

The Cost of Conflict: Economic Devastation and Human Suffering in Gaza

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Abstract

The prolonged Gaza conflict has emerged as one of the most severe humanitarian and economic crises in contemporary global politics, profoundly affecting the socio-economic structure and daily lives of civilians in the region. Continuous violence, political instability, blockades, and large-scale infrastructural destruction have weakened Gaza's already fragile economy, resulting in widespread unemployment, disruption of trade and commercial activities, inflation, and the collapse of essential public services. The paper examines the nature and extent of economic instability generated by the prolonged conflict and analyzes its impact on civilian livelihoods in Gaza. Particular attention is given to issues such as income loss, rising poverty, food insecurity, and the deterioration of living conditions among affected populations. The study further explores the relationship between infrastructural destruction and the intensification of civilian hardship, especially in relation to housing, healthcare facilities, transportation networks, water supply systems, and educational institutions. The research evaluates the effectiveness of humanitarian aid and economic support mechanisms implemented by international organizations, governments, and relief agencies in mitigating civilian suffering during the conflict. Based primarily on secondary sources, including reports of international organizations, scholarly literature, policy documents, and humanitarian assessments, the study highlights the multidimensional consequences of prolonged conflict on economic stability and human security in Gaza. The findings emphasize that sustainable peace, reconstruction efforts, and coordinated humanitarian interventions are essential for restoring economic resilience and improving civilian well-being in the conflict-affected region.

Key Words: Gaza, humanitarian, conflict, livelihood, insecurity

Background of the study

The Gaza conflict has its roots in the long standing Israeli Palestinian conflict shaped by territorial disputes political instability historical tensions and competing national claims over Palestine. Following the 1948 Arab Israeli war and later conflicts Gaza came under different forms of political and military control eventually becoming a densely populated Palestinian territory under blockade after 2007 when Hamas assumed governance of Gaza. Continuous restrictions on movement trade and access to resources weakened Gaza's economy and increased dependence on external aid even before recent escalations (Butter, 2024; ESCWA/UNDP, 2024). Periodic wars military operations rocket attacks and border tensions



repeatedly damaged infrastructure housing health systems and public services (Al-Hindi et al., 2021; Asi et al., 2024). The conflict intensified dramatically after October 2023 leading to large scale military operations widespread destruction displacement and severe humanitarian crisis (de Waal, 2024). Prolonged violence blockade and infrastructural collapse further disrupted economic systems employment food supply chains and civilian livelihoods creating deep economic instability and humanitarian hardship across Gaza (International Labour Organization & Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024; World Bank, 2024).

Introduction

The Gaza conflict has emerged as one of the most severe humanitarian and economic crises of the twenty first century causing widespread destruction of infrastructure livelihoods and civilian well being. Since the escalation of violence after October 2023 Gaza has experienced unprecedented economic collapse marked by disruption of trade employment production systems and public services (Elagraa, 2025; United Nations, 2025). Reports by international organizations including the United Nations World Bank International Labour Organization and humanitarian agencies indicate that Gaza's economy contracted dramatically between 2023 and 2026 with large scale destruction of businesses markets agricultural lands transport systems and industrial units (World Bank, 2024; International Labour Organization, 2024). Unemployment rates exceeded 70 percent in several periods millions of civilians lost stable sources of income and became dependent on humanitarian assistance for basic survival (International Labour Organization, 2025). The collapse of economic activity further intensified inflation shortages of essential commodities and severe decline in household purchasing power across the region (Hammoudeh & Bassett, 2025).

The prolonged conflict has also produced serious consequences for civilian livelihoods particularly in relation to poverty food insecurity displacement and deteriorating living conditions. Damage to farms fisheries markets and food supply chains sharply reduced food availability restrictions on movement and humanitarian access worsened hunger and malnutrition (Faris et al., 2025; Bahour et al., 2026). According to humanitarian assessments a large proportion of Gaza's population experienced acute food insecurity between 2024 and 2026 with repeated warnings of famine like conditions in heavily affected areas (World Food Programme et al., 2024; World Health Organization et al., 2025). Simultaneously large scale destruction of hospitals schools water systems sanitation networks roads electricity grids and communication facilities deepened civilian hardship beyond direct military violence (Cole, 2024; Alkhaldi & Alrubaie, 2024). Millions of internally displaced civilians were forced to live in overcrowded shelters damaged buildings and temporary camps with limited access to clean water health care sanitation and education. These conditions significantly increased vulnerability to disease outbreaks psychological stress and long term developmental insecurity especially among children women and elderly populations (Hammad & Tribe, 2020; Buheji & Buheji, 2024).

Existing studies on the Gaza conflict primarily concentrate on humanitarian conditions political tensions health emergencies or food insecurity separately. Limited research comprehensively examines the interconnected relationship between economic instability infrastructural destruction civilian livelihood collapse and humanitarian intervention effectiveness within a single analytical framework. Most available studies focus on short term crisis assessments insufficient attention has been given to the long term socioeconomic consequences of prolonged conflict on employment trade poverty and civilian resilience in

Gaza. Hence this paper makes an attempt to evaluate the multidimensional impact of economic instability and civilian hardship in Gaza assessing the effectiveness of humanitarian and economic support mechanisms in mitigating civilian suffering.

Objectives

The main objectives of this study are to examine the nature and extent of economic instability generated by the prolonged Gaza conflict, particularly in relation to disruptions in trade, employment opportunities, and essential economic systems; to analyze how such instability has adversely affected civilian livelihoods through income loss, rising poverty levels, and increasing food insecurity; to assess the relationship between large-scale infrastructural destruction and the intensification of civilian hardship in conflict-affected areas of Gaza; and to evaluate the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and economic support mechanisms in reducing civilian suffering and addressing the socio-economic consequences emerging from the ongoing conflict in Gaza.

Problem Statement

The prolonged Gaza conflict has emerged as one of the most devastating humanitarian and economic crises in recent history, particularly following the major escalation of violence between Hamas and Israel in October 2023 (Elagraa, 2025; United Nations, 2025). According to reports released by the United Nations, World Bank, and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, thousands of civilians have lost their lives, a large proportion of Gaza's population has been displaced since the outbreak of the conflict. By 2024, extensive destruction had affected hospitals, schools, roads, electricity systems, water supply networks, residential buildings, and commercial establishments across Gaza (Asi et al., 2024; Al-Hindi et al., 2021). Economic activities, including trade, small businesses, and employment sectors, were severely disrupted due to continuous airstrikes, border restrictions, and blockades imposed over the years (Butter, 2024; World Bank, 2024). Reports from 2024 indicated that unemployment levels in Gaza exceeded 80 percent in certain periods, poverty and food insecurity reached unprecedented levels (International Labour Organization & Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024). The World Food Programme warned that a significant section of Gaza's population was facing acute hunger and risk of famine because of restricted access to food supplies and humanitarian assistance (World Food Programme et al., 2024; de Waal, 2024). Healthcare facilities also suffered immense pressure due to shortages of medicines, fuel, electricity, and medical personnel, many schools remained closed or damaged, interrupting the education of thousands of children. Although humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and various United Nations agencies continued relief operations during 2023–2025, the growing scale of destruction and displacement limited the effectiveness of aid distribution and recovery efforts. In this context, the problem lies in understanding how prolonged conflict, infrastructural destruction, and economic collapse have collectively intensified civilian hardship in Gaza, also evaluating whether existing humanitarian and economic support mechanisms are sufficient to address the deepening crisis and restore socio-economic stability in the region.

Theoretical Framework

The study is primarily based on the Human Security Theory, which was formally introduced by the United Nations Development Programme in its *Human Development Report 1994* (UNDP, 1994). The theory shifted the focus of security studies from traditional state-centered military security to the protection of individuals and communities from threats affecting their survival,

dignity, and well-being. Human Security Theory emphasizes that true security cannot be achieved merely through territorial protection or military strength; rather, it requires ensuring economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, and community security for civilians (Paris, 2001). Scholars such as Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen significantly contributed to the development of this approach by linking human welfare, freedom, and development with security and peace (Haq, 1995; Sen, 1999), while Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy (2007) further emphasized the importance of human dignity and sustainable peace within the human security framework. The relevance of Human Security Theory to the Gaza conflict is highly significant because the crisis demonstrates how prolonged armed conflict directly threatens civilian survival and socio-economic stability. Since the escalation of violence in October 2023 between Hamas and Israel, civilians in Gaza have experienced severe threats to nearly every dimension of human security. Reports by the United Nations and the World Bank during 2024 highlighted large-scale destruction of homes, healthcare facilities, schools, electricity systems, roads, and water infrastructure, creating conditions of economic collapse and humanitarian distress. Human Security Theory explains that such destruction not only weakens physical infrastructure but also destroys the social and economic capabilities necessary for human survival and dignity (Sen, 1999). The theory is particularly useful in explaining economic insecurity in Gaza, where blockades, trade restrictions, and destruction of industries sharply increased unemployment and poverty during 2023–2025. Human Security Theory argues that economic deprivation and food insecurity are central threats to human survival because they reduce individuals' capacity to sustain livelihoods and meet basic needs (Haq, 1995). The theory also helps explain the collapse of healthcare and educational systems in Gaza as violations of health security and community security, as hospitals faced shortages of medicines, electricity, fuel, and staff, while schools were destroyed or converted into shelters (UNDP, 1994). The displacement of civilians, psychological trauma, and continuous fear resulting from armed conflict further reflect threats to personal security and human dignity (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). Human Security Theory also provides a framework for evaluating humanitarian interventions, where organizations such as UNRWA, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other relief agencies attempt to restore human security through food, healthcare, shelter, and emergency support. However, the continued escalation of conflict demonstrates the limitations of humanitarian assistance in achieving long-term human security without sustainable peace and economic reconstruction (Paris, 2001). Thus, Human Security Theory provides a comprehensive and multidimensional framework for understanding the relationship between economic instability, infrastructural destruction, and civilian hardship in Gaza, explaining how prolonged conflict threatens not only physical safety but also economic survival, health, dignity, and overall human development among affected civilian populations.

Methodology

The paper adopted a qualitative research approach based on descriptive analysis, thematic analysis, and newspaper content analysis to examine the relationship between economic instability and civilian hardship during the Gaza conflict from 2023 to 2025. The study primarily relied on secondary sources of data, including reports published between 2023 and 2025 by the United Nations, World Bank, World Food Programme, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, scholarly articles, policy documents, humanitarian assessments, and international media reports. Newspaper content analysis was conducted through a systematic examination of conflict-related news coverage, editorials, humanitarian reports, and economic assessments published during 2023–2025 in

internationally recognized newspapers such as The New York Times, The Guardian, and Al Jazeera. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes related to economic collapse, unemployment, poverty, food insecurity, displacement, infrastructural destruction, healthcare crises, and humanitarian intervention. The descriptive method further assisted in interpreting the socio-economic consequences of the prolonged conflict and evaluating the effectiveness of humanitarian aid and international response mechanisms implemented between 2023 and 2025 in mitigating civilian suffering and economic instability in Gaza.

Result and Discussion

Economic Instability and Disruption of Trade, Employment, and Economic Systems in Gaza

The prolonged Gaza conflict—intensified after the 7 October 2023 attacks by Hamas and the subsequent large-scale military campaign by Israel—must be understood not as a sudden or isolated crisis but as the culmination of more than two decades of deepening economic instability and structural decline between 2000 and 2025. Over this period, Gaza evolved into a chronically constrained and economically suppressed territory where repeated wars, blockades, political fragmentation, and restrictions on movement systematically weakened productive sectors, increased unemployment, and intensified dependence on external humanitarian assistance (Butter, 2024; ESCWA/UNDP, 2024). Reports published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the World Bank describe the 2023–2025 period as one of “near-total economic freefall,” emphasizing that the conflict dismantled Gaza’s already fragile economic structure and pushed the population into widespread poverty and humanitarian dependency (World Bank, 2024; United Nations, 2025).

During the years 2000–2007, Gaza’s economy experienced severe decline following the Second Intifada and escalating political tensions in the region. Although the 1994 Oslo Accords initially generated limited economic growth during the late 1990s, the outbreak of violence in the early 2000s resulted in declining investment, shrinking trade opportunities, and disruptions in labour mobility. By 2007, Gaza’s real GDP had reportedly declined significantly compared with its 1999 peak. After the political takeover of Gaza by Hamas in 2007 and the subsequent blockade imposed by Israel, economic conditions deteriorated further. Between 2007 and 2022, Gaza’s real GDP growth averaged only around 0.4 percent annually, far below regional economic averages and significantly lower than the growth experienced in the West Bank (Al-Riffai, 2024). By 2022, Gaza’s per capita income had declined to nearly one-third of that of the West Bank, GDP per capita continuously decreased because of prolonged restrictions on trade, investment, production, and movement.

The economic collapse accelerated dramatically after the October 2023 conflict escalation. Reports released in 2024 and 2025 by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development estimated that Gaza’s economy contracted by nearly 83 percent during 2024 alone, reducing GDP to approximately USD 362 million (Elagraa, 2025). The cumulative economic losses caused by repeated military operations, political fragmentation, and blockade measures between 2007 and 2023 were estimated at nearly USD 35.8 billion in constant 2015 dollars, reflecting the long-term destruction of Gaza’s productive economy even before the latest escalation. The GDP per capita of Gaza fell to one of the lowest levels globally during 2024–2025, demonstrating the severity of the economic collapse. Trade and productive sectors also experienced continuous paralysis throughout 2000–2025. Commercial activities were increasingly constrained after the mid-2000s because of movement restrictions, closure of



border crossings, and dependence on externally controlled trade routes. Reports published by the World Bank and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development indicated that Gaza's export capacity declined by more than 80 percent after the blockade imposed in 2007 (World Bank, 2024). Imports remained heavily dependent on crossings controlled by Israel and limited Egyptian access routes, creating severe shortages of essential commodities, industrial inputs, fuel, and construction materials. Following the 2023–2024 escalation, ports, warehouses, industrial zones, agricultural lands, and border infrastructure such as the Kerem Shalom crossing were damaged or repeatedly closed (Asi et al., 2024). Agricultural output reportedly declined by nearly 84 percent during late 2023 compared with pre-conflict levels, manufacturing and construction sectors were devastated by continuous bombardment and large-scale infrastructural destruction.

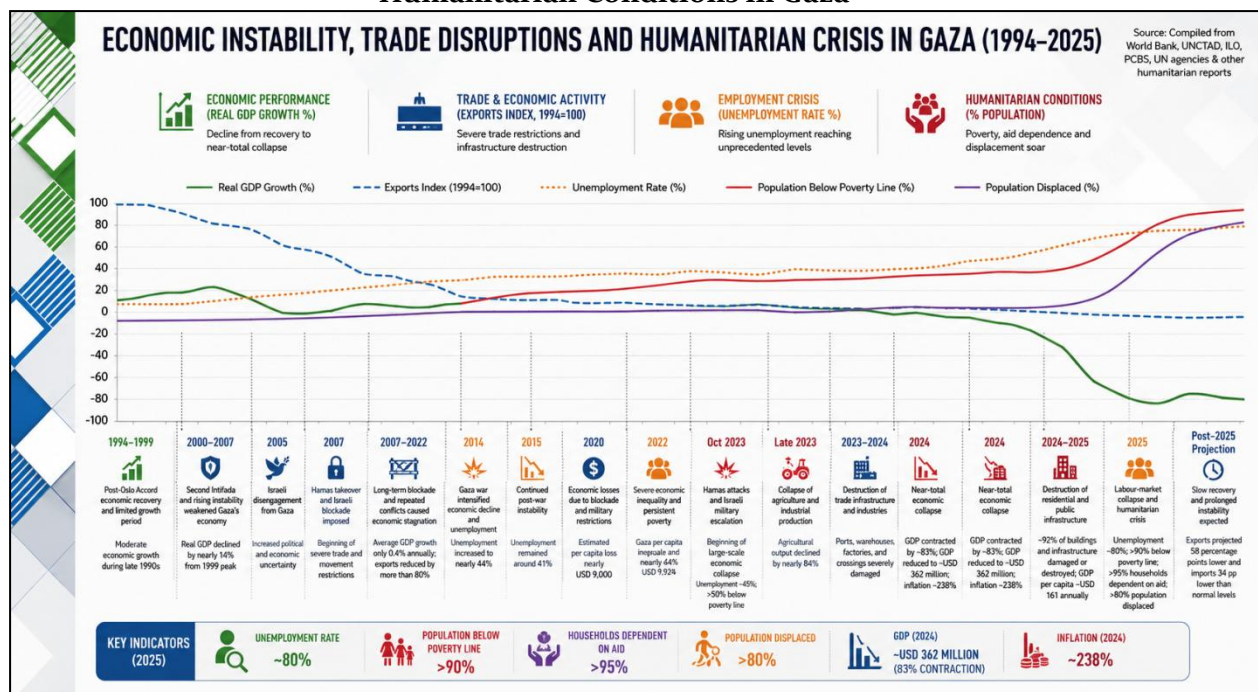
The labour market in Gaza also experienced a long-term decline over the years 2000–2025. In the early 2000s, unemployment levels remained between 20 and 25 percent, but the blockade imposed after 2007 increased unemployment to nearly 35 percent. Following the 2014 Gaza war, unemployment levels rose further to approximately 44 percent and remained persistently high during subsequent years. By 2022, official estimates indicated that unemployment in Gaza had reached nearly 45 percent, more than half the population was living below the poverty line. However, the 2023–2025 conflict generated an unprecedented labour-market collapse. Reports by the International Labour Organization and humanitarian agencies estimated that unemployment in Gaza reached nearly 80 percent by 2025, among the highest unemployment rates recorded globally (International Labour Organization, 2025; International Labour Organization & Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024). More than 90 percent of the population reportedly fell below the poverty line, and over 95 percent of households became dependent on humanitarian aid for survival (Buheji et al., 2025). The destruction of workplaces, industries, markets, schools, and public institutions eliminated formal wage employment opportunities and forced civilians into informal survival strategies, including barter systems, aid-rationing mechanisms, and displacement-related subsistence activities.

Basic economic systems and public-service institutions were also progressively weakened between 2000 and 2025. Tax collection systems, banking operations, utilities, healthcare institutions, sanitation services, and educational infrastructure deteriorated because of repeated conflicts and chronic shortages of financial and material resources. Reports published before 2023 already indicated that Gaza's economy remained highly volatile, with severe contractions during the 2014 and 2020 crises. By 2020, economic losses attributable to blockade measures and military operations were estimated at approximately USD 9,000 per person, Gaza's GDP would reportedly have been almost 50 percent higher without political and military restrictions. The 2023–2025 war pushed these trends toward near-total collapse. During 2024 and 2025, approximately 92 percent of residential buildings and a substantial proportion of water systems, sanitation facilities, hospitals, roads, electricity networks, and schools were damaged or destroyed (Al-Hindi et al., 2021; Cole, 2024). Inflation reportedly increased by approximately 238 percent during 2024, the prices of food, fuel, medicines, and basic commodities became six to ten times higher than pre-conflict levels.

Humanitarian organizations such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the World Food Programme, and the International Committee of the Red Cross reported that more than 80 percent of Gaza's population had experienced displacement at least once during the conflict period, the majority of households had

exhausted their savings and livelihood assets (World Food Programme et al., 2024; de Waal, 2024). The Gaza conflict represents a multi-decade economic and humanitarian crisis extending from the early 2000s to 2025. The period witnessed a gradual transformation from economic stagnation during 2000–2007, to de-industrialization and chronic unemployment during 2007–2022, and finally to near-total economic collapse during 2023–2025. GDP declined by more than 80 percent within a single year, unemployment reached nearly 80 percent, poverty and aid dependency became nearly universal, and trade and institutional systems were rendered largely non-functional. Without large-scale reconstruction, long-term political settlement, restoration of trade and mobility, and sustained international economic support, the structural instability affecting Gaza is likely to persist for decades, further entrenching the territory’s dependence on humanitarian assistance and limiting prospects for sustainable economic recovery.

Graph 1: Year-wise Economic Instability, Trade Disruptions, Employment Crisis, and Humanitarian Conditions in Gaza



Source: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), World Bank, International Labour Organization, and various humanitarian assessment reports published between 2000 and 2025.

Impact of Economic Instability on Civilian Livelihoods in Gaza

Economic instability in Gaza has severely undermined civilian livelihoods by causing large-scale income loss, escalating poverty, and intensifying food insecurity across major urban and rural localities between 2023 and 2025. Even before the October 2023 escalation involving Hamas and Israel, Gaza’s economy remained heavily dependent on public-sector employment, remittances, humanitarian aid, and small-scale commercial activities (World Bank, 2024). Reports published by the World Bank during 2023 indicated that nearly 60–70 percent of household income in Gaza depended on public-sector wages and informal trade activities concentrated in areas such as Gaza City, Khan Younis, and Rafah. However, continuous bombardment, closure of commercial crossings, destruction of marketplaces, and restrictions

on mobility after October 2023 resulted in the near-total collapse of formal employment opportunities (Elagraa, 2025; Butter, 2024).

Unemployment, which had already reached nearly 45–50 percent in 2022, increased to approximately 80 percent by late 2024 and 2025 according to labour-market assessments published by the International Labour Organization and humanitarian agencies (International Labour Organization & Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024; International Labour Organization, 2025). In Gaza City, economic activities associated with the port area, central marketplaces, transportation services, and retail trade almost disappeared due to infrastructural destruction and displacement. Similarly, in Khan Younis, commercial zones and small industrial workshops located in areas such as Al-Mawasi and Al-Karama were severely damaged or rendered non-functional, eliminating thousands of daily wage jobs and small family-run businesses. In Rafah, border-related economic activities and informal cross-border trade with Egypt sharply declined due to repeated military operations and restrictions at border crossings.

Figure 1 Economic Instability and Civilian Livelihood Crisis in Gaza (2023–2025)



Source: Author

The destruction of workplaces and markets significantly reduced household incomes, with several humanitarian assessments estimating that real incomes in many areas declined by nearly 50–70 percent during 2024–2025. The worsening economic instability also transformed poverty in Gaza from a long-standing structural condition into an almost universal humanitarian crisis. Mid-2023 estimates released by the World Bank indicated that approximately 64 percent of Gaza’s population already lived below the poverty line before the major escalation of conflict. By 2024 and 2025, however, reports published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and various United Nations agencies



suggested that nearly the entire population of Gaza approximately 2.3 million people had fallen below the poverty line because of economic collapse, inflation, unemployment, and widespread destruction (United Nations, 2025; United Nations Development Programme, 2025).

Inflation levels reportedly reached nearly 238 percent during 2024, drastically increasing the prices of food, fuel, medicines, and essential commodities. In densely populated neighborhoods of Gaza City, including Al-Shati (Beach Camp) and Al-Ramla, extensive destruction of residential buildings forced displaced families into overcrowded shelters where access to rent, healthcare, sanitation, childcare, and basic necessities became extremely limited. In northern areas such as Beit Hanoun and Jabalia, which experienced intensive bombardment during 2023–2025, humanitarian surveys revealed that more than 90 percent of households had lost their primary sources of income and depended almost entirely on humanitarian aid and food rations. Multidimensional poverty in Gaza intensified during 2023–2025 as civilians increasingly lacked access to clean water, electricity, healthcare, sanitation, and educational facilities. Reports issued in 2025 noted that even relatively less-damaged areas such as Rafah struggled to maintain functioning hospitals, sanitation systems, and uninterrupted water supplies. Food insecurity also reached unprecedented levels across Gaza. Before the October 2023 escalation, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Programme had already reported that more than half of Gaza's population depended on food-security and livelihood assistance (World Food Programme et al., 2024). Areas such as Deir al-Balah and central Gaza relied heavily on periodic food distributions due to chronic unemployment and economic vulnerability. Following the conflict escalation, Gaza became one of the world's most severe food-security crises. The 2025 Global Report on Food Crises classified the entire population under at least IPC Phase 3 acute food insecurity; several areas approached famine conditions (de Waal, 2024; Bahour et al., 2026). More than 500,000 civilians reportedly faced catastrophic hunger, severe acute malnutrition among children exceeded emergency thresholds in parts of Rafah and southern Gaza.

Infrastructural Destruction and Civilian Hardship in Conflict-Affected Gaza

Infrastructural destruction in Gaza is not just a byproduct of war but a central driver of deepening civilian hardship turning what might have been a temporary crisis into a near permanent state of survival level precarity (Asi et al., 2024; Al-Hindi et al., 2021). In the 2023 to 2026 period the near systemic collapse of housing water health energy transport and communication systems has intensified poverty health risks displacement and food insecurity for the civilian population (ESCWA/UNDP, 2024; United Nations Development Programme, 2025).

From buildings to bread Housing and displacement

Satellite and UN backed assessments show that over 45 percent of Gaza's housing stock has been destroyed or heavily damaged since October 2023 with some areas such as northern Gaza City and Beit Hanoun seeing up to 70 to 80 percent of residential buildings razed (Asi et al., 2024). This has displaced roughly 1.9 to 2 million people internally forcing families into overcrowded shelters tents and damaged buildings where basic privacy protection from the elements and access to latrines is minimal (United Nations, 2025). The loss of housing also erodes livelihoods many homes contained small workshops shops or storage for harvests their destruction wipes out both shelter and income generating capacity in a single strike. In a 2026 UN led domicile style analysis experts describe the large scale obliteration of housing and

civilian infrastructure as a deliberate tactic that renders whole neighborhoods such as Jabalia and parts of Gaza City uninhabitable pushing civilians into camps with worse health and security conditions (Elagraa, 2025).

Water power and sanitation the siege inside

The physical destruction of infrastructure has turned basic utilities into a third front of hardship. A joint World Bank UN report estimates that Gaza's water and sanitation network now operates at less than 5 percent of its pre conflict capacity with most functioning wells desalination plants and pumping stations either damaged or without electricity and fuel (World Bank, 2024; Cole, 2024). In 2025 to 2026 UN backed field reports describe households in Khan Younis and Deir al Balah routinely queuing for hours for water containers sewage overflows contaminate streets and makeshift shelters raising risks of cholera typhoid and skin infections (Farajallah & Farajallah, 2024). Electricity is similarly crippled. Damage to power lines transformer stations and fuel supply routes has left Gaza in near total blackout for much of 2023 to 2025 with only sporadic generator driven power in a few hospitals and warehouses. Without refrigeration medicines spoil vaccines lose potency and cold chain dependent health care is impossible. In already overcrowded shelters lack of lighting and ventilation worsens mental health stress especially among women and children.

Health education and social services under rubble

The destruction of health and education infrastructure amplifies civilian suffering far beyond the moment of bombing. A 2024 to 2026 UN coordinated assessment reports that 84 percent of Gaza's health facilities have been damaged or destroyed with remaining hospitals operating at a fraction of capacity due to shortages of drugs electricity and water (Alkhalidi & Alrubaie, 2024; Dardona et al., 2024). In 2025 Médecins Sans Frontières and UN linked bulletins document that many patients are forced to choose between travelling hours along cratered roads under threat of shelling or dying untreated at home. Similarly 100 percent of Gaza's school year has effectively been lost with nearly all educational buildings damaged and no safe classroom environment leading to what UN agencies call a lost generation whose cognitive and psychosocial development will suffer long term scars. The collapse of public service infrastructure municipal offices tax collection sewage pumping and waste collection systems also undermines any functioning state like order leaving communities to manage their own grey water rubble and conflict related injuries with minimal institutional support.

Roads communications and aid access

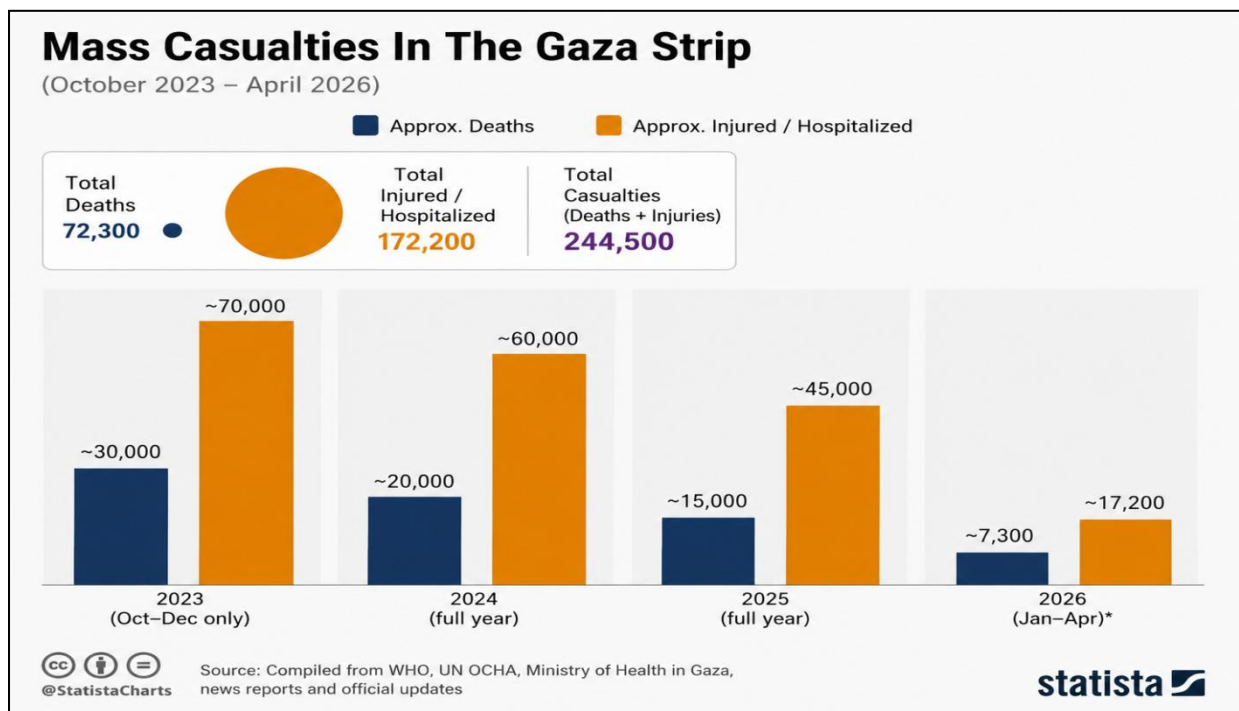
Transport and communications infrastructure act as a choke point for civilian hardship. Surveys and humanitarian assessments show that 92 percent of Gaza's primary roads are now cratered buried under rubble or mined bridges and roundabouts have been systematically targeted. In 2025 to 2026 UN coordinated logistics reports document that fuel and aid convoys frequently take longer to travel a few kilometers than in peacetime because of damage checkpoints and repeated security threats leading to severe shortages of food medicine and fuel even in areas nominally outside active fighting (World Food Programme et al., 2024; World Health Organization et al., 2025). Damage to telecommunications infrastructure, including cell towers, fibre-optic lines, and internet hubs, has further isolated Gaza's population by disrupting family contact, remittance support, and evacuation coordination. UN-backed studies in 2025 reported that communication breakdowns delayed medical evacuations, interrupted psychological support services, and restricted access to safety information, thereby increasing trauma and mortality. The destruction of hospitals, schools,

water stations, and roads has created a cumulative humanitarian crisis in which disease, displacement, hunger, and civilian suffering continue to intensify, making long-term reconstruction essential even after active conflict ends.

Mass Casualties and Humanitarian Crisis in the Gaza Strip (2023–2026)

The graph 2 below presents a concise overview of mass casualties in the Gaza Strip from October 2023 to April 2026, highlighting the severe humanitarian consequences of the ongoing conflict. It shows that approximately 72,300 people were killed and nearly 172,200 were injured or hospitalized during the period, resulting in around 244,500 total casualties. The highest casualties were recorded during the initial escalation between October and December 2023, when nearly 30,000 deaths and 70,000 injuries occurred within only three months, reflecting intense military operations and widespread destruction. Although casualty levels gradually declined in 2024 and 2025, the figures remained extremely high, indicating the continuation of violence, displacement, infrastructural destruction, and collapse of healthcare facilities. The graph further reveals that injuries consistently remained much higher than deaths throughout the conflict, demonstrating the enormous burden placed upon Gaza’s healthcare system and humanitarian agencies. Even during January–April 2026, significant casualties continued, suggesting prolonged instability and persistent civilian suffering. Overall, the graph illustrates that the conflict evolved into a major humanitarian crisis characterized by large-scale loss of life, mass injuries, destruction of public infrastructure, and long-term social and health-related consequences for the civilian population of Gaza.

Graph 2 Civilian Casualties and Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza (2023–2026)



Effectiveness of Humanitarian Aid and Economic Support Mechanisms during the Gaza

Conflict

Humanitarian aid and economic support mechanisms in Gaza have been partially effective in saving lives but largely insufficient in preventing or reversing deepening civilian suffering especially given the scale of destruction access restrictions and political constraints (United Nations, 2025; UNDP, 2025; Asi et al., 2024; Al-Hindi et al., 2021). Between October 2023 and early 2026 Gaza experienced one of the largest humanitarian emergencies in recent history with more than 2.3 million civilians affected by food insecurity displacement unemployment and infrastructure collapse (United Nations, 2025; UNDP, 2025; World Bank, 2024; Asi et al., 2024). aid prevented outright famine in some localities its impact remained uneven temporally limited and structurally undermined by blockade targeting of infrastructure and bureaucratic political obstruction.

Humanitarian aid mainly food parcels basic medical supplies water tanker deliveries and cash in hand or voucher based assistance has kept many households above the threshold of immediate death by thirst starvation or preventable disease. In 2024 the United Nations Relief and Works Agency UNRWA the World Food Programme WFP and the International Committee of the Red Cross estimated that humanitarian operations were reaching between 600000 and 1 million people daily during peak delivery periods (WFP, FAO & UNRWA, 2024; UNICEF & WFP, 2025; WHO et al., 2025). By mid 2025 more than 80 percent of Gaza's population depended primarily on external aid for survival. However multiple humanitarian assessments conducted in 2024 and 2025 showed that assistance volumes remained far below minimum needs. In heavily damaged northern districts such as Gaza City Jabalia and Beit Hanoun fewer than 30 percent of households reported receiving regular aid deliveries over several week periods. Surveys also indicated that many food packages supplied less than half of the minimum recommended daily caloric intake medicines fuel and clean drinking water remained critically scarce. IPC Integrated Food Security Phase Classification reports issued in 2025 warned that hundreds of thousands of people were facing catastrophic Phase 5 hunger conditions particularly in isolated northern zones (FAO, 2025). Effectiveness has been severely curtailed by physical and political barriers to access. During 2024 UN agencies estimated that Gaza required at least 500 to 600 aid trucks per day to meet basic humanitarian needs yet actual daily entries often fell below 100 to 150 trucks especially during periods of intensified military operations and border closures (International Labour Organization, 2025). Repeated restrictions at crossing points such as Rafah and Kerem Shalom delayed deliveries of food medicine fuel and shelter materials.

Simultaneously ongoing hostilities drone surveillance artillery fire and damaged transport routes made aid distribution extremely dangerous. By late 2025 humanitarian monitoring groups reported that more than 150 aid workers had been killed making Gaza one of the deadliest environments for humanitarian personnel in modern conflict history (United Nations, 2025). Field testimonies from 2024 to 2026 also documented incidents of aid diversion looting and unequal distribution with some communities accusing local intermediaries or armed actors of seizing supplies before they reached the most vulnerable households. Beyond in kind aid limited economic support mechanisms including cash transfers food vouchers and emergency employment schemes helped some households purchase bread medicine and hygiene products and avoid extreme coping strategies such as child labour or selling personal belongings. Between 2023 and 2025 the European Union Gulf donors the United Nations and international NGOs channelled several hundred million dollars in emergency humanitarian funding specifically for Gaza (UNDP, 2025; ESCWA/UNDP, 2024). Yet these interventions



remained temporary and narrow in scope. Gaza's economy contracted by more than 80 percent by 2024 according to UNCTAD estimates unemployment rates exceeded 75 percent in many districts (World Bank, 2024; United Nations, 2025; International Labour Organization, 2025; UNDP, 2025). Israel's restrictions on banking fuel and trade flows also contributed to a severe liquidity crisis reducing the real purchasing power of cash assistance. Inflation in food and basic commodities rose dramatically during 2024 and 2025 with staple prices in some local markets doubling or tripling compared to pre war levels. Consequently even households receiving cash support frequently remained unable to secure sufficient nutrition shelter or health care.

The effectiveness of humanitarian aid has also varied significantly by geography. Southern areas such as Rafah and Khan Younis received relatively greater aid volumes because of their proximity to border crossings and humanitarian coordination hubs. Nevertheless overcrowding and repeated displacement overwhelmed available resources. By early 2025 Rafah alone was estimated to host more than 1 million displaced civilians many living in tents or improvised shelters. In contrast heavily bombed northern and eastern regions including Beit Hanoun Jabalia and parts of Gaza City experienced prolonged isolation and near complete aid disruption. Humanitarian observers described these areas as suffering from shadow famine conditions where severe hunger and dehydration were widespread but underreported because of limited access and communications breakdowns. In fragmented urban zones aid often concentrated around formal shelters schools and camps families living in destroyed neighbourhoods informal settlements or roadside encampments sometimes went weeks without assistance. Overall humanitarian and economic support mechanisms in Gaza functioned more as emergency survival systems than genuine recovery strategies. They temporarily reduced mortality and alleviated some immediate suffering but could not reverse the structural collapse of housing employment education health care water and sanitation systems (Asi et al., 2024; Al-Hindi et al., 2021; Bahour et al., 2026; WHO et al., 2025). By 2025 the World Bank UNDP and ESCWA estimated that reconstruction costs would require tens of billions of dollars and decades of sustained rebuilding efforts (World Bank, 2024; UNDP, 2025). Without a durable ceasefire unrestricted humanitarian access restoration of banking and trade systems and long term reconstruction investment aid mechanisms are unlikely to restore livelihoods dignity or sustainable economic recovery. Instead they continue to operate primarily as crisis containment tools sustaining minimal survival conditions for a population facing prolonged displacement poverty hunger and infrastructural devastation.

Implications of the Study

The study on evaluating economic instability and civilian hardship in the Gaza conflict carries important humanitarian economic and policy implications by showing how prolonged conflict creates multidimensional crises affecting livelihoods food security health systems employment and institutional stability. The findings reveal that large scale destruction of infrastructure markets and public services has intensified poverty displacement unemployment hunger and dependence on humanitarian aid across Gaza between 2023 and 2026. The study is particularly relevant to five key Sustainable Development Goals namely SDG 1 No Poverty SDG 2 Zero Hunger SDG 3 Good Health and Well Being SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 16 Peace Justice and Strong Institutions. The collapse of local economies and widespread unemployment pushed millions into extreme poverty damaged agricultural systems disrupted food supply chains and increased famine risks. Simultaneously destruction of hospitals water systems and sanitation facilities worsened disease outbreaks malnutrition and mental health

challenges. The findings also indicate that humanitarian assistance alone cannot ensure sustainable recovery without long term reconstruction employment generation and institutional rebuilding. Continued violence insecurity and restrictions on humanitarian access further weakened governance and social stability. Therefore the study emphasizes that durable peace international cooperation and comprehensive reconstruction strategies are essential for restoring civilian livelihoods protecting human dignity and supporting long term progress toward sustainable development in Gaza.

Limitations of the Study

The study on economic instability and civilian hardship in the Gaza conflict is limited by several methodological and contextual constraints. First the study relies primarily on secondary data obtained from reports published by international organizations humanitarian agencies government sources research articles and media publications because ongoing conflict conditions restricted direct field investigation and primary data collection within Gaza. Second the rapidly changing nature of the conflict between 2023 and 2025 means that economic humanitarian and infrastructural conditions continuously evolved making it difficult to capture completely stable or final trends. Third access restrictions communication blackouts and political sensitivities may have affected the availability reliability and verification of statistical information related to casualties poverty unemployment displacement and food insecurity. Fourth some datasets and humanitarian estimates varied across organizations due to differences in methodology reporting periods and assessment tools. Fifth the study mainly focuses on macro level economic instability and civilian hardship and therefore may not fully capture localized community experiences gender specific impacts or long term psychological consequences of the conflict. Finally the absence of direct household surveys interviews and longitudinal field observations limits deeper empirical assessment of coping mechanisms resilience patterns and post conflict recovery prospects among affected civilian populations in Gaza.

Conclusion

The prolonged Gaza conflict generated severe economic instability that deeply disrupted trade employment markets and basic economic systems between 2023 and 2026 leading to widespread civilian hardship across the region. Repeated military operations border restrictions destruction of productive infrastructure and shortages of fuel electricity and raw materials weakened commercial activity reduced agricultural and industrial production and collapsed local markets. As unemployment rose sharply many households lost stable sources of income and became increasingly dependent on humanitarian aid for survival. Economic instability significantly affected civilian livelihoods through income loss poverty escalation inflation and food insecurity as damaged farms businesses and supply chains reduced access to food essential commodities and employment opportunities. Many families experienced hunger malnutrition debt dependency and severe psychological stress due to declining living conditions. The study further found a strong relationship between infrastructural destruction and deepening civilian suffering because damage to hospitals schools water systems sanitation facilities roads electricity networks and communication services intensified displacement disease insecurity and lack of access to essential services. Overcrowded shelters and damaged residential areas exposed civilians to unsafe and unhealthy living conditions institutional capacity for recovery remained severely weakened. Humanitarian aid and economic support mechanisms provided important emergency assistance through food medical aid water supply and cash relief programmes which prevented even greater humanitarian catastrophe in some

areas. However their effectiveness remained limited due to insecurity border closures transport disruptions political restrictions and uneven distribution systems. The study concludes that sustainable recovery in Gaza requires long term reconstruction restoration of economic systems protection of civilian infrastructure and durable Peacebuilding efforts. The findings strongly relate to SDG 1 No Poverty SDG 2 Zero Hunger SDG 3 Good Health and Well Being SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 16 Peace Justice and Strong Institutions.

Author Contribution

Abeeta Hilal contributed to conceptual development, theoretical framing, and drafting of the manuscript, literature integration, and overall structuring of the study. Dr. Meha Pant contributed to supervision, methodological guidance, critical analysis, and scholarly refinement of the manuscript. Both authors jointly engaged in reviewing, editing, and final approval of the manuscript for submission and publication.

Ethical Consideration

This study is based entirely on secondary data obtained from publicly available academic literature, policy documents, and international organizational reports. No human participants or primary data collection were involved; therefore, formal ethical approval was not required. The analysis, interpretation, and synthesis presented in the study are original academic work. Artificial intelligence tools (ChatGPT) were used solely for language editing and grammatical refinement, full intellectual responsibility, authorship, and analytical integrity remain with the authors. Proper academic citation practices have been strictly followed throughout the study.

Data Availability

All data used in this study are derived from publicly available secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, United Nations reports, World Bank datasets, and other internationally recognized institutional publications. No primary datasets were generated or analyzed during the course of this research. All relevant sources have been appropriately cited within the manuscript.

Funding Statement

This research received no external funding.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research.

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