
REVIEW OF REPORTS OF FAMINE IN GAZA
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, GLOSSARY AND ACRONYMS

Executive Summary

This review critically examines the claims of famine in Gaza made by various international organizations, particularly the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET). The analysis reveals significant errors, methodological flaws, and misrepresentations in their reports, which have been used to influence international legal and policy decisions regarding Israel.

Key Findings:

1. No Actual Famine

Despite alarming projections, there has been no famine, as defined by IPC standards, in the Gaza Strip since October 2023. Acute malnutrition levels are only marginally higher than pre-war figures.

2. Flawed March 2024 Reports

IPC and FEWS NET reports from March 2024 projected an imminent famine in North Gaza and stated that there was a risk of famine throughout the Gaza Strip. These assessments were based on incomplete and inaccurate information:

- Significant sources of food and water supply were overlooked.
- The reports relied on a perception of rapidly increasing child malnutrition influenced by an erroneous baseline and possibly anomalous data.

3. Misclassification of Food Insecurity

Subsequent reports consistently assessed the situation in Gaza or parts of it as IPC Phase 4 (Emergency) when the data only justified a classification of Phase 3 (Crisis) at most. There is no relevant mortality or malnutrition data to support higher classifications.

4. Errors in Malnutrition Data Analysis

- FEWS NET and IPC reports incorrectly assumed that the prevalence of acute malnutrition assessed by Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) in Gaza prior to October 2023 was 0.8% or 1%, when it was actually 4%.
- This led to erroneous claims of a tenfold increase in acute malnutrition since the start of the war.
- The perception of a sharp increase in acute malnutrition influenced projections and risk assessments.

5. Inconsistent Use of Metrics

Reports compared different metrics (Weight-for-Height Z-score and MUAC) or data from different age groups, leading to misleading conclusions about malnutrition trends.

6. Overestimation of Population in North Gaza

The December 2024 FEWS NET Alert was based on a significant overestimation of the population remaining in North Gaza, leading to false conclusions about food availability per person.

7. Failure of Projections

IPC reports consistently predicted significant increases in the percentage of the Gazan population classified as at Phase 4 and Phase 5. However, their own subsequent assessments showed the opposite trend, with decreases in these classifications over time.

8. Misrepresentation of "Risk of Famine"

The phrase "high risk of Famine" used in IPC documents is misleading. According to IPC guidelines, a "risk of Famine" statement refers to a worst-case scenario with a reasonable chance of occurring, not the most likely scenario.

9. Inadequate Consideration of Improving Conditions

Reports failed to account adequately for improving conditions, such as increased humanitarian aid and food supplies over time.

10. Impact on International Policy

These flawed reports have been cited by high-level officials, including the UN Secretary-General, the ICJ and the ICC Prosecutor, potentially influencing international legal and policy decisions regarding Israel.

Conclusions:

The analysis reveals a pattern of overestimation and misrepresentation in famine reports concerning Gaza. Key issues include:

- Reliance on incomplete or inaccurate data
- Inconsistent application of methodological standards
- Failure to adequately revise projections in light of new data
- Potential bias in interpretation and presentation of findings

These errors have led to an exaggerated portrayal of the food security situation in Gaza, which has been used to influence international opinion and policy. While the humanitarian situation in Gaza requires aid and attention, the evidence does not support claims of famine or emergency as defined by international standards. Future assessments should strive for greater accuracy and objectivity to ensure that international responses are proportionate and based on factual realities.

Recommendations:

1. Greater transparency in data collection and analysis methods used in famine reports.
2. Independent review of IPC and FEWS NET methodologies and their application in conflict zones.
3. Clearer communication of the differences between current assessments, projections, and worst-case scenarios.
4. Increased scrutiny of famine reports by courts, policy makers and media before using them as a basis for decision-making or reporting.

Glossary of Key Terms used in the Review

7 February Minutes: Minutes of the meeting of the Palestine WASH Cluster on 7 February 2024

95% Confidence Interval (CI): Range within which there is a 95% probability that the true value is included and a 2.5% probability of it being on either side of the range

Acute Food Insecurity: Food insecurity found at a specific point in time and of a severity that threatens lives or livelihoods, or both, regardless of the causes, context or duration.

Chronic Food Insecurity: Food insecurity that persists over time, mainly due to structural causes, including intra-annual seasonal food insecurity.

COGAT: Israeli Government Department dealing with humanitarian affairs in the Gaza Strip and West Bank

Crude Death Rate (CDR): The number of deaths per 10,000 people per day.

Famine: The most severe phase of acute food insecurity, classified as IPC Phase 5. Requires evidence of extreme critical levels of food insecurity, acute malnutrition and mortality.

Famine Review Committee (FRC): Committee of experts which reviews data and analyses provided by IPC partner organisations to determine whether the findings are credible and whether the data justifies classification as a famine

Food Consumption Score (FCS): A composite score based on dietary diversity, food frequency, and relative nutritional importance of different food groups.

Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM): The total percentage of children aged 6-59 months who are acutely malnourished, as measured by weight-for-height z-score or mid-upper arm circumference.

Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC): A set of standardized tools and procedures for classifying the severity and magnitude of food insecurity and acute malnutrition situations.

Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC): A measure used to assess nutritional status, particularly in children.

North Gaza: The North Gaza Governorate, i.e. the area of the Gaza Strip north of Gaza City

northern Gaza: The North Gaza and Gaza City Governorates, i.e. the area north of Gaza City together with Gaza City

Reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI): An indicator of household food insecurity that considers the frequency and severity of coping strategies.

Risk of Famine: Defined by the IPC as a worst-case scenario that has a reasonable and realistic chance of happening, but not the most likely scenario

southern Gaza: the area of the Gaza Strip south of Gaza City

Technical Working Group (TWG): A group of food security and nutrition experts who lead IPC analysis at the country level.

Under-five Death Rate (U5DR): The number of deaths of children under 5 years old per 10,000 children under 5 per day.

UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA): UN agency charged with providing relief and works programmes for Palestinian refugees

Weight-for-Height Z-score (WHZ): A measure of acute malnutrition that compares a child's weight to the median weight of a child of the same height in a reference population.

Working Paper: Joint working paper by experts at Israeli universities assessing nutritional values of supplies of food to the Gaza Strip published on 24 May 2024

Acronyms

AFI	Acute Food Insecurity
AMN	Acute Malnutrition
CATI	Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing
CDR	Crude Death Rate
CI	Confidence Interval
COGAT	Israeli Government Department for the Coordination of Government Activities in the Palestinian Territories
FAO	UN Food and Agricultural Organisation
FCS	Food Consumption Score
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning Systems Network
FRC	Famine Review Committee
GAM	Global Acute Malnutrition
GSC	IPC Global Steering Committee
GSU	IPC Global Support Unit
HHS	Households Hunger Scale distribution
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
MFA	Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOH	Gaza Ministry of Health
MUAC	Mid-Upper Arm Circumference
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
rCSI	Reduced Coping Strategy Index
TWG	Technical Working Group
UD5R	Under-five Death Rate
UNRWA	UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	UN World Food Programme
WHZ	Weight-for-Height Z-score