



PALESTINE

New risks in one of the world's most protracted crises

KEY FACTS

Population: **5.1 million**

2.4 million people in need of humanitarian aid

75% of Gazans in need of humanitarian aid

64% of Gazans food insecure even before COVID-19

5.6 million registered Palestinian refugees under UNRWA's mandate

49.1% unemployment rate in Gaza

4/5 score for severity of access constraints

55% of funding received for 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan

Please note Palestine is not covered by the ND-GAIN Index for vulnerability to climate change, the Global Health Security index or the WPS index of women's equality.

Above: In 2012, the IRC worked with primary school-aged children through a Healing Classrooms curriculum in the West Bank. The IRC does not currently work in Palestine.

PROBABILITY

6 HUMAN THREAT

3 NATURAL THREAT

IMPACT

3 CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE

5 EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION

COVID-19, economic pressures, funding shortages and regional tensions all increase the risk of escalation in one of the most protracted situations on this year's Watchlist, whose origins lie in the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967.

The people of Palestine are facing multiple emergencies that threaten their survival and wellbeing, in one of the most politicized crises in the world. Around half of all Palestinians are in need of humanitarian assistance, with needs most widespread in Gaza - accounting for 64% of those in need ([OCHA](#)) - due largely to the impacts of thirteen years of blockade and tensions between the de facto authorities in Gaza and the Israeli government. COVID-19 and measures introduced to slow its spread have further worsened the economic situation. Moreover, any recurrence of conflict in Gaza or widespread unrest, for example following renewed moves by Israel to further annex parts of the West Bank, or continued demolitions and forced displacement of Palestinians, could result in increased humanitarian and protection needs and major disruption to people's livelihoods.

"The situation in Palestine is dire, notably in Gaza where there is a double lockdown – a 13 year long blockade and now restrictions related to the pandemic. COVID is spiking in an area with one of the highest population densities in the world, and where access to medical care and clean water is severely lacking. The humanitarian situation in the West Bank, while less severe, is characterized by ongoing protection and human rights violations. The US decision to withdraw funding from the Palestinian Authority, the United Nations and the NGO community has had a devastating impact. It is imperative to prioritize the crisis in Palestine and contribute to the betterment of Palestinian lives."

- Su'ad Jarbawi
Regional Vice President,
IRC Middle East and North Africa



HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2021

- ▶ **COVID-19 is driving a rapid deterioration in the economic situation, while humanitarian agencies are facing record low funding levels.** Even before the pandemic, Palestine's economy was expected to fall into recession in 2020-2021. COVID-19 has significantly exacerbated the situation; household poverty rates are expected to rise from 53% to 64% in Gaza and double to 30% in the West Bank ([OCHA](#)). Gaza has been particularly affected, with unemployment rates reaching an unprecedented 49% ([OCHA](#)). The authorities there responded to the pandemic by imposing restrictions that have helped bring down the number of COVID-19 cases but also constrained economic activity. Increased socio-economic challenges are, in turn, likely a key factor in reported increases in psychosocial distress and gender-based violence ([OCHA](#)).
- ▶ **COVID-19 has compounded the thirteen-year blockade of Gaza, to cut civilians off from critical supplies.** Gaza remains heavily isolated by Israel and, since COVID-19 began, the number of people crossing in and out of the territory has dropped significantly, as have imports of fuel and cooking gas (from 26.6 million litres in September 2019 to 6.3 million in September 2020) ([OCHA](#)). All the while, funding levels for humanitarian agencies, particularly UNRWA, are at record lows and the humanitarian response has been particularly challenged. UNRWA is the second largest employer in Gaza, with [11,000](#) staff, and so shortfalls in its funding threaten to push unemployment there - which is already 50% - even higher.
- ▶ **The deteriorating humanitarian situation and enduring risk of major conflict in Gaza may be heightened by economic, political and regional trends that will continue into 2021.** A range of factors – like the risk of discontent and unrest in Gaza due to the deepening economic crisis, political tensions with Israel, and more – could all increase the risk of major conflict in Gaza during 2021. Previous major outbreaks of violence in 2008-2009, 2012 and 2014 killed many Gazan civilians, caused massive damage to homes and critical infrastructure in Gaza and displaced thousands of residents. Conflict escalation in Gaza has already injured Palestinian civilians and damaged civilian infrastructure and the [UN](#) has noted “a pervasive crisis of accountability, with no effective remedy for the vast majority of alleged violations of international law, to ensure justice for the victims and to prevent future violations.”
- ▶ **Palestinians are increasingly vulnerable as years of violations of IHL and human rights continue and risk escalating further.** On November 3, the largest single demolition of civilian structures in a decade occurred, when three quarters of the population of Humsa Al Bqai'a in the West Bank had their homes destroyed. As of November, 689 structures had been demolished across the West Bank, more than in any full year since 2016, rendering 869 Palestinians homeless ([OCHA](#)). Moreover, the Palestinian Authority reduced its cooperation with Israel in protest at Israel's annexation plans, which has [reportedly](#) removed one route previously available for Palestinians living in the West Bank to try and address challenges they faced accessing services such as healthcare.
- ▶ **Any renewed moves by Israel to further annex parts of the West Bank could trigger wide-scale protests and unrest, disrupting livelihoods and humanitarian action.** Israel delayed its announced plans to further annex parts of the West Bank in mid-2020 but, should it revive this idea, there would likely be a major backlash, including potentially violent protests in both the West Bank and Gaza that – along with the likely Israeli security response – would likely further restrict Palestinian freedom of movement, increase protection concerns and disrupt many Palestinians' livelihoods.

THE IRC IN PALESTINE

The IRC is not currently present in Palestine but we monitor and classify ongoing emergencies to inform decisions about if and when to enter a new location. As part of the IRC's Strategy 100 we commit to entering places where there is conflict and organized violence driving humanitarian need; there is unmet humanitarian need and we can add value; and there is funding forecasted to deliver programs and ensure financial stability. To read more about the IRC and our Strategy 100, visit [Rescue.org](https://www.rescue.org).



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