



Executive summary of Al Mezan’s annual report on the situation of economic, social, and cultural rights in the Gaza Strip in 2022

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This paper summarizes key findings from Al Mezan’s annual report on the situation of economic, social, and cultural rights in the Gaza Strip in 2022 ([available in full in Arabic](#)). Overall, the report shows a marked deterioration in the living and humanitarian conditions of over two million Palestinians residing in the Gaza Strip—a pattern grimly in line with previous years.

The main drives of such conditions are purely human-made and to be found in Israel’s settler-colonial closure of Gaza, which marked a grim 15th anniversary in June 2022, its apartheid policies, and yet another deadly military offensive against the Strip in August 2022. Internally, the internal Palestinian division and the economic policies adopted by successive Palestinian governments have systematically failed to counter poverty and unemployment rates. Lastly, declining international funds and development projects and decreasing financial allocations offered by government agencies to improve health care, education, social protection, labor, and other services, are additional factors that have negatively affected the enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights in Gaza.

Israel's closure and related permit regime: a blow to Gaza's economy

As previously noted by Al Mezan, [Israel’s apartheid policies toward Gaza have turned the Strip into a bantustan](#), an enclosed area geographically isolated from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT). Once again in 2022, Gaza’s economy remained in fact almost completely cut off from the outside world, including the rest of the OPT, due to Israel’s domination and control of Erez and Karem Shalom crossings and the draconian

restrictions it imposes on the movement of people, goods, and commodities from and to the occupied Gaza Strip.

Among the restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities is a capricious and discriminatory permit system to which all Palestinians wishing to leave Gaza via Erez—Gaza’s only pedestrian crossing with Israel—must apply. In 2022, Palestinian workers seeking job opportunities outside Gaza submitted 79,602 exit permit requests to the Israeli Coordination and Liaison Department (CLA) at Erez. Of these, 65.8 percent were declined or went unanswered. Of the 14,144 exit permit requests submitted by Palestinian merchants, 16.4 percent were delayed or declined. Of the other 19,261 requests submitted for different purposes—such as visa applicants, NGO workers, or Al-Aqsa mosque visitors—65 percent were delayed or rejected.

Moreover, Palestinian from Gaza who have permits to work in Israel have virtually no labor rights. According to the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions, in 2022, five Gaza workers in Israel died in the workplace due to the lack of appropriate safety and health measures that protect workers from hazards in the workplace. Notably, Israeli authorities—with a policy that is very much echoing apartheid and racial discrimination—deliberately classify Gaza workers’ permits as “financial needs” permits, depriving them of equal labor rights as enjoyed by Israeli workers.

Israel also controls the entry of all goods, supplies, and materials into the Strip, deciding which commodities may or may not enter Gaza based on a list of items that Israel defines as “dual-use”, i.e., civilian items which could also have military uses and that are severely restricted from entering Gaza. Given the fluid definition of the term “dual-use”, the Israeli authorities can potentially ban almost any type of product under this category, including medical equipment, food products, and building materials and machinery.

In 2022, under the guise of “dual-use items”, Israeli authorities continued to obstruct the entry of raw materials, machinery, devices, and spare parts required for production in most industries. Last year, 40 factory owners have requested Israeli authorities to allow

the entry into Gaza of machinery, equipment, and spare parts—including food, aluminum, and precious metals—needed for their production lines. Not even one request was approved. Israeli authorities also denied 600 exit permit requests from manufacturers and industrial facility owners, denying them the opportunity to expand their businesses, export their products to the rest of the OPT, or enter new markets.

Israel's ban on the entry of raw material—coupled with the unfolding global inflation crisis—further exacerbated Gaza's construction crisis. 100 out of 315 Gaza-based construction companies shut down, while 80 percent of the remaining companies face real risks and pressures, with only a few remaining to operate effectively. Dramatically, the number of workers employed in the construction sector has dropped from 70,000 before the closure of Gaza to only 700 *in the interim*.

Gaza's economic crisis in a context of global recession and financial crisis

In 2022, the prices of goods and commodities increased dramatically in the Gaza Strip due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on supply chains and continued to rise due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The costs of basic commodities such as flour, rice, sugar, and cooking oils have risen the most, adversely affecting the level of food insecurity in Gaza and exacerbating the already terrible humanitarian conditions caused by Israel's closure and blockade, which has now been in place for almost 16 consecutive years.

Due to liquidity crises related to Israel's restrictions on the volume of cash entering the Gaza Strip, residents, and merchants have been forced to buy goods in installments and then sell them for less than the original price in order to obtain cash to meet their daily needs or cover their financial obligations.

Israel's health apartheid against Palestinians in Gaza

In 2022, Israeli authorities continued to severely restrict the entry of diagnostic medical devices, such as interventional X-ray machines and CT scans, as well as spare parts needed to repair outdated or damaged medical devices into Gaza. X-ray machines are

vital machines that are used in intensive care units, inpatient wards, receiving units, and operating rooms. Their absence exacerbates patients' suffering and puts their lives at risk. This ban has been accompanied by the chronic shortage of the essential medicine list, making healthcare provision extremely difficult.

Efforts to localize healthcare services remained limited and ineffective throughout the year. Although the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital has been designated for oncology patients, it lacks radiotherapy and radioactive iodine therapy, meaning that patients still need to seek treatment outside of Gaza.

In 2022, Palestinian patients in need of medical treatment otherwise unavailable in Gaza submitted 20,295 exit permit requests to the CLA—among them, 47 percent were women, 29 percent were children, 19 percent were people over the age of 60, and 35 percent were cancer patients. Of these requests, 33 percent were delayed or denied by Israeli authorities. There were also 26,461 requests submitted by patients' companions—62 percent of which were either delayed or denied by Israeli authorities. This means that one-quarter of all patients—including children and elderly persons—traveled to their hospital appointments alone or without their designated companions.

Israeli authorities also continued to systematically use Erez to entrap and coerce Palestinians, most notably those who need to exit the Strip to access medical care. In practical terms, this means that patients and their companions are not only subjected to Israel's draconian, discriminatory permit regime but upon obtaining a permit, they risk being interrogated or arbitrarily arrested by Israeli authorities at Erez. In 2022, Israeli authorities conducted investigations and interrogated 225 patients at Erez as a condition for allowing them to leave Gaza to attend hospital appointments. Of these, only 24 obtained approvals for their exit permit requests. Of the 61 companions interrogated at Erez, only five were allowed to travel.

Israel's human rights violations in Gaza's access restricted areas

In addition to preventing Palestinians from Gaza from freely moving across the OPT, Israel also imposes fluctuating restrictions on movement within the Gaza Strip through the enforcement of severe access restrictions—commonly referred to as “access restricted areas”—which are military no-go areas or buffer zones on Palestinian land and waters. Two of the groups most affected by the enforcement of these restrictions are the Palestinian fishing and farming communities living and working on these waters and land.

Informally started after September 2005 and still in place today, at present the land buffer zone extends along the eastern and northern perimeters of the Gaza Strip and covers approximately 62.6 km², corresponding to about one-sixth of Gaza's total area. In 2022, Israeli forces opened fire at Palestinian farmlands 590 times and carried out 42 incursions into the lands near the perimeter fence, injuring Palestinian farmers and causing damage to the fields. In the maritime access restricted areas, in 2022 the Israeli navy opened fire at Palestinian fishermen 474 times, injuring 23 of them, arbitrarily arresting 64 (including eight children), seizing 23 fishing boats, and sabotaging fishing equipment ten times.

Overlapping crises: lack of enjoyment of rights to water and sanitation

In 2022, the drinking water crisis in Gaza persisted and its two million population continued to lack access to sufficient and safe drinking water. About 96.2 percent of the total water extracted from Gaza's aquifers does not meet World Health Organization (WHO) quality standards.

On top of this, in 2022, the gap between available and needed energy remained high, with an electricity deficit of 56 percent. The average amount of power required during the year was 420 megawatts, while the average amount of available megawatts was 189, resulting in a 237-megawatt deficit. This is further compounded by frequent power outages caused by malfunctions of electric feeding lines from Israel into Gaza.

Obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to education in the Gaza Strip

In 2022, Israel's military attacks against Gaza damaged two schools and killed eight students—six of whom were schoolchildren, and two were university students. Deteriorating economic and social conditions in the Gaza Strip have also had a negative impact on students' mental health. According to UNRWA, 42 percent of first graders have psychological issues. Furthermore, due to rampant levels of food insecurity, the number of anemic children has increased.

The higher education crisis has been exacerbated by the lack of financial resources and declining economic conditions. Since 2006, the Palestinian Authority has stopped aiding universities and colleges in the Gaza Strip. As a result, some higher education institutions have faced financial difficulties, and their developmental programs have been halted.

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Education, the ratio of expenditures on higher education institutions against the needs does not exceed 10 percent. 75 percent of students were unable to pay their educational fees, and 15 percent of students were unable to obtain their certificates due to financial constraints.

The impact of weak rule of law and internal divisions

The amount of financial assistance allocated to the Palestinian Ministry of Social Development's protection program has decreased and the suffering of approximately 663,528 poor families in Gaza has continued due to irregular disbursements payments, which were reduced from four to only two batches in 2022, including a consolidated cash payment worth 350 shekels without duly considering the family size and basic needs.

Notably, the Palestinian government's contribution to poverty alleviation in the West Bank was reduced from \$18.96 million in 2021 to \$8.29 million in 2022. In Gaza, government contributions decreased from \$15 million in 2021 to \$11.75 million in 2022. In contrast, civil society organizations' contributions to the needy multiplied and exceeded those of the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah and government agencies in Gaza.

The absence of a unified Palestinian government has also hampered the development of Gaza's tourism industry, particularly in terms of absorbing staff and recruiting specialized experts to restore archaeological sites and improve the exploration of new sites, as well as guarding existing ones that lack security, safety, and surveillance.

The security apparatuses of local authorities in Gaza have also imposed new restrictions and procedures on civil society organizations, such as requiring prior permission to hold any activities in closed halls and conditioning signing on a pledge that itself violates the law.

Recommendations

To the international community:

- Pressure Israel to swiftly, effectively, and unconditionally lift the closure and blockade on Gaza; comply with international humanitarian and human rights law; and allow the free movement of people, goods, and services into and out of the Gaza Strip.
- Take concrete action to ensure accountability and justice for widespread, gross, and systemic violations against the Palestinian people, including for the crime of apartheid.

To Palestinian authorities:

- End the internal political division; maintain political unity in Palestinian among the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; hold general elections as soon as possible; ensure and increase people's political participation.
- Increase the allocations and expenditures required for developing and improving the level of services provided in all sectors, particularly education, social protection, and the localization of health services.
- Adopt an immediate plan to alleviate the deterioration of humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip, including job creation and the establishment of a loan system that protects students' right to pursue university studies.
- Ensure the freedom of civil society organizations, the lifting of all restrictions and procedures on their work, and the continued international funding and support.

To international and regional donors and agencies:

- Uphold their financial obligations and pledges toward the Palestinian territories, provide the fund required for the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, and direct the funds toward the reform and development of the infrastructure, environmental facilities, and economic sectors.
- Increase their contributions to supporting and developing the local health system; ensure the provision of medical necessities and equipment; assist in efforts to localize the health services provided to cancer patients.