

SNAPSHOT OF DEPRIVATION OF HUMANITARIAN AID IN THE GAZA STRIP

SINCE JANUARY 2024

Methodology

This briefing note aims to offer an overview of the denial and restrictions of humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip faced by international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) since 26 January 2024. It is based on a survey conducted in February 2024 by members of the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), the INGO coordination forum in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). The data was collected among 24 INGOs operating in the Gaza Strip. With an estimated 30 INGOs active in the enclave, as reported by AIDA, the findings of this study can be deemed as representative of the challenges faced by INGOs' operations across the Gaza Strip during the period from 26 January to 15 February 2024. It is critical to note, however, that the vast majority of aid trucks are from UN agencies and bilateral aid donations which have not been included in this survey, nor have national NGOs. As a result, this briefing note does not reflect the full range of challenges faced in transferring aid into Gaza.

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Humanitarian operations are currently the main lifeline for 2.2 million people stranded in a state of exhaustion and destruction for over four months in the Gaza Strip. UN agencies and NGOs active on the ground have repeatedly warned that the death toll from starvation, diseases and lack of access to other fundamental needs is likely to surpass the number of people killed by bombardment if full, unhindered and safe humanitarian access is not ensured. Although Israeli restrictions that obstruct aid and access of humanitarian actors has been a longstanding issue in Gaza, which predates October 7th, the situation has dramatically worsened since the onset of current hostilities. The scale

of humanitarian needs now surpasses anything previously witnessed, marking a significant escalation in the challenges faced by those operating on the ground to meet dire needs.

This briefing note aims to provide an overview of the most recent challenges faced by INGOs in the provision of life saving aid to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. It examines the multifold and systematic patterns of restriction of humanitarian assistance encountered by INGOs throughout all the steps of the process of aid delivery within the period running from 26 January to 15 February 2024.

IMPEDIMENTS TO THE ENTRY OF LIFE SAVING AID INTO THE GAZA STRIP

Since 26 January, only one third of INGOs operating in the Gaza Strip have been able to import humanitarian aid trucks into the enclave. Not all organizations are registered in Egypt and have the capacity to overcome the complexity of the logistical process to enter supplies into the Gaza Strip. On the other hand, organizations who can send aid convoys through Egypt are facing great challenges in ensuring the transport of humanitarian aid trucks, including in obtaining Egyptian and Israeli approvals.

Trucks held up for unknown amounts of time at the border

INGOs are raising concerns about the lack of transparency surrounding the process of entry of trucks into the enclave. Organizations indicate a lack of clarity regarding the timing for their trucks to be granted passage through Israeli crossing points. **As of 15 February 2024, for the total INGOs surveyed, 78 trucks loaded with food, medicine, water, and survival equipment are still waiting on the Egyptian side of the border**, just a few hundred meters away from a population in desperate need of this aid. Some INGOs' trucks have been waiting for months for authorization to go through Israeli crossing points at Rafah or Karam Abu Salem / Kerem Shalom.

Delays and denials at Israeli crossing and inspection points

INGOs report long delays and denials of entry due to Israeli inspection mechanisms. One organization indicated that all 35 of their trucks had at one point been delayed by Israeli inspection mechanisms at the crossing points. Among the 7 INGOs who sent trucks from Egypt to the Gaza Strip, 2 reported that some of the items were denied entry by Israeli authorities on grounds of potential "dual use" materials. According to these INGOs, these shipments contained much needed assistance, such as water pipes, water quality control testing kits, hygiene materials, survivor blankets or candles. Israel's classification of certain items as "dual-use" may not align with international standards because it potentially includes a broader range of goods than those internationally recognized as dual-use.

No safety assurances during the crossing process

In addition, some organizations report challenges due to the lack of security for their trucks and traffic jams in the "no man's land" area in-between the crossing points.

What is the life saving potential of one humanitarian truck?



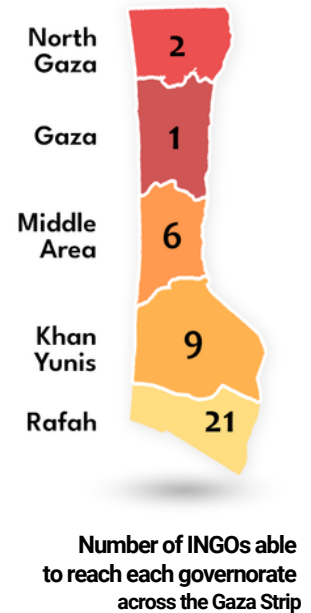
The barriers to INGO aid trucks entry into the Gaza Strip create substantial challenges for aid operations on the ground.

Many life saving services and supplies are delayed as INGOs could not receive the expected humanitarian trucks. 3 health organizations have been postponing the launching of mobile clinics as their medical emergency kits are still impeded from accessing the strip, effectively obstructing the provision of medical treatment to thousands of people in dire need of health services. Many organizations have also reported a critical shortage of fuel inside the enclave directly impeding their ability to deliver humanitarian aid effectively. This fuel scarcity exacerbates a broader crisis, including the severe lack of medical supplies, food, and clean water, due to a compromised supply chain. Consequently, INGOs are facing substantial challenges in fulfilling the basic necessities of Gaza's population, underscoring the urgent need for a streamlined aid delivery system to mitigate the humanitarian crisis.

ALMOST NO AID DISTRIBUTED BEYOND RAFAH

The intensity of hostilities and Israeli-imposed movement restrictions means that almost no aid is distributed beyond Rafah. INGOs who completed the survey reported the following:

- **Only 50% of INGOs said they were able to deliver any aid at all beyond Rafah.**
- Most of the organizations able to reach the Khan Yunis and Middle Area governorates qualify their access as “merely partial” or “minimal”.
- 80% of INGOs reported aiming to reach other governorates than the ones where they currently operate but are hindered by Israeli military operations, including constant bombardment, and checkpoint closures. Some used to operate in all five governorates but now work exclusively in Rafah due to access and security challenges.



Despite residents in areas north of Wadi Gaza facing some of the most severe food shortages, the people of northern Gaza are receiving almost no assistance, with aid convoys repeatedly denied the ability to enter the area by Israeli forces.

- **Only 3 INGOs are able to deliver aid in Gaza and North Gaza governorates.** Among these three, one INGO said they exclusively facilitate the delivery of supplies sourced from local vendors in the area as they cannot dispatch aid convoys from Rafah to northern areas.

What stops humanitarian aid from moving inside the Gaza Strip?

Extreme levels of danger for the lives of humanitarian personnel

Lack of protection for humanitarian personnel is the main reason impeding INGOs from expanding operations beyond Rafah. International non-governmental actors report on extreme levels of risk for field operation teams during their work in areas across the Strip. **Since the beginning of the hostilities, INGOs reported that a total of nine humanitarian workers were killed in strikes or sniper fire.** INGOs reported that the presence of Israeli ground forces has posed critical levels of risk for the lives of their personnel, local partners and their operations. The consistent unpredictability of the bombardment poses an additional security threat to humanitarian workers, rendering more places unreachable for aid in the Strip.

Physical obstacles to aid delivery

When INGOs venture into these high-risk areas to deliver life-saving services, they face physical obstacles that not only block access but also endanger their staff's lives. **Israeli checkpoints are one of these physical impediments, as INGOs report unpredictable and ad hoc decisions from Israeli soldiers in checkpoints regarding the crossing of humanitarian aid.** While some organizations confirm that they would have the capacity to deliver aid in Gaza and North Gaza governorates through local partners, they cannot send the necessary materials due to the requirement for Israeli permissions for any aid truck to access these areas. **One organization highlights that all of its missions intended for the Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Yunis were denied entry in the hospital complex by Israeli forces.** Physical obstacles also encompass the degraded situation of the roads inside the Gaza Strip. INGOs underline important levels of insecurity on the main paths for humanitarian movements, lack of deconflicted routes and challenges to move around due to wide destruction of the road networks and infrastructure across the enclave.

Many INGOs are increasingly worried that the challenges preventing them from extending their aid efforts to additional areas might soon affect Rafah, should Israeli ground forces advance into this governorate. Certain organizations estimate that an Israeli ground operation in Rafah could result in a loss of at least 50% of their aid delivery capacity, given that many of their operational bases, warehouses and offices are situated within this region.

ADDITIONAL PATTERNS OF RESTRICTION OF LIFE SAVING ASSISTANCE

at least **2**

humanitarian INGO offices destroyed

since 26 January 2024

Attacks and destruction of humanitarian facilities

Since 26 January 2024, at least two INGOs offices have been destroyed by airstrikes despite having previously

shared their location with the Israeli military to avoid bombing. **One organization confirms that their offices were raided by Israeli ground forces, with reports of soldiers humiliating humanitarian staff and their families while forcing them out of the facilities.** The bombing of facilities of local partners has also affected INGOs' humanitarian operations. Organizations utilizing deconfliction mechanisms have reported a significant erosion of trust in the adherence and implementation of these procedures.

Impossible working conditions for humanitarian staff

INGOs underscore that their staff members themselves are trying to survive the

humanitarian catastrophe as much as the rest of the population, and are mentally and physically exhausted by more than four months of constant bombing and displacement. Indeed, many humanitarian staff have been forcibly displaced themselves by bombardments and the Israeli ground operation, sometimes multiple times. These aid workers have to find shelter and provide for other basic survival needs for their families while pursuing their humanitarian work. Israeli restrictions on the entry of additional humanitarian personnel into the Gaza Strip prevent INGOs from ensuring staff rotation, exacerbating the exhaustion among teams on the ground.

70%

of INGOs' staff cannot be fully operational

due to the security and humanitarian situation

58%

of INGOs

highlight that they rely on

support from UNRWA

to facilitate the implementation of their operations.

- INGOs report that UNRWA supplies them with vital WASH items and fuel, and supports local partners with internet access to plan distributions.
- Some INGOs work alongside UNRWA convoys to deliver aid to hard to reach areas.
- Other organizations are directly providing life-saving services inside UNRWA shelters.
- Overall, INGOs operating on the ground are concerned over their operational capabilities in the Gaza Strip if UNRWA's capacities diminish due to funding cuts from major donors.

Communications blackout

All INGOs report communication blackouts as a significant obstacle impeding their ability to coordinate internally and externally to ensure the delivery of life saving aid. This results in life saving operations being postponed due to the impossibility to coordinate with other international or local partners or to send and receive real-time updates on the security situation. Some INGOs report that communication is particularly difficult outside of Rafah, thus further worsening the obstacles of delivering aid to all other governorates in the Gaza Strip.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The deprivation of humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip persists due to obstacles imposed by Israeli authorities and the continuation of hostilities despite unprecedented levels of humanitarian catastrophe.

Most INGOs indicate that they haven't observed any improvement from Israeli authorities in easing obstacles to humanitarian assistance since January 26, 2024.

Many highlight that challenges have remained the same they have been encountering since October 2023: lack of supply flow into the enclave, obstacles to access and high-risk operating circumstances. **Others underline that the situation has worsened since late January,** stressing that Israeli authorities are intensifying barriers, restrictions and attacks against humanitarian personnel. Such actions severely impede the ability to operate safely and effectively. In such conditions, ensuring the safety and operational efficiency of humanitarian personnel becomes nearly impossible.

In light of the findings presented, AIDA / INGOs operating in the Gaza Strip are urging all stakeholders to immediately:

- **Compel warring parties to implement an immediate and definite ceasefire,** the only solution to address the humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip.
- **Compel Israel to refrain from launching a ground attack on the Rafah governorate,** that would have devastating consequences on the civilian populations and INGOs ability to operate.
- **Compel Israel to allow full, safe, unhindered and unrestricted access to humanitarian aid** through all entry points to the Gaza Strip, in accordance with international humanitarian law, including:
 - Effective deconfliction mechanisms and safe passage for humanitarian aid throughout the Gaza Strip, including to North Gaza and Gaza governorates.
 - Immediate restoration of water, power, and commercial connections to the enclave, which have been cut by the Israeli government since 9 October 2023, are also crucial for meeting the immense needs of the civilian population.
 - Immediate restoration of telecommunication services in the Gaza Strip as they are key to coordinate the humanitarian response in the enclave.
- **Protect humanitarian workers and humanitarian and civilian infrastructures** from attacks.
- **Reaffirm support for the current vital work of UNRWA,** a decisive aid provider for millions of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and an essential component of the humanitarian system in the enclave.
- **Take measures to ensure accountability** of all warring parties' relevant to their obligation to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need.