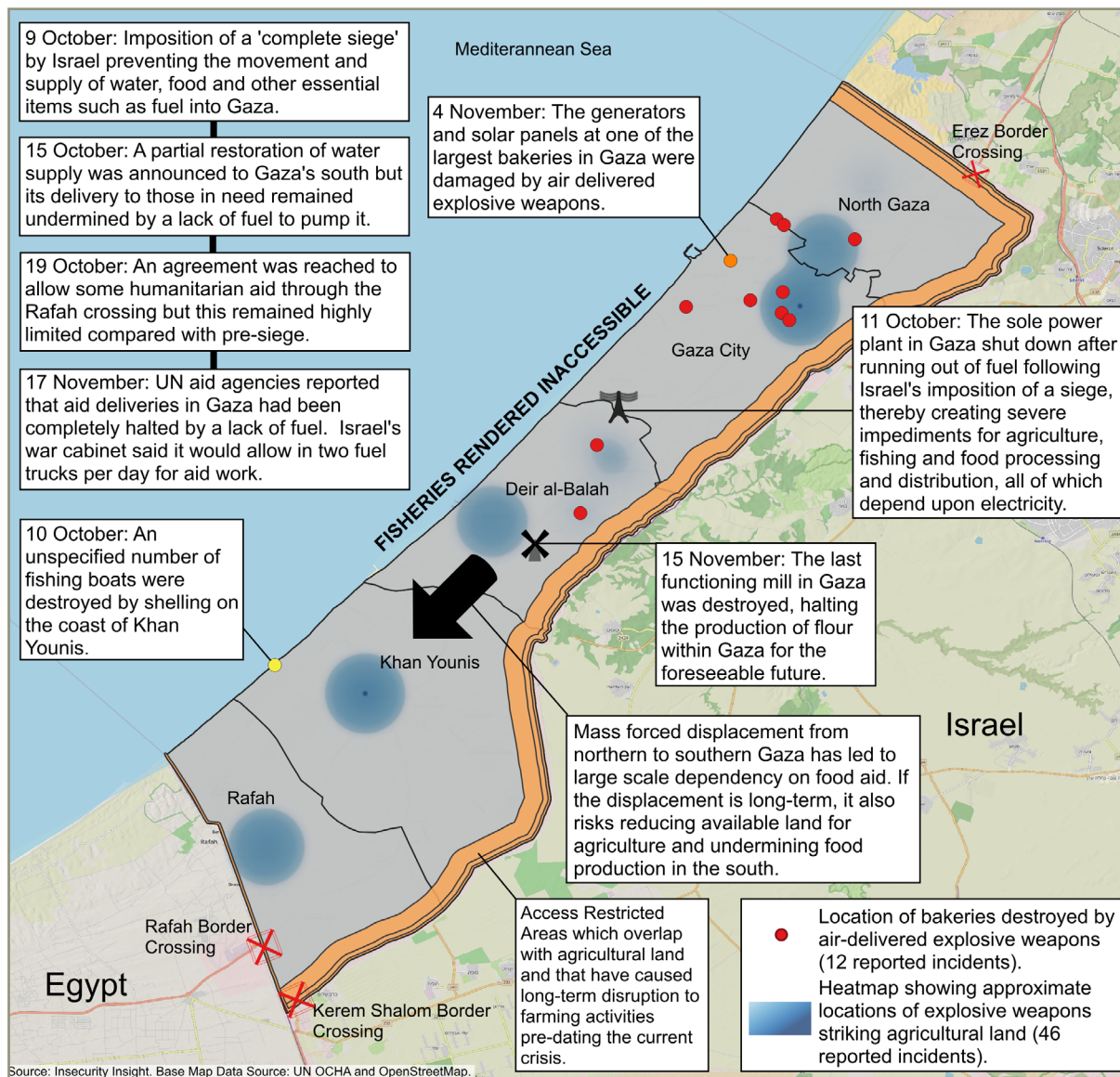


# Flash Analysis Report: Over A Month of Attacks on Food Security in Gaza

November 2023



**Figure 1: Examples of reported conflict incidents directly affecting food security in Gaza, 07-October-17 November 2023, and existing and emerging challenges**



## Introduction

Violence has severely escalated in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), especially in Gaza, following a series of attacks by Hamas-affiliated militant groups from Gaza into southern Israel on 7 October 2023. More than **1,000 Israeli and foreign nationals were killed** in these attacks in more than ten kibbutzim and at a music festival. One month later, the Gaza Health Ministry reported that over **10,000 people had been killed in Gaza**. Israel has called on civilians to leave northern Gaza for protection in the south, but these supposedly "safe zones" have often later been subjected to bombing and explosive weapons use. On 9 October Israel imposed a "total siege" on the already blockaded Gaza Strip, preventing the supply of water, food and fuel into Gaza. Coupled with the destruction of civilian infrastructure, this has severely limited Palestinian civilians' ability to access food.

## Methodology

International humanitarian law protects the rights of civilians to access food and water during armed conflict. Article 54 of the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions (1949) prohibits conflict parties from using the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare and attacking objects indispensable for the survival of the civilian population, including foodstuffs, crops, livestock and drinking water supplies. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reaffirmed these principles in 2018 when it unanimously passed Resolution 2417 requiring all conflict parties to protect civilian infrastructure critical to the functioning of food systems and markets and the delivery of humanitarian aid.

In this context, this flash analysis report documents a highly concerning trend in conflict incidents directly affecting food security in Gaza between 7 October and 17 November 2023. They include the damaging and destruction of bakeries, markets, food shops and fishing ports, and the use of explosive weapons striking agricultural land.<sup>1</sup> The report also provides testimonies from displaced residents in Gaza and insights into the broader impact of violence on food security based on key informant interviews conducted in late October and November.

**“Our daily life [has] turned into [a] daily struggle to secure food for [our] kids and [...] survive.”**  
**Displaced resident, Gaza, November 2023**

## The context: food security in Gaza

The oPt were **added** to the list of countries and territories on the Food and Agriculture Organization-World Food Programme (WFP) list of hunger hotspots for the November 2023-April 2024 acute food insecurity early warning outlook period due to the crisis that has been unfolding in Gaza since 7 October. However, despite historically possessing some of the most fertile land in the oPt, food insecurity in Gaza pre-dates this crisis.<sup>2</sup> In 2022, 1.3 million people, accounting for over half of the territory’s population, were **estimated** to be in need of food security and livelihood assistance. Food insecurity was most acute in Gaza’s eight refugee camps, but was far from limited to these settings.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, **80% of residents in Gaza relied** on international aid even before the latest round of hostilities. Recurrent violence and a decades-long Israeli blockade of Gaza restricting the movement and exchange of people, commodities, and resources have played key roles in contributing to this state of affairs.

Since September 2000 farmers’ access to their land has been limited by an Israeli-imposed Access Restricted Area between 300 and 1,500 metres wide on the Gaza side of the Israel-Gaza border fence. In this area, which overlaps with what historically has been some of the most fertile agricultural land in Gaza, farmers have faced grave security threats. Following the 50-day period of hostilities in Gaza in 2014, of 167 **farmers surveyed** who worked land within 500 metres of the Israel-Gaza border in Khan Younis and Rafah governorates, 88% reported crop damage, 84% reported damage to irrigation networks, and 64% reported injuries to or deaths among their livestock. Israel’s **recurrent spraying of crop-killing herbicides** in areas close to Gaza’s eastern border has led to the further degradation of agricultural land hundreds of metres into Palestinian territory. Buffer zones on Gaza’s coastline have also limited fishing to within three nautical miles of the coast, which has **effectively placed** 85% of the fishing areas officially allocated to Gaza off limits. The latest hostilities have severely exacerbated threats to agricultural and fishing activities and overall food insecurity.

## Reported conflict incidents directly affecting Gaza’s food production, processing and distribution infrastructure, 7 October-17 November 2023

Civilian infrastructure crucial for the production, processing and distribution of food in Gaza has been damaged or destroyed on a large scale. At least 12 bakeries producing bread – a

staple part of diets in Gaza – are reported to have been destroyed by Israeli air-delivered explosive weapons.<sup>4</sup> The bakeries were primarily in the northern half of Gaza. Several were in refugee camps, including the only bakery in the al-Maghazi camp in Deir al-Balah governorate in the centre of Gaza, which is **said** to have been frequented by thousands of citizens every day prior to its destruction. Notably, the last functioning bakery in the centre of Gaza City – the **Bhadra bakery** – was reportedly struck by Israeli air-delivered explosive weapons on 6 November. “Dozens” of civilians are reported to have been **killed and injured** in some of the attacks on bakeries, while bakery workers were also killed in at least one of the air strikes.

The capacity of bakeries that have not been directly damaged or destroyed to continue functioning has been hampered by a lack of electricity and fuel caused by the siege, as well as a lack of water, which requires fuel for its desalination. Gaza’s **last operating desalination plant** reportedly shut down on 17 October. Moreover, the energy-generating equipment of some bakeries has also been damaged. This includes the **Al-A’elat bakery** – said to be one of the largest bakeries in Gaza – which reportedly had its generators and solar panels struck by air-delivered explosives on 4 November. The combined impact of these factors – fuel, electricity and water shortages, and the damage and destruction caused by explosive weapons – has resulted in **not a single bakery reportedly remaining operational** in northern Gaza as of 7 November. Furthermore, the production of flour within Gaza to supply remaining bakeries making bread was halted for the foreseeable future on 15 November when the last functioning mill in Gaza was destroyed by Israeli artillery shelling. Civilians have often had to **queue for four to six hours** to buy bread at the bakeries still operating in the south, and have sometimes returned home empty-handed due to insufficient supplies.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to bakeries, at least three marketplaces are reported to have been damaged by Israeli air-delivered explosive weapons. This includes a marketplace bombed on 9 October in the Jabalia refugee camp on a street considered to be among the busiest commercial areas in northern Gaza. At least **69 people were reported to have been killed** in this incident, some of whom were on their way to buy bread at the time of the explosion. Given the recurrent communications blackouts, coupled with the high intensity of explosive weapons use with wide-area effects in urban areas where markets and food shops are also located, it is likely that more markets and food shops have been damaged than have been reported. Indeed, as early as 10 October **UN OCHA** reported that at least five of its Food Security Sector (FSS) partner contracted shops in Gaza that distribute food had been destroyed after hostilities escalated just days before. Even if shops and markets are still able to function, damaged roads, insecurity, and fuel shortages have meant that they are **unable to obtain fresh supplies to restock their shelves or stalls**. Consequently, many civilians who have been able to reach food shops despite the security risks have found the shops’ shelves empty.<sup>6</sup>

Explosive weapons struck agricultural lands in Gaza on at least 46 occasions between 7 October and 17 November. Most often, the incidents occurred in areas surrounding Gaza City, Rafah and Khan Younis, but were also recorded in Al Burayji, Al Maghazi, An Nusayrat, Beit Lahiya, Deir al-Balah and Jabalia. The majority of incidents involved explosives being fired by Israeli tanks, with all such incidents having occurred since 20 October, while the remaining incidents involved the use of air-delivered explosive weapons. The contamination of farmland by explosive weapons remnants and unexploded ordnance (UXO) is likely to have long-term negative and foreseeable consequences, and will reduce food production in Gaza even after the violence has decreased. This is due to the difficulties farmers will experience if they attempt to farm contaminated land and the risk of them and their livestock being killed or injured by the later detonation of UXO.<sup>7</sup>

The insecurity created by the high intensity of the violence and the severe levels of broader insecurity in Gaza since 7 October have resulted in the overwhelming majority of agricultural activities having stopped,<sup>8</sup> while some of the few farmers who have continued to farm their land have been injured or killed. The **Gaza Ministry of Agriculture** reported that Israeli air-delivered explosive weapons had killed almost 20 farmers working in areas east of Khan Younis alone as of 6 November.

Fishing activities in Gaza have been brought to a complete halt, while ports and fishing boats have been damaged.<sup>9</sup> Shelling by Israeli gunboats off the coast of Khan Younis and the port of Gaza City on 10 October resulted in the destruction of an unspecified number of fishing boats and damage to the port. Israel is reported to have used **artillery-fired white phosphorus shells**, which can cause serious burns to people and objects, in attacks on Gaza City port on 10 and 11 October. Threats such as these to fishing areas and the complete halt to fishing activities have reduced supplies of an important nutritional source for Gazan residents (with Gaza being historically famous throughout the oPt for its fishing).<sup>10</sup>

The desperation of civilians resulting from their inability to access food is likely to have played an important role in contributing to thousands of people forcibly entering UN warehouses on 28 October in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip and looting food, including flour and wheat, as well as hygiene kits. Many of those who **looted the food** said they had “no flour, no aid, no water, not even toilets”. Although other incidents of this type have not been reported, key informants were concerned that the desperation of civilians could lead to a recurrence of the looting of food aid.

## The broader impact of violence and the siege on food security

- **Civilians’ inability to access sufficient nutritious food**

In addition to the acute security challenges faced by people travelling to food outlets such as shops and markets, barriers to the restocking of these outlets caused by the severe damage inflicted on roads and other key infrastructure have resulted in shelves or market stalls being empty. In some cases, only items with very limited nutritional value have been available. One displaced person in Gaza who managed to reach a supermarket in early November recalled:

“The shelves of food were empty! What [was] remaining [were] sauces and some candies; people [were] moving around with their carts empty trying to find something useful to eat! But there [was] nothing!” Displaced resident, Gaza, November 2023

The reduced availability of food and other commodities has also reduced people’s ability to access food, because shortages of supplies inevitably lead to higher prices. **WFP rapid response surveys** found that by 23 October, 18% of respondents in Gaza had seen the price of wheat flour – essential for making bread – increase severely compared with before the escalation of the violence, while a further 36% reported moderate increases. These changes are likely to have knock-on effects for the price of bread for the few civilians who are able to access it at bakeries. Simultaneously, even people who would normally be able to feed themselves because they have enough money to buy food now need food aid, because cash is becoming harder to obtain. All 55 branches of Gaza’s ten banks have **suspended their operations**, and only ATMs are still functioning.



- **Mass forced displacement with immediate and long-term consequences for food insecurity**

After dangerous journeys with limited access to food and water, displaced people arriving in southern Gaza have often found overcrowded conditions and have sometimes been forced to sleep on the streets. The situation has been dire even for those who have managed to reach shelter, as one Gazan resident noted:

**“The shelters are completely overcrowded. They are trying to organise themselves, with women and children sleeping inside, and the men outside due to the overcrowding. Most people are sleeping on the bare floor. Diarrhoea is widespread and many people have a cold due to the low temperatures at night.” Displaced resident, Gaza, October 2023**

Conditions such as these, coupled with the fact that displaced people have frequently lost their livelihoods and private assets, have resulted in huge numbers becoming dependent on food aid. Tragically, however, this has been insufficient (as documented below).

In the longer term, the displacement of people from northern to southern Gaza is likely to reduce the area of agricultural land available for sowing and harvesting crops and rearing livestock. Land that was previously farmed in this way could instead become used to provide displaced people with somewhere to live, however basic, because many of them have had their properties and livelihoods destroyed. Even before the latest escalation of violence, most refugee camps in Gaza, including the Beach and Jabalia camps, lacked land on which crops could be grown. Instead, food production was largely only possible in these places on the rooftops of buildings.<sup>11</sup> The long-term displacement of so many people will aggravate this situation and increase Gaza’s overall food insecurity.

- **Severe challenges facing the provision of food aid and humanitarian assistance**

Food aid workers and providers have been seriously hampered in their ability to deliver aid, despite its urgent and widespread need. This is due in part to the lack of aid being permitted to enter Gaza. As of 30 October, the **average daily inflow of trucks to Gaza was equivalent to only 1.1%** of the inflows that occurred prior to the current hostilities. Humanitarian operations at the Rafah border crossing are expected to cease at any moment due to the lack of fuel to operate trucks and machinery used to take supplies from the border and unload them in Gaza. If no additional fuel is available, other supplies will not enter Gaza either, which will further disrupt aid agencies’ activities. Moreover, because of the siege, the lack of water or fuel to cook staple foods such as rice and lentils has meant that even the inadequate amount of food aid that has been allowed into Gaza has sometimes been **made useless because it cannot be cooked**.

In addition, aid workers have suffered grave security threats and have themselves been displaced from northern Gaza to the south in large numbers.<sup>12</sup> Communication blackouts imposed by Israel have meant that aid organisations have been unable to ascertain whether their staff members inside Gaza are still alive, and have made it almost impossible to effectively coordinate aid responses.<sup>13</sup> Reflecting the personal struggles of so many of Gaza’s residents, food aid workers have resorted to burning wood, old food packets, and debris from damaged buildings in order to try and make bread.<sup>14</sup> This illustrates how the crisis has also affected those who should in normal circumstances be able to alleviate food shortages and highlights the breakdown of support systems that results in devastating consequences for the most vulnerable. One civilian commented that:

**“The situation is catastrophic; it’s just self-management at this stage.” Displaced resident, Gaza, October 2023**

## • Negative coping strategies

In response to the severe barriers preventing civilians from accessing food, many have adopted negative coping strategies. These include drinking and using unsanitary water for cooking, and adults skipping meals and rationing their water intake to prioritise the feeding of younger children. One displaced Gaza resident noted:

**“We struggle to find bread and flour. The men are not drinking potable water in the house to ensure the children can drink the little available supplies.” Displaced resident, Gaza, November 2023**

However, this weakens the adults who are caring for the more vulnerable. In some cases, lactating mothers have found it difficult to breastfeed infants because they themselves are not getting enough food.<sup>15</sup> While food shortages are apparent across Gaza, their prevalence is especially notable in the north of the territory, where the violence is most intense and the presence of aid agencies is very limited.<sup>16</sup> Some families with elderly and disabled members have felt obliged to remain in northern Gaza despite the high intensity of the violence there so that they can support their less mobile family members. This highlights how the violence impacts the most vulnerable demographic groups in particular.

Farmers have also adopted negative coping strategies, including the harvesting of crops ahead of schedule in the first days of the hostilities in anticipation of future security risks. Similarly, the malnourishment of livestock has worsened due to the limited availability of supplies to feed them, which has led to some farmers prematurely slaughtering their livestock.<sup>17</sup> Measures such as these will reduce food supplies further in the coming weeks and months, requiring even higher levels of imports and food aid than in the past.

## Recommendations

### General proposals:

- All parties to the conflict should agree to an immediate humanitarian ceasefire to ensure the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure and allow for the increased delivery of vital, life-saving humanitarian assistance.
- Third party states should actively promote and monitor the implementation of UNSC Resolution 2712 (2023), which calls for urgent humanitarian pauses to the fighting and the establishment of safe corridors throughout the Gaza Strip for a sufficient period to enable rapid and unhindered access for humanitarian actors consistent with international humanitarian law.
- All parties to the conflict must immediately stop the targeting of civilians and infrastructure critical to the survival of the civilian population, including food production and distribution facilities.
- All actors should work towards increasing the quantity and diversity of humanitarian assistance entering Gaza through all available crossing points. The blockade of Gaza, which prevents the entrance of life-saving food, fuel and water, constitutes a collective punishment that violates international humanitarian law.
- Israel should agree to allow the immediate entry of sufficient fuel into Gaza to restart vital civilian infrastructure, including food production and distribution sites.

**Specific proposals:**

- Sufficient fuel should be immediately allowed into Gaza to enable the proper functioning of hospitals; water extraction, purification and distribution infrastructure; and communications networks for the coordination of the humanitarian response.
- Water supplies should be provided for Gaza's population in line with the minimum humanitarian response standards of 15 litres per person per day for drinking, cooking and sanitation purposes. This requires fully restoring the uninterrupted Mekorot water supply lines from Israel into Gaza.
- Sufficient food should be allowed to enter the Gaza Strip each month to meet the recommended minimum nutritional requirements of 2,100 calories per person per day, with 10-12% of the total energy provided by protein and 17% by fat.
- Telecommunications in Gaza should be restored and safeguarded to allow the use of electronic payments through PalPay and financial service providers and to facilitate people's access to markets.
- All parties to the conflict must prevent attacks on humanitarian workers and assets, including deconflicted (geolocalised) offices and facilities and cargo movements.
- Objects that are indispensable for the survival of the civilian population must be protected, including foodstuffs, crops, livestock, agricultural assets, and drinking water installations and supplies, as well as those necessary for food production and distribution such as farms, markets, mills, and food-processing and storage sites. Targeting these objects is a direct violation of UNSC Resolution 2417, which forbids the use of hunger as a weapon of war.

1 The incidents in this report have not been independently verified and do not reflect a complete or representative sample of all incidents directly affecting food insecurity in Gaza during the analysed period.

2 Key informant interview.

3 Key informant interview.

4 There are conflicting reports regarding the exact number of bakeries damaged and destroyed by explosive weapons in Gaza. This figure includes reported examples of specific bakeries affected.

5 Key informant interview.

6 Key informant interview.

7 For the long-term negative consequences of explosive remnants of war and UXO for food production, see Insecurity Insight, 'The Links between Conflict and Hunger in Syria.' April 2023. Switzerland: Insecurity Insight. <https://bit.ly/SYRHungerApr2023>.

8 Key informant interview.

9 Multiple key informants reported that fishing activities in Gaza had been brought to a complete halt.

10 Key informant interview.

11 Key informant notes from field work conducted in Gaza in March 2022.

12 Key informant interview.

13 Key informant interview.

14 Key informant interview.

15 Key informant interview.

16 Key informant interview.

17 Key informant interview.