.

Air, sea, and land blockade by Israel: The blockade on Gaza was imposed in 2007 (after Hamas gained control over Gaza), intensifying previous access restrictions. There are only two functioning crossings between Gaza and Israel, both under Israeli control: Erez, which is a crossing primarily for Palestinians and humanitarian staff with permits, and Kerem Shalom, through which commercial and humanitarian goods are imported and exported.

The blockade severely limited the access of Gaza's population to healthcare, education, and livelihoods. Israel also restricts the import of 'dual use items' – goods that are perceived as potentially having a military use such as generators or advanced health equipment. This hampers the maintenance and repair of critical civilian infrastructure, new construction, and development.

Rafah crossing blockade by Egypt: The pedestrian crossing at Rafah has been effectively

closed since 2013; since then it opens rarely and for limited periods only. Prior to its closure, Rafah was the main crossing used by Palestinians. At least 23,000 people, including humanitarian cases, are pre-registered and waiting to cross into Egypt OCHA 16/04/2018.

Lack of a political solution: National, regional, and international actors lack the willingness to mitigate the impact of the internal divide, as well as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This remains a major obstacle in unifying the Palestinian territories and implementing the two-state solution. Humanitarian conditions are not likely to improve without necessary actions taken by all the sides to the conflict.

Economic crisis: The economic crisis is driven by the restrictions on movement, commercial access, imports, exports, and trade and exacerbated by the impact of several military conflicts. The economic situation was compounded in 2017 by the punitive measures imposed by the PA, which led to reduced consumption and lowered the national income. The Gazan economy is estimated to have grown by 0.5% in 2017 compared to around 8% in 2016. The unemployment rate has been high (especially among women and youth) since the 2007 blockade. Lack of employment opportunities drive the high level of poverty with over 53% of Gaza residents living below the poverty line, which leads to constraints in access to basic services World Bank 03/2018, PCBS 2017.

Protracted displacement: Vulnerable UNRWA-recognised Palestinian refugees make up 70% of the 1.8 million population of Gaza. Over 20,000 people remain displaced in Gaza following the 2014 conflict and are particularly vulnerable to shocks and highly dependent on aid.

Deteriorating access

Continuous protests at the border of Gaza and Israel are likely to diminish access to and from Gaza, as closure of border crossings has previously been used as a punitive measure in response to violence against Israel Al Monitor 18/04/2018. Decreasing access to and from Gaza is already one of the main drivers of humanitarian needs, preventing the majority of Gaza residents from accessing education, medical services, and employment outside of Gaza while simultaneously preventing economic recovery and the provision of basic services, including food, education, electricity, water, and sewage treatment, inside Gaza. Furthermore, impediments to entry for humanitarian workers continue to increase.

Pedestrian access

The number of people allowed to cross through Erez to Israel has been extremely low since the imposition of the blockade by Israel in the second half of 2007. Yearly exit numbers into Israel were increasing between 2007 and 2015 but started decreasing after late 2015.

A sharp decline in numbers of crossings into Israel was reported in 2017, when 50% fewer crossings were registered in comparison with 2016. The monthly averages of crossings in 2018 were below the corresponding numbers in 2017, with the exception of March. Despite that, the number of crossings in March remained 22% below the monthly average before the imposition of the blockade OCHA access: 20/04/2018, Gisha.

In 2017, a number of measures imposed by Israel further restricted travel to and from Gaza, bringing the number of crossings to similarly low levels as seen in 2014. Extensive use of 'security blocks' was reported, which allow Israeli officials to ban people from travel, quoting undisclosed security measures as the reason for denial of a permit. The frequency and severity of the security interrogations at Erez also increased. Residents of Gaza were often permitted to travel abroad only after signing a document stating that they would not attempt to return to Gaza for one year. Many people receive no response to their permit applications, banning them from travel without being officially rejected. As a result, in September 2017, over 16,000 permit applications were pending. The process of considering applications was lengthened from 23 working days for 'non-urgent' requests to 50-70 working days in October 2017. Additional restrictions prohibited Palestinians in possession of food, toiletries, or electronic devices other than mobile phones from exiting Gaza. Gisha 01/2018.

Rafah crossing into Egypt has been registering extremely low levels of crossings in both directions since the closure in 2013. Between 1 January and 30 April 2018, the crossing was partially opened for 13 days (eight days in both directions and five days in one direction). It was open for 36 days in all of 2017, and 44 days in all of 2016. In 2017, 17,000 people exited Gaza through Rafah compared to 26,000 in 2016 and 151,000 in 2013 OCHA 27/04/2018, OCHA access: 20/04/2018.

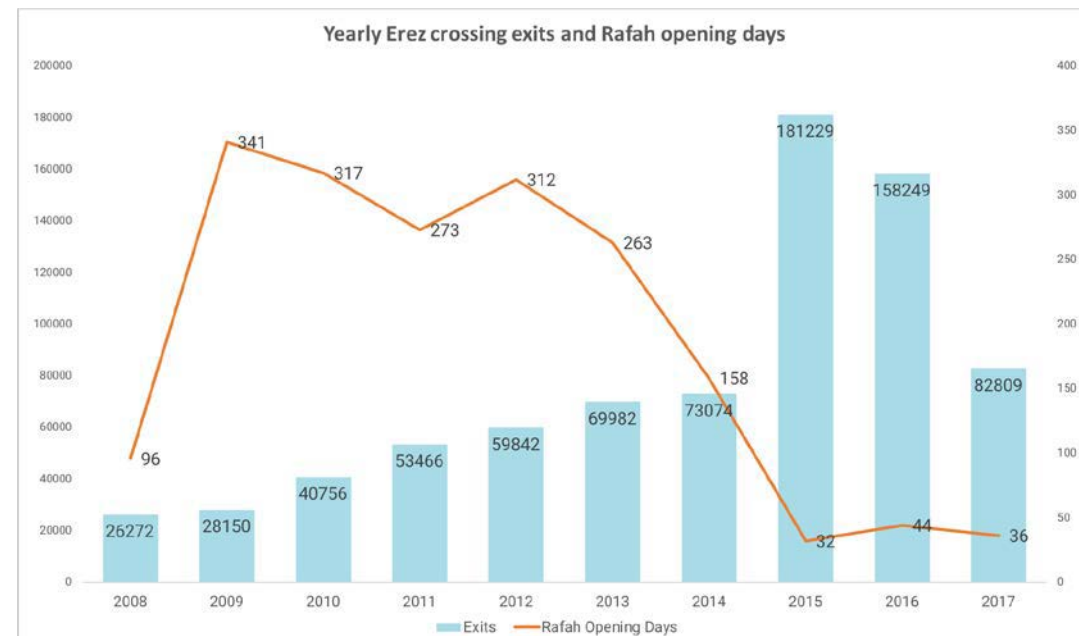
Growing restrictions on travelling have had a detrimental effect on access to healthcare, as patients seeking healthcare outside Gaza must file an application to Israeli authorities to exit through Erez. The approval rates of those applications have been declining since 2012 and reached 54% in 2017, the lowest level on record since 2008. The number of delayed applications, which remain pending by the time of scheduled health appointment, grew between 2012 and 2017, when it reached 44%, compared to 31% in 2016. However, in first months of 2018, the percentage of delayed applications started decreasing, while the percentage of denied applications, which was relatively low and stable in 2017, started to increase WHO 03/2018.

When patients don't receive the answer from Israeli authorities, they are forced to seek another appointment and reapply for a permit, which significantly prolongs the process and puts patients at risk of not reaching the health assistance in time. 54 patients died while awaiting security permits from Gaza in 2017, the vast majority of them referred for cancer diagnosis and/or treatment WHO 12/2017, Al Mezan.

Additional factors hampering the access to healthcare from Gaza include slow processing of requests for financial approvals by the Palestinian Ministry of Health (governed by the Palestinian Authority) to cover the cost of health consultations outside Gaza, security interrogations of patients with approved applications, and low rates of approval of patient companions applications by Israel WHO 12/2017.

Access for patients seeking medical care in Egypt via Rafah crossing remained very limited. Only about 1,400 patients were able to exit through Rafah in 2017, compared to more than 4,000 per year exiting for health-related reasons before the 2013 closure WHO 12/2017.

Graph 1: Exits through Erez and Rafah since 2012



Source of data: OCHA oPT

Commercial access

The level of imports of commodities was generally increasing after a big deterioration due to the closure in 2007. However, in 2017 it slowed down, remaining below 2016 levels, and it continues to decrease. In first months of 2018, the volume of goods entering Gaza remained up to 20% below the monthly average in 2017 OCHA 02/2018.

Increasing importation levels since 2015 can be attributed to the establishment of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, facilitating delivery of vital reconstruction items. Since 2015, the percentage of imported food items has also been growing and constitutes 25% of all imported items in 2018. Karni crossing closed in 2007, leaving Kerem Shalom as the only commercial route for the entry and exit of goods from Gaza. The operational and storage capacity of the crossing is very limited, which slows down import rates. The internal divide between the PA and Hamas further hampers capacity due to a complicated coordination process that involves all Israel, the PA, and Hamas in control of commercial deliveries and transactions, which significantly prolongs the process of importation.

Certain types of goods perceived by the Israeli authorities as having a potential military use are not allowed to enter Gaza, severely limiting imports of materials required for reconstruction and advanced equipment, including generators and health equipment. There is no clear policy on what constitutes a 'dual use' item, and the decisions are arbitrarily taken by Israeli authorities. Since 2014, only 16% of the nearly 3,000 items requested to rebuild Gaza's water infrastructure have been approved UNRWA 21/03/2018.

Humanitarian access

Since the start of the demonstrations on 30 March at least 96 health personnel have been injured and 16 ambulances damaged by Israeli forces. Some are reported to have been intentionally targeted Al Mezan 25/04/2018, WHO 2/05/2018.

Humanitarian staff face increasing difficulties obtaining permits to enter or exit Gaza. In the first two months of 2018, 43 UN personnel received permit denials and one-year bans, compared to 41 personnel denied in all of 2017 UN 20/03/2018. Entering and exiting of humanitarian personnel has been increasingly difficult due to prolonged processing time for long-term permits for working in Gaza (50-70 days) and permits for travelling abroad for Gaza-based personnel (70 days), compared to 14 days processing time required in the beginning of 2017 OCHA 15/01/2018. 33% of permit applications submitted for UN personnel in Gaza between September 2017 and March 2018 remained pending with no response by the date of travel UN 20/03/2018.

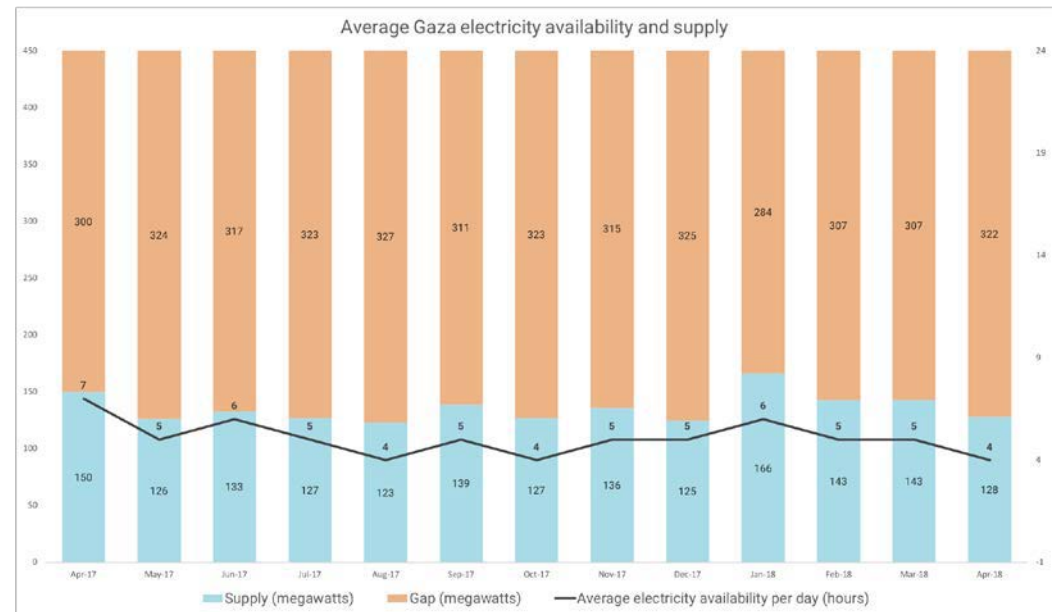
Since 2015, the amount of humanitarian imports has been rapidly decreasing, and is currently at the lowest level since 2008, despite growing needs in Gaza OCHA 03/2018.

Electricity crisis

Recent developments: Gaza's Power Plant (GPP) was forced to shut down on 12 April due to lack of fuel. Egyptian power lines ceased to work on 11 February, due to technical malfunctioning of three feeder lines OCHA 02/2018. Without two out of the three sources of

power, the electricity supply in late April amounted to 120MW per day against an estimated 400-500MW of demand OCHA oPt, Gisha 3/01/2018. This results in four hours of electricity per day followed by 20-hour-long shortages, evidencing further deterioration of electricity supply compared to the beginning of 2018, when between five to eight hours of electricity per day was delivered OCHA oPt. Imported quantities of petrol, diesel, and cooking gas are not adequate to meet the needs of the residents of Gaza. Only 70% of cooking gas needs were covered in March 2018 OCHA 03/2018.

Graph 2: Average electricity availability and supply



Source of data: OCHA oPt

Background on electricity crisis: Gaza has been entirely dependent on electricity supplied by Israel and Egypt since 1967. Israel provided 120MW and Egypt up to 28MW on a regular basis. Since 2014, the total electricity supply amounted to maximum. 208MW, covering at best 50% of needs Gisha 3/01/2018. GPP became operational in 2002 and since then has been repeatedly bombed by Israel, which limited the operational capacity to a maximum of 60MW. Damage to the power plant limited its storage capacities, resulting in high dependency on very frequent fuel deliveries, which surpass financial capacities of Gaza Electricity Distribution Company (GEDC). Delivery now depends on safe passage

through Sinai, as fuel for the power plant has been delivered from Egypt since June 2017, when the PA stopped subsidising fuel delivery from Israel [UN 20/03/2018](#), [ABC News 13/07/2017](#). Restrictions on the entrance of materials necessary for reconstruction prevent the GPP from reaching full operational capacity. Electricity supply from Egypt is highly unreliable due to regular technical malfunctions.

The chronic electricity crisis in Gaza has been deteriorating since 2017, when the PA implemented a number of punitive measures to pressure Hamas to give up control over Gaza. At the PA's request, Israel reduced the electricity supply from 120 to 70 MW, which coincided with Hamas' inability to afford fuel after PA cut subsidies in April 2017, resulting in a closure of the GPP. Despite the reinstatement of full supply (120MW) from Israel in 2018, the electricity supply remains very low due to the PA ordering the GEDC to cover a part of the cost of electricity purchased from Israel, which reduced the financial resources for the fuel for the power plant. Additionally, the amount of fuel imported from Egypt has been decreasing in 2018, limiting the capacity of GPP. Current electricity supply remains at similar levels compared to the electricity crisis in 2017 (graph 2). There were 56 days with 4 or less hours of electricity a day in 2017, compared to 26 so far in 2018 (as of 30 April) [OCHA oPt](#).

The humanitarian impact of the electricity crisis in Gaza has a major influence on other sectors, particularly health, WASH, and education.

Crisis impact

The humanitarian impact of the current escalation in violence in Gaza cannot be considered without the background of accumulated vulnerabilities resulting from long-standing occupation and blockade. Humanitarian sectoral needs in Gaza are highly interdependent and mutually compounding, which aggravates the risk of further deterioration. The following section on crisis impact addresses the most pressing needs faced by the population in Gaza, simultaneously focusing on the long-term impact of the blockade and the political situation in order to adequately assess the severity of humanitarian needs.

Health

Most pressing needs

The recent escalation of violence in Gaza has led to multiple casualties, with many people requiring urgent medical attention. Severe injuries have been reported, involving large exit wounds and a high level of destruction to bones and soft tissue, which can lead to long-term physical disabilities [MSF 19/04/2018](#). Since 30 March, over 4,000 people were

hospitalised, and some 2,790 were treated at primary healthcare facilities and medical points. Of the casualties, the majority were adult men. Escalating violence has had significant mental health and psychosocial implications as well, particularly among children. At least 700 children were injured [WHO 2/05/2018](#). In April, 60% of children surveyed by NRC suffered from traumatic nightmares and showed signs of psychosocial deterioration, compared to 53% in March [NRC 03/05/2018](#).

The health sector in Gaza is struggling to respond to this sudden influx of injured patients: hospitals are overcrowded and not equipped to respond to the high level of complex injuries, as there are shortages of essential medicines, blood banks, and essential laboratory materials. Rapid deployment of emergency medical staff has been identified as a key humanitarian need in order to conduct complex lifesaving surgeries. Mental health support, adequate transportation of casualties, post-operative and rehabilitative care, and protection of health personnel are also priorities. At least 16 ambulances have been damaged and 96 health personnel injured since 30 March, at least five by direct fire [WHO 2/05/2018](#), [OCHA 27/04/2018](#), [WHO 14/04/2018](#), [OCHA 12/04/2018](#), [WHO 9/04/2018](#), [WHO 30/03/2018](#).

While some patients have to be referred to hospitals in West Bank and Israel for life or limb-saving treatment, Israeli authorities have denied 66% of the applications of people who participated in protests [OCHA 13/04/2018](#).

Sectoral vulnerabilities

The surge in health-related humanitarian needs takes place against a backdrop of vulnerabilities of the health sector acquired through years of blockade, internal divide, and chronic electricity crisis. Health facilities in Gaza depend on humanitarian deliveries of fuel for generators so they can provide health services. Received funding for emergency fuel has been decreasing since 2016 [OCHA oPt](#). In January and February 2018, fuel shortages forced three hospitals to suspend medical services and 23 primary healthcare clinics to reduce services [WHO 02/2018](#). Negative coping mechanisms including postponement of elective surgeries, discharging patients prematurely, and limiting sterilisation and laundry services have been used by hospitals since 2017 [WHO 01/2018](#).

The long-standing economic crisis and access restrictions have eroded the health sector in Gaza leading to shortages of essential drugs, lack of equipment, lack of qualified professionals, and unpaid salaries. 42% of 516 essential drugs were completely depleted and further 5% were at critically low level (less than four weeks supply) as of February. Additionally, 23% of disposables were completely depleted, and a further 3% were at critically low level. The number of completely depleted drugs has increased from 175 in January 2017 to 241 in February 2018 [WHO 02/2018](#).

People with special needs and disabilities face disruptions to services, as medical institutions are affected both by the general worsening in the economic situation and the

shortages in electricity. Over 49,000 people in Gaza suffer from some type of disability, and many risk further complications due to lack of assistance, rehabilitation support and health equipment, transportation difficulties, and physical barriers to access healthcare OCHA 11/10/2017.

Movement restrictions prohibit Gaza's health personnel from accessing professional training or exchange know-how with the health sector in West Bank. The entry of international experts to Gaza has also been increasingly restricted, hindering the delivery of specialised trainings. Over 6,000 medical personnel have not been paid their salaries regularly since 2014, and receive 40% of their salary every 40 to 50 days WHO 02/2018. Similarly, healthcare-related goods are not allowed to enter Gaza. Materials that have been reportedly prevented from entering Gaza include, among others, ethylene oxide, used in instrument sterilization, and medical radioisotopes used in cancer biopsy Al Mezan.

All those factors contribute to over 1.2 million people in need of health assistance in Gaza OCHA 20/12/2017, with most affected areas including North Gaza, Gaza, and Khan Younis governorates. Mental health has been a growing concern, with over 200,000 children requiring psychosocial support in Gaza OCHA 08/2017.

WASH

Most pressing needs

The WASH crisis in Gaza has been aggravated by the 2017 electricity crisis and will likely be further affected by shortages in electricity and fuel supply in 2018. Access to piped water has decreased from 90 to 70 litres per person per day from January to December 2017 (WHO minimal recommendation is 100 litres per person per day). In December 2017, the volume of clean water produced by desalination plants per month was more than 50% lower than in March 2017 OCHA 12/2017. Due to electricity shortages, water supply through the network reaches most homes for just 3-5 hours every day WHO 02/2018.

Sectoral vulnerabilities

Groundwater from the coastal aquifer remains the main source of water available in Gaza. The extraction rate from the aquifer reaches about 200 million cubic metres per year, which is four times the annual capacity of recharge. This leads to seawater and wastewater intrusion into the aquifer causing high water pollution levels resulting in over 96% of abstracted water being unfit for consumption. The water from aquifer faces irreversible depletion by 2020 UN 07/2017.

The water shortage is compounded by a poor distribution network, which results in the leakage of over 32% of water produced. Rafah, Khan Younis, and Gaza governorates receive the least amount of water. For these reasons, the main source of drinking water remains the desalinated water from water vendors, which creates a significant financial

burden - the cost of a cubic metre of water provided through the water trucking at NIS 30-40 compared to NIS 1.0-1.3 for the cubic metre provided through the water network Palestinian Water Authority 2018, UNICEF 07/2017.

Shortages of fuel and electricity decrease the operational hours of WASH facilities and have led to poor treatment of wastewater. This has resulted in approximately 100 million litres of untreated wastewater flowing into the sea every day, an increase of over 30% from January to December 2017. This exceeds international standards by more than 430% OCHA 12/2017. The contaminated areas increased from 48% in May 2017 to 73% in July 2017 WASH Cluster 08/2017. The Palestinian Environment Quality Authority warned people not to swim in polluted sea, and 'no swimming zones' were declared due to potential health hazards.

Lack of access to water and appropriate waste disposal leads to insufficient sanitation and hygiene practices, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases. The cases of diarrhoea among children under three years old almost tripled between March and December 2017 and continue to remain at a higher level than before the electricity crisis OCHA 12/2017.

OCHA estimates that around 1.5 million people are in need of WASH assistance in Gaza OCHA 20/12/2017. However, all 2 million of Gaza residents are affected by ongoing deficits and challenges in the access to water. WASH cluster data from August 2017 showed that out of 2 million people affected by the WASH crisis due to electricity shortages, up to 1.73 were in need of humanitarian assistance, with Gaza and Khan Younis governorates most affected WASH Cluster 08/2018.

Livelihoods

Most pressing needs

The recent escalation of violence is likely to impact the livelihoods of Gaza's residents by limiting access to land located close to the perimeter fence. Increasing violence against fisherman has also been reported. Since the beginning of 2018, the number of incidents of firing at fisherman and farmers in the Access Restricted Area near the perimeter fence has been increasing. 64 shootings were recorded in two first months of 2018 compared to 213 in all of 2017 OCHA 03/2018. This affects the working environment and safety of fisherman, who are already confronted with the negative impact of water pollution on their livelihoods, as people refuse to buy locally caught fish out of fear of pollution Washington Post 28/09/2017. There are approximately 3,700 registered fishermen in Gaza who rely on the activity for their livelihoods. Israel limits the Gaza fishing zone to 6 – 9 nautical miles off the coast, which negatively impacts on both catch and revenue OCHA 03/2018.

On 3 May the PA cut salaries of civil servants in Gaza by 20% Reuters 3/05/2018. The PA has been increasing pressure on Hamas in 2018 by withholding salaries of civil servants in

April, and eventually paying only the workers employed by the PA. Reducing payments to public servants was previously used as a means of pressuring Hamas in 2017, when nearly a third public employees were forced to retire, and the rest had their salaries reduced by 30% [Reuters 3/05/2018](#).

The issue of timely salary payments affects all employees paid by the state including teachers and doctors. The economic conditions for the private sector are dire, and resulted in widespread protests and a national strike held by the Gazan private sector in April 2018 [Al Monitor 29/04/2018](#).

Sectoral vulnerabilities

Gaza residents' livelihoods have been suffering from the economic crisis since 2007, which is further aggravated by the internal divide between Hamas and the PA. Of the 56% of the workforce that has employment, 36% work in the public sector while most of the private sector workforce is employed in family-owned and family-operated businesses, largely engaged in trade and service activities [HCT 2017/07](#).

A lack of financial resources aggravates the economic situation and results in high levels of unemployment and poverty. Unemployment reached almost 44% in Gaza in 2017, compared to 41.7% in 2016. Unemployment among the 15-29 age group is particularly high, at 61%. Women are particularly vulnerable with participation rate in the labour market standing at 19%, compared to 71% men's participation. High levels of unemployment lead to the majority of Gaza's residents living below the poverty line, and being highly dependent on international aid [Al Jazeera 24/06/2017](#), [World Bank 03/2018](#).

Protection

Most pressing needs

Very large numbers of casualties reported since 30 March point to increasing protection needs in Gaza. The use of live ammunition has been widespread, with approximately 75% of serious injuries caused by live ammunition in the first days of protests, compared to a third of injuries during first days of protests in December 2017 attributed to live ammunition. There have been at least 48 Palestinian fatalities and over 7,900 injuries in Gaza reported in 2018 compared to 28 fatalities and 1,181 injuries reported in Gaza in all of 2017 [OCHA 27/04/2018](#).

Sectoral vulnerabilities

At least 49,000 people with disabilities face particular protection needs. Over 90% are unemployed and highly dependent on cash assistance. Over 35% of children with disabilities do not attend school, and less than 50% are enrolled in regular education. Families of people with disabilities report funding shortages for transportation, rehabilitation, and special hygiene items [OCHA 11/10/2017](#).

Women constitute 49% of the population in Gaza and are also particularly susceptible to the repercussions of the access restrictions and deteriorating social and economic conditions. Women experience greater difficulties entering the job market as well as advancing within it, including due to training and professional development barriers [Gisha 2018](#).

Impoverishment and the absence of economic opportunities are central drivers of gender-based violence in Gaza. Levels of GBV increased in Gaza in the period between 2005 and 2010, whereas they decreased in West Bank [OCHA 01/2018](#). According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) 2011 Violence Survey, 51% of women in Gaza are victims of gender-based violence [UNFPA](#). However, the percentage is likely higher due to under reporting. Availability of GBV case management and health, legal, and psychosocial support is limited [WILPF 2/11/2018](#).

There are 1.36 million Palestinian refugees registered by UNRWA in Gaza. Palestinian refugees are defined by UNRWA 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. Palestinian refugees are highly vulnerable to unemployment, poverty, and protection threats related to recent protests. In Gaza over 40% of refugees are food insecure [UNRWA Al Monitor 5/04/2018](#).

According to OCHA estimates, over one million people need protection assistance in Gaza. However, it is possible that number is even higher, given the aggravation of protection concerns since 2017 [OCHA 20/12/2017](#).

Shelter/NFIs

Most pressing needs

Shelter destruction has been reported due to multiple airstrikes and missiles fired into Gaza by the Israeli forces in April [OCHA 27/04/2018](#).

Over 22,000 individuals remain displaced in Gaza following the 2014 conflict, of whom 96% remain in need of cash support. They live in particularly overcrowded conditions and are often unable to pay rent, which causes frequent relocation [OCHA 03/2018](#).

Due to lack of funding, only 55% of the 11,000 housing units totally destroyed in the 2014 hostilities have been reconstructed, while another 8% are in progress. 59% of the 160,000 damaged homes have been repaired, while work is in progress on another 6%. Limitations on imports of construction material and funding gaps continue to impede reconstruction efforts. Despite increased imports of construction materials since 2015, 35% of the cement required for the reconstruction has not been delivered [Shelter Cluster 01/2018](#).

Sectoral vulnerabilities

The state of civilian infrastructure in Gaza is critical following decades of neglect and the impact of several military operations. Initial findings of an assessment on substandard living conditions in Gaza, conducted by the Shelter Cluster in 2017 show that up to 29% of households in Gaza report high shelter vulnerability, with the most important issues reported being leaking roofs (46%), no bathroom (29%), and no municipal water connection (10%) [Shelter Cluster 09/2017](#). Gaza is prone to flooding due to poor and overcrowded urban infrastructure [UNRWA 8/01/2018](#). Compounded by poor WASH infrastructure, flooding can lead to health risks and displacement.

OCHA considers 230,000 people to be in need of shelter/NFI support, a number estimated on updated figures of affected by the 2014 conflict and preliminary findings of the aforementioned assessment [OCHA 20/12/2017](#).

Education

Most pressing needs

Over 5,200 students who attend 13 schools located in the Access Restricted Areas (ARA) are at heightened risk of Israeli military incursions following the protests at the border [Education Cluster 03/2018](#).

Sectoral vulnerabilities

The education system has been heavily impacted by the electricity crisis and the punitive measures imposed on Gaza by the PA in 2017. 70% of the UNRWA schools and 63% of Ministry of Education run schools operate on double or triple shifts due to electricity shortages, and still face problems with accommodating large numbers of students. Ministry of Education data shows that 86 new school buildings and 1,081 additional classrooms are needed in order to provide an appropriate learning environment [Education Cluster 03/2018](#).

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) in Gaza is facing difficulties recruiting new teachers and covering their salaries. As a result, it faces a shortage of 800 teachers and administrative staff and a deficit of \$300,000 each month for salaries, resulting in overcrowded schools and limited hours of education, with the average daily class room time per student as low as four hours. There is a critical need to recruit over 230 additional teachers to cope with staffing shortages [HCT 2017/07, EducationCluster](#).

Access to higher education is severely limited due to movement restrictions. Students have often held protests near Rafah crossing to request exit possibilities in order to access higher education in other countries. The enrolment rate of children in secondary education has overall been in decline, mostly due to the increase in dropout rate from

secondary school, as well as barriers such as the lack of infrastructure [Gisha 21/12/2017, Carleton University 2018](#).

Aggravating factors

Failure of reconciliation between Hamas and the PA

The Palestinian factions began a new Egypt-brokered reconciliation process in the fourth quarter of 2017, which has largely been unsuccessful. Despite signing the reconciliation agreement on 12 October 2017 and the handover of the control of Gaza crossings to the PA in November, long-standing issues like control over the security sector, foreign policy towards Israel, and the situation of Hamas public employees hampered the efforts to form a joint administration. In 2018, the PA threatened to impose new punitive measures to pressure Hamas into cooperation. Salary payments to public sector employees have been frozen since the beginning of April 2018 [AI Monitor 13/04/2018](#). Further measures are likely to cause a significant deterioration in humanitarian situation, similarly to what happened in 2017, when a significant drop in livelihoods was witnessed.

Unstable leadership

Palestinian leadership operates under an expired mandate in West Bank following the postponement of elections in 2016, while Hamas remains the de facto government authority in Gaza. Moreover, the majority of Palestinians are contesting the authority of Mahmoud Abbas, the 82 year old PA president, who is operating without an official electoral vote [MEMO 13/12/2017](#). Ismail Haniya, Hamas' leader since 2017 has also been criticised for his policies regarding Israel. The stalemate in the reconciliation process is likely to further postpone elections planned for 2018, leaving the PA and Hamas in a vulnerable situation. The first meeting in 22 years of the Palestinian National Council was held in the beginning of May 2018, and it did not include Hamas or other political groups from Gaza. This deepened internal divisions between political factions [Middle East Monitor 1/05/2018](#).

Status of Jerusalem

In December 2017, US President Trump officially recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital, leading to violent demonstrations in Palestine, including Gaza. Despite the international condemnation, further actions to move the US embassy to Jerusalem have been taken, with the opening of the embassy planned for May 2018 [The Guardian 23/02/2018](#). The status of Jerusalem has been a major issue between Palestine and Israel since 1967, when Israel occupied and annexed East Jerusalem. The biggest escalations of violence

across Palestine in 2017 were connected to the status and access to Jerusalem, and further escalation of violence is likely following the relocation of the embassy.

Key characteristics

- Demographic profile: total population: 1.9 million in Gaza, 48% 0-17 years old, 23% 18-29 years old, 4% 60+ years old [PCBS 2018](#).
- Nutrition: prevalence of moderate and severe stunting: 7% [UNICEF](#).
- Health: infant mortality rate: 18 per 1000 live births, under-five mortality rate: 21 per 1,000 live births [UNICEF](#).
- WASH: 10% of the population uses improved drinking water, 99.9% improved sanitation [PCBS 2018](#).
- Literacy levels: Total adult literacy rate (2008-2012): 95.3%, over 32,700 illiterate people among population 15+ [PCBS 2018](#), [UNICEF](#).

Stakeholders

Hamas is an Islamist organisation established in 1987 during the first Palestinian Intifada – The Uprising (1987–1993), with the aim of resisting the Israeli occupation. It has a military wing called the Izzedine al Qassam Brigades. In 2006 Hamas won political elections in Gaza, which Fatah did not recognise. Following this, clashes broke out between Hamas and its secular rival Fatah and since 2007 Hamas holds de facto power in the Gaza Strip. In 2017, Hamas expressed its willingness to consolidate a unity government with Fatah by announcing the dissolution of its governing body in the Gaza Strip and agreement to hold general elections [Middle East Monitor 25/09/2017](#). Hamas has regularly fired rockets into Israel and conducted attacks against Israeli military and civilian targets.

Fatah is a political party that was founded in the late 1950s for the purpose of Palestinian liberation. Despite being expelled from Jordan, and then Lebanon, it eventually became the controlling power behind the Palestinian Authority. Fatah remains the dominant party in the West Bank and within the PA [Britannica](#).

Palestinian Authority (PA) is a governing body in Palestine, established in 1994 following the Oslo Accords between Israel and Palestine. Following the 2006 elections and takeover of Gaza by Hamas, its authority extends only over West Bank. PA authorities began to use the name 'State of Palestine' on official documents in 2013 following

granting the title of a non-member state by the UN in 2012. Mahmoud Abbas has been a president of the PA since 2005 [Mission of Palestine](#).

Israel has occupied Gaza, West Bank and East Jerusalem since 1967. Israel withdrew its forces and removed its settlers from the Gaza Strip in 2005 but imposed a strict blockade in 2007 to control the flow of goods and materials. Israel and Hamas have been involved in three major conflicts in 2008, 2012 and 2014. In the end of 2017, tensions between Israel and Palestine increased after the US President recognised Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel.

Palestine Liberation Organisation was established in 1964 aiming to represent Palestinian people and fight for Palestinian independence. It is an umbrella organisation consisting of a number of resistance groups, movements and political parties, out of which Fatah is the most significant. The PLO was involved in protracted irregular war against Israel through its military branches and was criticised for attacks on Israeli civilians [Palestine UN](#).

Response capacity

Local and national response capacity

The financial and operational capacity to respond to recent outbreaks of violence is considered low. Hospitals in Gaza declared a state of emergency and called for international support to respond to the most urgent needs following the protests on 30 March.

National response capacity to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is low and the Palestinian Authority, which in theory holds the authority over Gaza, is one of the stakeholders driving the humanitarian needs.

There are up to 800 local NGOs registered in Gaza, but only a small number is active in the humanitarian sector on a regular basis [OCHA](#).

International response capacity

According to OCHA oPT There are between 13 and 15 UN-affiliated agencies present in Gaza, although some of them have a relatively small, project-based presence. Additionally, there are 74 registered INGOs. Together with local organisations there are up to 200 active UN, INGO, and NGO partners in the humanitarian sector in Gaza.

Since 30 March, activities have been delivered in response to the recent escalation of violence, including prepositioning of drugs and supplies, deployment of medical teams, and provision of post-operative care. However, the hospitals remain critically overcrowded and sometimes release patients prematurely due to the lack of space.

Significant funding gaps remains a serious concern, especially following the cuts to UNRWA budget made by the US in the beginning of 2018 [World Bank 03/2018](#). The operational environment and humanitarian access are worsening in 2018 with up to 40% of personnel having their permits denied or delayed, and new security measures leading to a further deterioration in access.

Regular preparedness activities have been organised in Gaza and contingency plans have been developed since 2004. An Emergency Coordination Centre and plans of response to a range of scenarios have been established (including large scale conflict, civil unrest, and natural disaster). An inter-agency simulation exercise SIMEX was conducted in March 2018 to identify and respond to gaps in emergency preparedness [OCHA oPT](#).

Despite high presence and ongoing preparedness activities, the operational capacity faces serious challenges related to access, capacity of responders, and material preparedness. The projects designed in the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2018-2020 have secured the funds for only 14% [FTS 20/04/2018](#). In 2018, some of the partners reported not having enough resources to provide food assistance. As a result, food entitlements were reduced for 55,000 people, and cash assistance for further 65,000 was temporarily suspended in January [WFP 31/01/2018](#).

Information gaps and needs

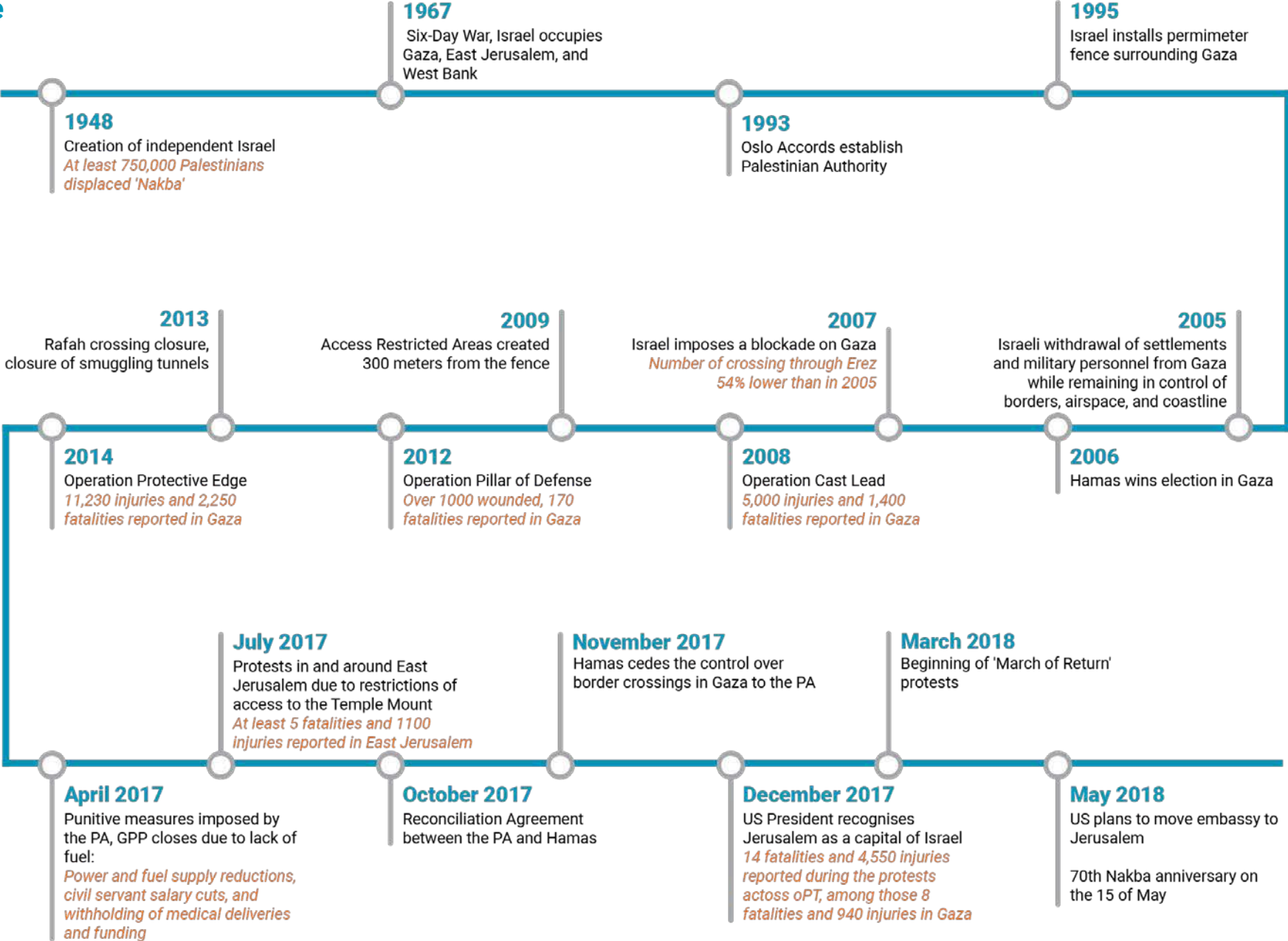
The most recent comprehensive inter-sectoral assessment (MIRA) was conducted in Gaza in 2014, following the 50-day conflict with Israel. Since then, assessments have been conducted by individual sectors and on an ad-hoc basis by Emergency Assessment Team. Main information gaps include:

- Gender related data on the impact of the blockade, capacity of services, vulnerable groups
- Information on living conditions of IDPs and the barriers to return of IDPs
- Food security data at locality level
- Health emergency preparedness data
- Data on education-related violations and education sector emergency preparedness
- Inter-sectoral impact of WASH crisis including water quality-related health risks
- Shelter data at locality level and vulnerability profiles in need of shelter assistance
- Up-to-date nutrition data

Lessons learned

- Displacement in Gaza threatens the social fabric and stability. Up to 490,000 people were displaced in Gaza during the last conflict in 2014. Development of an efficient tracking mechanism is necessary in order to effectively respond to the needs of IDPs [OCHA 30/08/2014](#).
- Emergency exchange of technical labour, spare parts, and equipment required for infrastructure repairs may help to respond to the needs of remaining IDPs in Gaza [ALNAP 6/02/2017](#).
- Lack of jobs, particularly for youth, are a serious factor threatening the economic and political stability. Large scale employment measures both within Gaza as well as enabling Gazans to take up jobs in agreed schemes in the region and abroad are critical [ALNAP 6/02/2017](#).
- Increase the number and presence of civil society partners to document possible human rights violations [OCHA 23/04/2018](#).
- Developing the nexus between humanitarian response and development projects is necessary for the implementation of large-scale water, sanitation, health, and education projects [ALNAP 6/02/2017](#).

Timeline



Sources: OCHA oPT, Institute for Middle East Understanding, Middle East Monitor, B'Tselem