

Fact Sheet on: The Fishing Sector in the Gaza Strip under the Strain of War

Introduction

Israeli occupation forces continue to target all aspects of life in the Gaza Strip, including the Palestinian fishing sector. Strict restrictions have been imposed on fishermen since the beginning of the war. These restrictions include repeated military attacks on fishermen and their boats, the destruction of fishing infrastructure, and the complete closure of the sea. These practices prevent fishermen from carrying out their work and providing for their families, while depriving Gaza's residents of a vital food source—fishery resources.

The Fishing Sector before the War

The Gaza Strip features a coastline approximately 41 km long¹, with its residents relying heavily on the sea as a primary source of livelihood, making fishing a traditional occupation passed down through generations. Over 4,500 fishermen work in this sector, along with more than 1,500 people involved in related trades such as artisans and traders. The number of boats and fishing vessels operating in Gaza's maritime sector exceeds 2,000, including 1,100 motorized boats and 900 rowboats². Most of these vessels dock at the main Gaza port and five small harbors scattered throughout the Gaza Strip.

Fishing is the second-largest productive sector in Gaza, including both marine fishing and fish farming. The marine fishing sector's annual production over the past three years has been between 3,000 and 4,000 tons of fish, in addition to 300-500 tons from fish farming. These quantities are insufficient compared to the actual needs of Gaza's population, representing only a third of the required amount. This shortfall is attributed to restrictions imposed by the occupation, including reduced fishing areas, repeated sea closures, and pursuit of fishermen at sea, resulting in the death of 16 fishermen, injury to dozens, and damage to over 400 boats and thousands of nets. Moreover, the entry of fishing equipment and spare parts has been restricted, leading to a 97% accumulation of broken motors in recent years².

The Fishing Sector amidst the War

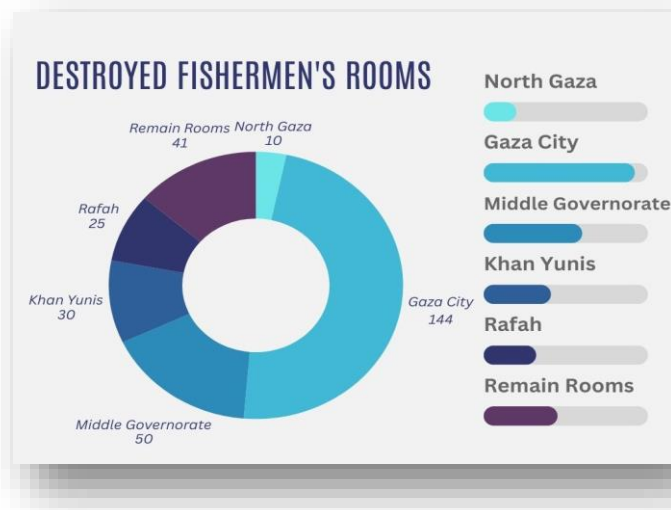
"With the sudden onset of the war on the Gaza Strip, most fishermen could not take the necessary precautions to protect their boats and equipment, leaving them on the shores and at the docks. As the aggression continued, the occupation forces destroyed most of these boats and bombed Gaza's port and small harbors, causing complete destruction,²" noted Zakaria

Fishing Sector Components	Fishing Sector 2022	Fishing Sector Losses
Fishermen	4500	150 Martyr
Motorized Boats	1100	96
Non-Motorized Boats	900	900
Fishermen's Rooms	300	259
Ports	1	0
Small Docks	5	0
Miles of Permitted Fishing Area	6	0

Figure (1) illustrates the preliminary estimate of losses in the fishing sector due to the war.

¹ UNRWA| <https://www.unrwa.org/ar/careers/working-in-gaza>

² Interview with Zakaria Bakr, Coordinator of fishermen's committees at UWAC| 17.9.2024



Baker, Coordinator of Fishermen's Committees at the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC).

Since October 7, 2023, the occupation's attacks have resulted in the death of 150 fishermen, 30 of whom were trying to fish to support their families. The attacks have also led to the destruction of 87% of fishing boats, totaling about 1,050 vessels, including 96 launches and 900 non-motorized boats. Additionally, the destruction of fishermen's rooms, stores, and associations (as shown in the figure³²) has occurred. Gaza's port has been

completely destroyed, with a 20-meter-deep crater along the maritime tongue, and indirect losses are estimated at around \$7 million per month initially².

Challenges Facing Fishermen

- Direct targeting of fishermen preventing them from accessing the sea and practicing fishing.
- Damage to boats and fishing equipment while the occupation prevents the entry of spare parts and fishing equipment, resulting in an accumulation of broken motors, exceeding 95%.
- Restrictions on the entry of necessary fuel for engine operation.
- Destruction of the fishing sector's infrastructure, including ports, harbors, fishermen's rooms, and warehouses.
- Intentional reduction of fishing areas before the war and a complete ban during the conflict.

These challenges have increased the suffering of fishermen's families, numbering more than 50,000 people, especially amid repeated displacements of families, prompting many fishermen to risk their lives by fishing in waters no deeper than one mile.

Moreover, the systematic destruction of the fishing sector has deprived Gaza's residents of fish, especially as the occupation has restricted the entry of humanitarian aid trucks and prohibited the entry of any fresh meat into the local market.

The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Supporting the Fishing Sector and Fishermen

Palestinian civil society organizations are working hard to support the fishing sector and fishermen through advocacy efforts and documenting violations against the sector. They aim to raise

³ Palestine Online| 20.6.2024 <https://2u.pw/HktsI3Y6>

fishermen's voices to the international community to pressure the occupation forces to lift restrictions on the fishing sector and protect fishermen's rights.

"The Agricultural Work Committees Union has allocated some relief aid to fishermen, but the scale of this aid is insufficient to meet the growing needs of fishermen and their families amid the significant challenges they face. Continuous coverage of all fishermen is extremely difficult. Thus, we call on civil and international organizations to allocate permanent relief programs and cash assistance directed towards fishermen to support them in meeting their basic needs and coping with difficult living conditions⁴," said Saad Ziyada, Coordinator of the Agriculture Sector at the Palestinian NGOs Network.

Recommendations

- Increase international and local support for the fishing sector by providing emergency aid to purchase fishing equipment and rehabilitate port infrastructure and related facilities.
- Ensure maritime security for fishermen by providing the necessary protection while they carry out their profession.
- Allocate special relief programs for fishermen and their families, including the provision of food supplies and cash assistance to secure their basic needs.
- Enhance humanitarian relief efforts to ensure the delivery of essential food items, especially animal proteins, to the population.

⁴ Interview with Saad Ziadeh, Coordinator of the Agriculture Sector at PNGO | 8.9.2024