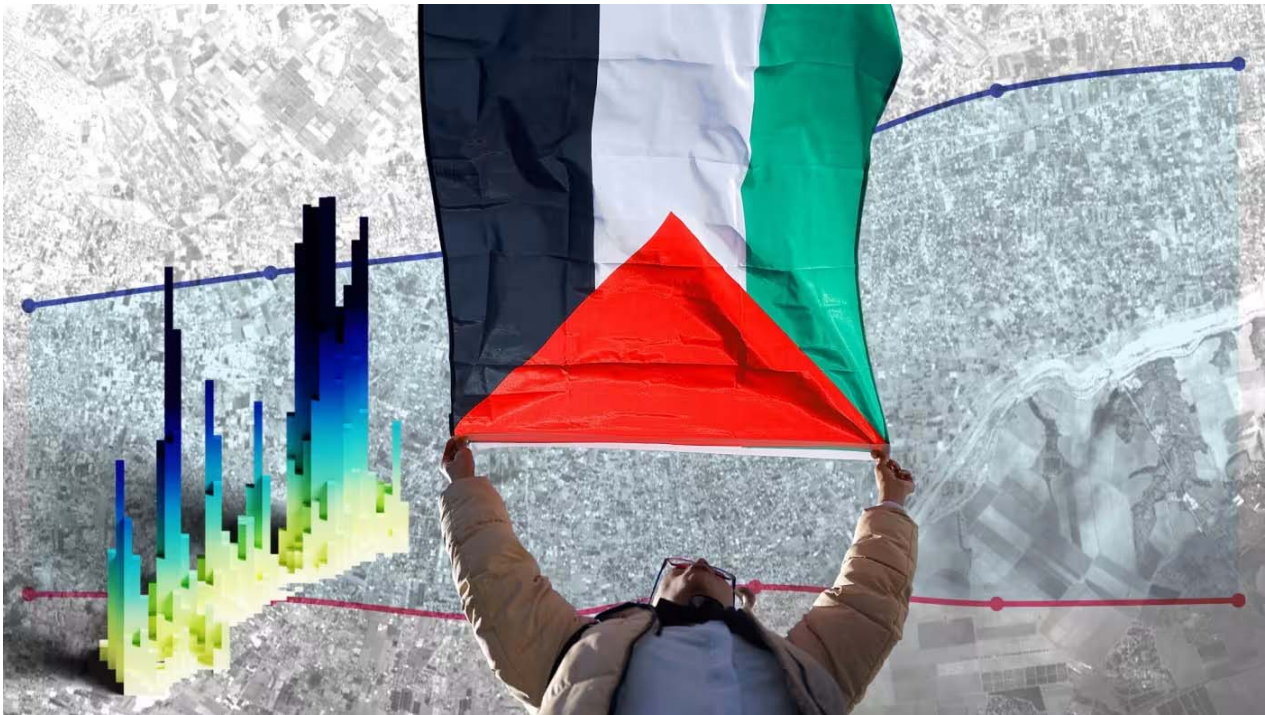


**Israel-Hamas war****The Gaza Strip – in charts**

A humanitarian crisis is unfolding in the Palestinian enclave which is more crowded than Manhattan in parts



Gaza's extraordinary demographics exacerbate the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the enclave © Reuters/EOBrowser/FT montage

Keith Fray, Steven Bernard and Alan Smith OCTOBER 16 2023

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The coastal strip of Gaza, the hemmed-in Palestinian enclave under Israeli bombardment, has grown over seven decades of displacement and conflict into a community that is almost unique in the world.

Covering an area roughly a quarter of London, [Gaza](#) is more crowded in parts than Manhattan — even though it lacks the high-rise buildings. Its population of 2.3mn includes almost as many children as adults, and Israel and Egypt control the only access points. Israeli authorities tightly control what goes in and out.

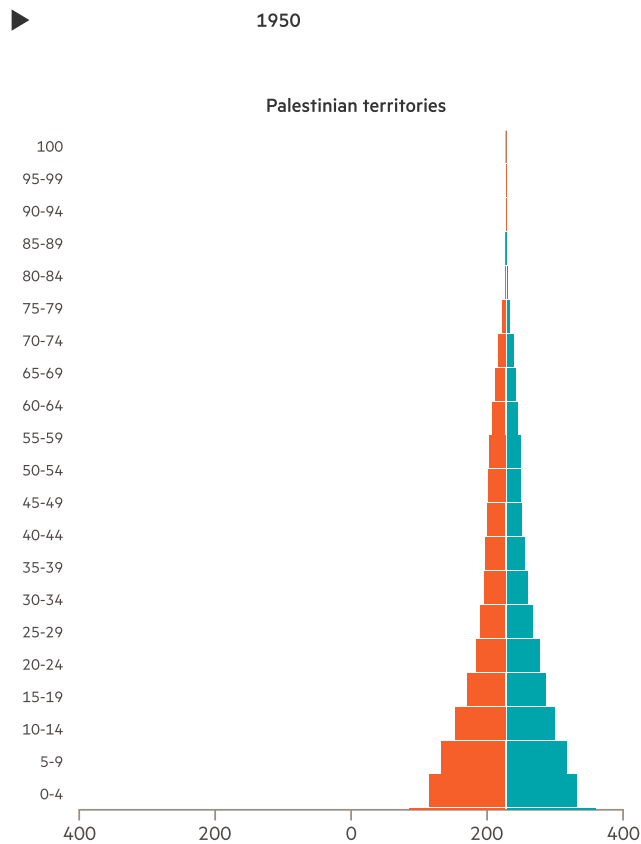
The enclave's extraordinary demographics exacerbate the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza as Israel prepares to step up its offensive against the militant group Hamas in a [war](#) that already appears to be one of the deadliest since the foundation of the Jewish state. In recent days, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have fled their homes after Israel ordered them to move from Gaza's north to the strip's south.

Hamas, which has ruled Gaza since 2007, led an attack that killed more than 1,400 people in Israel and abducted 199, according to Israeli authorities. Since then Israel has pounded Gaza with air strikes and artillery, while tightening its siege on the enclave, cutting off power, fuel and fresh water. At least 2,700 people have been killed in the bombardment of Gaza, according to Palestinian officials.

Collecting data on the Palestinian territories is fraught with difficulty. But reliable statistics do allow a portrait of the coastal enclave in the period before this war, and how it compared to other parts of the world, including the occupied West Bank.

## Five million people live in the Palestinian territories. Half are under 20 years of age

Population of **men** and **women** by age ('000s)



Source: [United Nations](#)  
FT graphic: Martin Stabe

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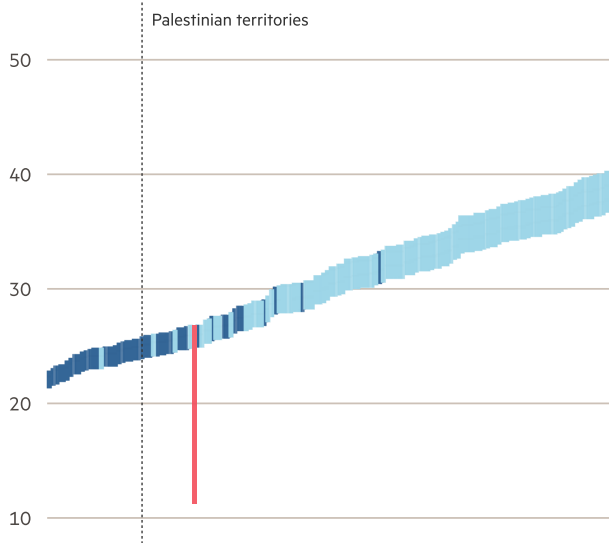
The population is notable for maintaining a steady rate of rapid growth. There were 1mn Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza at the time of the Six-Day war in 1967, when Israel occupied the territories, and the Yom Kippur war six years later. But by 2000, it had risen to 3mn, and has increased by two-thirds since then to 5.2mn last year, according to UN estimates.

The age structure of the population is also striking. The animated “population pyramid” graphic above has a triangular shape throughout, representing a consistently youthful age structure from the 1950s right through to the present day.

Population pyramids of higher-income economies, by contrast, are notably more top heavy. This is in part due to higher life expectancy and lower fertility rates.

### The **Palestinian territories** have one of the youngest populations in the world

236 countries ranked by their median age in 2023 (years). **Sub-Saharan African** countries shaded dark blue



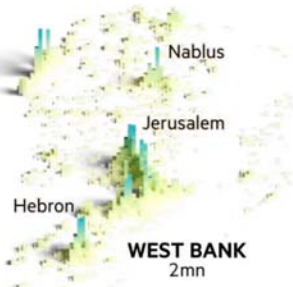
The Palestinian territories of Gaza and the West Bank comprise one of the few places outside of Sub-Saharan Africa to have a median age — the age at which half the population is older, and half younger — below 20 years.

It is estimated to be 19.6 for this year. Syria, by comparison, has a median age of 22, while it is 24 in Egypt and Jordan. Israel, at 29.1, is closer to the global figure of 30.5. In the UK, the figure is 40, while in Japan it is 49.1.

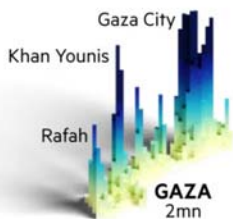
### Gaza's population has nearly doubled since 2000



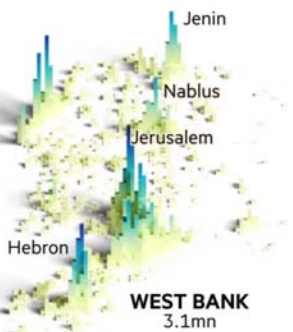
2000  
TOTAL POPULATION  
1.1mn



WEST BANK  
2mn



2020  
TOTAL POPULATION  
2mn



WEST BANK  
3.1mn

Sources: Worldpop; Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

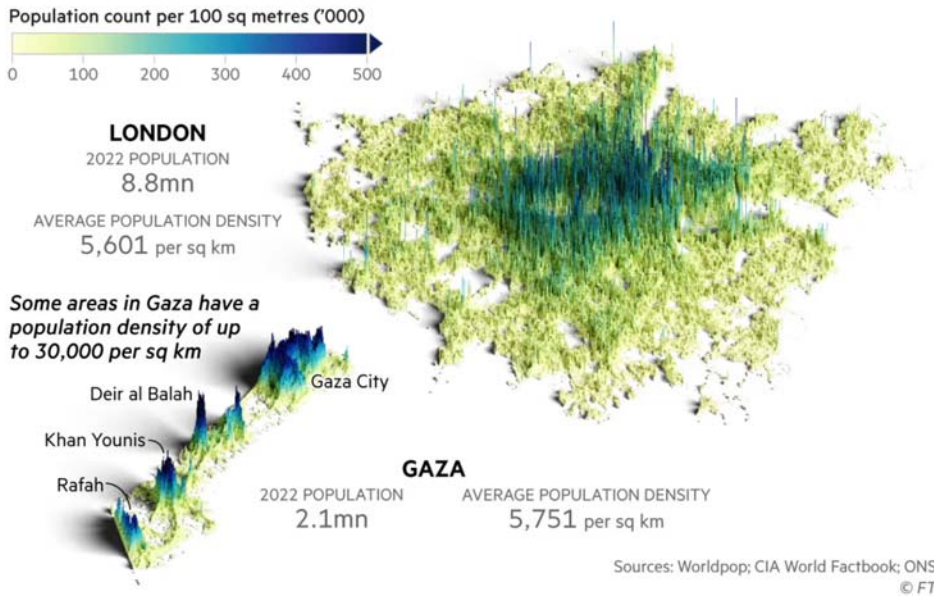
© FT

There are, however, stark differences between the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The population rise during the current century is visualised in the “spike” map above, showing population distribution and density for the two territories in 2000 and 2020.

Gaza has long been more crowded, but that difference has grown markedly over the past two decades.

### Gaza's overall population density is similar to London, but many areas are more than five times as dense

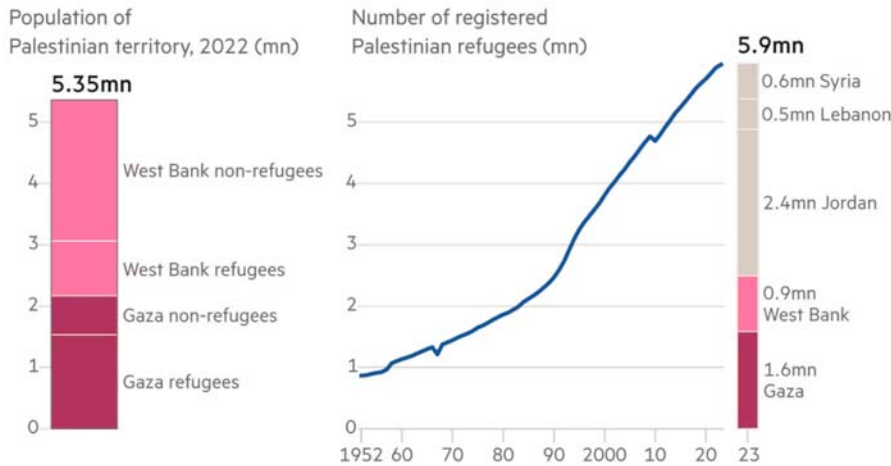


The rapid growth has given Gaza a population density that is similar to London. But more granular data shows that many areas are up to six times as dense. This includes the parts of northern Gaza, including Gaza City, where about 1.1mn civilians were told by Israel to leave for their own safety.

The Gaza Strip as a whole has a population density of 5,751 per square kilometre, which is very similar to 5,601 for Greater London. It has roughly a quarter of the population, in a quarter of the space.

But in some areas of Gaza City in the north and Khan Younis, density tops 30,000 people per sq km. That is more crowded than the Manhattan average.

### Most residents of Gaza are registered refugees



Sources: UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees; Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics © FT

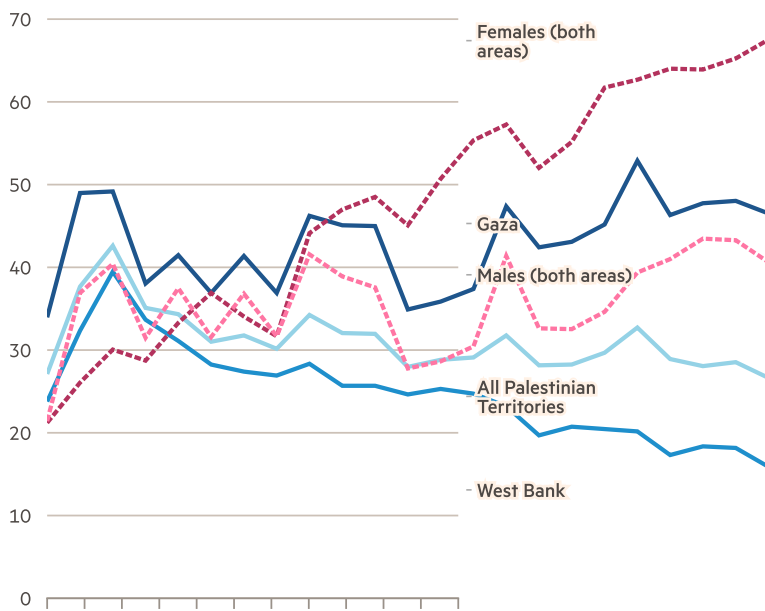
A large proportion of the Palestinian population are refugees, officially registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees.

Out of almost 6mn registered Palestinian refugees around the world, more than half — 3.5mn — are in the neighbouring countries of Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. But of those within the Palestinian territories, almost two-thirds, or 1.6mn, are in Gaza. The Gazans who are not officially defined as refugees, typically because they are descendants of locals, live under Israeli occupation.

Inside Gaza and the West Bank, not all Palestinians live in refugee camps. Nevertheless, the eight refugee camps in Gaza feature some of the highest population densities in the world, according to UNRWA.

### In Gaza almost half of the adult population are unemployed

Unemployment rate (% of aged 15 and over)

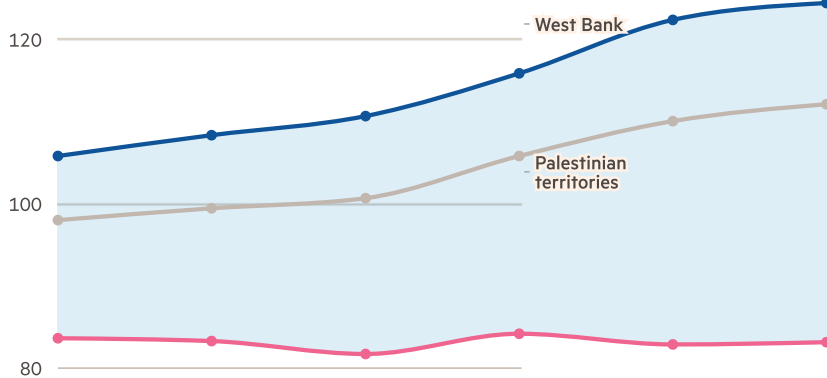


Collecting data on the labour market and on living standards in the two Palestinian areas is a serious challenge.

But from the data that is available, two trends seem relatively uncontroversial: the Palestinian territories are blighted by poverty and labour market dislocation, and the situation is much worse in hemmed-in Gaza than in the West Bank.

### Wage gap between Gaza and West Bank continues to widen

Average daily wage for employees aged 15 years and above (new Israeli shekels)



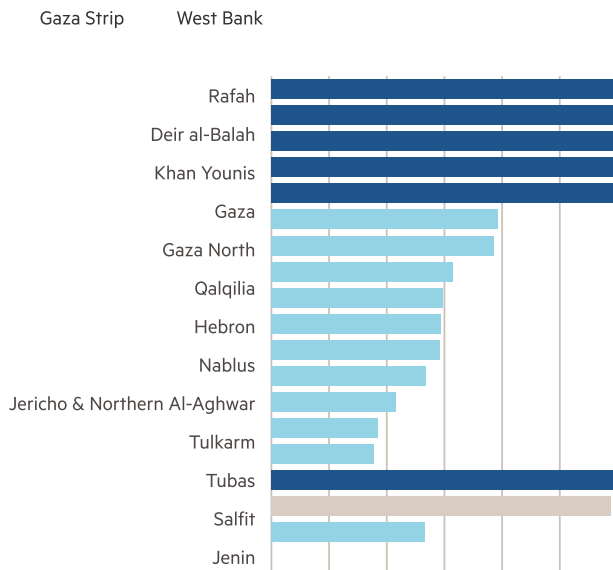
The Palestinian statistical authority estimates that the unemployment rate among those aged 15 and over was about 24 per cent last year.

But the composite figure hides a significant disparity: the West Bank rate is just 13 per cent but it is close to half of the adult population — 45 per cent — in Gaza, which is enduring its fifth devastating war between Hamas and Israel since 2007.

Gaza’s nominal average wages are also half of those in the West Bank in 2020, with the gap widening noticeably in the past five years.

### Palestinians living in Gaza are four times more likely to be living in poverty than those in the West Bank

Poverty rate - share of the population that cannot afford to buy a basic basket of goods\*, 2017 (%)



More than half of the Gaza population is estimated to be living in poverty in 2017, defined as being unable to afford a basic basket of goods. Poverty rates were considerably lower — but still sizeable — in the West Bank areas.

Now with Israel expected to launch the severest offensive ever mounted against the enclave, the long-suffering Gazans can only expect more devastation.

## Israel-Hamas war

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